



Immersed in the Land

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BETTERING OUR COMMUNITIES

Alan Haney

I expect those reading this essay all share an interest in natural landscapes. Some of us reserve time each year to traipse for a few days in wild places. Nearly all of us will visit state natural areas, public parks, or forests at least a few times during the year. Some us are fortunate enough to have open land, perhaps even relatively undisturbed forests or wetlands, near enough to our homes that we can walk in them several times a week, if not daily. Ever wonder what motivates people to spend so much time seeking these experiences? Evidence suggests that similar motivation leads to gardening, hunting, bird-watching, and even raising house plants.



Alan Haney

Deep within human psyche is a connection with nature that cultural evolution and modern technology have not totally erased. Humans were directly nourished by nature for over 99 percent of the time we have existed as a species. Indeed, it has only been in the last 200 years, less than 0.01 percent of our existence, that technology has increasingly isolated us from nature.

When people are asked why they are drawn to outdoor activities that immerse them in nature, most will mention inspiration or spiritual renewal. Similar responses are common when asked why they attend church. A quiet experience in a relatively pristine woodland, in fact, is often equated to attending a church service.

In a recent article in *Scientific American* (December 2009), P. Wesley Schultz summarizes research that provides more hard evidence for how experiences with nature affect our basic values. Schultz reminds us that there is much indirect psychological evidence suggesting that natural experiences reduce stress, improve mood, and promote healing and an overall increase in physical and psychological well-being. The fact that exposure to nature has restorative properties would be reason enough to protect the natural environment in and around our communities, but the recent research established yet additional benefits.

Researchers at the University of Rochester have shown that exposure to nature can affect our basic values. In their study, people who were exposed to nature “became less self-focused and more other-focused.” Values shifted “from personal gain to a broader focus on community and connection with others.” It wasn’t necessary for people to walk in natural environments to achieve this

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT 04/2010

Community and Family Planning



Jo Seiser

Neighbor talking to neighbor is often what starts thoughts about preserving land. Sometimes it is noticing the success of a landowner who did an easement, but often it is noticing a failure where lack of forethought and circumstances meant land was turned over, subdivided into smaller parcels and the view of the meadow, woods or wetlands was broken up into lots that more resemble the density and accoutrements of a city like a row of driveways, garages, and parked cars.

In *Saving LAND*, Fall, 2009, a young woman, Jessica Schley, wrote about her dream of taking over her grandmother's cattle ranch. She was only 10, when she discovered that she might not get her dream. She has been scheming for the last decade or more about saving her family's land and interned with the Land Trust Alliance. Her words to us,

"I wish my family had known about and used the conservation tools land trusts offer decades ago. Knowledge is power, and communicating and planning ahead with family members is the key to saving cherished family land for future generations."

"To all land trust people out there, thanks for everything you do. Here's to hoping that your own 10-year old grandchild will have not only the desire, but the opportunity to enjoy open space in the future."

Over this last decade, NCCT has worked with 28 landowners on their conservation projects. There are examples where one easement encourages another close by. Some are adjacent to public lands, thereby extending land preserved. So far, NCCT has worked from those opportunities brought to us from interested land owners and will continue to do so. However, the Board is in the process of identifying priority areas for preservation, and considering new ways to work in those areas such as accepting land donated to NCCT to be sold to a conservation-minded buyer with an easement held by NCCT. NCCT has also been the recipient of funds to assist with small land acquisitions in the Big Eau Pleine Watershed as one example, which may mean a pro-active approach to working in priority areas. NCCT does plan to propose a farm easement in cooperation with the Working Lands Program of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection in Central Wisconsin in this first year of the program.

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Spring 2010

NEWMAN CONSERVATION EASEMENT SIGNED

The Newman easement is 80 acres in the Town of Lanark, Portage County, signed in December 2009. The property is bordered to the south by an ephemeral pond and to the west by woodlands and a spring-fed creek that serves as a tributary to Spring Creek.

The pond provides a breeding area for up to six species of frogs, the American Toad, and the Spotted Salamander, as well as wood ducks and an occasional green heron. The creek provides overwintering habitat for brook trout. Jon noted that the water levels for the creek and pond are lowest he has seen in the 14 years they have owned the property.

From the pond and creek, the property rises to a hill that overlooks the area. Jon and Michelle can watch the Stevens Point, Amherst, and Waupaca fireworks all at once on the fourth of July.

