



NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVANCY TRUST

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Rice Lake, photo by Gary Kiedrowski

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BOBOLINKS, CONSERVATION, AND PERPETUITY

Alan Haney, President

Leopold's well-known essay, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, reminds us that human perception is remarkably narrow. We think in terms of backyards, or perhaps the scale of a farm or a national forest, and in years or decades. Nature, on the other hand, exists within broad, sweeping landscapes, and millennia. It is within the broader landscape, with its component range of habitats, and centuries that the essential diversity of nature can persist and continue to adapt to environmental changes. As we disrupt the landscape with farms, mines, cities, and corridors of roads and lines that distribute electricity, oil, and gas, we increasingly isolate species into smaller parcels where their ability to exist is more problematic. Aside from any ethical issues, it is important to realize that these species are responsible for the natural processes that not only gave rise to the world we know, but which are essential to its maintenance. Fragmentation also introduces non-native species, many of which disrupt long-standing relationships of native species. Over eons of time, native species co-evolved. Together, as integral communities, they produce the soil, pollinate the plants, recycle the nutrients, and maintain the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. Non-native species, as well as most human activities, disrupt the harmony of natural communities. How could anyone fail to appreciate the beauty and intricacy of this natural world, even if they overlook its essential role for human well-being?



It can only be ignorance or extreme arrogance to think that humans, a very recent arrival compared to nearly all other species, can use or take from the nature whatever is desired without negatively impacting natural communities and processes upon which we ultimately depend. Nearly 50 years ago, Rachel Carson wrote in *Silent Spring*:

“The ‘control of nature’ is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man.”

Frank Egler (1911-1996), a pioneer American ecologist, once wrote, “Ecosystems are not only more complex than we think, they are more complex than we can think.” Thirty-five years after Egler penned that observation, it is still true, in spite of our remarkable advances in technology and science. Conservation is still best defined as “wise use,” but it seems that use more often than not trumps

wisdom. If we were wise, we would approach the natural world that sustains us with a lot more humility and respect, if not reverence. If nothing else, we must learn from global climate change that our technology has given us the power not only to destroy local landscapes, but to disrupt the entire global ecosystem. To proceed without extreme caution would be unimaginably foolish.

How can we do it? How can we stem the tide of exploitation that threatens the very world that sustains us? Albert Einstein said, "Look! Look! Look deep into nature and you will understand everything." Through the ages, we have repeatedly been admonished by philosophers and teachers to pay heed to what nature has to teach us.

Literally in my backyard, a male Bobolink established his territory in early May and was successful in attracting two females, each of which made her nest on the ground in the tall hay. The Bobolink song is one of the most uplifting, cheerful songs of any bird that nests in Central Wisconsin, sung by the male as he takes short flights over the tall grass where his mates are incubating eggs. Bobolinks migrate to Argentina for the winter, a flight of 10,000 miles, where they spend much of the year in wetlands and upland grasslands. This once common bird has become increasingly less common as prairies and wetlands have been destroyed, and with the decline of Bobolinks, our lives have become poorer. Forced to nest in hayfields, eggs or young are often destroyed by harvesting the hay before the young are old enough to fly. Can we find a way to live compatibly with Bobolinks? Or are Bobolinks, and thousands of other species that make up our natural world, doomed by our avarice and ignorance?

The purpose of conservation easements is to permanently protect portions of our landscapes that sustain natural beauty and the environment. Those precious prairie fragments, the wetlands, and even abandoned fields where Bobolinks can safely nest can be permanently protected from development with a conservation easement. Not only that, one could put a conservation easement on farm land that stipulates that hay cannot be harvested before the middle of June, a relatively small sacrifice in most cases. We can farm the land and protect Bobolink habitat, too.

Of course, the Bobolink is a metaphor for nature, for all those species whose habitats are critical to their survival. If we are to maintain an environment that is healthy, and that enriches human lives, we must find ways to live compatibly with all the other species that share the Earth. More than this, ecologists have known for decades that the natural processes essential to the perpetuation of human life are dependent upon the perpetuation of the other species. Without them, our soils would erode and not be restored, disease and pestilence would overrun our neighborhoods, groundwater and streams would become contaminated and depleted, and the atmosphere would become malignant.

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SERIOUS PEOPLE

Jo Seiser, Executive Director

Land protection is serious business. The NCCT Board and the volunteers on the Properties Committee appreciate the interest and vision of landowners as they consider how best to protect their land.

Communicating with a landowner is one of the most satisfying tasks of land preservation work. Landowners learn about land trusts and NCCT in many ways, such as presentations we do at public meetings or in response to requests from organizations, from our website, and from neighbors and friends. When we are contacted by interested landowners we arrange face-to-face visits as soon as possible. The outcomes are not uniform, but there is respect and appreciation for the thoughts shared. We meet interesting, committed people—serious people.



