



Waukesha County Citizens Protecting Waukesha County's Remaining Natural Areas

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And not just any 127 acres. The largest remaining oak savanna/oak opening in SE Wisconsin will now be permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Waukesha County Land Conservancy. Located on a ridge along the banks of a creek in the Mukwonago River watershed, this stunning site is designated as primary environmental corridor by the Southeastern Wisconsin Planning Commission (SEWRPC).

Oak openings are a globally rare natural community. Original land surveyors' records (1836) indicate that uplands in this area were part of a large oak savanna (these surveyors called them 'oak openings') that covered much of southwest Waukesha County and beyond. This conservation easement protects a remnant of that larger community of scattered bur oak trees and an understory of savanna/prairie wildflowers. Nearly all other former savannas have been logged, over-grazed, invaded by non-native brush, converted to residential areas or plowed. The reason this site still has the characteristic open aspect of a savanna is the light grazing it has received for the past 100 years. Sheep or cattle have kept invasive brush under control yet have not destroyed the scattering of bur oaks.

Another 127 acres protected!



Also protected by this conservation easement are seventeen acres of riverine wetlands and a large natural pond with emergent marsh plants along its margins. These areas provide additional wildlife habitat.

As all properties protected by conservation easements remain privately owned and are not open for public use, the Conservancy does not publicly list the names of these landowners nor the location of their properties. The public still enjoys the benefit of keeping available places where Blanding's turtles can breed and bobolinks can nest.

We thank these landowners for their conservation ethic - for their wish to forever protect this rare oak savanna, river corridor, wetlands and pond.

2012 Annual Meeting



The Conservancy's Annual Meeting was held at the Red Circle Inn on March 14, 2012

The featured speaker for the evening, Lloyd Eagan, is greeted by Joan and Buzz Hardy and Jean Holtz. As WiDNR's South District Water Leader, Ms. Eagan's timely topic was "*Land Conservation and Water Quality Protection - A Symbiotic Relationship.*"



Truman and Barbara Schultz with Dave Gennrich .



Greg Hillman and Elaine Haberichter



Laura Giese and Tony Meyer

Photos courtesy of Gee Esslinger

A Raucous Resident Returns

by Ellen Gennrich

A loud kar-r-r-o-o-o echoes over the marsh. Even our small children recognize this exotic call. We know it must be spring. The sandhill cranes have announced their arrival.

Sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) are one of the few crane species that are still common. They are found on most of the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's wetland properties in spring, either refueling on their way to a nesting site in Canada or Alaska or staking out a claim to a nesting site here. Even our members who are not normally bird watchers can identify these tall gray birds with their red foreheads. The only other bird that is somewhat similar is the great blue heron, though he lacks the sandhill's red forehead and in flight the crane flies with its neck extended, whereas the heron curls its neck against its body. And, compared to a sandhill, a great blue heron is a quiet creature.

Feeding on a wide variety of plant tubers, grains, small vertebrates (mice and snakes) and invertebrates such as insects or worms, sandhills find their food in upland fields and in shallow wetlands.

Mated pairs of the sandhill cranes exhibit complex and coordinated dances. While calling, cranes stand in an upright posture, with their heads thrown back and beaks skyward, as they engage in bowing, jumping, running, stick or grass tossing and wing flapping. When ready to lay their eggs, sandhills build mounds of vegetation on which they nest, usually in wetlands or shallow water at the edge of a pond.

Sandhills are raucous and obvious now, from the Kettle Moraine State forest wetlands to the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's Tamarack Swamp Preserve in Menomonee Falls. With a wingspan wider than six feet, sandhill cranes would be very noticeable, even if they didn't have their volume turned up.



Sandhill Crane at WCLC's Ottawa Wildlife Refuge
photo by Ralph Curtis

Dates to Remember:

May 6, 2012 8:00AM

Bird Hike

led by Marlin Johnson at:

Nelson Woods & Wilson Wood Duck

Sanctuary

Meet at the Nelson's Woods sign on Hwy ZD (Main St) south of Dousman..

Work Days

May 19th 9:00 AM

Remove tree protectors and stake trees at Ottawa Wildlife Refuge.

Meet in Dousman at the parking lot across from Bicycle Doc store on Main St..

June 24th 9:00 AM

Pull knapweed at Eagle Centre Prairie.

Meet in driveway to Eagle Centre Bed & Breakfast on Hwy 67 south of Eagle.

Featuring a Property: Tamarack Swamp Preserve

by Ellen Gennrich

I live in Brookfield. There are no sandhill cranes bugling in my backyard. Nor in any of my neighbors' yards. Not even the nearby city-owned Wirth Park is wild enough to attract this large bird. So where can I easily go and be quite certain that I will glimpse one of these majestic migrants?

Within less than 10 miles of where more than 75,000 people live, the Tamarack Swamp preserve is the furthest east of the lands owned by the Waukesha County Land Conservancy. This 147-acre property made up of swamp, upland woods and old fields is located in the Village of Menomonee Falls, about one-half mile west of Pilgrim Road, on the south side of Good Hope Road. The land owned by the Waukesha County Land Conservancy is part of a larger 830-acre wetland complex. Pairs of sandhill cranes nest here every year.



As far east in our county as this property is located, it is also known for being about as far west as another stunning species is found. The Waukesha County Land Conservancy's Tamarack Swamp Preserve protects one of the furthest west stands of American Beech trees. The maple/beech forest plant community stretches from the Atlantic coast of Northeastern United States just into the eastern edge of Waukesha County. These majestic trees can be identified by their smooth, gray bark and by their golden leaves that hang on through the winter.

Within these hardwood stands, another unusual habitat is found. Ephemeral ponds are bodies of water that tend to dry up in mid-summer and thus cannot support fish. These ponds form a unique habitat for a m p h i b i a n species that would normally be food for fish. Thanks to the work of volunteers Chris and Nancy Gloe, who



American Beech Tree

conducted the herpetology study at the Tamarack Swamp Preserve last spring, we now know that rare spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma maculatum*) thrive in these ephemeral ponds, as well as several other amphibians. And should you come to the Tamarack Swamp Preserve between April and June, you will be treated to stunning yellow water buttercups (*Ranunculus flabellaris*) floating on these ponds.



Water buttercups on pond

All of this natural beauty is preserved within about two and a half miles of Milwaukee County. So, thanks to the Waukesha County Land Conservancy, those of us who live in eastern Waukesha County can also hear those noisy harbingers of spring – the sandhill cranes.

Land Letter



Waukesha County Land Conservancy

*P. O. Box 2572
Brookfield WI 53008*

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Good Harvest Market, Waukesha County's largest natural food store, is devoted to improving the health of not just community members but of the community itself.

The Waukesha County Land Conservancy also seeks to benefit the local community through its efforts to preserve natural space, and Good Harvest is happy to support the organization again in 2012.

Good Harvest will donate 5% of sales on Saturday, April 21st (their Earth day celebration) as well as proceeds from the Harvest Café tip jar for the month of April.