

Seven Ponds Nature Center

2017 Annual Report



SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

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Mission

The mission of Seven Ponds Nature Center is to conserve the natural environment of the nature center as a sanctuary for native plants and animals, as a living classroom for environmental education, and as a peaceful retreat for its visitors. The nature center's mission, further, is to foster an understanding and appreciation of our natural world, and to develop an environmental ethic in the people and communities of Southeast Michigan through education, service as a community resource, and responsible stewardship of nature center and adjacent lands.

2017 Board of Directors

Mary-Sue Weber, Chairman, Member-at-large
Nan Toppin, Vice Chairman, Member-at-large
Kelly Heyner, Secretary, Member-at-large
Paul Messing, Treasurer, Macomb Audubon Representative
Daryl Bernard, Ex Officio, Executive Director
Nancy Buck, Member-at-large
Mike Butterfield, Member-at-large
Emory Clark, Member-at-large
Kathy Fulcher, Genesee Audubon Representative
Greg Gossick, Oakland Audubon Representative
Bill Haney, Member-at-large
Gisela Lendle King, Detroit Audubon Representative
Mike Mercier, Lapeer Audubon Representative
Joanna Pease, Grosse Pointe Audubon Representative
Carole Porretta, Member-at-large
Lois Rheume, Member-at-large
Jocelyn Scofield, Member-at-large
Susie Stroh, Member-at-large
Charlie Turner, Lifetime Member

2017 Staff

Daryl Bernard, Executive Director
Mike Champagne, Executive Director (retired March 2017)
Mike Grappin, Maintenance
Stacey Hollinsworth, Weekend Receptionist
Nancy Kautz, Seasonal Naturalist
Katie McKiernan, Naturalist
Karen Page, Seasonal Weekday Receptionist/Media Specialist
Diane Rankin, Office Manager
Lois Rheume, Naturalist (retired May 2017)
Carrie Spencer, Director of Environmental Education/Chief Naturalist
Cathy Wesley, Naturalist

SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

2017: The Year in Review

Introduction

The year was one of transition at Seven Ponds Nature Center, with the retirement of three long-time staff members and the hiring of three brand new employees. There were challenges throughout the year as the new staff worked to find their place at the nature center, learn their roles, and take on the challenges that came their way.



That said, by all measures Seven Ponds Nature Center had another successful year, continuing its mission of serving Southeast Michigan as a sanctuary for native plants and animals, a living classroom for environmental education, and a peaceful retreat for its visitors. Land stewardship continued with invasive species control and the planting of native trees. Once again, thousands of school children visited Seven Ponds for field trips, made possible in many cases due to the generosity of area service groups and local community foundations. As always, the nature center offered a full slate of walks, workshops, classes, field trips, club meetings, and field tours, benefitting both members and the general

public. These programs provided environmental education activities for children, families, and adults. Finally, we celebrated our 50th anniversary this year with a Party at the Ponds, reminiscing with old friends, looking back over 50 years of service and growth, and looking forward to the next 50 years as we explore ways to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world.

Stewardship

Over the past 50 years, Seven Ponds has carefully nurtured the land which makes up the nature center. As a result, the nature center is a living textbook of the natural communities found in Southeast Michigan. Nature center staff and volunteers continued their dedication to stewardship during 2017, putting in many hours to maintain the integrity of the center's natural communities and to improve their diversity. The mowing regime for the fields near the parking lot and in the North-80 were continued in order to maintain habitat for plant and animal species which require open areas. Nearly 100 bird houses were maintained in these fields for Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Black-capped Chickadees. These houses were once again monitored on a weekly basis during spring and summer by staff and volunteers. More than 40 additional nest boxes for Wood Ducks and Eastern Screech-Owls, erected in previous years, continued to provide nesting sites for these species. The Osprey platform in the North-80, the Purple Martin house near the parking lot, and the Chimney Swift tower near the building did not attract residents in 2017, but we continue to have high hopes for the future. The center also has four bat houses which provide daytime roosting shelter for the bats which patrol the skies each evening from spring through early fall. A Barred Owl nest box was put in place in the pine trees behind the director's residence in hopes of attracting a nesting pair.

