



Reconnecting to the Land

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RECONNECTING WITH THE LAND

Alan Haney, President



The “Ancients,” those early people who first inhabited the lands we now call “home,” had a worldview much different from ours. Their “world” was limited to the geography and resources where they lived. Nearly every culture had a word for itself that translates to “the people.” Other places and other people were largely beyond their awareness. Their narrow focus, however, ran deep, and therein lies the primary difference between their worldview and ours.

For people of most early cultures, the sentient world was one and the same as the spiritual world. It was beyond their comprehension

to imagine a spiritual world apart from the physical world. The logical extension of that resulted in ascribing a spiritual dimension to the plants, animals, and even inanimate objects around them. Some dismiss this as “nature worship,” usually with the implication that it is a pagan, or at least naive understanding of spirituality. To the contrary, this worldview seems consistent with the belief that the world is the creation of a spiritual power beyond our understanding, a view taught by most modern-day religions. Moreover, the acceptance that our spiritual well-being is closely tied to the well-being of our physical environment is increasingly recognized by scientists and philosophers alike. This leads to a level of reverence for land and all within it. Indeed, it is incongruous that we worship the Creator yet abuse the creation.

Aldo Leopold acknowledged this worldview in his argument for a land ethic. He recognized that most of our environmental problems could be traced to a disconnect between people and the land, and urged that we recognize that we are a part of the land community, not apart from it. Isolation from “the land” increases with a growing dependence on technology. This disconnect gives rise to an emptiness in our lives that has been widely recognized and discussed by philosophers such as Kathleen Dean Moore and Peter Forbes.

A growing hunger to reconnect with nature is now recognized world-wide, and is more acute among those who are most separated from the land. The

“local food” movement is but one manifestation with both economic and ecological justification. Organizations such as The Nature Conservancy have never had more support. Indeed, the most rapidly growing conservation movement in United States is land trusts.

Quite aside from our spiritual health, there are dozens of important reasons we need to be more proactive in protecting natural ecosystems on all scales. On a global scale, climate change we humans are causing by our increasing use of fossil fuels is imposing the greatest threat since *Homo sapiens* first walked the Earth. Closer to home, we continue to see the beauty and integrity of our communities fractured by development, nearly always associated with the scourges of erosion and stream or wetland degradation. Our grandchildren will never experience nature in our communities as we have known it, and that alone should drive us to protect special places.

Whether we preserve nature through public land or easements is less important than making sure we protect enough to provide for the critical habitat and ecological functions that are necessary to perpetuate healthy ecosystems. I am saddened by the decline in fireflies and songbirds. Unless we act, children may never be moved again by the chorus of frogs in the spring, or the dance of butterflies across a prairie.



*Lincoln County Easement
photo by Stacy Klade Pettit*

It is extremely difficult to re-create healthy ecosystems once they have been seriously compromised. With each passing year, we see further inroads into the rural environment in central Wisconsin. Highways, shopping centers, industrial parks, and more rural housing may suggest economic prosperity, but what really matters in the end is our spiritual, mental, and physical health, or more importantly for most of us, that of our grandchildren. From personal experience, I know that I am spiritually healthier because I have put a conservation easement on my farm, but I also am healthier because some of my neighbors have taken similar steps. I need only drive down a beautiful rural road, through the rich fabric of farms, forests, wetlands, lakes, and streams, to be both happier and more whole.

Let’s take an important lesson from the Ancients, wonderfully described

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CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER AS WE RECONNECT WITH THE LAND

Jo Seiser, Executive Director

NCCT is part of a statewide effort of land conservation with the umbrella organization, Gathering Waters Conservancy (GWC). In April we hosted GWC's Annual Land Trust Staff Retreat in Wausau, attended by representatives from over a dozen land trusts around the state. Among many topics discussed, a new grant program, Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) was explained. Although not successful, we completed our first application on behalf of a landowner of an organic farm in Marathon County. On Saturday,



we hosted a fieldtrip to the Mumford property on the Eau Claire River in Marathon County. This beautiful property was our first easement, and the picture-perfect day further complemented our fieldtrip. While picnicking along the river, we were rewarded by a bald eagle that flew over us.

