

A Passion for the Natural World: Judy Semroc's Mission to Inspire and Protect

For more than two decades, Judy Semroc has been a dynamic force in conservation and environmental education in Northeast Ohio. A naturalist, ecologist, and gifted educator, Judy worked for 20 years in the Natural Areas Division at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where she conducted extensive ecological surveys on both public and private lands. Her work has helped shape land management practices, conservation plans, and public awareness across the region.

In 2021, Judy launched her own business—**Nature Spark**—a venture focused on connecting people to nature through ecological consulting, public programs, and field-based learning. Whether leading a field trip or presenting at a lecture, Judy's mission remains clear: *“to teach people how to see, understand, and care for the natural world—especially children, who will become the next generation of conservationists.”*

Her programs blend science with storytelling, illustrating the delicate interdependence of plants, animals, and habitats. Judy speaks of the tiny yet mighty gray tree frog in her talks, an ambassador for wetland health whose presence signifies a thriving ecosystem. As she explains, wetlands don't just harbor frogs and sedges—they purify water, support biodiversity, and protect the entire landscape.

One such wetland winds through the heart of the Merkel property protected by the Gates Mills Land Conservancy. Judy highlights it as a biologically rich area that also plays a crucial role in maintaining local water quality. “Protecting these habitats isn't just about saving frogs,” she says. “It's about safeguarding the water that runs past your home and into your rivers, which in turn helps to protect human health. If our ecosystem denizens & habitats are in peril, then we are too.” Her approach is methodical and practical:

- **Assess the site fully** - learn everything you can, including seasonal patterns and species richness.
- **Create a baseline** inventory with photographs and species lists.
- **Prioritize the worst invasive species** (such as Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard, or bush honeysuckle), determine the extent of each, and develop a timeline for management.
- **Develop long-term stewardship plans** based on the natural rhythms of the site.
- **Make clear recommendations**—what to do, what to avoid, and when to act.
- **Phase the work**, selecting multiple management methods and choosing the right time of year to implement them.
- **Minimize the use of chemicals**, allowing nature to recover at its own pace.
- **Give native species space** to re-emerge once invasives are controlled.

“It's almost impossible to remove all invasives at once,” Judy explains. “You have to give the land a chance to breathe and see what comes back on its own. It may take several rounds of treatment to knock back some of the more aggressive species, so patience and continued diligence is very important.”