2017 was the sixth year of an ambitious tree planting project designed to improve the woodland around the Interpretive Building and create a "Forest of the Future." Utilizing funds garnered through the "Buy-a-Tree" program as well as donations from local garden clubs, 45 native trees were planted at Seven Ponds Nature Center. Among the plantings were Speckled Alder, Serviceberry, Musclewood, Bitternut Hickory, American Hazelnut, American Beech, White Oak, Bur Oak, Red Oak, Black Oak, Wild Black Currant, and Basswood. These young trees were enclosed in protective fencing to keep deer and other animals from browsing during the next few years.



A few of the native trees planted through this year's "Buy-a-Tree" program for our Forest of the Future

The demonstration gardens in front of the Interpretive Building continue to grow and develop, creating a natural landscape and providing visitors the opportunity to see how native trees and shrubs can be used to enhance their own property. The Friends of Herbs and the Butterfly Gardeners continued to maintain their beautiful gardens, where visitors can often be seen enjoying these well-cared-for areas.

Non-native, invasive plants continue to have a significant impact on the natural communities of Seven Ponds. Nature center staff and volunteers worked on at least 15 species of invasive plants, including Garlic Mustard, Glossy Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, Crown Vetch, Oriental Bittersweet, Autumn Olive, Canada Thistle, Dame's Rocket, and Purple Loosestrife in areas adjacent to the building, in the North-80, in Earl's Prairie, around the lakes, at Richie Pond Preserve, and at Jonathan Woods. Much of this work was done on the numerous **Invasive Plant Workdays** scheduled spring through fall and conducted by Naturalist Cathy Wesley. Additionally, Connor Socrates, a summer intern, spent six weeks working near the observation tower overlooking Big Pond on various control methods of the invasive glossy buckthorn. By the end of the season, 685 hours had been put in by staff and volunteers on invasive control efforts. Progress is being made on some of the plant species, but many others continue to provide a formidable challenge.

Education

The nature center continued its dedication to environmental education for children during 2017. Children from preschool age and up visited Seven Ponds to learn about the natural world using the center's woodlands, fields, ponds, and prairie. They came from public and private schools, home schools, and scout organizations to take part in **School Field Trips, Explorer Programs, Homeschool Programs, Seasonal Walks, and Scout Programs**. Some children received in-classroom presentations through the center's **Traveling Naturalist** program. Many of the area's young people also attended the center's **Summer Field School** program, coming out to the center for in-depth activities throughout the summer. This again included **Field School Specials** for children wishing to learn about advanced topics. **Knee-high Nats**, for three and four year olds, was offered monthly throughout the year, attracting our youngest students. The week-long program, **Annie's BIG Nature Lesson**, provided two classes of 6th graders from Dryden Elementary School and five classes of 4th graders from Borland Elementary an opportunity to spend an entire week at the nature center. Staff Naturalist Cathy Wesley and Chief Naturalist Carrie Spencer worked with all of the teachers to make these four special weeks happen. All of these activities exposed students to the wonders of the natural environment, complemented school science curriculums, and helped raise the awareness of the participating young people.



Graduates of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson enjoyed an entire week at Seven Ponds Nature Center

The nature center served 7,759 children with programs during 2017. This number was down slightly from 2016. Unfortunately, schools in the nature center's service area continue to be impacted by the financial climate existing in the region. As a result, schools continue to experience significant budget constraints which limit funds for field trip fees and transportation. In addition, the numbers of students attending most schools served by the nature center continue to be lower than they were during much of the center's history. Schools are often unable to fund field trips, and administrators and teachers are reluctant to pass along field trip costs to students and their parents. For all of these reasons, getting students out to Seven Ponds on field trips continues to be a challenge.