An Amish family (the Stutzmans) owned the land prior to the Newmans. Hill-sides were used for grazing and the flat areas were planted with hay, corn or other crops. Spotted knapweed, an aggressive invader on sandy soils, became established on the hillsides and in one of the old fields. Recently the Newman's secured a grant from the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program for a variety of projects including prairie restoration. Last year, Jon had good success with knapweed control by resorting to spraying and he will continue spraying efforts this year on the remaining fields. Time will tell if he got ahead of the knapweed. This spring the Newmans performed a prescribed burn on 20 acres and they will be planting trees, shrubs, and reseeded the area as well as other tasks to prepare for another burn next year.

The Newmans have a great awareness of the conservation management this beautiful property requires, and NCCT is delighted to become a partner in protecting this land.

MARKMAN EASEMENT SIGNED

There are many divisions of properties along the Tomorrow River near Amherst in Portage County but Leslie and Len Markman have chosen to put some restrictions on development of their 22 acres. This land is sensitive as is the shoreland along rivers. The vegetation from the shore edge to land that is wet or dry depending on the rain and the water table and up to land higher and away from the water. These conditions of proximity to water mean there is great diversity of plants and animals along natural river banks. The Markmans have restricted development on the land along the Tomorrow with a conservation easement to NCCT.

MUMFORD EASEMENT VISITED BY LAND TRUST CELEBRITIES

Gathering Waters Conservancy supports the land trusts in Wisconsin. This year their annual land trust retreat took place in downtown Wausau. Sessions were held for volunteers, staff, and directors of many of the over 50 land trusts in the state. Topics included legal defense insurance, fundraising, and the new Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) program to preserve working lands. There were many chances to compare notes with representatives from other land trusts.

On Saturday, NCCT hosted a field trip to the Mumford easement on the Eau Claire River in Marathon County. This was our first easement. The property is appreciated for the beauty of the forest and the river that passes through the property, cascading through a series of spectacular rapids. The Mumford family had the foresight to protect an extraordinary resource with a conservation easement. We thank them for permitting us to share this easement with representatives of land trusts from other areas of the state.



2010 Wisconsin Land Trust Retreat, Mumford Easement

We also appreciate our local sponsors, Barbara and Don Frank, Sally Overholt, Kathy Powell and Steve Griswold, Joe and Mary Claire Freeman, and River Valley Bank.



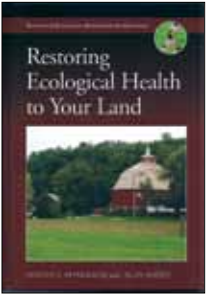
PRAIRIE BURN AT NEWMANS'



photos by
Jon and Michelle Newman

Spring 2010

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS



Restoring Ecological Health to Your Land, a primer on ecological restoration by Steven Apfelbaum and Alan Haney, was released in mid-April by Island Press. The rapidly growing field of ecosystem restoration prompted Island Press to ask Apfelbaum and Haney to write the book, filling a gap in the restoration literature. Before their book, no one had written a book for beginners, for those just learning about ecological restoration. Steve and Alan are now completing a sequel, a field manual on ecological restoration, that will be published by Island Press next year. *Restoring Ecological Health to Your Land* is available in both paperback and hardcover and can be ordered directly

NCCT Board reluctantly accepted the resignation of Patty Dreier only months after she joined us. We are pleased, however, that Patty's departure was a result of her recent election as Portage County Executive. Patty's energy and enthusiasm for our work will be missed at NCCT, but she will continue to do good things for our community in her new capacity.

Bettering Communities Continued from page 2

effect. Just seeing nature made a difference, although the more immersed the experience, the more profound the effect.

According to Schultz, the researchers were particularly interested in responses to extrinsic life aspirations compared to intrinsic life aspirations. Extrinsic aspirations are things like being financially successful and admired. Intrinsic aspirations are things like seeking enduring relationships or being motivated to improve society. The Rochester scientists found that those exposed to nature experienced a shift in values. They scored significantly lower on extrinsic life aspirations and significantly higher on intrinsic life aspirations.

Protecting a quality natural environment in and around our communities, therefore, nurtures us in many ways, from improving our physical and psychological health to shifting our values toward stronger relationships and community improvement. The short-term financial motivation that generally underlies abuse of land initiates a vicious cycle. Aldo Leopold certainly understood this when he wrote, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." As land in and around our communities is abused, we receive less and less benefit from nature. We should keep this in mind as we talk with our neighbors and elected officials.

SPRING EVENT AT POWERS BLUFF

May 22, 2010

On Saturday, May 22, plan to join NCCT members and friends at Powers Bluff County Park from 11AM to 2PM for a lunch and guided walk.

