

Are There Really Caves?

Nick and Claire Wolterstorff placed a conservation easement on their beautiful 80-acre private property on Guernsey Lake Road, a state-designated Natural Beauty Road. In the process of completing this transaction, SWMLC had the opportunity to name the creek that runs through the property and to learn about a special feature of the creek.

The Wolterstorff land is stunning, with many dramatic topographical features. The main trail through the property winds down the hill, through the 70-foot-tall, cathedral-canopy, oak-hickory forest, past pocket wetlands teeming with life, and ends at the Cave Creek corridor. The scenery changes with the passing seasons, starting with a carpet of spring ephemerals, giving way to a diverse variety of summer ferns (including Christmas, lady, sensitive, cinnamon, royal, wood, maidenhair and more), changing to a rainbow of autumn foliage that is eventually covered by the snow before the spring ephemerals pop through the ground once again.

Traversing the property is a cool, crystal-clear, spring-fed creek which meanders and babbles along the rocky bottom. The origin of the name, as rumor has it, comes from two larger caves at the headwaters of the creek that were dynamited shut for safety reasons. Along the north bank of the creek are many smaller caves that have been studied by a Michigan State University geologist. Geologically, Michigan went through many periods of glaciation, and the geologist believes there are two places in Michigan that were not glaciated — one of these is Cave Creek.

Cave Creek begins as several small wetlands on the west side of Norris Road and flows west through the Wolterstorff property. It then flows downstream into Tamarack Lake and into Fish Lake, where the banks are protected by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources & Environment. Protecting this property creates a corridor of conserved land that gives wildlife plenty of room to roam as they



The caves that give Cave Creek its name can be seen along the leaf-strewn upper bank of this photo, appearing as dark spots just below fallen trees. Photo by Emily Wilke.

compete for one of the many caves to call home.

Although the stream is locally known as Cave Creek, we discovered that this small creek which flows through the Wolterstorff property actually had no official name. We couldn't find a name on any map, so we contacted Rose Anger, Barry County's GIS technician, who confirmed that the creek did not have a name. Rose filled out the application, gave us a brief rundown of the process on how to officially name a creek, and connected us with someone at the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in Reston, Virginia.

After learning about the naming process, we started by contacting Jennifer Goy, Orangeville Township clerk, to suggest officially naming the creek and secured the township's support at their April 6, 2010, meeting. Then, working with county administrator Mike Brown, we presented the idea for review and approval by the Barry County commissioners, who endorsed the name at their July 20, 2010, meeting.

The proposed name was then approved by the Michigan Geographic Names Authority. The application was forwarded to the Department of the Interior, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs — through the three tribal groups in Barry County: Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi — reviewed and supported the proposed name. Finally, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names voted in favor of naming this unnamed creek, Cave Creek, on December 9, 2010.

So, after a lengthy eight-month process of governmental review and approval at local, county, state, and federal levels, what was once just casually known as ... is now officially and *nationally* known as ... Cave Creek.

The Wolterstorff property is one of the special places that makes Barry County unique, and SWMLC has been pleased to work with Nick and Claire to protect it forever.

— Emily E. Wilke