Fortunately, Seven Ponds had several partners to help give its efforts a boost. The nature center once again received a grant from the Four County Community Foundation which provided funding for classes from eight local school districts to come out to Seven Ponds on field trips. This grant also funded a teacher workshop, and staff and teacher training for Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. The Foundation has funded these programs since 2010 and has thus made it possible for the nature center to maintain its longtime tradition of providing environmental education programs for local school children. In addition, the Kiwanis Club of Lapeer and the Lapeer Optimist Club made contributions which allowed students from Lapeer Community Schools, the Chatfield School, Bishop Kelly Catholic School, and St. Paul's Lutheran School, all in Lapeer, to visit the nature center on field trips. This is the fourth year in a row that these two service clubs have provided such funding to Seven Ponds.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs during 2017. Each season brought new opportunities to learn and new things to experience. The seasons unfolded as follows:

WINTER - The winter season saw the return of our very popular **Winterfest**, a day of winter activities, crafts, and nature study. Then, the Winter Lecture Series brought presentations titled **Bats of the World, From Sea Watch to Seward: Birding in Alaska, Beavers in the Burbs, Galapagos Islands, and A Winter Dweller's Celebration**. These Sunday afternoon programs were all free to members. The season also featured **Behind the Scenes at Seven Ponds, Snow**



and Ice, Winter Solstice Walk, Winter Walkabout, Fun with Fossils, Snowshoeing at the Ponds, Let it Snow, Tracking, Who's Been Here?, Nature Journaling, Snow Moon, Paint-a-Rock Animal, Scout programs, and four Winter Bird Walks. Staff also participated in the National Audubon Society's 117th Annual **Christmas Bird Count** for Lapeer County.



SPRING – The busiest season at the nature center is typically spring, with many scheduled activities. During 2017, the season featured **Knee High Naturalists, Memories from the Ponds, Spring Awakenings, Windy Wanderings, Arnold's Sugar Bush Tour, Invasive Plant Workdays, First Walk of Spring, Salamander Foray, Curious Canoers of Seven Ponds, Botanical Easter Eggs, Bird Song Serenade, Woodland Wildflower Workday, Singing Frogs, Wildflower Walk,**

Night Time Adventures, and Scout programs. Four **Spring Bird Walks** included a day trip to Lapeer State Game Area in Lapeer County.

The special event of the season was **Eco Days & Native Plant Sale**, which featured crafts, seed bombs, chalk murals, pond critters, a trail mix station, flower planting, bird house building, and presentations on mammal myths, insects, Michigan monarchs, and a visit with live animals with Science Alive. The popular Native Plant Sale provided visitors with the opportunity to purchase a wide variety of native plants. The Stingers hosted a bake sale, and visitors participated in the Invasion Destruction Competition.

SUMMER - When summer arrives, much of the center's time is devoted to **Summer Field School** for children. There were also many programs for adults and families during the season, including **Hiking Around the Ponds, Bug Catching, Golf Cart Tours, the Yoga at the Ponds series, Summer Solstice Hike, Curious Canoers, Demonstration Gardens Workday, Butterfly Count, Early Prairie Walkabout, Insect Signs, Nature Detectives at Jonathan Woods, Fairy Garden Workshop, Canoe Clinic for Adults, Evening Paddle on the Ponds, Wildflower Area Workday, and Invasive Plant Workdays.**



Summer Bird Walks included day trips to Nayanquing Point in Bay County and Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in Saginaw County. Once again Seven Ponds hosted the annual **Butterfly Count**, in association with the North American Butterfly Association. A **Seven Ponds Trail Rally** was enjoyed by many fun, competitive teams.

A special event was held in late August as we celebrated fifty years of service to the greater Southeastern Michigan community with a **Party at the Ponds**. The event was an open house style affair that saw many of the center's long-time friends and supporters in attendance. Along with current staff and board of directors,



several former employees and board members enjoyed the festivities, along with many of our members and volunteers. The nature center's clubs were represented with ongoing demonstrations and available information, both our Butterfly Gardeners and Friends of Herbs were on-hand to show off their gardens, and the Stingers set up a bake sale table. Activities included naturalist-led trail walks, a running slide show of photographs from fifty years, historical displays from the center's past, and a presentation on the history of Seven Ponds by Executive Director Daryl Bernard. The festive day of celebration concluded with an evening bonfire, complete with s'mores, and a time capsule ceremony, during which staff members placed special objects into a time capsule to be opened on the center's 75th anniversary in 2042.