In May NCCT members and friends gathered at Powers Bluff County Park, Wood County for lunch and a guided wildflower walk led by Dr. Bob Freckmann. Bob has been a long-time volunteer with NCCT. Thirty volunteers and neighbors, several of whom either have or are interested in completing easements on their properties, attended.

Each spring prescribed fire is used on several easements with restored prairies. Fire is necessary to spur growth of prairie plants. Jon and Michelle Newman, who completed our most recent easement, would like help during their burns this coming spring. Volunteers will be needed to assist with several other prairie burns. Burns are weather dependent and happen on short notice. If you would like to participate as a worker or observer, please send an email to info@ncctwi.org NCCT will email information about burn locations, times, and needs.

Fine weather in August rewarded 50 people from several groups who gathered to see and discuss prairies on the Haney and the Shaw easements. Groups included Portage County Ice Age Trail Chapter, New Hope Family Forest, Wild Ones, the Aldo Leopold Audubon Club, and NCCT. Alan Haney began a prairie restoration two years ago and reviewed the early

results. Byron Shaw shared how prairie was established on previously cultivated fields. Prairies have alien invaders like Canada thistle, smooth brome grass, Queen Anne's lace, and spotted knapweed, all discouraged by fire. Photos of the August event and the blooming prairie flowers can be viewed at www.ncctwi.org.

Several years ago, one of NCCT's members expressed surprise at how meager a budget we have. He commented, "I did not realize my donation was such an important part of the whole!" That still holds true. Fortunately, you have been consistently generous in supporting our work. In the past year, donations by household numbers grew 32% and the total money donated increased by 53%. We hope to see a continuation of support in the coming year, beginning with your response to the appeal in this newsletter.

On a personal note, I was asked to be on the Land Trust Council, an advisory group to Gathering Waters Conservancy. The Council assists GWC in their efforts to support all Wisconsin land trusts. We are pleased that NCCT is respected and valued by other land trusts, and we will continue to be a leader among the 50 land trusts in Wisconsin.

TOM OVERHOLT REMEMBERED

During the early years of NCCT, Tom Overholt provided much of the essential energy and leadership. We dedicate this issue of our newsletter to him. We thank Sally Overholt for sharing her insights about her late husband.



Tom probably acquired his passion for the environment from visits to his grandpa's Ohio farm. I recall that his idea of a honeymoon was a lakeside cabin in Michigan where he introduced me to rod and reel. His idea of "fun" included birding, bicycling, canoeing, and visiting natural areas. After moving to Stevens Point, Tom developed a special interest in birding, and pursued it on four continents.

But most was done around home in Central Wisconsin. When the idea of a regional land trust surfaced, Tom was full of enthusiasm, realizing full well the importance of preserving as much as possible of our natural environment. Tom took great joy from the founding of NCCT, as well as his association with dozens of others who helped to get our land trust started.

LATE~SUMMER EVENT FOCUSES ON PRAIRIE RESTORATION

NCCT sponsors a late-summer or early autumn event each year. This year, the event was co-sponsored by Portage County chapter of the Ice Age Trail Alliance, New Hope chapter of Wisconsin Family Forests, and the local chapter of Wild Ones. The event was held on 14 August in order to highlight flowering in the prairie restorations on the Haney and Shaw easements. Over four dozen people gathered to begin the tour at the 7-acre prairie on the Haney property in Portage County.

The field was put into the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 17 years ago, and was planted to smooth brome. When Alan bought the property in 2004, the CRP contract was transferred and continued. When the contract concluded in 2008, Alan renewed the contract but got permission to convert the brome to native prairie. The brome was killed with applications of glyphosate (Round-up) herbicide, and a dozen species of prairie grasses and forbs were drilled into the dead sod in June 2009. Weeds dominated the first summer, and were mowed in late August at 18 inches to provide increased light to the young prairie plants. This year, black-eyed Susan, yellow coneflower, and four species of prairie grasses dominate the field, but many weeds still persist. Beginning in spring 2011, the field will be burned to further encourage prairie and discourage weedy plants and trees.



