Nature Preserve Policies

Adopted by the Board of Directors on October 22, 2014

1. No individual or group of individuals will be denied access to or use of any preserve for reasons of non-membership, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin.

2. Preserves are open free of charge to the public. Admission will not be denied to any individual site or nature preserve, except in cases where a significant health or safety hazard exists or where significant degradation of natural resources would result from public use of the area. In these cases, admission will be provided only through explicit written permission from the Stewardship Coordinator, and the process for obtaining permission will be posted at or near the entrance to the preserve or restricted area.

3. Artificial structures, including roads, buildings, parking areas, picnic areas, trails, fences, bridges, dams, docks, restrooms, or other infrastructure may be built or retained only as part of an approved Preserve Management Plan or are otherwise in accordance with the Land Conservancy’s mission and values and the management principles identified in Policy 11. All infrastructure must be adequately maintained to standards established by the Stewardship Committee.

4. The use of motorized vehicles or aircraft of any kind is prohibited on Land Conservancy preserves, with the following exceptions:

   a. When used appropriately on established public roads, private access roads, and parking areas

   b. When required in emergency situations

   c. When approved by the Stewardship Coordinator to complete land management work in accordance with an approved Preserve Management Plan. In those cases, motorized vehicles will only be allowed when alternatives to their use are deemed impractical or inefficient, and only after any potential concerns over damage to natural resources or safety have been adequately addressed.

   d. When persons with disabilities use “other power-driven mobility devices” (OPDMDs) pursuant to the US Department of Justice (DoJ) regulations amending the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title II regulation, 28 CFR Part 35. The following policies regarding the use of OPDMDs takes into consideration DoJ’s specific Assessment
Factors as they apply trails on Land Conservancy preserves. These policies do not apply to wheelchairs, which are permitted by law on all pedestrian trails.

The use of OPDMDs is generally permitted on Land Conservancy trails by those with a demonstrable need for such devices subject to the following requirements and limitations:

i. To maintain quiet conditions for wildlife and the public, OPDMDs with internal combustion engines are prohibited on Land Conservancy preserves.

ii. To avoid damage to natural environments, OPDMDs must remain on established trails.

iii. To maintain the safety of all trail users, OPDMDs must be operated at a speed not exceeding four (4) mph. Where other visitors are present and visible on the trail, a safe speed may be less (e.g., 2-3 mph).

iv. Due to the high potential for physical damage to trails resulting from their use, tracked vehicles of any kind are prohibited.

v. Due to the physical characteristics of most trails and the need for trail users to be able to pass while remaining on the trail, OPDMDs may be no greater than 36 inches wide. However, the physical characteristics of some trails may require that an OPDMD be narrower than 36 inches.

vi. Most trails on Land Conservancy preserves have not been designed for OPDMD use. Many trails are narrow, contain steep slopes, wet areas, uneven surfaces, or are otherwise topographically unsuitable for OPDMD use. Furthermore, weather conditions may change quickly, resulting in wet or icy slopes, deep mud, downed tree limbs, or other barriers that limit OPDMD access. All trail users, including those who use OPDMDs, use trails at their own risk, and must make informed decisions about whether they can safely use a particular trail.

vii. Land Conservancy personnel may ask a person seeking to use an OPDMD on a Land Conservancy preserve to provide a credible assurance that the device is required because of a person’s disability. A valid, state-issued disability parking placard or other official documentation of disability will be accepted as credible assurance. In the absence of official documentation, verbal representation that the device is being used for a mobility disability will also be accepted as credible assurance.

5. Activities that have the potential to negatively impact natural resources or are inconsistent with the Land Conservancy’s mission and values are prohibited on preserves, unless permitted in an approved Preserve Management Plan or in writing by the Stewardship Coordinator. These activities include, but are not limited to, bicycling; swimming; horseback riding; camping; starting fires; collecting plant, animal, or mineral specimens; discharge of firearms; prospecting; recreational sports such as disc golf and paintball; dumping of trash, yard waste, or any other material; walking off-trail where established trails exist; and feeding or baiting animals. Geocaching is permitted
provided it does not cause damage to natural resources and is conducted in accordance with the stand-alone Land Conservancy Geocaching Policy. Hunting, trapping, and fishing are also prohibited, except as provided for in Policies 6 and 7.

6. Fishing is prohibited on Land Conservancy preserves, unless permitted in an approved Preserve Management Plan or in writing by the Stewardship Coordinator. If permission is granted for fishing, provisions must be made to address trampling, erosion, trash accumulation, the accidental release of live bait, or other potential impacts related to fishing activities.