Discussions typically ensue and sometimes can continue for a year or more with landowners and their family members. What is an easement and how does it protect my land? What will it cost? What are the tax benefits? How might the easement restrict what I do on my land? Although NCCT will purchase easements, all 35 easements that we hold have been donated. Landowners who donate easements, of course, still own their land and can continue to use it as they wish, as long as the use remains consistent with their easements.

An easement is a voluntary agreement between the landowner and the land trust. It restricts the landowner from certain activities or uses that the donors do not wish to have done on their property, not only now, but forever. Because use, generally including development, is restricted, an easement reduces the land value. An appraisal compares the land value with no easement and the value with an easement. The difference, which can be as high as 25% or more, is the easement value, and so far, has been viewed as a charitable contribution by the IRS.

For example, if a 40-acre parcel is appraised at \$120,000 and an easement that restricts development reduces the value to \$72,000, the easement's value is the difference, \$48,000. This value is a potential tax benefit to the landowner. The land trust receives nothing from the easement. We simply hold and enforce the easement. So how do we get money to operate and work with landowners? We ask landowners to make a contribution based on property size and simplicity of the easement—a cash donation usually

of \$5,000—\$12,000. That money is also treated as a charitable donation by the IRS. We invest the money in the Easement Stewardship Fund to grow and support monitoring and defense of the easement. Nearly all the additional money needed for our work comes from cash donations.

Easements do not limit what landowners can do with their land other than the restrictions they choose to put in the easement. The land can be held, sold, willed to heirs, or given away. The easement follows title to the land.

Easements should not be done casually because they are permanent. Serious thought and discussion should occur among family members with an interest in the land. Some landowners decide to donate their land to NCCT instead of putting an easement on it. As an organization committed to land protection, NCCT will work with donors to develop an easement for the land and then find a buyer who accepts the responsibility of managing the land as protected by the easement. NCCT will continue to hold and enforce the easement. Upon sale, the money received by NCCT is used for pursuing other projects and protecting more land. Thus, gifts of land achieve triple benefits: the donor gets the tax benefit, the land is permanently protected, and the proceeds go toward protecting more land.

A primary reward for NCCT volunteers is the opportunity to work with landowners who care so deeply for their land. These are special people, and we consider it a privilege to work closely with them. Of course, the ultimate reward for all of us comes with the permanent protection of the beauty and health of the central Wisconsin landscape.

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Photo by Gerry Janz

It is not enough for us to manage only for this year, or this decade. The Bobolink and its immediate ancestors have existed for over 10 million years. The natural world that we often casually take for granted has been developing and adjusting for several billion years. To be good global citizens, we must learn to live compatibly with all life. Conservation easements are but one tool that can

help. Please support the efforts of North Central Conservancy Trust to protect the pieces of nature, like the Bobolink, that enrich and sustain our lives in perpetuity.

CREATING A CONSERVATION LEGACY



Thanks to the generosity of Dr. D. Joe and Mary Clare Freeman, NCCT now has a substantial endowment fund invested with the Community Foundation of North Central Wisconsin (CFNCW). The Freeman family has played a very significant role in NCCT. Seeking to protect a forested property surrounding their home in Weston, the Freemans put a conservation easement on the property and deeded it to NCCT. They also established an account with CFNCW from which NCCT could draw the interest to assist with expenses. The easement was given to Lakeland Conservancy. In subsequent years, owners of two adjacent properties developed conservation easements with NCCT. Together with the Freeman Tract, a sizeable green space was secured for the neighborhood.

An invasive species, smooth buckthorn, began to change how NCCT viewed our responsibilities for the long-term protection of the Freeman Tract. Conservation easements rarely address management requirements other than restricting what can be done on a property. Non-native, invasive species are a growing problem throughout most of the world. Central Wisconsin is no exception. Invasive species such as buckthorn have the potential to insidiously destroy the values of a property that owners and easement holders wish to protect. It became all too apparent to the NCCT Board that we simply lacked the resources to responsibly protect the Freeman property against such threats. At least at this point in our relatively young history, our primary mission is to hold and enforce easements. It is our hope that owners of properties can carry out the day-to-day vigilance and management required. Diverting significant resources into on-going management activities would greatly limit the resources NCCT needs to work with property owners who want conservation easements.

