

Annual Impact Report

2026

ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Keweenaw LAND TRUST

Executive Director Report

By B. Lauer, Executive Director

It is a rare opportunity in life where one gets to experience time in as multidimensional a way as I was invited to this year. In KLT's 30th year as a community partner, protecting the land, water, and quality of life we value most in the Western U.P., I was called to look backward, experience the present, and imagine the future all at the same time.

Looking back, this anniversary has been an opportunity to learn from the people and decisions that brought us here, while taking pride in just how far we've come. Thirty years of conservation is the result of countless acts of love, care, and generosity. I was reminded of these values as our community said goodbye to one of KLT's founders, Terry Kinzel. His legacy reminds us that our shared work is deeply human, shaped by the people who give something of themselves to the places they love.

This year was not without enough excitement to keep me glued to the present. In January, we welcomed Elam Maurer into a permanent role as a Stewardship Associate, after a great summer and fall with him as an intern. This summer we also welcomed Margaret Armstrong onto our team as Administrative and Development Coordinator. Both of them have bolstered our team in invigorating ways.



Investigating fungus. Photo by Kevin Frest



KLT staff

With our expanded team, we were able to meet greater administrative and internal needs while also bringing expanded programs to our community. We added new lands, increased opportunities to get involved with our stewardship work, and hosted larger events like Land Jam. Every step of the way, we've had the support of you, our community. Whether you gave to protect Ancient Shores Nature Area, bought a new KLT hat, or let us know that you are remembering KLT in your estate plans, every gift is a vote of confidence in the work we do.

Throughout the year, but especially now, as our year of celebration comes to a close, we ask ourselves what comes next? As we embark upon a year of strategic planning, we get to work. In the pages that follow, you'll hear from our wonderful staff about the projects, programs, and people that made this year what it was.

Thank you for the 30 years of care and conviction that brought us here, for making this year so special, and for joining us in imagining what the next 30 could hold.



Board Report

By Nancy Langston, President of the Board of Directors

As the Keweenaw Land Trust celebrated its 30th anniversary throughout 2026, our Board considered what we have inherited from those who founded KLT and what we want to leave for those who come after us. Three decades of conservation have given us a remarkable legacy: thousands of acres protected, special places cared for, and a community that believes the Keweenaw's lands and waters are worth protecting. Our responsibility now is to carry that legacy forward with intention.

To ensure we hold true to the KLT mission, we held conversations with many of KLT's founders and trailblazers, including Terry Kinzel, whose legacy in protecting the Keweenaw is visible on every KLT property. Their stories helped us understand the passions and dreams that shaped KLT in its earliest years.

One important element in the Board's work this year was clarifying our commitment to public access. KLT's nature areas are part of the community, and people need opportunities to experience and explore the places we protect. Our public access policy now makes this commitment explicit: our nature areas will be open and accessible to the public, wherever possible. This is more than a policy. It is a promise for the future—that KLT will not simply protect land, but help people connect with it.

The Board also explored KLT's ongoing commitment to stewardship and a legacy of care. Conservation does not end when a property is protected. Caring for land, water, trails, and habitats requires patience, resources, volunteers, staff, a long-term commitment to doing the work well—and a need for sound financial policies to ensure the work continues, one of the Board's core responsibilities.

Finally, the Board held a retreat to begin a strategic planning process that will involve our broader community. Over the coming year, we will ask members, partners, volunteers, and neighbors: What do you value most about KLT? In what ways should we grow? What does our community need from KLT as the Western Upper Peninsula faces new pressures and opportunities? These are not questions the Board can answer alone. KLT was built by people who care deeply about this place, and its future will be shaped by all of us.

As we mark our 30th anniversary, I invite you to celebrate not only what KLT has accomplished, but what we can accomplish together. Thank you for being part of the KLT community—and for helping us build what comes next.





Board Directors past and present gather at the May Trailblazers BBQ

Land Conservation

By Pat Toczydlowski, Project Specialist

Three decades of KLT land conservation work have created 32 diverse nature areas protecting native wildlife habitat and offering opportunities for low impact public visitation on about 5,500 acres of land and an additional 20 conservation easements, offering an additional 2,370 acres of publicly accessible lands across select easements.