Noted botanist and UWSP Professor Emeritus Robert Freckmann, will lead a walk to identify spring flowers and plants that thrive under the dense maple forest canopy at the park. Many of the spring wildflowers should be blooming, including trilliums, phlox, wild geranium, jack-in-the-pulpit, mayapple, and the showy orchis.

Eighty acres of this unique park in Wood County have been designated as a State Historical Site. Skunk Hill, located in the park, was the home of the Menominee, Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk people for generations. Dance rings and burial grounds are preserved in the park, and for the Potawatomi Skunk Hill is a sacred site.

The NCCT Board is hosting a light potluck lunch at the shelter in the park before the walk. Feel free to bring your favorite dish to pass. NCCT will provide place settings and beverages.

We hope you join us to explore this jewel in our own backyard. Please let us hear from you if you're planning to attend. For directions, details and to RSVP, contact Jo Seiser, NCCT Executive Director, at joseiser@coredcs.com A small donation will be requested.



photo by Lora Hagen

Executive Director's Report Continued from page 3

The Property Committee is in the process of identifying the priority areas of work for the next ten years. Some of the criteria that the land trust values are lake, river, wetland, and groundwater quality based in area watersheds and their land/water ecosystems; scenic or aesthetic views in the countryside; working farms; areas of unique features like glacial geography or Indian mounds; and areas near or adjacent to public open lands. The Board will let our members know of these areas being discussed, and would welcome your input. Perhaps our members are aware of land worth the land trust's attention or maybe you know a family thinking about land options with the joys and the dreams of a 10-year old grandchild in their minds.

PRAIRIE RESTORATION AND EASEMENT FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 2010 9AM-2PM

Portage County Ice Age Trail Chapter/New Hope Family Forest/NCCT

Leaders: Alan Haney (ahaney@uwsp.edu) 715 592-6949
Vincent Heig (vheig@uwsp.edu) 715-592-4239
Margaret and Byron Shaw (bmshaw@wi-net.com) 715-677-3867

The Portage County Ice Age Trail Chapter, the New Hope Family Forest, and NCCT invite you to visit two farms with restored prairie and conservation easements.

9:00 am-10 am: We will meet at Alan Haney's property, 1990 Star B Hill, Custer, WI 54423 (2 miles east of Polonia on Cty Z, take Star B Hill road north through wooded area and park along drive). Alan's new prairie is where we will begin our tour with a discussion of prairie restoration.

10 am-11:30 am: We will walk through the Haney farm to Vincent and Arlene Heig's on the east side of Pallen Lake. We'll view bog plants along the lake and bird-friendly gardens at the Heigs', then return across the Haney farm to our cars.

Noon-1 pm: Gather at Margaret and Byron Shaw's, 9250 Shaw Dr, Amherst Junction, WI 54407 (go east on Cty Z to Cty ZZ, then south about three miles to Shaw Drive on right) for a potluck lunch.

1 pm-2 pm: We will view the mature prairie at the Shaws' and see Byron's handmade wood canoes and carvings.

Potluck Notes: New Hope Family Forest will organize the potluck. Those who wish to attend should bring a dish to pass. Dishes required to be kept hot or cold should be dropped off at Shaws' before 10:00 on the day. They would also appreciate an RSVP that you are attending the potluck to help them make arrangements (bmshaw@wi-net.com or 715-677-3867).

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Community

“...I’m moved by the way the ethic of care and Leopold’s land ethic lean toward each other, both gleaning moral wisdom from the human experience of loving and being loved. Both ethics respond to the sadness of separation, the disquiet people feel to be dangerously or unhappily apart—whether the separation is from families and communities, or landscapes and ecosystems.

I think the ethic of care has it right: The care we feel for people is the ground of our moral responsibilities. Our moral responsibility to care for the land grows from our love for the land and from the intricate, life-giving relationships between people and their places. Then doesn’t this follow?—that our moral calling must be to reknit and cherish healthy webs of connection not only to people, or not only to land, but also to families, human communities, landscapes, and biotic communities—all our relations.

What we need is a new ethic—call it an “ecological ethic of care, call it a “moral ecology” It’s an ethic built on caring for people and caring for places, and on the intricate and beautiful ways that love for places and love for people nurture each other and sustain us all....”

“Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care”

Pine Island Paradox

Kathleen Dean Moore

Milkweed Editions

Minneapolis, 2004



photo by Lora Hagen

“[Nature] is not a place into which we reach from some safe standpoint outside it. We are in it and are a part of it while we use it. If it does not thrive, we cannot thrive.”

—Wendell Berry

Help us all thrive...please support NCCT.



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