



# OPEN SPACES

WEST WISCONSIN  
LAND TRUST

SUMMER 2005

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1

## Wisconsin's Newest State Park

by Brandon Gorringer and Michelle Dingwall



Residents and visitors of Wisconsin now have a second State Park to enjoy in Polk County, thanks to two years of negotiations lead by West Wisconsin Land Trust. Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area was dedicated by Governor Doyle on April 19, 2005.

The 2,780-acre property is located three miles northeast of Luck, and includes a 107-acre wild lake, with no lakeshore development. Other natural features include nearly 800 acres of old growth forest and rare geologic formations. The pristine property contains nesting populations of trumpeter swans, bald eagles, loons, diverse communities of frogs and salamanders, and has the largest population of cerulean warblers in Wisconsin.

Brunkow Hardwoods Corporation owned the property for several years, but their low-impact management preserved its pristine natural features. When they were considering the sale of the land, the Brunkows did not want to see it irresponsibly developed. After negotiations with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) stalemated, Bruce Moss, DNR Northern Land Leader, approached West Wisconsin Land Trust in March of 2003. For two years, WWLT Executive Director, Rick Gauger strategized to preserve the land, and negotiated with the DNR, the Brunkows, and conservation buyers to protect the property.

As interest by the DNR waned, conservation buyers, John Morrison and Mark

[continued on page 4](#)



## WEST WISCONSIN LAND TRUST

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# Note Worthy

## New Board Leadership

January 2005 marked a transition in the Board of Directors of West Wisconsin Land Trust.

Curt Rohland stepped down as President, after serving four years in that capacity. When Curt was elected President in 2000, WWLT was known as the Wisconsin Farmland Conservancy. The organization's name changed in 2002, to better reflect its conservation of natural areas as well as farmland. Land conservation was happening at a record pace in the early 2000s, with over 10,000 acres protected in just four years. Throughout his term as Board President, Curt's leadership and dedication helped WWLT become the largest land conservation organization based in Wisconsin. Thank you, Curt!

WWLT welcomed Linda Keefe as Board President in January 2005. Linda has served on the Board since 2002, and shares a sincere passion for protecting western Wisconsin's natural character. In fact, she and her husband protected their own property in 2001, a vineyard in the Pine Creek watershed.

"With the protection of increasing acreage, the responsibilities of WWLT also increase," said Linda. "My goal as President

is to build our membership to be a strong foundation for monitoring and protecting the lands placed in our care. WWLT needs members from all our communities and at all levels of participation, to provide the continuity for our programs and the base for our volunteer efforts."

WWLT is grateful for the experience and passion of Board members like Curt and Linda. Their commitment and vision helps WWLT continue to protect western Wisconsin's natural character.

## Thank You Volunteers!

Several volunteers have assisted with a variety of WWLT activities this year. Mary Hifiker, Dan Marchand, Marcie O'Connor and Kathy Olson helped staff the WWLT booths at the Fly Fishing Expo and the Lake Home & Cabin Show in April. They introduced West Wisconsin Land Trust to visitors, and answered questions about conservation projects.

Ten other volunteers are participating in a pilot program under the leadership of Kathy Olson, Board Member and Volunteer Coordinator. The program will train and certify volunteers to monitor properties conserved by WWLT.

Training was held in May at Ed and Karol Moersfelder's property in Amery. Volunteers were trained by Land Program Director, Rick Remington, and received a map and baseline documentation for specific properties to use as reference. Certified volunteers will monitor properties over the summer.

The program will be evaluated at the end of the summer, and adapted for other regions of our service area.

Ed Moersfelder is the monitoring coordinator for the northern region, and will assist Kathy and WWLT staff throughout the program. Other certified monitoring volunteers include: Larry Bresina, Dave Clausen, Tim Doyle, David Foster, Deb Gingenbach, Roberta Collins Harper, Ruth Hilfiker, William List, and Ben Skinner.

If you are interested in helping with these or other volunteer opportunities, please call 715-235-8850 for more information.



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# The Big Deal

Over the past six months *your* staff at the West Wisconsin Land Trust have completed several transactions resulting in the permanent preservation of over 3,500 acres of pristine land.

One of the properties received multi-state press because it was the first time in state history a complete state park was obtained in a single purchase. The Straight Lake Park purchase was negotiated by WWLT staff and resulted in the protection of 2,780 acres in a single swoop.

