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WITH A FRIEND
...or two

20,000 & Counting!

Thanks to the generous support of members like you, West Wisconsin Land Trust has now helped conserve **20,000 acres of farms and natural areas!** From Straight Lake State Park to the David Hansen Memorial Landing on the Black River, people are enjoying the fruits of your financial support every day.

Please renew your membership today, if you haven't already. (Membership expiration dates are printed on the label below.) Your tax-deductible gift goes a long way toward preserving the rivers, lakes and landscapes that define western Wisconsin.

Thank you for making this important work possible.

Don't know what to give to that person who has everything this year? How about a membership to West Wisconsin Land Trust? Recipients of gift memberships will be sent a welcome packet, a card acknowledging your gift, copies of Open Spaces and our annual report. As a member, your friend or loved one will continue to receive Open Spaces and invitations to member events throughout the year. And remember, your gift memberships are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

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signature:	



WEST WISCONSIN
LAND TRUST

FALL 2006

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2

A Window into Wisconsin's Farming Past

By Patrick McRaith

Conserving farmland between the suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota and Eau Claire, Wisconsin has been a priority of West Wisconsin Land Trust for nearly 20 years. For the past eight years, West Wisconsin Land Trust has preserved at least one farm a year from residential development.

"Farms near cities will become increasingly important as transportation costs rise and the demand for locally produced food increases. Farms in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties are high on our radar screen," commented Rick Gauger, executive director of West Wisconsin Land Trust.

With the assistance of West Wisconsin Land Trust and the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP), Gene

and Jane Schommer of Prescott, Wisconsin have signed a land protection agreement that permanently protects their 160-acre farm (pictured below).

A window into Wisconsin's past, the Schommer farm was recently recognized as an official Sesquicentennial Farm. The Schommer family has owned the farm since it was homesteaded in the 1850s, shortly after Wisconsin became a state.

Gene and Jane Schommer have raised seven children on the farm. "We want another generation of our family to be here, too," Gene said. Preserving their farm through West Wisconsin Land Trust will allow the fifth generation of Schommers to continue the family's farming tradition, and

continued on page 9



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WEST WISCONSIN LAND TRUST

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Note Worthy

Nature Walk/Run

On an unseasonably cool Saturday in September, 40 people of all ages participated in the Nature Walk/Run for Life at Maiden Rock Bluff and Maiden Rock Apples. Herdie Baisden and Carol Wiersma, owners of Maiden Rock Apples



and long-time members of WWLT, organized the event to generate money for the American Cancer Society. Their energy and enthusiasm helped raise nearly \$2,000!

West Wisconsin Land Trust staff and volunteers shared information about Maiden Rock Bluff's wildlife and natural resources at several stations along the route. Participants enjoyed seeing more than 70 acres of restored prairie in full bloom, as well as the stunning view of Lake Pepin from the blufftop.

Thanks to Herdie and Carol, and all the participants and volunteers who helped make the Nature Walk/Run for Life so special.



Monthly Giving Made Easier

Perhaps you've heard of *free*, automatic bill-paying service? To pay a bill, all one has to do is designate the amount, the date, and to whom it should be paid. Once these guidelines are set up, banks will automatically pay your bill each month. This convenient service may also be used to make contributions.

Two members of West Wisconsin Land Trust recently enrolled in their bank's automatic bill-paying service, to make monthly donations. Each month, WWLT receives a check from their bank, with the members' names and contact information, so that we may send a receipt. But best of all, membership renewal is automatically updated, helping to reduce the cost of mailings.

Ask your bank if they offer automatic bill-paying. It's a great way to make a sizable annual donation through smaller monthly gifts.

Welcome Anne



Anne Annis joined West Wisconsin Land Trust in June 2006.