Behind this work are meaningful stories of people that care deeply about their land. I didn't imagine, when I helped found KLT, that I would still be doing this work and I am extremely grateful for the people and experiences it has connected me with, many of whom have passed on but are survived by this land legacy.

To date at least 75 individual land transactions have gone into this work. Since last October, Linda Ott donated land, inspired by her neighbors, Bill and Nanno Rose, and their vision for conservation in the Silver River watershed. Nanno and her sons are now donating adjoining land to expand this conservation area. The Trudell family offered their remote property on the north shore of the Keweenaw at far less than its market value to see it protected by KLT for others to enjoy. With your help, KLT raised funds and closed on the purchase in September to establish the Ancient Shores Nature Area. About a decade in the making was a decision by Sally Santeford to follow through on a vision she and her late husband Henry had been dreaming, to share their beloved farm with the community, offering 115 acres in the Pilgrim River watershed for field studies, recreation and community gardens. Sally recently donated the land, reserving her private use of 10 acres around their homestead for her lifetime, and entrusting KLT to carry out a now shared vision for the Paavola-Neimi Farm, named in honor of its settlers.

The early KLT lands program emphasized conservation easements (CEs), allowing people to protect land they continue to own, and we thought placing less burden on KLT. Land trusts across the country are facing costly issues upholding CEs with new land owners over time. KLT is working to complete two CE projects, the first in several years, and will continue to use this land protection tool when appropriate. As its conservation portfolio grows, KLT is more thoughtful in evaluating all potential conservation projects, carefully considering values and benefits along with potential risks and long-term stewardship obligations. I trust that KLT will continue to be a "people and land" conservancy, building on our portfolio that spans from urban green spaces and "40s" close to where people live, nature retreats and rustic cabins, to the wild and remote ecological gems that come with living amidst ancient landforms on the shores of Lake Superior.



