

## The Vision for a Conservation Legacy

The vision of the founding members of the Gates Mills Land Conservancy became a reality through the generosity of Villagers who have donated land, funds or granted conservation easements. In fact, the majority of Village citizens have continuously supported the conservation movement by passing and then renewing a 1-mill tax levy to fund the acquisition of land every five years. This tax support is unusual and was recognized by the Land Trust Alliance as unique in the United States. It continues to be the primary source of capital for the purchase of land. Since its formation in 1988, the Gates Mills Land Conservancy has preserved 724 acres within the Village. The Conservancy owns 300 acres of land and holds conservations easements and deed restrictions on an additional 424 acres.

Members of the Gates Mills Land Conservancy, through dues, and generous donations of supporters, fund the Conservancy's operating expenses. These funds enable us to carry out our stewardship responsibilities. We monitor and protect lands that have been entrusted to our care. Properties are maintained in their natural state with some being used – in collaboration with other conservation organizations and our local schools – for conservation education.

So, what do we actually do?

We begin with a baseline documentation for each property. Documentation includes a map of the property, date of the purchase or easement, a description of the conservation value of the property, and the relative conditions that must be monitored and enforced by the conservancy. Properties are inspected on a regular basis, at least annually, to ensure they remain in their natural state. This includes maintenance such as repairing split rail fences, removing fallen or potentially hazardous trees, mowing open fields, eradicating invasive species, identifying indigenous trees and flora, or enforcing easements when necessary.

Reports are prepared for each site inspection, and violations are resolved as needed. Good relationships with property owners holding a conservation easement are maintained to ensure an understanding of and adherence to the conservation provisions in the easements.

Clearly, our residents and our Village Officials had the courage and foresight to protect the natural open spaces and scenic resources of the Village and the Chagrin River Watershed. It is fair to say that in the realm of local land conservancies, the special synergy that has existed between Gates Mills Land Conservancy and the Village citizens for thirty-four years is unique among communities.