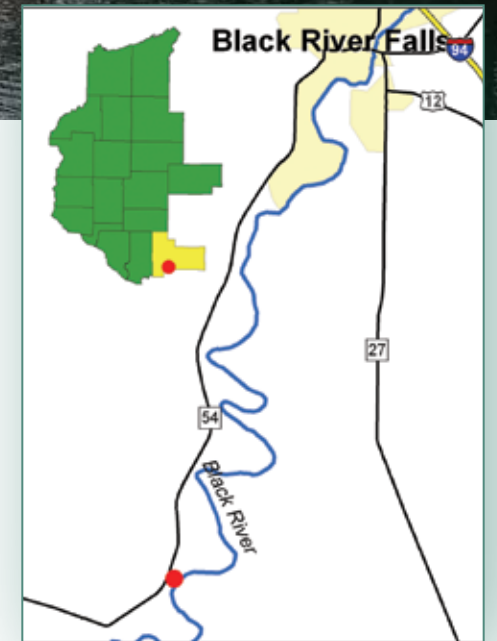
Anne has a passion for gardening, and challenges herself by using natural resources or aged relics as inspirations for creating unique arbors, trellises, bird baths or planters in her numerous perennial gardens. Other passions, which she shares with her husband, Jeff, include their first "awesome" grandson, Grant, and their three daughters Stacy, Jodi and Megan.

Please join us in welcoming Anne to the WWLT family!



Black River Beginning

By Rick Remington



Every once in a while, a project comes along that seems to bring together the right people and a wonderful resource; that has the potential to touch the lives of others well into the future.

WWLT found such a project over a year ago while talking to a relatively new watershed-based organization, Friends of the Black River (FBR). As the name implies, FBR focuses its work on the protection of the Black River, a large tributary of the Mississippi that flows from Medford to near La Crosse.

The Black River is considered a large and very significant conservation resource due to the variety of ecological landscapes along its corridor, and the remaining large blocks of rural and undisturbed land in the watershed.

While focusing on river protection, FBR realized that recreational access to the river was a critical component of any protection plan, as people need to see and appreciate the resource in order to want to safeguard it. The organization further identified a small but significant parcel of land in the community of Irving, used historically as a canoe landing by the good graces of landowners David and Mary Hansen.

I was delighted when Rolf Skogstad of FBR asked me to accompany him on a visit to Mary Hansen last spring to discuss formalizing the canoe landing at Irving. Mary, Rolf and I discussed several scenarios for the site including purchase and conservation easement. Early this fall, we all agreed that the best avenue was a public access easement held by WWLT. While a conservation easement focuses on protection of a property's natural resources, an access easement is primarily used to ensure that the property remains open for public access to the river.

A partnership agreement between WWLT and FBR outlines the responsibilities of each organization regarding site management. FBR has installed a trash bag dispenser at the landing to make sure that both the river and the landing remain clean, and posted a sign recognizing the Hansens' contribution. WWLT will assure the site remains publicly accessible and that the integrity of the areas remains conducive to river access.

"This is great for both FBR and WWLT," said Andy Ellingson, president of FBR. "FBR has been interested in easements for some time and it is so

rewarding that we have now teamed up with WWLT to make this a reality."

On October 16, 2006, the David Hansen Memorial Landing at Irving was dedicated, in honor of Mary's late husband David, who passed away in October of 2005.

Thanks to the generosity of the Hansen family, hundreds of canoeists and kayakers will have access to this stretch of the Black River every year. And with this new partnership between FBR and WWLT, the potential for land protection along the Black River will go well into the future.

The Pension Protection Act of 2006

By Patrick McRaith and Michelle Dingwall

New Conservation Incentives

With the signing of the Pension Protection Act on August 17, 2006, the income tax incentives to donate a land protection agreement have more than doubled.

Now, when landowners preserve their land, they can take up to a 50 percent deduction on their adjusted gross income until the appraised value of the donation is used up, or for the next 16 years! Furthermore, qualifying farmers and ranchers (those who receive more than 50 percent of his/her income from "the trade or business of farming") can receive a 100 percent tax deduction on their adjusted gross income for the next 16 years!

The time is *now* however, because these new incentives only apply to properties conserved in 2006 and 2007.

The following example shows how this new law significantly increases the benefits for landowners:

Landowner Adjusted Gross
Income = \$100,000

Conservation Easement Donation
(appraised value) = \$800,000

Previous Law: Owner could deduct
\$30,000/year for 6 years =
\$180,000 total allowed deductions
(amount of donation unused =
\$620,000)

New Law: Owner deducts \$50,000/
year for 16 years = \$800,000 total
allowed deductions (amount of
donation unused = \$0)

New Law for Qualifying Farmer/
Rancher: Owner deducts
\$100,000/year for 8 years =
\$800,000 total deductions (100%
of donation used in 8 years)



Many conservationists see this as a landmark victory for preserving our remaining farms and natural areas. Landowners are now being rewarded with these new tax incentives, for their generous and long lasting gifts of land conservation agreements.