Pat and fellow founders circa 2009



Jill and Sally S. at Paavola Neimi Farm Nature Area

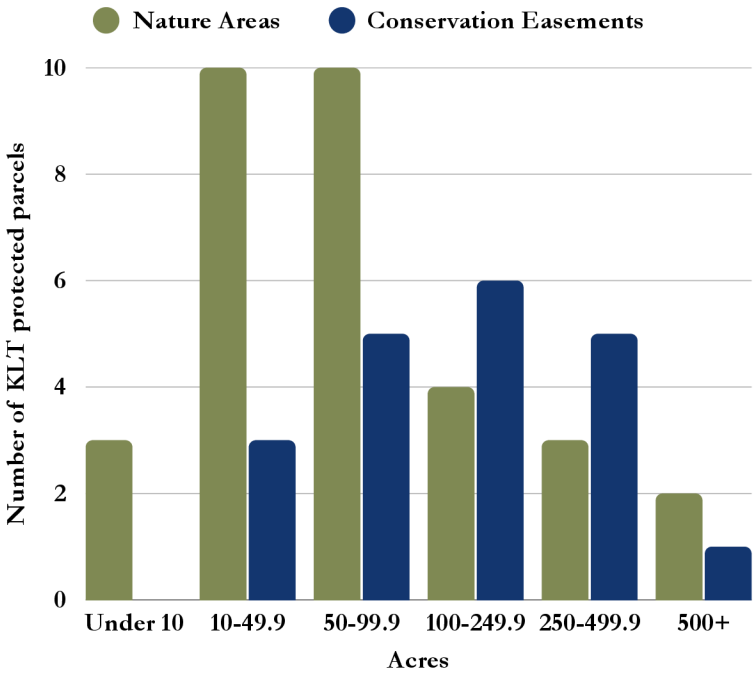
LAND CONSERVATION IMPACT AT A GLANCE

32 nature areas owned and open to the public

5,423 acres owned by KLT

54,749 feet of Lake Superior shoreline protected

Protected Lands by Parcel Size



20 conservation easements

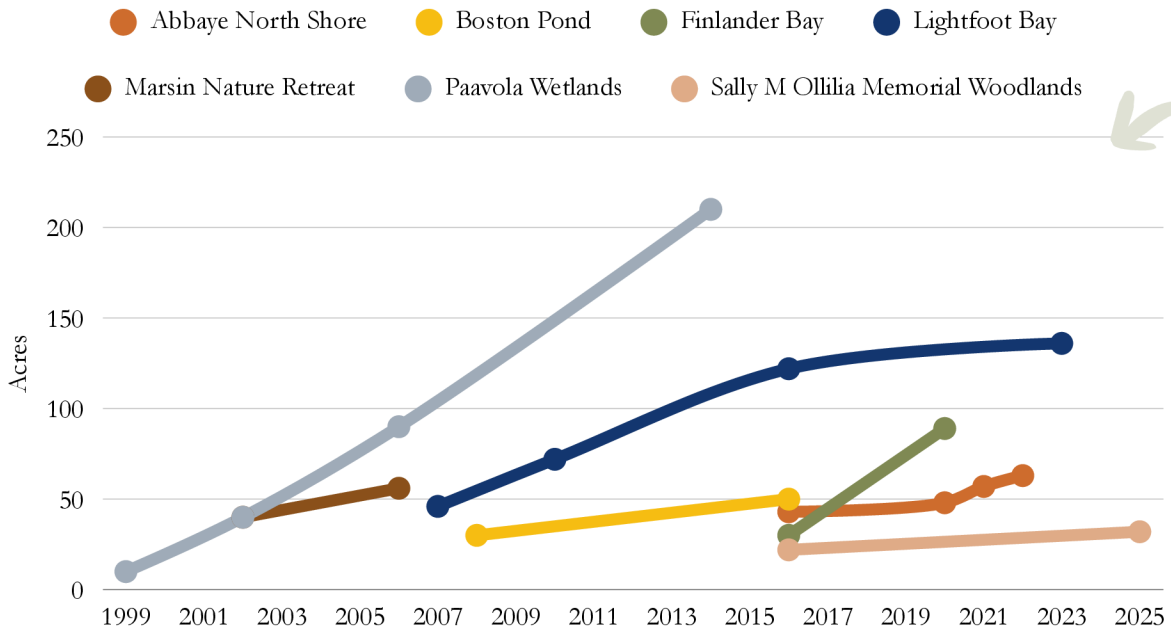
4,220 acres protected under conservation easement

2,373 acres under KLT conservation easement open to the public

52 protected properties

75 individual land transactions

Conservation is built over time



Protecting a place starts with one transaction and can build with new opportunities, representing years of commitment and collaboration.

Stewardship

By Jill Fisher, Botanist and Stewardship Manager



Jill in the new work truck

When I first started with KLT in 2018, the Father's Day Flood had just blown out the dam at Paavola, the 8-mile fence at the Huron Bay Field Station had just come down, and KLT managed only 18 nature areas. Acquisitions have not slowed down, thanks to Pat's leadership, and we are now stewarding 32 nature areas! The more land KLT owns, the more work our stewardship team has to ensure its care.

If we count people as tools, then the addition of Stewardship Associate, Elam Mauer, and our excellent summer interns, Connor Ford and Isabelle Holmstrom, have made a hard-working team that has cleared trails, added signage, replaced invasive plants with native ones. On top of that our Stew Crew worked alongside numerous volunteers on Second Saturdays and Third Thursdays to keep KLT lands accessible and well managed. We hope you've noticed the changes and support us in continuing the care for the lands.

Our new truck is the right tool for getting more work done efficiently. Recently, I was driving behind this year's stewardship crew ("Stew Crew") driving ahead of me in the truck with the trailer behind it. These tools allowed us to haul four of my Subaru hatchback's worth of tools and plants to improve habitat at Point Mills Nature Area. Connor made modular compartments in the bed of the truck to keep our tools organized and safe. Most days the crew only has to load only a portion of the tools specific for that day and the compartments allow us to store tools we often need in designated spots. This has added to our efficiency over packing and unpacking our tools into our cars each day. Such an improvement!