FALL – The fall season saw the return of school field trips, with the nature center full of young children learning and exploring. Fall activities included two **Demonstration Gardens Workdays**, continuation of the popular **Yoga at the Ponds** series, **Autumn Equinox Stroll**, **Curious Canoers**, **Prairie Walk and Flower Pressing**, **Evening Paddle**, **Color on the Lakes**, **Golf Cart Tours**, **Invasive Plant Workdays**, **Leaf Décor**, **Nature Journaling**, **Skeleton Trees in Jonathan Woods**, **Scout programs**, and **Painting at the Ponds**. Four **Fall Bird Walks** included day trips the Port Huron State Game Area in St. Clair County and Lake St. Clair Metropark in Macomb County.

September and October are a busy time for special events. The final rendition of **Heritage Harvest Days** took place in September, as the nature center Executive Director, Board of Directors, and staff decided to end the long-time festival due to numerous reasons, including increasing costs, declining participation of vendors and exhibitors, and impact on the grounds. Other fall special events were **Birdseed Saturday** and the sixth annual **Enchanted Woodland**. During this latter program, families explored the nighttime forest, learning about nocturnal animals from staff and volunteers in costumes along the trail. The weather was perfect for the event and a large number of people attended. A new costume this year was a gray squirrel, which was fabricated by our own talented Naturalist Lois Rheume prior to her retirement. The nature center now has twelve great costumes for the event.



Retired Naturalist Lois Rheume with a few of her animal creations for the Enchanted Woodland

Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups throughout the year: **Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Astronomy Club, Birding Club, Beekeepers' Club, and Camera Club.**

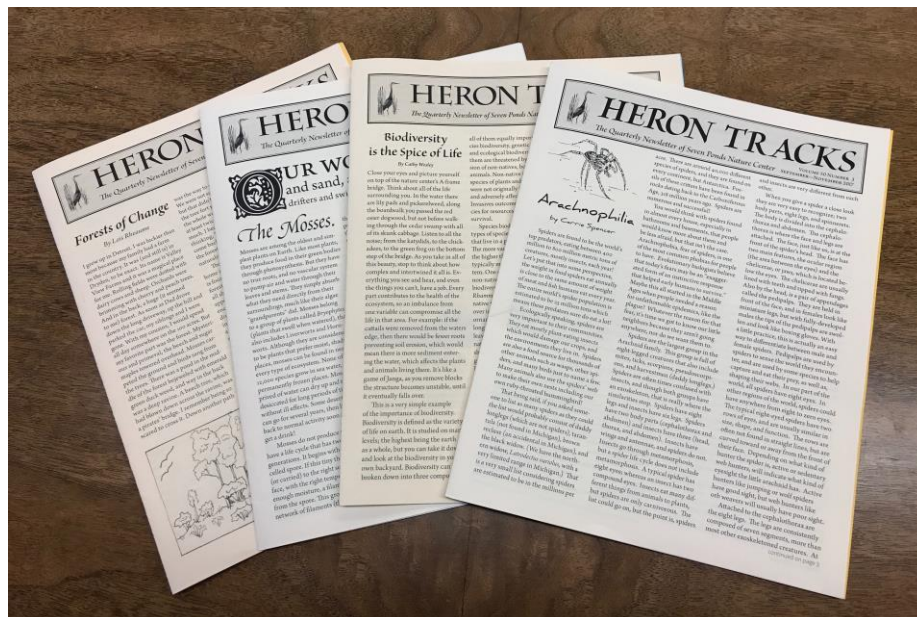
The staff continued to add and enhance exhibits in the Interpretive Building during the year. The “Nature Nook” (added in 2016) continued to develop and was enjoyed by hundreds of budding young naturalists throughout the year. The many exhibits in the building continue to provide a focal point for nature center visitors.

Seven Ponds staff completed two field tours in 2017, both in June. Naturalists Carrie Spencer and Nancy Kautz led a group into Ontario’s Bruce Peninsula for a **Niagara Escarpment Natural History Field Tour**. The group explored the unique rock formations of the Niagara Escarpment, and enjoyed the full range of flora and fauna the Bruce Peninsula area has to offer. Executive Director Daryl Bernard led a group west for a **Colorado Birding Field Tour**. The tour took participants to numerous locations to explore short grass prairie of the Pawnee National Grasslands, the rugged foothills of the northern Front Range, the high desert sagebrush of North Park, and the forested valleys and alpine peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park. Participants in both of these Seven Ponds Nature Center field tours experienced the special natural features of the locations visited, enjoyed the camaraderie of other trip participants, and were exposed to conservation issues and efforts in other parts of North America. In the process, relationships between the nature center staff and participants were developed and nurtured. Field tours generate significant revenue, act as professional development for staff, and strengthen bonds between participants and the nature center.