Contrast Straight Lake with another park purchase in the first half of 2005, the Martell Rush River parcel. At 1.78 acres, this segment of trout stream is our smallest transaction ever. This project received barely a mention in the regional news, but may have as much or more impact on Wisconsin and Minnesota residents.

Now trout-fishers, families, and handicapped persons will be able to access the "Rush" through the Martell Park without walking through someone's back yard. The public will be able to more fully enjoy a resource unique to western Wisconsin.

Private land conservation continues to make up the bulk of our work, and the Buckman and Olson families continue that trend with some exceptional land protection. Farmland and lakeshore are being divided and developed just as fast as anywhere in the country. So when families donate the development rights to protect their tradition, they are also preserving the natural heritage of western Wisconsin.

We're tempted to say that the big deal has got to be Straight Lake, and there is no question it is a big deal, but I think that you, our members, *get it*. The Big Deal is that we are preserving the special places in western Wisconsin—whether large or small—one parcel at a time, day in and day out, year after year.

And I'm sure you'll agree with me, that your support of WWLT is bearing huge dividends and resulting in some really "big deals". Enjoy reading about some of them in this newsletter, and know that your investment in West Wisconsin Land Trust is making a difference right now.



by Richard E.  
Gauger

Executive Director

"The Big Deal is that we are preserving the special places in western Wisconsin—whether large or small—one parcel at a time, day in and day out, year after year."

## Annual Member Meeting

Over 60 members gathered on April 14 to celebrate West Wisconsin Land Trust's accomplishments in 2004. Attendees enjoyed Dr. Kelly Cain's presentation of "Sustainability and the Future of Western Wisconsin", and learning how sustainable practices used in other cultures may be applied locally.

Other highlights of the evening included recognition of those who have made significant contributions to land conservation. Janette Sweasy and John Goetz were honored with the 2004 Legacy Award. Their contributions enabled West Wisconsin Land Trust to purchase and permanently protect Maiden Rock Bluff.

Nearly 30 charter members of the Stewardship Circle were recognized for their significant commitment to conservation. Stewardship Circle members have preserved their own land or have contributed significantly to land conservation efforts at WWLT.

Rick Gauger and Linda Keefe thanked everyone for their commitment to preserving the natural character of western Wisconsin. Without member support, we truly would not have been able to conserve nearly 15,000 acres of natural areas and family farms.

below: 2005 Annual Meeting





Linda Keefe with the Brunkows



Straight Lake dedication. Governor Doyle is at the far right.

**"We always wanted the property to be conserved as a park," said Bob Brunkow, President of Brunkow Hardwoods Corporation, "but it took West Wisconsin Land Trust to bring this deal together."**

**"Future generations will look back with gratitude for the lakes, rivers, forests and natural areas we are preserving today," said Governor Doyle.**

Johnson almost purchased the property and placed a land preservation agreement on it. However, the DNR entered back into the negotiations with a more reasonable offer and the promise of the property being open to the public. The end result of these deliberations was an offer to purchase by WWLT, accepted by Brunkows, and then assigned by WWLT to the DNR.

"The Brunkow's cared for the property for over 10 years, and they knew they wanted it to be protected forever and used by the public. Bob and Bill had higher offers from bigger loggers and developers, but they chose to stick this out with us," said Rick Gauger, Executive Director.

This purchase wouldn't have been possible without the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. Through the Stewardship Fund, Governor Doyle and the Natural Resources Board have ensured millions of Wisconsin residents and visitors from Minnesota and the Midwest will be able to enjoy one of Wisconsin's most scenic natural areas for years to come.

The Straight Lake property will be divided into two areas: Straight Lake State Park and Straight Lake Wildlife Area, as designated by DNR staff. The southern portion (approximately 1,200 acres) is the state park, where hiking trails and walk-in water access are currently open.\* The north-north-east portion of the property will be designated as a State Wildlife Area, preserving Straight Lake's unique variety of wildlife habitats.

In addition, visitors may enjoy Straight Lake State Park via the Ice Age Trail. Nearly four miles of the trail will be constructed on the property, representing the largest contiguous segment ever purchased. A volunteer crew with the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation will be responsible for building this premier trail through the former-Brunkow Hardwoods property.

"Our hope is to have the Ice Age Trail open through the property during 2006 or 2007," stated Andrew Hanson, Trailway Director for the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation.

To date, West Wisconsin Land Trust has helped establish over six miles of Ice Age National Scenic Trail on multiple conserved properties in Polk and Chippewa Counties.

