

President's Message to Supporters, January 21, 2024

The Little River Wetlands Project (LRWP) is in the process of renewing and improving our image in the community. In addition to our existing, dedicated board members, we have new board members and are taking steps to make the organization more transparent to our board, staff, donors and volunteers.

Our first action was to recruit former board members to return to the board and give us the benefit of their experience and advice. Prominently among the new ones is Paul McAfee, founder of LRWP and steadfast supporter ever since. Our former Executive Director and former Director of Properties and Programs, Betsy Yankowiak, joined to assist in representing, historically, both the staff and board perspective. Also, Becky Cummings, a former board member during the early growing years and a continuous volunteer and supporter was added for her expertise in human resources. I must also list myself as "new" since I term-limited off the board last December after 20 years and returned in November, 2023, and being elected President.

A second action we are taking is to conduct a financial audit of the organization. We should do these periodically and haven't for several years. We are also instituting a consistent staff review process, along with goal setting. Once again, we have fallen behind in this action. We are continuing a review of staff functions, and the personnel actions that came into question in 2023.

We would like to report that 2023 was a great year of achievements at LRWP. Our programs and events connected with over 10,000 people, including approximately 2,700 children and adults in our "Seed to Marsh" program. This program has attracted the attention of other Indiana conservation nonprofits. We are getting a few reports that others may start similar programs tailored to their constituencies. Our program continues to grow as we learn more about collecting and growing seeds for dispersal on our properties. Children learn hands-on how plants produce seeds, how seeds take root and how they then propagate to make our prairies and marshlands more effective for flood water storage as well as attractive to wildlife. These children are our future wetland warriors, forever connected to the values of wetland preservation.

Please continue to support us through this renewal period as we begin a new fundraising effort designed to improve our impact on restoring part of the Great Marsh. Paul McAfee and the late conservation activist Jane Dustin originally envisioned the restoration of Eagle Marsh from a hill overlooking hundreds of acres of corn fields that repeatedly flooded and often failed. Ms. Dustin remarked something like "I see it too, let's do it!". Wetland restoration is good for our valley. As we expand and restore, flood damage downstream should decrease and our children and grandchildren will hopefully see thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese along with countless waterfowl and shorebirds finding residence or just passing through.

This vision requires your continued volunteer and financial support and a shared vision of what this restoration can become.