



Waukesha County Citizens Protecting Waukesha County's Remaining Natural Areas

Volume 17 No.2

Oct 2009

An Evening on the Lake



Betty Jo Nelsen, Jim Nelsen and Hostess Judith Stark



Mary Korkor and Deborah Holsen

An "Evening on the Lake" was hosted by Judith Stark on the beautifully landscaped grounds of her Pine Lake home. Event Co-chairpersons were Sandra Dionisopoulos and Mary Schmidt. The 292 attendees agreed that it was a fabulous party. The income from the event supports the mission of the Waukesha County Land Conservancy.



Jean Garman, Fay and Terry Amerson sample appetizers in front of the boat house

John Siepman dressed as a forester helps auctioneer Dan Vrakas solicit donations for land management.



Photos by Gee Esslinger & Ellen Gennrich

PETER SPARROW DONATES LAND



Peter Sparrow at his home in Town of Lisbon

Time to celebrate a generous landowner. Raise your glass to Peter Sparrow! Thirty-eight acres of his land in the Town of Lisbon has been donated to the Waukesha County Land Conservancy. This permanently protected land is part of an area called "The Sussex Swamp," a 147-acre SEWRPC-designated Natural Area. The Waukesha County Land Use Plan suggests that The Sussex Swamp should one day be owned by "a non-profit agency," such as the Waukesha County Land Conservancy.

When asked what he found was special about this land, Mr. Sparrow said, "It is basically a wooded swamp. It has lots of wildflowers and is beautiful in all seasons." Sparrow added that the upland forest houses a huge bur oak tree that requires the outstretched arms of four people to reach around its trunk. It is open grown, with branches very low to the ground.

Mr. Sparrow purchased the site in 2003, hoping to preserve much of it and "maybe build some homes on it." The land he donated to the Conservancy will become an extension of the backyards for perhaps two lots on which he hopes one day to build environmentally sensitive homes.

Mr. Sparrow credits his great-great-grandfather for the family's interest in environmental protection. This ancestor was a state representative in Massachusetts in the 1850's. His great-great-grandfather inherited land on Cape Cod that his father had purchased from the Indians. He planted many different species of trees on it, on the recommendation of arborists from a nearby botanical garden. Four generations later, Peter Sparrow went to the University of Maine to study wildlife management and forestry. In the future Mr. Sparrow plans to write a book, documenting his family's correspondence in a work of fiction.

Mr. Sparrow's family recently sold 60 acres of conservancy land on Cape Cod. One reason that he donated his land in Waukesha County to the Land Conservancy was to offset his capital gains from that land sale.

When asked what he hopes the Waukesha County Land Conservancy will do with the land, Mr Sparrow replied, "Absolutely nothing."

That sounds perfect!

Written by Ellen Gennrich

GREAT EGRETS RETURN TO THE OTTAWA WILDLIFE REFUGE

A ditch needed to be filled. A scrape was created. It filled with water. Trees became flooded. Some toppled over. Birds found these fallen trees to be excellent perches. Woodpeckers used the dead, standing trees for nest sites. Wood ducks found natural cavities in the trees for their nests. And the great egrets came.

The wetland restoration at the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's 350-acre Ottawa Wildlife Refuge is exciting to both the wildlife and the humans who enjoy watching the wildlife. Jason Dare, who is now working as an independent contractor to manage WCLC's land, reports that all of the woodpeckers whose range includes Southern Wisconsin are now found at the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge. In addition to the downy woodpeckers, hairy woodpeckers and red-bellied woodpeckers that you often see on your bird feeders, the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge now hosts pileated woodpeckers, flickers and this summer, even red-headed woodpeckers have returned. Jason attributes this to the fact that now a very good wetland is connected to good upland on this site.

Wildlife photographer and Conservancy member, Ralph Curtis, does much of his wildlife photography at the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge. He finds the restored wetland and pond are the best place he has seen for photographing wood ducks. This summer he is also seeing numbers of great egrets here, previously not a common sight in Waukesha County. Ralph recently sent WCLC the following message:

"The white egrets are really using all of the scrapes you made. I was with my camera down in the canary grass to the south, and the egrets flew back and forth between the scrapes all morning long. I think there were six of them, along with a couple of great blue herons. I saw at least twenty green herons! Along with the herons, I saw approximately two-hundred mallards, about a hundred teal, and some gadwall. I didn't want to bother them on the ponds, but I just thought to myself, 'How are all those ducks fitting on such small ponds!'"

Cornell University's ornithology website reveals that though great egrets are declining in parts of the Mississippi River drainage area, they are increasing in the Great Lakes region, including Wisconsin. Conservancy member and birder, Mike Fort, found a colony of great egrets making its home in the Rome/Oakhill Swamp in Jefferson County, not far from the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's Ottawa

Wildlife Refuge, as the egret flies. Cornell's study of great egrets tells us about the needs of these large birds:

"Foraging habitat is probably the key factor in (great egret) population fluctuations. Protection and restoration of wetlands are critical to protection of populations of this species. Many nesting areas are protected, but often foraging grounds for these colonies are not. Important foraging areas for colonies need to be identified and their hydrologic integrity protected and restored."

Cornell's study of great egrets confirms that the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's wetlands restoration project is exactly what this species needs.

written by Ellen Gennrich



Great egret photo taken at Ottawa Wildlife Refuge by Ralph Curtis

Land Letter



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Wetlands at the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge, restored with the help of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, now support several species of shoreland birds including the great egret.

Photo by Ralph Curtis