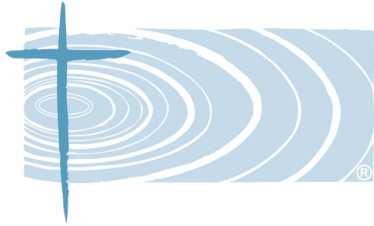


Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ



Partners in the work of the Spirit



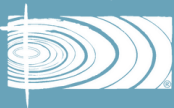
2023 ECOLOGICAL IMPACT REPORT

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ engage in sustainable land stewardship as a comprehensive approach to managing our properties and natural resources that prioritizes environmental conservation, social well-being, and economic viability. Through our work, we aim to manage the land and natural resources responsibly and ethically to ensure long-term benefits to humans and the natural world around us.

As states pass legislation reducing the protection of highly sensitive wetlands, the Poor Handmaids are working to restore these critical and important habitats on their own properties. Wetlands are one of the most important and biodiverse habitats. They are critical to the availability of clean water and act as natural flood control regions. They also act as important carbon sinks at a time when carbon in the atmosphere is on a critical rise. Since the early 1700s, the United States has lost more than **40%** of its wetlands across the entire range of the lower 48 states. In Indiana, we have lost more than **85%** of our historic wetlands, primarily to agriculture and real estate development. Of our original wetland habitat state-wide, only approximately **800,000 acres** remain. While that may sound like a lot, consider that the State of Indiana alone had around 5.6 million acres of wetlands in the 1780s.

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ identified 23 acres of farmland and designated it to be restored as a wetland habitat due to its low-lying elevation and proximity to an existing wetland and Lake Galbraith. In July of 2022 we were awarded a **Lakes and Rivers Enhancement (LARE) grant** from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to cover a portion of the cost to do this work. With additional partnerships with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited, work began on site in 2023 with anticipated completion in May of 2024. This new wetland will become a vital part of the Flat Lake Watershed in Marshall County, Indiana. Additionally, this new site will serve as a place of education and research for organizations such as Marion University, Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy (Purdue University), and other state and federal partner organizations.

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Wetland habitat isn't the only area where the Poor Handmaids are focused on restoring our lands to their native state. Creating rich biodiversity is important in supporting wildlife and sequestering carbon. Grasslands and native prairies play a critical role in this important work. The PHJC properties contain over **10 acres** of mixed native prairie and grasslands which support various types of plant and animal life and is an important infrastructure for native pollinator species. It is estimated that for each acre of native prairie, one ton of carbon is sequestered out of the atmosphere annually. This is in contrast to standard turf lawn that sequesters only **.25 ton** of carbon per acre. Further, turf grass generally requires regular maintenance for mowing and adding synthetic fertilizers, which means burning fossil fuels. Native prairies are perennial and self-supporting and generally only require a single maintenance mowing once per year!

The Poor Handmaids have extended this ever-important land ethic to our farm as well. Currently our farm is primarily in a conventional soybean-corn rotation, with **30 acres** dedicated to organic (non-chemical use) farming, and we are taking great strides each year to convert our system to a fully regenerative agriculture system that increases soil health, reduces erosion, and reduces our use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. During the 2023 growing season we reduced our use of chemical inputs by almost **40%** by incorporating new soil testing that took into account biologically available nutrients and incorporated variable rate fertilization. As we move into 2024 we continue to incorporate regenerative farming practices such as rotational grazing, increased use of cover crops, and further reduction of chemical inputs. This is in addition to the new pollinator habitats that we will be developing along fence rows and farm field edges.

The adoption and integration of sustainable land stewardship practices has far-reaching positive impacts on the environment, society, and economy. By prioritizing biodiversity, conservation, soil health, and climate change mitigation, we can create a more sustainable and resilient experience for future generations. Embracing sustainable land stewardship is a critical investment in the long-term well-being of our planet and its inhabitants.

Through your generous support - and following the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ core values of Openness to the Spirit, Community, Simplicity, and Dignity and Respect for all - the PHJCs are making critical change in our approach to our shared home.