The Colorado birding group is all smiles after spotting the elusive White-tailed Ptarmigan in the alpine tundra of Rocky Mountain National Park

Throughout the year, members and friends of Seven Ponds also received information about the natural world and the nature center's programs through the quarterly newsletter, *Heron Tracks*, produced by Media Specialist Karen Page and other staff members. Titles of this year's lead articles were: **"Forests of Change"** by Lois Rheame, **"The Mosses"** by Nancy Kautz, **"Arachnophilia"** by Carrie Spencer, and **"A Year in the Life of a Chickadee"** by Cathy Wesley. The newsletter also provided information regarding the center's projects, volunteers, clubs, and fundraising efforts. A variety of information about Seven Ponds and its activities could be found in digital format in 2017. The center's website, www.sevenponds.org, managed by Karen Page, provided many people with an introduction to Seven Ponds. The nature center also provided information about its activities and featured fun nature tidbits and trivia on its Facebook page, which is managed by Naturalist Cathy Wesley. The nature center continued its monthly e-newsletter, *The Great Blue Heron*, which is sent out to both members and non-members by Executive Director Daryl Bernard.



The quarterly *Heron Tracks* newsletter entered its 50th year of publication

Buildings and Grounds

Staff and volunteers worked hard during the year on many regular tasks related to buildings and grounds. Many hours were spent keeping the miles of trails and boardwalk at Seven Ponds and nearby Jonathan Woods in good shape, with mowing, wood chipping, tree clearing, trimming, and boardwalk maintenance. Much of the lumber in an aging bridge over the drain in the North-80 was replaced due to safety concerns. The A-Frame Bridge – a signature feature of Seven Ponds – received a maintenance upgrade with the addition of a moisture-proof barrier and cedar cap, which should greatly extend the life of the bridge's beams. A kiosk sign board was constructed near the front of the building through an Eagle Scout project by local scout Austin Zwierz (Troop 144, and a senior at Dryden High School).



Skunk cabbage blooming in the early spring along the boardwalk that borders Miller Pond

Finances and Fundraising

The nature center's annual finances continued to be affected by the state of the economy in Southeast Michigan during 2017. Board and staff worked hard to maintain income levels, however, and the nature center was able to continue staffing and program levels similar to recent years, take on the projects listed in this report, and handle several expenses related to unforeseen maintenance needs. The nature center finished the year with a small deficit. A full breakdown of the 2017 finances can be found later in this report.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2017 including the **Lapeer County Bird-a-thon, Native Plant Sale, Wine Tasting Benefit, Stingers Rummage Sale, Buy-a-Tree, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Saturday, Stingers Bake Sales, Special Gifts, Used Book Sales,** and the **Holiday Auction**. Staff and volunteers worked very hard to put on these many special events and all went well. The Development Committee of the Board of Directors once again hosted a Wine Tasting Benefit, which was held at Metamora Golf & Country Club in June. The event grew in success and raised approximately \$13,000. The Holiday Auction was not only a celebration of another successful year, but raised nearly \$21,000.

Staff and Volunteers

As always, the people of Seven Ponds were an important part of the center's success. The staff of nine (six full time, one part time, and two seasonal) worked very hard, often putting in extra effort during busy seasons or before special events. As 2016 came to a close, three long-time staff members prepared for retirement. Dan Hayes (Office Manager, retired December 2016), Mike Champagne (Executive Director, retired March 2017), and Lois Rheaume (Naturalist, retired April 2017) had accumulated 85 years of nature center experience at Seven Ponds, and their replacements had big shoes to fill.

Diane Rankin, of Imlay City, joined the staff as Office Manager in mid-December of 2016 and was able to work with outgoing Office Manager Dan Hayes for three weeks and benefit from his knowledge and experience gained from 38 years at Seven Ponds. Daryl Bernard (formerly of Midland) was named the next Executive Director of Seven Ponds and began his tenure in February of 2017, giving him a month to work with Mike Champagne, who retired in March after leading Seven Ponds for the past 25 years. Katie McKiernan (formerly of Zeeland) was hired in May to a full-time Naturalist position, which was vacated when Lois Rheaume retired.