This year KLT received a generous donation to make good headway on controlling the invasive woody glossy buckthorn whose berries are spread by birds and can take over wetlands quite quickly. This gift allowed us to hire an additional summer intern to increase our impact. With Elam's leadership, the Stew Crew along with our volunteers and partners from the Keweenaw Invasive Species Management Area (KISMA) have logged 764 hours. What an accomplishment!

This summer, our expanded staff capacity has allowed us to learn from our past work and implement some innovative habitat improvement techniques. From tools, to financial support, to volunteer hours, none of this would be possible without our community.


Elam with pulled buckthorn


Stew Crew with volunteers during a workday

STEWARDSHIP IMPACT AT A GLANCE


MTU Wildland Fire Club fixes a trail at Boston Creek

17.07 miles
of maintained trails

14 signs
installed


Volunteers pose after a work day


Connor makes signs

2,314 miles
driven in the new work truck

834 hours
volunteered to support the stewardship program

20 workdays
hosted

Special thanks to:

MTU Wildland Fire Club
MTU Service Learning Class
Keweenaw CAPE
MTU Tau Beta Pi Sorority
Superior National Bank
Keweenaw Wild Ones
KISMA

for their generous donations of time, talents, and plants!


Volunteers level a boardwalk at Paavola


Tau Beta Pi treats buckthorn



Elam, Connor, and Isabelle pose with the truck

>1,000 stems
of invasive buckthorn treated

105 trees & shrubs
(native) planted

Nature Connections

By Tiff DeGroot, Ph.D., Community Engagement Manager

Connecting with the land and each other

From bringing back a beloved fundraiser, to revamping our volunteer systems, it has been a big year for nature connections at KLT. This organization's roots run deep in our community, and 2026 was all about nurturing those roots and building new connections in a wonderful symbiosis that will enrich our community for the next 30 years, and beyond.

Nurturing volunteers

Thanks to the support of the Americana Foundation, I was able to spend a significant portion of my time this year assessing and streamlining KLT's volunteer program. This began with a complete audit of our existing volunteer database, communications, and processes. I conducted interviews with staff and volunteer Site Stewards to determine how to improve volunteers' experiences, track volunteer time, and communicate volunteer opportunities.

Reflecting on the audit and interviews, I streamlined our volunteer database to better reflect our volunteers' skills, interests, and availability, then worked with our Stew Crew to integrate new volunteer processes into workdays. This helped us better log volunteer time and more consistently promote volunteer workdays through KLT's printed newsletter, social media, email, website, and partners.

As a result, we have quite possibly the most comprehensive picture KLT has ever had of how volunteers support KLT, with volunteer hours spent mainly on stewardship (45%), operations (30%), and outreach-related tasks (23%), reflecting the diversity in KLT volunteers' skills and opportunities available to them. **Thank you to each volunteer who gifted your time and skills in 2026!**

Bringing people together

KLT has remarkable knack for bringing people together, and this year, we hosted 32 outreach events for over 790 people. At these events, we: brought kids and their parents together to learn about UP frog species, gave a primer on estate planning, snowshoed silently under the moon, explored the relationship between plants and rocks—and so much more! We even hosted our first ever Volunteer Welcome Day, a volunteer orientation and kickoff to our field season! I have personally made new connections at some of these events, and I hope you have, too.

We held two fundraising events to help support land projects this year. I am delighted that KLT was able to bring back Land Jam—one of our most beloved fundraising events—after a six-year hiatus. Land Jam 2026 was one of our biggest events yet, raising $15,600 to support KLT land protection. It was inspiring to see so many new and familiar faces come together to support a great cause and enjoy great music on a gorgeous summer day.



Drop-in workday volunteers with Jill and KLT intern, Isabelle.