Protection of the Straight Lake property represents a creative alternative to traditional land protection. Through trusted partnerships with the Brunkows, John Morrison and Mark Johnson, as well as the DNR, WWLT "kept the deal alive" for two years, until this incredible property was permanently protected. Thanks to the efforts of everyone involved, thousands of Wisconsin residents and visitors will now enjoy the unique natural beauty of Straight Lake State Park and Wilderness Area for years to come.

*\*Straight Lake State Park currently allows entry at the corner of 120th Street and 270th Avenue. Parking is available along the road and people must walk downhill to access existing trails. All trails are unmarked.*

# Sanctuary On The Lake

by Jane Anklam

Donald and Carol Buckman know this land well. Donald's grandfather homesteaded the farm a stone's throw away in 1900. His dad bought a lake lot on Gull Lake in the '40s. In 1957, when Don and Carol bought their place on Gull Lake, there were two resorts and a mobile home on the lake. The west shore was completely undeveloped and wild. Today, while there are a few more cottages and resorts, the lake has maintained its serenity and clarity, thanks to an active Lake Association and landowners like the Buckmans who see the lake and their ownership as both a joy and responsibility.

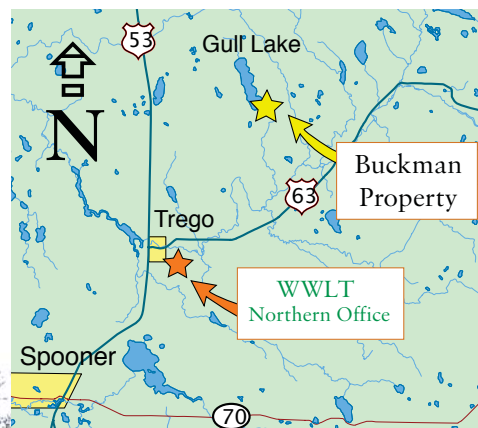
"We have always kept the shoreline wild," explained Don. "We did not want to destroy something that was the very reason we came up here in the first place."

So after many summers living on Gull Lake, Don and Carol decided to place 37 acres—including a quarter mile of shoreline—under a land preservation agreement with WWLT. The outlet of Gull Lake flows through the Buckman's property and

eventually into the Namekagon River. The property includes wetlands with tamaracks and pitcher plants on a floating sphagnum bog. The mixed forest of oaks, aspen, birch and old red pine has been carefully tended and adds to the quiet beauty of their land.

"We have had many years of fun and enjoyment," said Carol. "Now we can give something back to the land. We like the idea of providing a sanctuary for the wild animals...a place where we can see the stars in a dark sky."

The Buckmans are active in their community and continue to be world travelers. No matter where their travels take them, they will now be assured their side of Gull Lake will remain wild forever.



"We have had many years of fun and enjoyment. Now we can give something back to the land."



# Protecting Wisconsin's Trout Streams

by Patrick McRaith



Brown trout,  
© Eric Engretson,  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

insert: Pine Creek

The cool, clean, crisp water of Wisconsin's trout streams represent some of the most prized and endangered natural wonders in the Midwest. Few streams have these very specific and distinctive features needed to support a healthy trout population.

Classifying streams based on the quality of their trout habitat, only the most pristine of streams receive a classification of "one". West Wisconsin Land Trust recently protected shoreline along two trout streams in Pierce County, Pine Creek, a marvelous Class 1 trout stream, and Rush River, a beautiful Class 2 trout stream.

West Wisconsin Land Trust has continued its 4-year-long partnership with landowners in the Pine Creek watershed in order to protect a total of 422 acres of land and three miles of this sought-after Class 1 Trout Stream.

The nourishing waters of Pine Creek work their way to the Mississippi, passing through the beautiful and ecologically unique Mississippi bluff lands. Exhibiting the unique and rare qualities needed to support trout in Wisconsin, Pine Creek holds up to 3,000 Brook trout per mile, which brings in anglers from throughout the Midwest. WWLT's conservation of the shoreline ensures Pine Creek will remain an ideal habitat for thousands of trout.

Larry Claggett, a Wisconsin DNR Coldwater Fisheries Ecologist, says, "The purchase and leasing of lands along trout streams is probably our most important management activity."

Working from the momentum of the Pine Creek project, WWLT recently protected 1.78 acres of land that has 600 feet of frontage on the Rush River. This Class 2 trout stream is home to the uncommon anglers hat trick, with Brook, Brown, and Rainbow trout all calling the Rush River home.

