

Partnerships



GTRLC partners with many like-minded organizations in order to achieve collective conservation goals. Below are stories of just some of these partnerships.

SEEDS

When it came time to build a small viewing deck at Green Point Dunes, which offers some of the best views of any of GTRLC's preserves, Steve Lagerquist had plenty of options.

He could have hired a general contractor, of course, and the deck would have turned out just fine. But what if there was a way to achieve some other positive outcomes along the way? Lagerquist – a land stewardship specialist at GTRLC – decided to reach out the folks at [SEEDS](#).

SEEDS is a Traverse City-based nonprofit that works heavily in the fields of ecology and sustainable design, often involving at-risk youth in the process. The organization had previously done some work with invasive species removal for GTRLC, and Lagerquist felt an infrastructure build would be a good fit. The folks at SEEDS jumped at the opportunity to get their youth working on another meaningful project in the community.



A youth team from SEEDS designed and built a beautiful deck with a natural, rough-hewn look. What's more, the deck is built from black locust, a troublesome invasive species that SEEDS crews previously helped remove from the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

"It's a great story to tell," Lagerquist said. "They hire local youth in order to teach them useful skills, and there's the black locust aspect – It's just fantastic all around."

The picturesque deck, completed in 2011, was just the first of what's turning into many partner projects with SEEDS. Lagerquist tapped the group in 2015 to revamp aging infrastructure at Pyatt Lake on Old Mission Peninsula. They're now set to build black locust benches for the upcoming Overlook Trail at Arcadia Dunes, a universal access trail to be completed this summer, and to improve the trail at the Elberta Dunes South Natural Area.

SEEDS considers GTRLC a tremendous partner, said Bill Watson, SEEDS' Youth Development Director.

"GTRLC staff has always been great at engaging our young people. They help them understand why they're doing what they are doing, how important the work is and what the impact of the work is," Watson said. "That's not always easy when you are cutting or pulling invasives or hauling black locust lumber up a steep hill."

The partnership is a true "win-win," Watson said. At-risk youth gain skills, get a chance to make a difference, and GTRLC benefits from a project sure to be enjoyed by the public for years to come.

"This allows young people to do meaningful work that has long-term positive impacts for both the land and themselves. Our members receive dozens and dozens of unsolicited 'thank yous' from people they don't know who visit the natural areas where they are working," he said. "For many of the youth working in SEEDS, they have never been thanked for anything. They end up feeling proud of themselves and the work they are a part of."