After considerable soul-searching and discussion with the Freemans, we reached a painful decision to sell the Freeman Tract, knowing that the terms of the easement would ensure that the property was protected from development in perpetuity. The Board readily agreed that proceeds from the sale would be added to the funds already invested with CFNCW to begin a significant endowment fund. We expect the fund to grow with other contributions, and increasingly provide support for operating costs of NCCT. Building on what the Freemans began, NCCT could have a million-dollar endowment within ten years. Because the easements we hold are permanent, such an endowment would go a long way toward ensuring that NCCT will be there to fulfill its mission in perpetuity. We owe not only our beginning to the Freeman family,

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LEAVE A CONSERVATION LEGACY

Young people who are exposed during their formative years to meaningful outdoor experiences are more likely to mature into people who continue to care for the environment and contribute efforts to protect it. A recent study (Margaret Savanick Guiney and Kasren S. Oberhauser. 2009. Conservation volunteers' connection to nature. *Ecopsychology* 1(4): 187-197) provides additional evidence for the importance of early exposure of children to nature. The danger of not providing young people with such experience is that the resulting adult population will become increasingly indifferent to nature and the environment that provides the quality of life that we require to remain healthy.



Klade Family, Lincoln Cty

NCCT has a clear mission: to protect and preserve the open lands and waters in central Wisconsin that contribute to the aesthetics and health of the landscape. NCCT relies on those of you who care about nature and our environment to help us do that. We know that adults who contribute to our mission are more likely to raise children and grandchildren who both appreciate this work and continue it in the next generation.

There are many opportunities for helping NCCT. The simplest is to use the enclosed envelope to send a contribution. Your annual gift will keep you on our mailing list, and you will receive our newsletters and invitations to events. If you do not have the self-addressed envelope, please send your donation to P.O. Box 124, Stevens Point, WI 54481-0124, or make your donation online at our website at www.ncctwi.org

As you weigh your estate planning options, please consider leaving a legacy to NCCT. Any gift of real estate, investments, or securities will be used to further our work. Although we do not hold real estate permanently at this time, we will make certain it is protected with an easement that meets your expectations.

Thank you for your support.

Continued from page 6, Creating a Conservation Legacy

but we also acknowledge their role in putting the organization on a firm financial track into the future.

Please consider NCCT in your estate planning, or make a contribution to our endowment in your annual gift (see donation insert). NCCT would like to establish endowments in the Community Foundations of Portage and South Wood Counties, similar to that the Freemans began at the Community Foundation of North Central Wisconsin. Your gift can make it happen.

RICE LAKE, A CENTRAL WISCONSIN GEM

Fed by cold water from permanent springs, Rice Lake is one of the few undeveloped lakes in north central Wisconsin. Ten thousand years ago, the lake was formed when a 25-acre chunk of glacial ice was buried in calcareous till as the glacier made its final retreat. Much of the surrounding land was poorly drained, and supports sedge meadows, white cedar forests, and alder-dominated swamp. The ridges and slopes grew back with forests of maple and oak that harbor a dazzling display of flowers in the spring.

Farmers, mostly of Polish and German heritage, arrived in this area in southeast Marathon County about 150 years ago. The better-drained land was cleared, but most of the wetlands were left, resulting in a rich landscape mosaic of crops, pasture, forests, and wetlands. Dairy farming prevailed. The nature of the landscape favored family farms, many of which prospered for two or three generations. Most farms that remain have gotten larger by absorbing neighboring acreage. Others were broken up and sold in pieces.

In 2010, NCCT identified high-priority conservation areas in our eight-county service area. The Plover River watershed is one of six priority areas identified. Efforts to protect properties in priority areas were greatly promoted when the Plover River Alliance disbanded and transferred a substantial grubstake to NCCT. At about the same time, we were contacted by the principle landowner holding property around Rice Lake, who was interested in a conservation easement. The springs feeding Rice Lake are part of the headwaters of the Plover River, and because Rice Lake has been protected by landowners who have protected the natural landscape, we were eager to assist.

The till around Rice Lake contains limestone. Lime is slowly dissolved into the groundwater and carried from the springs into the lake where it precipitates, creating what is called "marl." Most lakes in central and northern Wisconsin are fed from surface water that is acidic. Marl lakes are much less common. Many years ago, marl was dredged from Rice Lake to be used as agricultural lime. Marl adds yet another ecological dimension to the attractiveness of Rice Lake.



photo by Gary Kiedrowski
Autumn 2011

The west end of Rice Lake and a short section of the stream draining toward Pike Lake are part of a 40-acre parcel owned by Claire Pflieger. When we contacted Mrs. Pflieger to explain our hope for protecting the land around Rice Lake, she

generously offered to donate her land to help. Her property will be protected by an easement, and used to leverage other easements around the lake. It is through caring people like Claire Pflieger, who value the beauty and ecology of places like Rice Lake, that NCCT can carry out its mission, to protect the critical resources that make north central Wisconsin such a beautiful place to live and work.

