



# KEEPING CURRENT

With the Clinton River Watershed Council

## Stop and Listen – Rediscovering Nature with Soundwalks

Chris Bobryk

I stopped for a moment next to an impressive eastern cottonwood tree, snarled and stretched over the river, listening to bursts of cool air rushing through its bare branches. A faint hum of road noise filtered through the young floodplain forest, only audible after I stopped crunching through well-seasoned leaves.

I was on a soundwalk practicing my “stop and listen,” the first of six exercises outlined in a new podcast called [“Soundwalking in the Time of COVID-19.”](#) created by [Dr. Sharon Gill, Ph.D.](#) – a soundscape ecologist and associate professor of biological sciences at Western Michigan University.

Sharon’s encouraging voice gently guided me through each exercise designed to tune your ears to the intricacies of soundscapes all around us.

With my eyes closed, I tilted my head up and listened: wind, songbirds (at least six species), traffic, flowing water. Eyes opened, I crouched and looked closely at the ground: leaves coated with dry sediment, moss-lined branches, insects scurrying, an unexplainable crackling sound in the distance, like someone slowly sprinkling sand grains over sheets of paper.

Social distancing has been difficult for many, and people are looking to nature to find solace during these uncertain times. There is evidence that nature helps strengthen our [minds and bodies](#), and soundwalking is an easy way for us to reconnect to ourselves, memories of places we’ve visited, or the roles nature plays in our everyday lives.

***“You can sound walk anywhere. Any place in nature, any time of day or even any time of year will do; as we listen, we learn about the rhythms of nature.”***

***- Sharon Gill, Ph.D.***

“Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy noticed a lot of visitors to their preserves and I thought a sound walk would be a nice, but maybe even needed, addition to visitor experiences,” stated Dr. Gill about why she decided to create the podcast since the stay-at-home order. “Soundwalks lead to new discoveries, even about places one has visited many times and feels acquainted with.”

Soundwalks instill moments of mindfulness that help bring awareness to our environment and the need for action to protect it. They are growing in popularity across U.S. communities (like [Chicago](#) and [Detroit](#)), and across the [globe](#), as ecological and cultural activities that inspire, excite, and inform listeners.

New dimensions of an ecosystem or neighborhood can be exposed by peeling back the layers of information hidden in the sounds of environments. This level of awareness can be a catalyst for action to protect the integrity of our natural resources.

In the podcast, Dr. Gill tells us to, “Tune our ears to really hear the sounds of nature” and “gain a new view” of what is happening around us. Using our ears to view nature is a powerful way of thinking about conservation.

Soundscapes that define entire ecosystems are disappearing because of habitat loss, decreasing biodiversity, and intruding noises from urban development. We can actually hear and see these changes. Soundwalks are helping provoke a strong sense of responsibility to care for, protect, and improve access to natural areas, green spaces, or water trails for future generations to experience.

“Soundwalking in the Time of COVID-19” podcast is a wonderful resource to help you get started with exploring the sounds of your environment at any time or season.

The Clinton River has its own acoustic signature playing loud and clear, just waiting for you to listen and discover all it has to offer. Work with us to hear it by walking the trails, paddling the river, or joining CRWC’s soundwalk coming this fall. The watershed has a story to tell and we want to help you hear it.



**Listen Now!**  
**Click the image on the left to access the podcast.**

*“On this walk, I’ll ask you to change your focus to concentrate on what you hear when in nature.”*  
Sharon Gill