7. Hunting and trapping are prohibited on Land Conservancy preserves, unless permitted in an approved Preserve Management Plan or in writing by the Stewardship Coordinator. Hunting or trapping on Land Conservancy preserves may be authorized on a case-by-case basis for purposes including, but not limited to, the following:

   a. to control invasive or overabundant animal populations, including white-tailed deer
   
   b. to control stray domestic animals
   
   c. to conduct scientific research

Where appropriate and feasible, the use of live traps is preferred over lethal methods of animal control. Any hunting or trapping activities approved on Land Conservancy preserves will adhere to all relevant ethical and legal standards.

Individuals hunting legally on land adjacent to Land Conservancy preserves are authorized to pursue wounded game onto Land Conservancy preserves if necessary to retrieve an animal. However, firearms may not be discharged on Land Conservancy preserves, and the right-of-way must be given to other users of the preserve.

8. Dogs and other pets are allowed on Land Conservancy preserves, except where prohibited in an approved Preserve Management Plan. Where permitted, domestic animals must be kept on a leash with a maximum length of six feet and under control at all times. In preserves where domestic animals are not allowed, signs noting the restriction will be posted at the main entrance to the preserve and at other trailheads as appropriate.

9. Herbicides or pesticides may only be used on Land Conservancy preserves in order to achieve management objectives identified within an approved Preserve Management Plan, or as necessary to address immediate ecological threats or public access concerns in accordance with the general management principles identified in Policy 11. All pesticide use will be conducted under the supervision of a Certified Michigan Commercial Pesticide Applicator and in accordance with all relevant laws and
regulations. Volunteers are permitted to apply pesticides provided they are over the age of 18, understand the potential risk of herbicide exposure, and have received adequate training on pesticide application in the context of ecological stewardship.

10. Alteration of vegetation or other natural features on Land Conservancy preserves may only be conducted in accordance with an approved Preserve Management Plan. If, for a given preserve, a Plan does not yet exist or is in the process development, management of natural features may occur on that preserve as necessary to address immediate ecological threats or public access concerns until a Plan is approved. In these cases, management will be conducted according to the general management principles identified in Policy 11.

11. A Preserve Management Plan will be developed within three years of a preserve’s establishment in order to guide the management of that preserve over a period of 10 years. Every 10 years, each Plan will undergo a comprehensive review and be revised as necessary to reflect changes in conditions relevant to stewardship. However, the Plan may be amended before the end of the 10 year period in order to adapt to changes resulting from new information, management progress or setbacks, or changes in organizational capacity. Each Preserve Management Plan will include the following sections:

   a. Introduction: Provides the scope and rationale for the Plan

   b. Background: Describes characteristics of the preserve, including ecological and cultural history, natural communities, public use, and existing threats and ecological stressors

   c. Goals: Identifies overall goals for management of the preserve

   d. Objectives: Defines management objectives. Objectives should follow SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, Time-bound)

   e. Strategies: Identifies management strategies used to achieve objectives

   f. Monitoring Plan: Outlines a specific monitoring plan to measure progress towards meeting objectives

Additionally, Preserve Management Plans should be written in accordance with the following principles, which also guide preserve management in the absence of an approved Plan:

   a. Sustainability: Stewardship is conducted in a way that ensures the long-term sustainability of resources and opportunities we enjoy today for future generations.
b. Diversity: Biological diversity provides resilience against degradation by human or natural causes and embodies the richness of our natural heritage. Protecting rare species, significant natural communities, habitat connections, and biological diversity at all scales often requires management beyond passive preservation efforts.

c. People: People are an integral part of ecosystems and can influence them in positive or negative ways. Managing natural areas sustainably often requires active human participation. Sustainably managed systems encourage appropriate human use and enjoyment while protecting ecological quality and biological diversity.

d. Adaptation: Change is inherent in all sustainable ecosystems, and management aims to incorporate the dynamic nature of natural systems. Management practices, which are based on sound ecological principles and current scientific knowledge, are continually evaluated and adapted to specific conditions as ecosystems change over time.

Prior to being implemented, each Plan will be reviewed and approved by the Stewardship Committee and Board of Directors.

12. Except where otherwise stated, exceptions to this Preserve Policy may only be made by the Stewardship Coordinator with approval from the Executive Director, Stewardship Committee, or Board of Directors as appropriate.