Following discussion at the Haney prairie, the group walked to the adjoining property of Vince and Arlene Heig to discuss "bird-friendly backyards." The Heigs have a bird haven around their home. Vince led a walking tour of his yard and frontage on Pallen Lake, where many different species find suitable habitat.

The group then made the short drive to Byron and Margaret Shaw's prop-

erty. The Shaws have established prairie on several fields around their farm, many of which are old enough to be especially attractive with all the plants flowering in the late-summer prairie. The discussion of techniques used to establish and maintain prairies in central Wisconsin was continued following a potluck lunch. Before lunch, Dave Hillier was presented with an NCCT Distinguished Service Award (see feature article).



Prairie vegetation was widely scattered through central Wisconsin at the time of European settlement, and most of the species used in restoration still occur in isolated patches in the region. Native prairie provides an ideal habitat for grassland bird species that are having a particularly difficult time adapting to intensive agriculture. Thus, prairie restoration provides a great opportunity to increase the beauty of our landscape and improve habitat for many bird species that are becoming uncommon. Many of the conservation easements held by NCCT have restored prairies as part of their management.



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by ethnobotanist Wade Davis in *The Wayfinders* (House of Anansi Press, Inc. 2009), and accept the ethical responsibility for how we treat our physical world. In doing so, we will be healthier in all ways, and spiritually enriched. Please join the growing community of people who assist North Central Conservancy Trust to keep central Wisconsin one of the best places to live.



PLEASE HELP US GROW

AUTUMN MEANS IT'S TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Please consider active involvement in central Wisconsin's land trust community. There are many ways to do so. NCCT depends on your financial support, of course, but we also welcome your direct participation in our work. For the hundreds of you who already support NCCT, thank you. We ask for your continuing generosity.

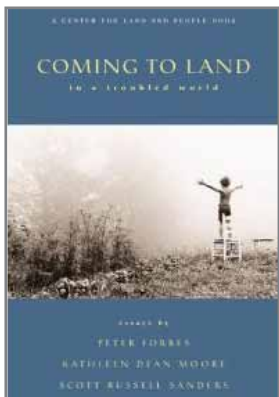
Green Newsletter

We are becoming more "green" by including our appeal in this newsletter rather than as a separate mailing. The newsletter is printed on partially recycled paper. For the first time, we can accept credit cards, and it is possible for you to make your contribution online through our website if you prefer. Please be as generous as your time or resources permit. NCCT does not share or sell our membership information to other organizations. We thank you in advance, but more importantly, the generations who follow will be even more grateful for your having helped preserve the beauty of central Wisconsin.

Credit Card Donations

Financial contributions can be mailed using the enclosed envelope, or charged to your credit card through our secure website. If you choose, you can also use a credit card for your mail-in contribution. We are a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, so your contributions are tax-deductible. We will gladly acknowledge all gifts so that you will have a receipt for your file.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the death of Tom Overholt, one of the major figures in the establishment of NCCT. Some of us will be taking this opportunity to make a special donation in his memory. Perhaps you



have an occasion, or a person of which you would like to make special note. If so, please fill in the name, or the occasion on the line provided. While donations can be made anonymously, special donation recipients will be noted in our annual list of contributions, unless otherwise instructed.

We encourage as many of you as possible to join at the "Sustainer" or higher level of support. For those who do, while supplies last we will send you a copy of *Coming to Land*, a wonderful collection of essays published by The Trust for Public Land. The essays make a terrific case for why we need to

protect the land that supports us. The excerpt at the end of this newsletter comes from one of the essays. If you already have a copy, the book is an excellent gift for someone else.

