**Ouabache Land Conservancy**

**Five-year Strategic Plan 2024-2029**

**Preface**

The Ouabache Land Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that preserves nature in the Wabash River Valley in the west-central Indiana counties of Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vigo, and Vermillion. Founded in 2007, by the end of 2022, it had 800 acres of land under its protection and was overseeing grants of over one million dollars for conservation-oriented agricultural practices in the Otter Creek watershed.

**Our Vision**

Our mission is to protect and restore land in west-central Indiana by providing habitat for native species, maintaining natural scenic beauty, and improving water and air quality while offering education and enhancing the quality of life in our communities for future generations.

We imagine lands left to nature where wild native plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fungi, and fish can all flourish. We envision current and future generations, adults and children, exploring these lands and learning about the natural processes that govern its close-knit cycle of life, growth, death, decay, and regeneration.

In the distant future, as more land is developed, these protected lands will remain as precious gems displaying important values: wonder at nature’s complexity, joy at its brilliant diversity, and a deeper appreciation of our spectacular planet. They will also provide economic value to the community in a variety of ways, including providing cleaner air and water, slowing flooding, creating recreational opportunities and improving public health, adding value to surrounding land, increasing interest in investment and job creation in the area, attracting retirees, potentially protecting working lands, and boosting economic activity near preserves.

Everyone belongs to the Ouabache Land Conservancy. OLC enhances the quality of life of our local communities by protecting land for our native flora and fauna. All people should have equal access to saving nature. We embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in every community.

**Strategic Goals for 2028 and Initiatives to Reach Them**

**Strategic Goal One: Protect and restore natural areas**

Protecting and restoring natural areas is the passion driving the volunteers who power the conservancy. We expect to encourage the donation of additional land and conservation easements by displaying ongoing success in managing existing properties and by widespread communication with the public about these efforts. All the steps outlined below for achieving strategic goals also support this goal.

Potential land donors must trust the conservancy’s ability to care for their property correctly, and this trust will flow from an ongoing demonstration of proper stewardship of lands under our protection. This stewardship includes creating a management plan for all properties and identifying stewards for each parcel. Stewardship will also include restoration projects such as plantings of native prairie and hardwood species where appropriate, management of invasive species, and ensuring water quality.

The Land Conservancy will work towards identifying the unprotected areas within the service area with the most critical conservation value and prioritize acquisition efforts around these properties.

**Strategic Goal Two: Educate the public and landowners about nature.**

The Ouabache Land Conservancy will offer presentations and hands-on events in public or at schools. Topics might include the workings of natural processes, the identification and habits of native birds and other wildlife, the importance of native plants, and the science of biology and ecology.

We will create opportunities for the public to experience nature directly. Where appropriate, lands will be open to the public with marked trails, interpretive signage, or take-home materials. Rural landowners will be encouraged to adopt conservation practices on their land.

We will offer educational hikes and public opportunities to participate in stewardship, including the management of invasive species.

**Strategic Goal Three: Improve water quality in area watersheds.**

The conservancy oversees a Clean Water Act 319 grant that encourages conservation-oriented agricultural practices in the 220-square-mile Otter Creek watershed through grants of over a million dollars for conservation-oriented farming practices. We will continue this work and apply for future funding.

**Strategic Goal Four: Build a robust organization to last forever.**

The Ouabache Land Conservancy pledges to protect its lands forever, a profound promise. The organization must remain active, financially healthy, and self-perpetuating to meet that commitment. Necessary steps toward this goal will include:

 \* Increasing fundraising efforts from individuals, corporations, and granting agencies

 \* Hiring a staff person to amplify the group’s efforts toward growth

 \* Improving communication with the general public as well as specific groups such as

 members, elected officials, and communities of lesser economic means

 \* Increasing overall membership and working to attract younger members

 \* Encouraging member participation and volunteering

 \* Engaging members of the advisory board

 \* Diversify the board across the many dimensions of lived experience

 \* Seeking partnerships with other organizations

 \* Committing to meet all guidelines for certification by the Land Trust Alliance

 \* Prepare annual statements showing performance towards goal against crucial metrics

such as the number of projects completed, acres protected, number of members, miles of trails maintained, number of public events, etc.

**List of Current Board Members, 2023**

Thomas Baer, President

Claudia Cozadd, VP of Stewardship

Alysa Morley, VP of Development

Lisa Baer, Secretary, and Treasurer

Ron Tyner, Director

David Kluger, Director

Dr. Michelle Marincel Payne, Director

Hansford Mann Jr., VP of Acquisition

Phil Cox, VP of Programs

Dr. Jim Nardi, Director

Brendan Kearns, Director

Dr. Daniel Bradley, Director

Dr. John Whitaker Jr., Director

Marty Jones, Immediate Past President

**Honorary Advisory Board**

Jim McDonald

**List of Current Advisor Board Members, 2023**

George Bakken
Jane Santucci Bryant

Mary Beth Eberwein

Jeff Fisher
Robert Jean
Susan Berta
Adam Grossman

Mike Fisher

Dan Griggs

Ted Harris

T.J. Hellman

Fred Nation

Joe Newport

Jean Testa

Marshall Parks

Patrick Ralston

Keith Ruble
Peter Scott
Jim Speer
Jeremy Montgomery

Curt Stanfield

Carissa Lovett

Britton Luther

Bill Mitchell

Gerald McGlone

Raoul Moore