IRA rollover

Another measure included in the Pension Protection Act is the ability for people age 70^{1/2} and older to exclude up to \$100,000 from their gross income for a taxable year, for cash gifts directly from an IRA to a qualified nonprofit organization like West Wisconsin Land Trust. The IRA Charitable Rollover provision applies only to traditional and Roth IRAs,

not other retirement plans, such as 401(k), 403(b), annuities, and SEPs.

This provision allows donors to make significant gifts to West Wisconsin Land Trust, while reducing their taxable income in 2006 and 2007. And unlike other planned gifts, it allows donors to see the impact of their generosity by watching WWLT conserve more land and water for wildlife, and keeping the air and water clean for future generations.

For more information about how this new legislation can help you leave your "footprint" on the future of western Wisconsin, please call West Wisconsin Land Trust at (715)235-8850 and speak to our executive director, or contact your tax advisor.

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

-David Trueblood

Our Members' Eyes

Remember the old agriculture saying, regarding the "eyes-to-acres" ratio? It's the idea that every acre of land needs a pair of eyes looking after it to be properly cared for and stewarded. Well, the members of West Wisconsin Land Trust are our eyes. We figure we need at least 50 members for each 1000 acres conserved to keep *our* eyes on the land. Eyes that guide, assist, direct, implore, facilitate, strategize and husband the land that *we* have conserved, as well as the land yet to be conserved.

Members of West Wisconsin Land Trust, those who contribute five to fifty-thousand dollars a year, have grown to over 800 people. Most of our members are from Wisconsin and Minnesota, but we have members from 48 states. Members keep the lights on at our WWLT offices. Members serve on our board of directors, volunteer on our properties, direct us toward new projects, and help finance land purchases. Members allow West Wisconsin Land Trust to thrive.

West Wisconsin Land Trust has a reputation for being a creative, nimble, opportunistic and aggressive protector of the natural areas and farmland in western and northwestern Wisconsin. We listen carefully to the collective voice of our membership, knowing that our members have literally made this organization what it is today: the largest, most successful land trust in the state of Wisconsin.

As 2006 ends, we are putting the final touches on land protection agreements that will catapult us to over 20,000 acres of land conserved. Think about that: 20,000 acres permanently protected so that nature can flourish, which contributes to cleaner air and better water quality. So stay with us, and encourage your neighbors, friends and family to become members, because more eyes are needed to steward the land!

It's your concern for the environment, for the stewardship of God's creation, your hope for your children and grandchildren that drives us.

*Our members have made this organization
what it is today: the largest, most successful
land trust in the state of Wisconsin.*



Wild Lake, Chippewa County



By Richard E.
Gauger

Executive Director

Upcoming Programs

Night Hike

Saturday,
December 9th
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Hoffman Hills State
Recreation Area,
Menomonie

or

Saturday,
December 16th
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Maiden Rock Bluff
State Natural Area,
NW Pepin County

Discover the nocturnal world by seeing with your feet, echolocating a moth, or finding a friend with your nose. Maybe even look at the stars and learn why pirates wore eye patches. Leave with your breath Wint-O-Green fresh and new activities for sleepovers.

All programs are free and open to the public. Register by calling (715) 235-8850, or by sending an e-mail to bdingwall@wwlt.org.



Table-top education, Earth Day 2006, Hudson

An Office is Good! By Bill Dingwall

Those are words that many outdoor educators will never say. There are no trees in this office, no critters to watch, nor is there a vast expanse of open land right outside the door. However, being in an office is great because it promotes a style of programming that is mobile in nature. We take the program to the people.

Since its beginning in June of 2005, WWLT's Education program has served over 1,500 participants in seven counties. A total of 17 sites have been used, including state and community parks, town halls, schools, and even a church basement. Being based in an office building has actually allowed the program to get out into more communities and meet more people than standard education programs.