If you are interested in a conservation easement on your property, please visit our website to get more information, or contact Jo Seiser, our Executive Director, by email, phone, or letter. We also welcome inquiries concerning estate planning or gifts of real estate.



Join or Renew Your Membership to Support North Central Conservancy Trust

Membership Contributions

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter | \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer | \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Protector | \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preserver | \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustee | \$1000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Key Donor | \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | _____ |

Special Tribute for: _____

Interests

- I have property I may wish to conserve. Please send me a packet.
- I am interested in becoming a volunteer with NCCT.
- I am interested in knowing more about NCCT before I join. Please send me a membership brochure.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

- My check is included, or charge my credit card (MC or VISA)

Credit Card: _____ Exp: ____/____

Signature: _____

Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.
Please mail to: NCCT PO Box 124 Stevens Point WI 54481-0124

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD



Dr. David Hillier: 2010 Recipient of NCCT Distinguished Service Award, and his wife, Margaret

The Board of Directors of NCCT has presented David Hillier with a Distinguished Service Award for extensive work with landowners and on the NCCT Properties Committee.

Dave has worked with many landowners to prepare conservation easements. Each easement is tailored to the property and the landowner's wishes for how the property is to be protected in perpetuity. The process includes often lengthy discussions with landowners, which can take some time before all are satisfied. Dave has good humor and great patience. Also, his understanding of legal language and ability to explain the implications to others has made him greatly appreciated by fellow volunteers as well as landowners. But his work doesn't stop with preparing easements. Dave stays in touch with landowners and participates in yearly monitoring. He also trains others, leads field trips, maintains computer files, and searches for ways to improve NCCT easement administration.

As a retired plant ecologist at University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, Dave brings a great understanding of healthy ecosystems and natural history to his efforts to protect important natural features in Wisconsin. Dave is typically quiet and open-minded giving him a "laid back" style. However, those of us who work with him realize his ideas are backed by careful thinking. Landowners take comfort in knowing that Dave will provide gentle but firm guidance in the development of their easements.

NCCT extends a hearty "thank you" to Dave, and to Margaret, whose tolerance supports his long hours of volunteering for NCCT.

KARNER BLUE RESTORATION

John Shillinglaw

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The program's mission is to "efficiently achieve voluntary habitat restoration on private lands, through financial and technical assistance, for the benefit of Federal



Trust Species." In Wisconsin this program is being used to preserve and restore habitat for the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. The butterfly's habitat is in the central sands of Wisconsin, and landowners in this area wishing to help secure populations of Karner blue butterflies may apply for the program: <http://www.helpyourhabitat.org> The program is a voluntary 10-year agreement with an option to renew for additional periods of 10 years. Technical assistance is provided by biologists from the Fish and Wildlife Service. For the past 10 years, we have benefited from the program to restore the prairie environment for Karner blue butterflies on our land in Waushara County and this has resulted in a 10 fold increase in the numbers of butterflies in the restored area. We are renewing the program for another 10 years. The first 10 years have been mainly to establish the prairie and subsequent years will consist of prairie maintenance through prescribed burning. Also in order to continue the restoration for years to come, we have protected our land as prairie savannah by a trust agreement with the North Central Conservancy Trust.



I am prepared to give Powerpoint presentations to interested groups. Prairie restoration topics include the Karner blue butterfly, grassland birds, and prairie plants. Feel free to contact me directly at 920-731-4222 or jashlaw@aol.com

*Photo by Paul Labus,
The Nature Conservancy*

NCCT WEBSITE GETS A NEW LOOK!




NCCT recently launched a new look to our website www.ncctwi.org

Visit us often to see continually changing information on the home page regarding an existing easement, a new easement, an upcoming event, or current land trust news.

Do you sometimes get stuck when trying to explain NCCT to your friends? Direct them to our website or go there yourself to get concise answers to common questions and clear information about easements: what they are, how to begin the process of creating one, what the benefits are.