Currently, public access to the Rush River is very limited, but the partnership between WWLT, the Town of Martel, Pierce County, the Wisconsin DNR, two Trout Unlimited chapters, Ellsworth Rod & Gun Club, and Eau Galle-Rush River Sportsman's Club will allow free public access to this high quality trout stream. The property will become a community park, with parking, a picnic shelter, and a wheelchair-accessible fishing area, and will be the only public access point with parking along the Rush River.

Pine Creek and Rush River are part of a unique and limited network of cool clean waterways that are able to support the Midwest's trout population. WWLT is proud to have protected this pristine habitat for wildlife while providing humans a truly stunning natural retreat.

# Notes from the Field

The names are testimony to the character of the streams found in the steep-sided valleys and coulees where they are: Lost Creek, Cave Creek, the Rush River. The trout streams of the Driftless Area of western Wisconsin are quite different than their counterparts flowing through the rolling sands of central Wisconsin and the lowlands of the northern forests.

Tall, forested bluffs tower over the river valley. At the base are cold freshwater springs, the source of the stream. Water emerging from the springs is near 50 degrees, and is cold enough to support native brook trout fisheries in the headwaters, often along the entire waterway. Warmer sections downstream are home to the elusive brown and rainbow trout.

Although the streams we see today are picturesque, and the trout populations seem stable, the waters are not without problems. Over 100 years of poor farming practices in the watersheds have increased soil erosion and inundated the valleys with sediment and agricultural residues. Soil erosion degrades spawning habitat, reduces overhanging bank cover, widens the channel, and decreases overall water

quality. Even the defining characteristic of these streams—the cold water—is at risk. Changes in and out of the streams create a more shallow, slow moving current, which results in warmer water. A more recent issue is the poor and unplanned residential development. Not only does this directly impact the stream, but also directly impacts the angler along it. The century-old anglers' path is now facing an increasing number of new homes and "No Trespassing" signs.

To meet the challenge, West Wisconsin Land Trust is partnering with public agencies, local sportsmen clubs, and private landowners to have an on-the-ground impact. WWLT has made the protection of western Wisconsin trout streams among its top priorities. With increasing momentum from initiatives like TUDARE (Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Restoration Effort), and the Lower Chippewa River Wetland Partnership, WWLT anticipates making great strides in not only stream restoration, protection and angler access, but also in further protection of the greater western Wisconsin Blufflands.



by Rick  
Remington

Land Program  
Director



## Centennial Farm Protected Near Spring Valley

by Michelle Dingwall

In the I-94 growth corridor spanning across the Minnesota/Wisconsin border to Eau Claire, suburban expansion threatened the future of the Olson family farm. The Olson farm is one mile east of Spring Valley, in an area characterized by rolling hills, woods and farmland. Unfortunately this natural beauty has attracted dozens of new residences, including a new development directly across from the Olson farm.

The Olson family settled the 200-acre property in 1896, and in 1997 it was dedicated as a Centennial Farm. Their land includes a combination of rolling agricultural land, pasture, hayfield and woodlands. Siblings Don Olson, Paul Olson and Anita Fletcher recently signed a land preservation agreement to preserve their family's homestead and farming tradition.

"Thank you for helping preserve the Olson family farm as it is. I am sure our parents would be very pleased with this agreement... I hope our neighbors will give serious consideration to their land use options," said Paul Olson.

Under the restrictions of the land preservation agreement, the property cannot be subdivided. The agreement allows for a maximum of one additional residence. Current and future owners must use sustainable agricultural practices, such as limiting the number of livestock,

continued on page 8



## Centennial Farm, continued from page 7

following a soil and water conservation plan, and limiting the amount of manure that can be applied to the fields.

Preservation of the Olson family farm represents WWLT's twentieth land preservation agreement in Pierce County, for a total of 1,900 acres. Member support continues to preserve the remaining natural areas in one of Wisconsin's fastest-developing counties.

# Second Annual Photo Contest



Congratulations to Dan Wilcox, winner of last year's photo contest! Dan and Carol conserved their 84-acre property in the Town of Martell, in 2003. It includes about 50 acres of mature hardwood forest and 26 acres of restored prairie, as well as a 2-acre pond. The scenic landscapes provide habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, including reptiles, amphibians and migrating songbirds. Submissions for this year's Photo Contest are due December 1st. Watch for more information in the Fall issue of *Open Spaces*, or at [wwlt.org](http://wwlt.org).

*"It takes a noble man to plant a seed for a tree that will someday give shade to people he may never meet."* David Threlkeld

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