A new direction that has sprung from this mobility is a technique called table-top education. Wisconsin is blessed with an abundance of wildlife. Critters, especially aquatic, can be found in nearly every community we serve. The Education Program takes small creepy-crawlies (macro-invertebrates) from local water bodies, places them in bins of water on a table, and lets people discover what is literally in their back yards. Many adults and children have never seen these animals, much less know that they can be used to indicate water quality. The impact of this technique is evident in the many looks of excitement, shock, and true curiosity from all ages. To date, this technique has "creeped out" over 200 people. Not bad for being in an office.

For more information on this or other Education Programs, please contact Bill Dingwall at 715-235-8850 or bdingwall@wwlt.org.

Snow—Did You Know?

As I write this, snow is falling from the clouds and the dull colors of late fall will be covered with a blanket of white. However, snow is much more than just frozen water. For many, snow means slower drives to work, back-breaking shoveling, or even the time to migrate south like the geese. For others, snow is seen as something beautiful, refreshing, and dare I say, even welcomed. For some wildlife, the snow even saves lives.

Do you know that grouse use the snow to escape the cold? When it gets too cold, these birds will leave the shrubs and dive into the snow to stay warm. While the air might be -30 F, it can be as toasty as +20 F down in the snow. That may still seem cold, but it's a difference of 50 degrees!

continued next page

Wisconsin's Farming Past, continued from the cover

the land will be available to agriculture forever.

Pierce County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Wisconsin, with population expected to increase about 25 percent between 2000 and 2030, according to the Wisconsin Department of Administration. This rapid development is putting intense pressure on farmers and other owners of large parcels. "Farmers never want to sell their land to development—they have to," commented Gene.

"The development pressures are real and immediate; we must act to preserve land now," added Ralph Schommer, Gene's brother and a long-time member and advocate of West Wisconsin Land Trust.

The USDA identified about 96 acres of "prime and important agricultural soils" on the Schommer farmstead. The soil that has supported farming for a over a century has remained rich, due in part to the responsible agricultural practices the Schommers have used, such as crop rotation and grass waterways. It's no wonder Gene and Jane received the Pierce County Conservation Award in 2003.

"The farm is more productive now than it was 150 years ago. That shows that we are doing something right," said Gene. The Schommers' good farming practices not only