The website also features:

- The ability to join or donate online using a credit card
- Volunteer opportunities
- Current and past newsletters
- Photo gallery of land preserved by easements

Follow us on Facebook and help us spread the word about NCCT by sharing NCCT with your friends. 

Visit us often and keep up-to-date on land trust news!

BATTLING BUCKTHORN

Since 1996, North Central Conservancy Trust has owned 41 acres in the Town of Weston, Marathon County. Half was used for agriculture until approximately 50 years ago and the rest has been in continual forest. Undisturbed for many years, the old field is now covered with a mix of pine and hardwood trees. The older forest now supports large stately maple, oak, and other species.

Beginning about 20 years ago, buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*) found its way to north-central Wisconsin, where it continues to invade fields and forests. An exotic with few native diseases or herbivores, buckthorn has a competitive edge over native species, and slowly replaces them. To restore the native vegetation, NCCT will begin to eradicate buckthorn from the Freeman Tract. Field work will begin in October by WisCorps, the Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corps.

The WisCorps crew consists of five young adults under the direction of an experienced leader. Kerry Brimmer, longtime NCCT volunteer, will provide general oversight of the project.



Buckthorn
photo courtesy
Stephen L. Solheim



WisCorps crew photo by Kerry Brimmer

A management plan for the Freeman Tract calls for buckthorn removal to begin in areas of the least infestation and work toward the areas that are worse. This prevents buckthorn from reaching the healthy areas. WisCorps will pull small buckthorn and use clippers and brush saws to cut off buckthorn too large to pull. Herbicide will be used on those stems and trunks to prevent re-sprouting.

Restoration of the property will require several years. WisCorps may be asked to assist again, but NCCT hopes to join forces with neighbors to develop a group of volunteers who can cooperatively tackle buckthorn infestation throughout the neighborhood. Anyone interested in more information, and especially anyone who would like to join with us in our efforts to discourage buckthorn in Weston should contact us at www.ncctwi.org or call Jo Seiser at (715) 341-7741.

LANDING

“What are the illusions of separation and self-sufficiency that allow us to think of ourselves as sensible people, while we make decisions that sabotage the ecological systems on which our lives depend? Here are just a few....

“...Surely, I say to myself, no one believes it’s possible to sever the connection between past, present, and future. But how else could people who love their children act in ways that diminish or destroy the world in which their children will live? How else could voters allow industry to endlessly mine the land and the lake and the seas, liquidating the earth’s assets, extinguishing species forever, holding this great going-out-of-business sale, and forget that it is our children who will be left standing in the empty store?...

“...A second delusion is that the nearby places where we live are ecologically and culturally separable from what is far away—other peoples’ neighborhoods or “Nature” out on a mountaintop somewhere. This allows us to believe that it is possible to safeguard one’s own backyard without regard for the distant places, and the reverse: that it is possible to safeguard distant beloved places while the close-in neighborhoods collapse around us. On the contrary, the ecosystems that sustain us are linked in beautiful and complex ways to each other, to economic and social systems, and to the land. Living in this interlocking whole, we need to find our own integrity, a moral wholeness that holds us to the same standards of care for the land, no matter where we are....

“...the most disastrous self-deception [is] the idea that human beings are separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world, and the equally disastrous corollary: We can destroy our habitats without destroying ourselves.

As we begin to understand instead that humans are seamlessly connected, are kin to the natural world, then we may begin to act in caring ways toward the earth and its inhabitants. This is a matter both of pragmatic self-interest, sustaining the systems that sustain us, and of moral obligation, honoring and caring for our relations....

“...Moral obligations grow from relationships. If we are of the land, and if we care about and depend on our connections to it, then we ought to act in ways that nurture, enhance, and celebrate healthy webs of connection with the land and all the members of the biotic community...”

Kathleen Dean Moore

“Landing,”

Coming to Land

San Francisco CA, Trust for Public Land, 2003



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www.ncctwi.org info@ncctwi.org

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Act locally to conserve land in Central Wisconsin, land in our own townships and counties.