Tiff works on Land Jam poster prints at CCCAC



Dancers at Land Jam. Photo: Tom Oliver

NATURE CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT A GLACE

32 events

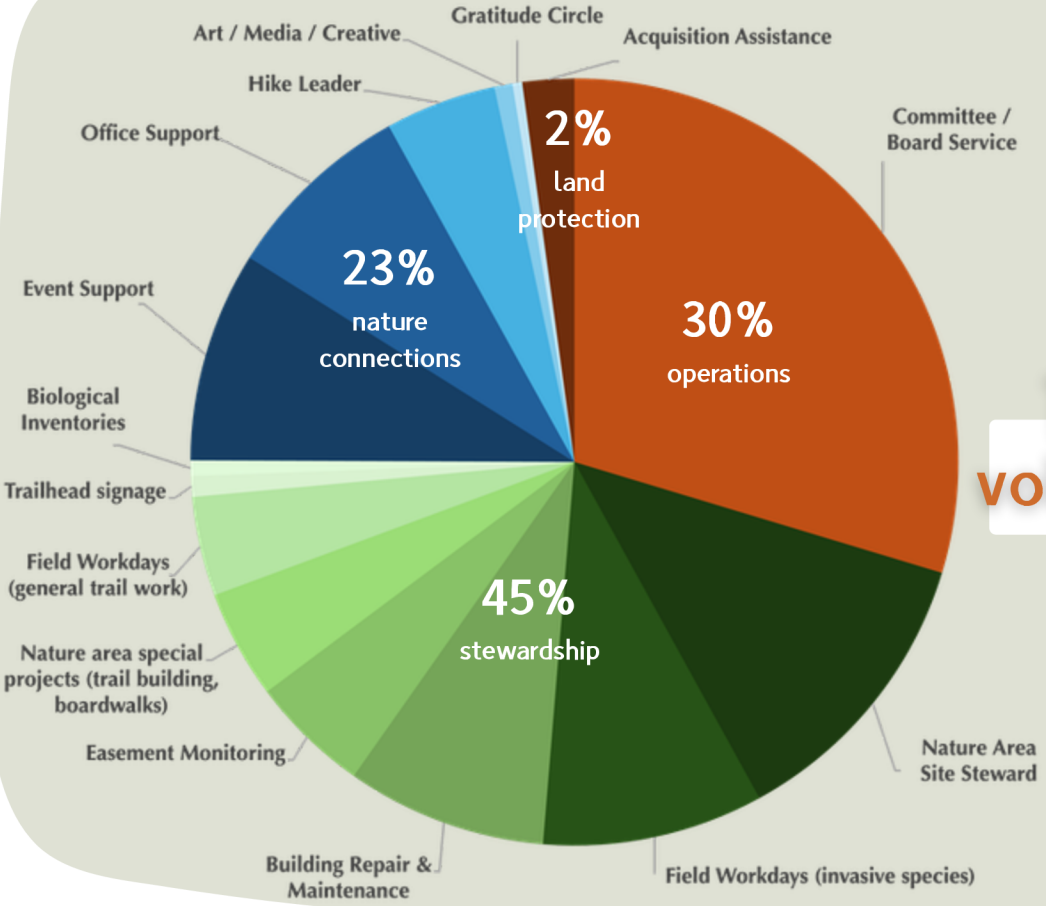
790+ attendees

58 groups
partnered with on projects

1,709 newsletters
mailed to supporters *Fall '25, Spring & Summer '26*

beyond measure
Feet on trails & hearts outside

Volunteer contributions



1,837 hours
total time donated

127+ volunteers

~16% increase
in stewardship volunteer workday hours logged

27,000 visits
to KLT website

7,100+ followers
on social media

54% increase
in social media interactions this year

16% increase
in email subscribers this year

PARTNERSHIPS AT A GLANCE

There is a reason the first words of KLT's mission statement are "a community partner." As a small organization with a big mission, we know our work is amplified through partnerships with local individuals, organizations, and institutions. This year, our team engaged in several collaborative projects made possible by the diverse skills and talents of our community partners.

The year kicked off with a partnership with Michigan Technological University's Rozsa Center surrounding a National Geographic presentation by world-renowned night sky photographer Babak Tafreshi. Led by Tiff and volunteer Tom Oliver, KLT hosted a series of night sky events to connect Babak's presentation to our local landscape. In recognition of this collaboration, KLT received a Community Partner of the Year Award.