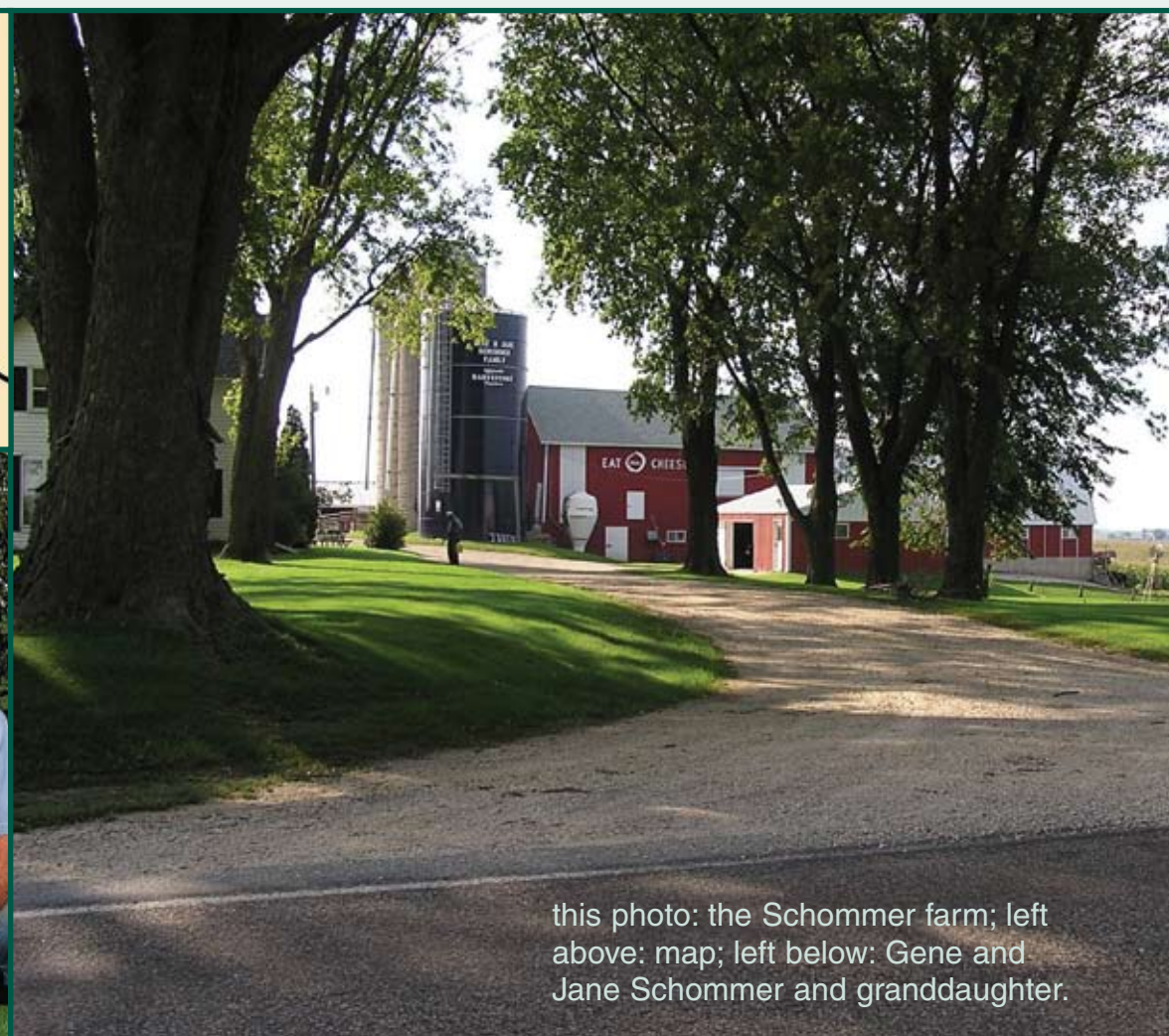
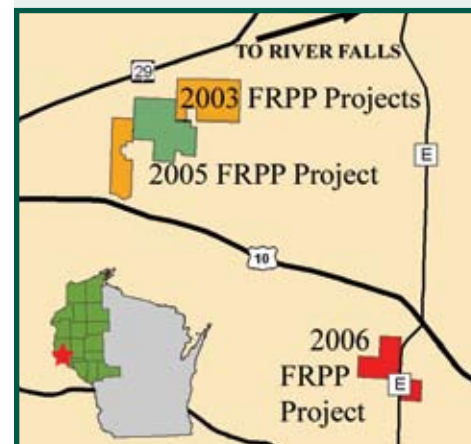
safeguard the soil resources on the property, but have lasting effects downstream, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

The farmstead is complemented by small woodlots that are home to a diverse mix of tree species, deer, small mammals, turkeys and songbirds. The property also contains two ravines that flow into the Big River, a Class I trout stream located about a half mile away.

The Schommer farm lies within West Wisconsin Land Trust's Pierce County priority farmland area. This is an area where farms are still relatively large, prime agricultural soils are present, and the threat from residential development is high.

Protection of the Schommer farm also meets West Wisconsin Land Trust's conservation goal to preserve large areas of contiguous land. The Schommer farm is about three miles from two farms previously preserved with the assistance of the FRPP program.

With the addition of the Schommer farm, West Wisconsin Land Trust has protected almost 800 acres of farmland in Pierce County, and nearly 5,000 farmland acres in our region. West Wisconsin Land Trust is proud to help preserve Wisconsin's farming tradition.



this photo: the Schommer farm; left above: map; left below: Gene and Jane Schommer and granddaughter.



Protecting a Pocket-Prairie

By Britta Lee

Headwaters of the St. Croix: Birthplace of a Beloved River

By Jane Anklam

Whether you live, work or play in northwestern Wisconsin, you are never far from the influence of the St. Croix River. It drains a great portion of Douglas, Washburn, Burnett, Polk, St. Croix, Bayfield and Sawyer Counties in Wisconsin. It includes the sub-watersheds of the Namekagon, Totagatic, and Clam Rivers, as well as the Eau Claire Lakes. And, of course, this list includes only the Wisconsin side of the St. Croix watershed. Minnesota's landscape adds hundreds of square miles to the flow of the river.