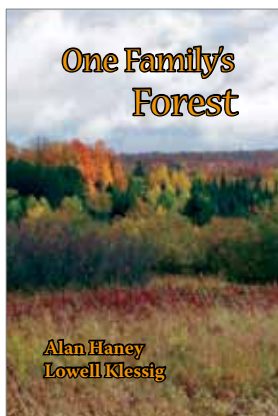
The Annual Meeting of NCCT is Tuesday, October 11, 2011 6p at the Red Mill, 1222 County Rd HH West, Stevens Point. Please come! Dinner will be at each person's own expense, with a short meeting and review of the activities of the year. RSVP to info@ncctwi.org or Jo Seiser 715 341 7741 if you plan to attend.

MOVING TOWARD ACCREDITATION

The land trust movement across the country, indeed, around the world, continues to grow rapidly. Protecting important land and water resources with easements has become the most rapidly growing conservation movement. The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is a national umbrella organization that provides support, guidance, and oversight to state and local land trusts in United States. In Wisconsin, LTA works closely with Gathering Waters, our state organization, but also directly with local land trusts. NCCT has called on LTA frequently to guide us in transactions and operations, and we routinely refer to the many published documents LTA provides to assist land trusts. To further assist land trusts with legal and ethical issues, LTA encourages development of policies to guide the work of land trusts. Toward this end, LTA has developed an exhaustive set of guidelines, covering every aspect of land trust organization and activities, from interactions with landowners to management of investments, that when fully implemented, can lead to national accreditation.

In 2010, NCCT began to systematically review the LTA guidelines, and develop policies tailored to our organization. In August 2011, the Board voted unanimously to pursue accreditation. While we still have much to do to complete our preparation, we believe that we will be ready to apply for accreditation in 2012. Each step brings us to a higher level of professionalism. NCCT is one of the more active of the 50+ land trusts in Wisconsin, and requests for assistance to land owners who wish to protect their land seem to increase each year. Effort to qualify for accreditation falls onto volunteers who already are working hard to keep up with ongoing land preservation work. The payoff, however, is great. Accreditation will provide national recognition of NCCT's professional status, now enjoyed by only a few percent of land trusts. More importantly, the policies we develop and follow will ensure the continuity, quality, and permanence of our work.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I'M GONE?



If you are like a lot of rural landowners, especially if you are strongly attached to your land, you probably have given more than passing thought to what will happen to your land when you are gone. Nearly everyone with a conservation easement falls into this category, along with many who have not yet protected their land with an easement. Two landowners who have conservation easements with NCCT, and who collectively have many decades of experience managing rural lands in Wisconsin, have addressed the challenges of keeping land intact from one generation to the next in a novel that was published with a grant

from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board.

Alan Haney and Lowell Klessig titled their book *One Family's Forest*. The novel follows an extended farm family struggling with all the related issues of keeping the farm that they love while being fair to the three children. They discover that part of the solution lies in the forest that has been greatly appreciated but not managed. Haney and Klessig use extensive appendices to cover technical details, thereby minimizing the disruption of the story. The aim of the book, however, is to provide technical information, but do so in a way that is easy for readers who have limited background to follow. Reviews of the book have been very positive.

Haney and Klessig, both emeritus professors in the College of Natural Resources at Stevens Point, draw from a wealth of professional training and experience as well as management of their own properties. Alan is a professional forester who was Dean of the College from 1988 to 1998. Alan is currently the president of NCCT. He lives on a farm in Portage County, and owns forested property there as well as in Marathon County. Lowell's background in social sciences complements Alan's natural science orientation, but Lowell has a stronger farm background. He manages forest and farm land in three counties in central and northern Wisconsin. A blend of their expertise and experiences provides a depth of first-hand knowledge that goes far beyond technical details. While the story alone is engaging, the book is laced with useful information for anyone who cares for their land.

If interested, please send your name and address with \$5 to cover shipping and handling to: Lora Hagen, E1757 Moen Rd, Iola WI 54945

FRECKMANN EVENT DRAWS FRIENDS

The gathering at the Bob and Sally Freckmann home in August was a time to view the plantings of two botanists. Sally has the herb garden, and Bob has the vegetables and tree gardens with species outside of their typical comfort zone. Bob also maintains trails over their 32 acres with a conservation easement.

Some 40 people attended with landowners of six easements held by NCCT. These folks gathered for a photo: from left to right, Guy, Doug, and Willa Pledger, Jon and Michelle Newman, Bob Freckmann, Alan Haney, Phyllis Biedess and John Shillinglaw (missing: Sally Freckmann, Fawn Shillinglaw).



NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVANCY TRUST
PO BOX 124 STEVENS POINT WI 54481-0124
www.ncctwi.org info@ncctwi.org

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Working to protect land in central Wisconsin