KLT has also been a longtime member of the Community Advisory Committee for the Keweenaw Heartlands project, which reached major milestones this year. State legislation



B and fellow members of the Keweenaw Heartlands CAC accept award

was amended to allow for the formation of a Forest and Recreation Authority, with the first five-member board elected on November 3. In recognition of this collective effort, the Keweenaw Heartlands project received Project of the Year from Visit Keweenaw.

Alongside these longstanding partnerships, KLT launched several new initiatives, including a multipart educational series on Northwoods fungi with the Carnegie Museum; a day of learning about old-growth forests in partnership with Michigan Nature Association, Michigan Natural Features Inventory, and Old-Growth Forest Network; and an initiative to designate the City of Houghton as a Bird City in collaboration with Visit Keweenaw, City of Houghton, Copper Country Bird Club, Keweenaw Invasive Species Management Area (KISMA), Keweenaw Outdoor Recreation Coalition, Keweenaw Wild Ones, Keweenaw Wild Bird REC, Michigan Tech, and The Nature Conservancy. Houghton is the first Bird City in the UP and the first Michigan community to earn "High Flyer" status.


B and Tom accept awards for Nature by Night series


Keren Tischler and Curt Webb demonstrate cooking with mushrooms


Walking Among Elders old growth event at Estivant Pines. Photo: Kevin Frest



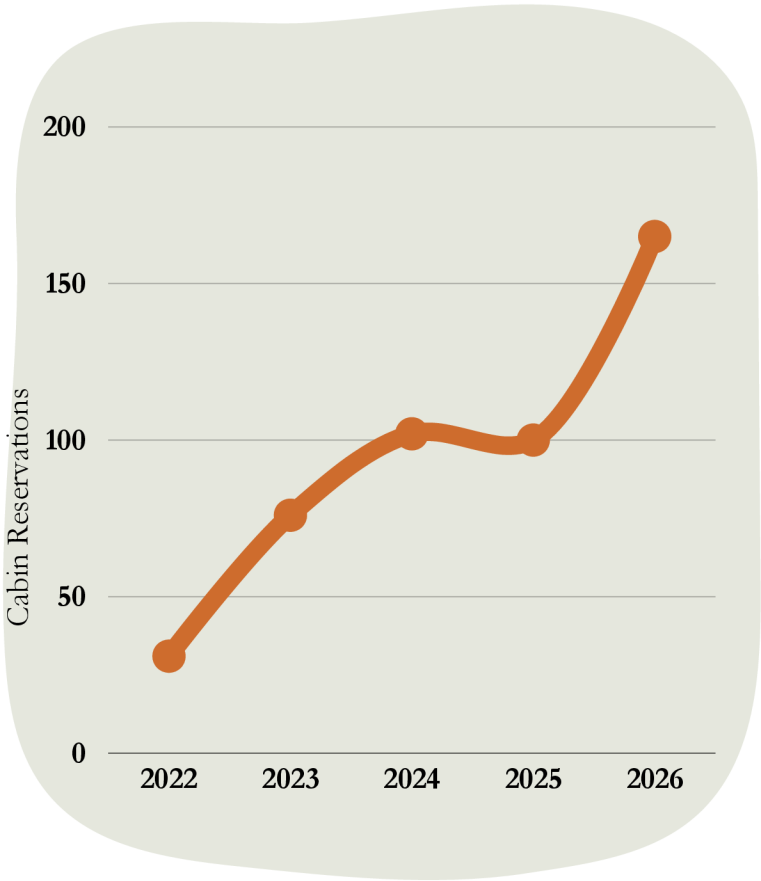
Tiff and Bird City working group accept official designation

CABIN RESERVATION PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Did you know that many of KLT's protected lands come to us with usable structures on them? While KLT is not obligated to keep all structures that come with lands protected for conservation, we view many of them as assets.