When one considers how much this river is enjoyed by Twin Cities residents, as well as vacationers from around the region, it is no wonder an intense interest has developed in protecting its natural resources. Ironically, the eight-mile stretch of headwaters of the St. Croix is not protected as part of the National Park Service's Wild River designation, making this critical tract quite vulnerable.

West Wisconsin Land Trust is tak-

ing advantage of the synergy recently created by several initiatives concerning the headwaters of the St. Croix. The Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters, of which West Wisconsin Land Trust is a member, has been working with local units of government, landowners, and the state to garner protection via Outstanding Resource Water designation. We are also working to implement a plan to protect the water quality and natural habitats of this upper stretch of the river.

"With all the wonderful work that has been done to protect the St. Croix River from Gordon down to the confluence with the Mississippi River at Prescott, it really makes sense, both ecologically and economically, to have a protection plan in place for the headwaters," explains Scott Peterson of the Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters. "By building on what Douglas County and the DNR have already initiated through their watershed plan, the headwaters can continue to have a posi-

tive impact on the river in a time when growth and development are a looming threat."

West Wisconsin Land Trust is also assisting the DNR with the Sharp-Tailed Grouse Habitat Plan in this key upper watershed habitat. "The success of implementing the Sharp-Tailed Plan will depend on how we provide regional travel corridors for the birds," explained Fred Strand, DNR wildlife biologist. "This will not be possible without protection of habitat on private lands as well as public land."

The opportunity to have the same impact on wild-rice grounds, mussel populations, sedge meadows and breeding wolf populations in the Upper St. Croix Headwaters is taking shape as more landowners are introduced to the important work of West Wisconsin Land Trust. Conserving private land will ensure these critical components continue to define the landscape of northwestern Wisconsin for generations to come.

Land prices in St. Croix County are among the highest in western Wisconsin, especially on Bass Lake, one of the largest lakes in the County. Despite this, the Simon family, a brother and three sisters, chose to honor their mother's wishes and preserve their remnant prairie forever.

The five-acre site, which is within earshot of Bass Lake, is a dry-mesic prairie that is home to many native grasses and flowers. The prairie species include: Little Bluestem, Big Bluestem, Black-Eyed Susan, Indian Grass, Round-headed Bush Clover, Lead Plant, Arrow Leaf Aster, and many other native plants.

West Wisconsin Land Trust partnered with The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) to permanently protect the Simons' unique and beautiful remnant prairie. This partnership allowed the Simon family to donate the land to West Wisconsin Land Trust. The Prairie Enthusiasts will manage the plant community on the property.

"The prairie is not large, but it is a remnant prairie and has a great base of native species to start from," said Harvey Halverson, a member of TPE and DNR wildlife biologist for St. Croix County.

Evanne Hunt, president of the St. Croix Valley chapter of TPE went on to say, "This is definitely a win-win situation for our local prairie heritage!"

Management of the property will include the elimination of invasive and non-native species, burning the prairie, and eventually, a species enhancement project. Currently the prairie boasts an above average species count for the highly developed St. Croix County area.

Thanks to a creative partnership between WWLT and TPE, as well as the commitment of the Simon family, people from Minnesota and Wisconsin will be able to enjoy the rich diversity of another remnant of our western prairie.

Snow—Did You Know, continued from page 4

One fun way of observing the effects of snow's insulating ability is to build a snow dome (quinzee) and bring your thermometer to measure the inside and outside temperatures. A more scientific way is to fill several film canisters with hot liquid gelatin and place them in different locations: in the snow, on the snow, in the sunlight, etc. After 15 minutes, come back and see which of these "canister critters" survived. Just don't eat the gelatin until you've made your observation!

Do you know that there is often space between the snow and solid ground? It's called *subnivian space* and is used by many small mammals like rodents. Often, plants and branches form a layer just an inch or so above the ground that is strong enough to support snow. Animals use this air space to stay warm and to escape predators. However, they aren't completely safe. Foxes can stick their noses into the snow to smell the animals, and some owls can even hear them under their snowy blanket. Look for tunnels into this space near clumps of grass, brush piles, or even cross-country ski trails.