Naturalist Katie McKiernan

There were also some internal promotions among the nature center staff. Long-time Naturalist Carrie Spencer was promoted to Director of Environmental Education and Chief Naturalist. Both Cathy Wesley (Naturalist) and Mike Grappin (Maintenance) were moved from part-time to full-time positions. In addition to her role as seasonal Receptionist, Karen Page took on the responsibility of Media Specialist, working on both the *Heron Tracks* quarterly newsletter and updates to the nature center's website.



Three college students joined the nature center in the summer as interns. Each of these interns came from a different background, is attending a different college, and has different career goals – but all three decided that a summer internship with Seven Ponds Nature Center was a good fit for them. Dominique McKillop (Olivet College) and Amber Hubbard (Ferris State University) spent the summer shadowing and assisting naturalists with programs, animal care, nest box monitoring, trail maintenance, and more. Connor Socrates (Wayne State University) worked on invasive control techniques for removing Glossy Buckthorn.

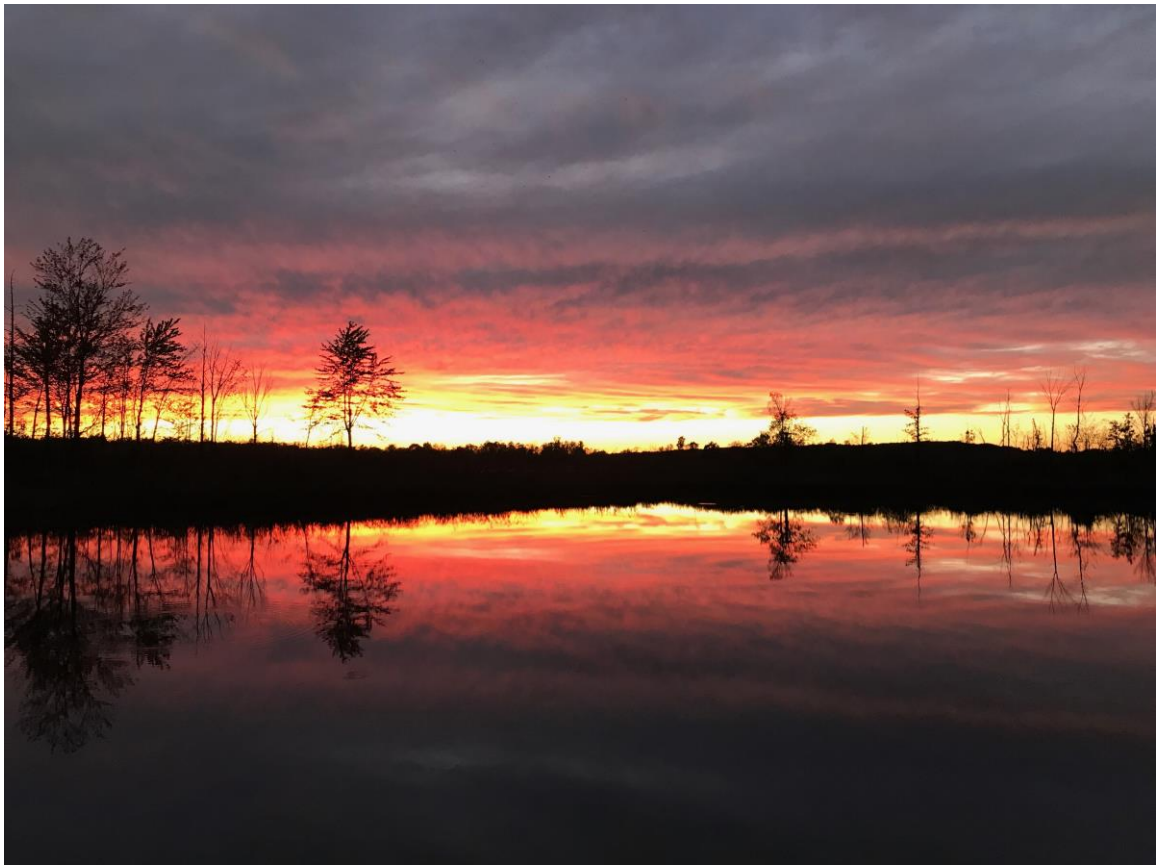
The nature center again received thousands of hours of work from hundreds of volunteers. The **Assistant Naturalists, Stingers, Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Board of Directors**, and many others contributed hundreds of hours of time for education, habitat management, trail and garden maintenance, clerical work, fundraising, and governance. Members of the center's various special interest clubs also helped with education programs and special events. In a typical year, approximately 500 people volunteer at the nature center. In December, the center held a **Volunteer Celebration Dinner** which included good food, fun games, wonderful camaraderie, and recognition by the staff of all the great things our special volunteers do to help make our nature center and its programs successful.