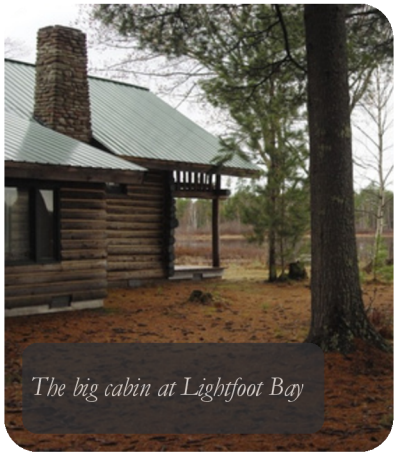
For years, KLT has welcomed members of the public to reserve four rustic cabins for short term personal use. The Marsin Nature Retreat, Din Egen Woods, Lightfoot Bay Coastal Wetlands, and Point of View all offer unique nature connections made all the more special through the opportunity to spend the night surrounded by protected land and waters. In return, we ask that guests make a donation to KLT to support our ongoing care for and stewardship of the land.

After their first stay at Point of View, a recent guest wrote to our staff, "Thank you so very much for maintaining the property and sharing that incredible spot in this way. How incredible to be able to wake in the night and walk out to the rocks to see the stars and listen to the waves."



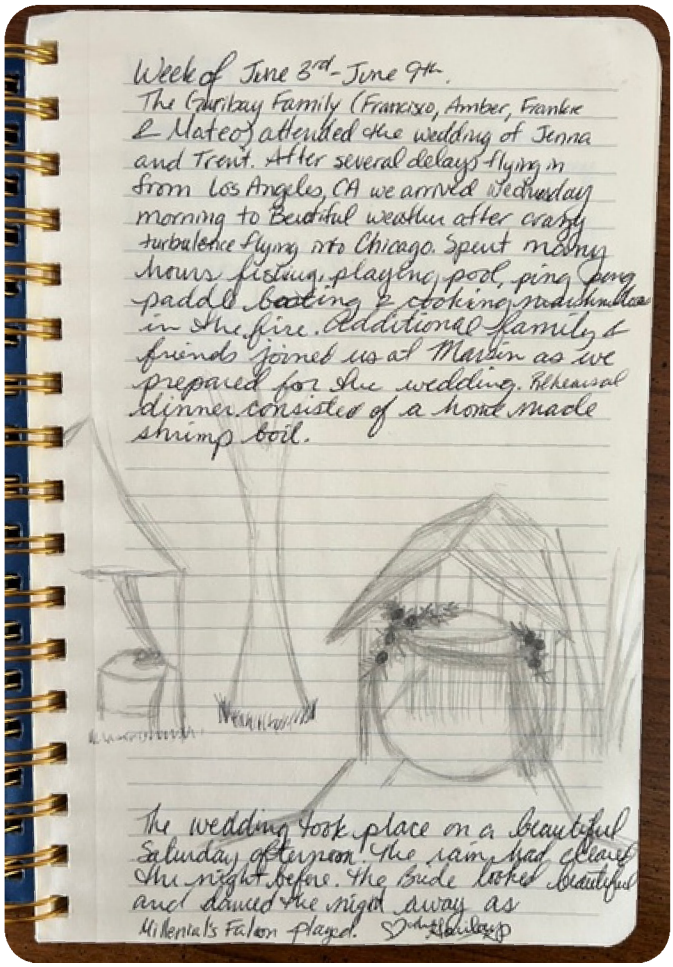
From weddings and work retreats to family vacations and quiet solo escapes, KLT cabins could be where your next favorite memories are made.

To learn more about our cabins and to make a reservation, visit: **keweenawlandtrust.org/reservable-properties**


The big cabin at Lightfoot Bay

165
individual reservations made

$21,400
donated to the Land Stewardship and Marsin Funds by users


Week of June 3rd - June 9th.
The Garibay Family (Francisco, Amber, Frankie & Mateo) attended the wedding of Jenna and Trent. After several delays flying in from Los Angeles, CA we arrived Wednesday morning to Beautiful weather after crazy turbulence flying into Chicago. Spent many hours fishing, playing pool, ping pong paddle boating & cooking marshmallows in the fire. Additional family & friends joined us at Marsin as we prepared for the wedding. Rehearsal dinner consisted of a home made shrimp boil.

The wedding took place on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The rain had cleared the night before. The bride looked beautiful and danced the night away as Millenial's Falcon played.

MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDRAISING AT A GLACE

255 tickets to Land Jam sold

$2,119 raised through Gordon Borsvold pottery sale


Borsvold pottery sale

$122,000 in grant funding from foundations and partners

$8,250 in monetary sponsorhips for Land Jam

$5,500 in in-kind sponsorhips for Land Jam

$102,560 raised for the acquisition, care and long term protection of Ancient Shores Nature Area



Land Jam 2026

458 current member households

186 new member households

118% increase in new members when compared to last year

MEMORIALS

Land is a lasting memorial. Throughout KLT's 30th year, we have reflected on the ways that time, memory, and love shape our connection to the land and to one another. The places we hold most dear connect us to the people who came before us, the people we have shared them with, and those who will come after us. A familiar beach, a favorite scenic outlook, a quiet perch next to a creek remind us of all we have inherited and our responsibility to steward the next generations' inheritance.

A gift made in memory of a loved one is an act of remembrance and a choice about the future. We are grateful to all who have entrusted KLT with gifts in memory of their loved ones this year. Whether your loved one was a founder of KLT, an active community member, or someone who cared about the beauty of the Western U.P., a gift in their memory helps ensure that the land, water, and quality of life of the Keweenaw remain for generations to come.



Terry Kinzel loved the the pie eating contest at the Horsetail Scrambles



Nancy and Doug Sherk at George Hite Dunes and Marshes

In 2026, gifts were given in memory of:

Barb and Bob Filer

Christine Contrino

Jeffrey Cummings

Judy and Steve Albee

Nancy and Doug Sherk

Roger Held

Terry Kinzel

30 Years at a Glance

Organizational highlights

KLT established by an all-volunteer group

Board passes resolution to follow Land Trust Aliance Standards & Practices



Pat Toczydlowski: 2nd staff member hired as Project Specialist

Office moves to E.L. Wright Building in Hancock



Evan McDonald: first staff member hired as Executive Director

KLT moves into first office at E-Center in Lake Linden

New logo



Nathan Miller hired as Project Coordinator



Jill Fisher hired as Botanist and Stewardship Manager

Office moves to 101 Quincy, Hancock



Carolyn Meingast hired as Office Manager

KLT acheives LTA Accreditation



B. Lauer hired as KLT's 2nd Executive Director



Elam Maurer hired as Stewardship Associate



Tiff DeGroot hired as Community Engagement Manager



Margaret Armstrong hired as Admin and Development Coordinator

Office moves to purchased house on Limerick Street, Hancock

Accreditation renewal awarded

1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026

KLT accepts Marsin Nature Retreat





1st Conservation Easement: Simi Easement
1st Nature Area: Paavola Wetlands



Abbaye Peninsula conservation priority area initiated

KLT starts Inland Waters Initiative with CE's in western counties



Hungarian Falls acquired



Over 1,000 acres of CEs acquired in the Pilgrim River Watershed using USFS Forest Legacy funds

Point of View acquired

Little Spruce Lake donated to KLT, marking the single largest acquisition in KLT history



Jacob's Falls purchased



Silver Island donated

Land protection milestones

FROM THE ARCHIVE



Jeff Flam, Kate Alvord, Kraig Klungness, Janet Marr, Greg Kudray, Michelle Morgan, and Christa Walck working on an early lands project



Susan Dlutkowski, Pat, Rachel and Al T-11, at the Joseph and Mary Lizzadro Lakeshore Preserve Dedication



Terry Kinzel and Dana Richter at the Bete Grise dedication



KLT and conservation partners scope out a coastal conservation project and learn how to write baseline documentation reports



Janet Marr, Joe Kaplan, Erik Lilleskov, Evan McDonald, Bob Marr, Carol MacLennan, Terry Kinzel, Sue Ellen Kingsley, and Mark Roberts (2004)



Former Executive Director, Evan McDonald leads an invasive species pull at the Marsin Nature Area



ACCREDITED™
LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Sound Finances
Ethical Conduct
Responsible Governance
Lasting Stewardship

Keweenaw LAND TRUST

A community partner protecting land, water, and quality of life through land conservation, stewardship, and nature connections.