Love Lake: One Successful Project Spawns Another

By Michelle Dingwall

Last year, the Love Lake Association successfully raised funds to purchase and conserve land just before it was sold to a developer. This 37-acre project included four separate parcels along Love Lake, totaling more than 7,000 feet of shoreline. After purchasing the properties, the Love Lake Association ensured the properties' permanent preservation by donating the land to West Wisconsin Land Trust.

About the same time the members of the Love Lake Association were able to pull off this stunning conservation effort, they learned of another developer's purchase of 24 acres, adjacent to the parcels conserved in 2005. They immediately began negotiations with the developer, who had planned to locate nine homes on 2,000 feet of shoreline.

The downturn in the real estate market, along with some limiting factors related to the shoreline, made the developer willing to sell the property to the

Love Lake Association for virtually no profit. However, the sale needed to take place in approximately three months. Ned Bixby, president of the Love Lake Association, immediately contacted all landowners on the lake, requesting their contributions to support the acquisition.

"The mission of the Love Lake Association is to protect and enhance the quality of Love Lake and surrounding areas, so these projects were a perfect fit," said Bixby. "Every resident on Love Lake is a member of the association, and several of our families have been on the lake for 80 years," he added. "We all want to see Love Lake protected so our grandchildren and great-grandchildren may enjoy it as we do."

Momentum from the first project's success helped the Love Lake Association raise nearly \$300,000 in just three months! Many of the Love Lake landowners chose to donate stock.

Gifts of stock to a charitable organization, like West Wisconsin Land Trust, allow donors to make significant gifts without paying penalties or interest on the capital gains. Thanks to dozens of contributions, the second Love Lake property was taken off the market in August.

"The passion and commitment of the members of the Love Lake Association, and Ned Bixby in particular, was simply astounding," said Rick Gauger, WWLT executive director. "Their ability to complete another project within just 18 months has inspired lake associations around the state."

Indeed, these committed landowners have permanently protected about two miles of shoreline and ninety percent of the natural springs that feed Love Lake. Through their efforts, future generations will enjoy a cool, clear Love Lake for many years to come.

Making the Best Even Better: Stewardship On the Brule River

By Jane Anklam

No doubt the presidents came here for good reason. I feel it as I wind down the trail to the shores of the Bois Brule River in Douglas County and slip into my kayak. In a moment, I am transported to another time and place. I am absorbed in this river corridor much like President Coolidge must have been in the 1920s. Indeed, we all know of wonderful places that generate such emotions. Some are well known, some a secret.

The 44 miles of the Brule River, along with nearly 128,000 acres of adjoining landscapes, are protected: private landowners have conserved approximately 5,000 acres with The Nature Conservancy; local units of governments have enhanced protections with special designations along the river corridor; and the Brule River State Forest encompasses over 40,000 acres. All are important to the water quality, timber, recreation, and wildlife habitat of the region.

So what does West Wisconsin Land Trust add to a resource that is already well protected? "The challenge is always to be alert to the status-quo," suggests Bob Banks, president of the Brule River Preservation, Inc., and third-generation landowner on the Brule. "This is a much loved river with its share of residents, recreationists and regulations. We, the landowners, want to do right by the way we individually manage our properties on the river. That's not always easy with so many protections and wildlife management practices to follow. For example, when a tree falls off a

property into the river, shall we remove it to allow a free flowing channel for canoeists, or leave it for habitat?"

The Brule River Preservation, Inc. approached WWLT to collaborate on a project to "raise the bar" for river landowners. A "Brule River Owner's Manual" will be developed by WWLT, with needs assessment and input from the landowners, local wildlife and fish managers, sportsmen, and jurisdictional agencies.

"The landowners not only saw the need for a reference to guide property decisions, but also to connect them with the proper agency staff," explained Steve

Peterson, the DNR's Brule River State Forest supervisor. "Providing such information in one manual tailored to Brule River landowners will be extremely valuable." The manual will be developed and completed by WWLT over the winter, allowing for a distribution by Memorial Day 2007.

The cost of keeping the Brule River corridor as nature intended is not possible without the ideas and efforts of many landowners, and constant review of progress and needs. West Wisconsin Land Trust is proud to assist in keeping the Brule River inviting for many presidents to come.

