

Hello everyone,

Thank you from the Land Use Committee of Christyl Burnett, Meryl Domina, Bryan Heystek, Mariah Scott, and Steve Wester. If you would like to join or know more, please reach out to the chair, Mariah Scott.

I am excited to talk to you all about the Land Use Committee and Circle Pines Center's work to uphold our mission. While each committee's role is difficult to define, we in the Land Use Committee consider, suggest, and enact policy of how Circle Pines can environmentally steward the landscape it encompasses, through cooperation. Circle Pines is also a community of caring, hardworking individuals. So, land use work at Circle Pines happens as a result of both collaborative and self-guided efforts of the Land Use Committee, staff of Circle Pines, members, volunteers, guests, and the larger community! If you are interested in getting involved, we are also working on ways to help make everyone who visits Circle Pines feel like valued Stewards of the land. If you have any ideas to help us in this effort to promote environmental stewardship, please share them with us. I would love to give a special mention to Tera John, Gerardo Reyes, Noah Silver-Mathews, Danielle Hoskins, Ethan Avery, and Eddie DeGraw for all the work they have done for the Circle Pines environment!

Community Outreach

Circle Pines regularly attended this past spring's Kalamazoo Community College's Honorable Harvest Lecture Series. This lecture series explored the ways in which we can come together to nurture and restore the Honorable Harvest in our communities and in our everyday lives. Attending this series connected us to our local community, promoted Circle Pines Center, and prompted ideas for field trips to local land stewards for summer camp.

Circle Pines was represented at the Faces of Conservation: Barry Conservation District Annual Meeting & Board Election, as well as the Barry Conservation Network meeting at Piece Cedar Creek. Circle Pines has been and will continue attending these events for years as a way to connect to our local community of conservationists. Circle Piners took part in the Michigan Waterways Stewards' Kalamazoo Verberg Park Beautification cleanup and the Lansing Till Utopia Free Tree Give Away as volunteers. We continue to meet with our North Country Trail partners, as a beautiful addition to this winding piece of nature.

CPC Events

Circle Pines events all work to be environmentally conscious, from the food we source to the connections fostered with the land we inhabit. In addition, many events are specifically focused on connecting people with their surrounding environment. I consider Maple Syrup Weekend, Apple Cider Weekend, Mushroom Camps, Foraging Festival, Brunch with all My Relations, Buttermilk Jamboree, Summer Camp, and all of our workbees to be vital to the goals of the Land Use Committee. That is not to mention the groups that come join during the year to help do everything from clear trails to build our straw-bale structure. Circle Pines regularly works to get people into and connected to nature. Additionally, Mariah Scott joined the Buttermilk

Jamboree workbee planning meeting, to ensure the event preparation aligned with the Land Use Committee's goals to preserve our native plant habitats.

To keep the relationship of people and place reciprocal, Circle Pines has established foraging guidelines. We are all expected to follow these guidelines posted on the bulletin board outside of swallows. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Circle Pines Center was gifted with over 100 native, fruiting trees. This gracious donation was from the Ypsilanti Free Fruit Tree Distro, a tireless group of Mother Earth loving, community involved abolitionists, with members of Mutual Aid Network of Ypsilanti. Circle Piners have been planting the Burr Oaks, Sycamores, American Plums, Aronia, and Elderberry trees around the property. This has been an opportunity to further increase the native species diversity at Circle Pines Center.

Saw mill and sustainable brush use

We are getting our saw mill back in use after the winter. The previously harvested lumber will be utilized this coming summer. The summer camp construction project leader, Ethan Avery, has carpentry experience and sustainable saw mill knowledge to help inform our future steps. We are also excited to welcome Lisa Phillips, the summer camp trails project leader. With Lisa's ecology background, we are hoping to maintain our trails, remove invasive species, and have campers learn biological field methods to update our [Land Stewardship Plan](#).

Land Stewardship program development

Circle Pines is finalizing their Michigan Agriculture and Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Recertification. This certification was initially started to inform our environmental stewardship goals, as well as our saw mill and invasive species removal practices. This summer, we are hoping to update the knowledge of our forest ecosystems, by having summer campers join us in measuring our trees. This way we can compare the data to the measurements taken around seven years ago.

The committee is beginning to develop a program to teach more about land stewardship practices. We would love your input!

Deer populations

There are also suspected cases of deer contracting a disease known as bluetongue (epizootic hemorrhagic disease or EHD). Confirmed cases had been reported in the surrounding area, This disease does not hurt humans, but is fatal to deer. Our seven suspected cases last fall were reported to the Department of Natural Resources. We have not seen additional cases since and the deer populations appear to be rebounding.

Spongy moths

Spongy moths (*Lymantria dispar*) were quite an issue this time last year, eating many of our tree's leaves. We are hoping their declining populations will give our trees some re-leaf. According to the [Barry Conservation District](#) website *"When caterpillar densities are high, it is the perfect environment for the nucleopolyhedrovirus (NPV) to spread rapidly and wreak havoc on the population, usually leading to a noticeable decline. This virus, often combined with a fungal infection, typically ends the 5 to 7-year outbreak cycle of these troublesome pests."*

Lucky for us, Dr. Greg Dwyer, from the University of Chicago, owns a cabin in Barry County and noticed this pest eating his trees! Dr. Dwyer has found that nearly 99% of caterpillars his team sampled in Barry County during Summer 2024 are indeed infected with this virus, which is a hopeful sign that we will see a dramatic reduction of this pest across the county this season.

*The fungal pathogen *Entomophaga maimaima* is native to Japan but has been found in the U.S. for nearly 30 years, keeping populations of spongy moths in check across its introduced range. This fungus is a highly effective "natural enemy" of the spongy moth when environmental conditions are right. Like all fungi, this species relies on cool, moist conditions to spread."* So far this spring has been cool and wet, so we are hopeful for our trees and have not noticed any spongy moths yet.

Maple syrup and sugar

Speaking of trees, we tapped our maple trees this year, with over 70 taps. Thank you to Noah Silver-Mathews, Tera John, Gerardo Reyes, Mariah Scott, and Eddie DeGraw for their hard work syruping, sugaring, and leading volunteers and guests in making delicious sugar again. We will be using the gallons of syrup made during our events for as long as possible.

Herbicide use in Stewart Lake

A Stewart Lake resident has contacted Circle Pines to update us about the plans to contract with a company to apply herbicides to Stewart Lake. We are contacting them to see if we can collaborate on alternative methods, such as manually removing their weeds, like we do at our lake front.

Entomology research results

Bill Westrate of the DNR is analyzing the data from the research study comparing the insect diversity of multiple prairie restoration locations, including Circle Pines Center (which has not used herbicide) and Piece Cedar Creek (which carefully uses herbicide). We are happy to welcome Bill to the membership meeting to discuss his preliminary findings.