Nearly seventy volunteers enjoyed an evening of fun, food, fellowship, and recognition at Seven Ponds

Conclusion

As we look back on another successful year at Seven Ponds, we also look forward to many more great years to come, working together to fulfill our mission. As always, funding will continue to be one of our biggest challenges. As a staff and board we need to be creative in our approach to fundraising. Additionally, our programming needs to evolve and adapt to meet needs of our members and visitors. Conversely, in a world that is in constant motion and ever-changing, Seven Ponds remains a place where people know they can escape the hurried pace of their everyday lives, just as it has been for three generations – and will continue to be for generations to come.



A fiery sunset over Little Pond brings another day to a close at Seven Ponds Nature Center

Seven Ponds Nature Center Investment Funds

Endowment Fund

Market Value on 1/1/2017	\$2,224,364.58
Market Value on 12/31/2017	\$2,351,104.84
Income to General Account in 2017	\$105,784.41

Reserve Fund

Market Value on 1/1/2017	\$334,053.25
Market Value on 12/31/2017	\$354,790.46
Income to General Account in 2017	\$15,878.76

Seven Ponds Nature Center Activity Report

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	2016	2015
School and Youth Groups															
Seasonal	0	0	0	217	210	101	6	112	105	70	0	0	821	978	1104
Explorer	0	0	0	0	1356	399	0	0	547	1099	92	0	3493	3471	3080
Traveling Naturalist	15	346	248	344	168	0	59	0	0	28	150	103	1461	2670	2107
Scouts	0	28	28	118	22	11	0	9	0	112	60	0	388	311	266
Homeschool	17	11	9	10	14	0	0	0	12	12	7	5	97	115	64
Birthday Parties	0	0	48	22	40	23	12	0	35	0	0	0	180	87	
Annie's Big Nature Lesson	0	120	648	207	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	975	154	550
SUBTOTAL	32	505	981	918	1810	534	77	121	699	1321	309	108	7415	7786	7171
Misc. Adult/Fam. Programs															
Nature Center	21	20	0	0	36	17	0	0	40	10	0	0	144	305	231
Away	0	0	261	1385	226	322	57	0	0	22	0	0	2273	2855	1033
SUBTOTAL	21	20	261	1385	262	339	57	0	40	32	0	0	2417	3160	1264
Member & Public Activities															
Field Schools	0	0	0	0	0	74	54	48	0	0	0	0	176	207	222
Sunday Walks	7	0	2	19	18	0	0	0	0	1	4	5	56	77	134
Knee-High Naturalists	25	23	31	20	0	0	0	10	22	0	21	16	168	218	112
Pgms/Videos/Etc.	283	128	135	48	60	78	42	69	53	54	84	12	1046	619	664
Special Events	123	0	0	0	226	155	0	466	1600	333	0	220	3123	3483	2370
Field Trips	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	54	43
Field Tours	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	45	22
Rentals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	100	89	291
SUBTOTAL	438	151	168	87	304	345	96	693	1675	388	109	253	4707	4792	3858
Volunteer & Interest Groups															
	235	448	272	270	246	201	169	210	182	209	227	83	2752	2511	2571
Casual Visitors															
	218	378	248	765	698	648	780	699	583	500	262	207	5986	5586	4759
TOTAL	944	1502	1930	3425	3320	2067	1179	1723	3179	2450	907	651	23277	23835	19623