



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

HELP LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR THE NORTHWOODS

Wisconsin's 2007 Land Trust of the Year!

P.O. Box 321, Eagle River, WI 54521-0321

Summer 2008

Conservation focus: the Upper Wisconsin River

The Wisconsin River begins its "Gathering of the Waters" flowing from its headwaters at Lac Vieux Desert in northeastern Vilas County. The Upper Wisconsin is a small, intimate stream of brushy overhangs and beaver dams. It picks up both warm- and cold-water streams as it flows west then south through Vilas County forest lands. The stretch of river, with its quick current and lots of twists and turns, is fun to run in kayaks and canoes.

At the intersection with the Eagle River chain of lakes at Watersmeet Lake, the Wisconsin becomes part of the "world's largest interconnected chain of freshwater lakes." Walleyes stack up below Otter Rapids dam in the springtime, which regulates the water level of the lake chain. In the summer, the river and inner-tubers tumble over and around large rocks.

Next comes the Rainbow Flowage, home to multiple nesting pairs of osprey, bald eagles and loons. Downstream of the Rainbow dam is another scenic stretch as the river heads south again toward Rhinelander. As the faster current gives way to the large Rhinelander Flowage, the channel meanders through large wild rice beds critical to waterfowl and many other species of wildlife.

The first of the mill dams is located in the heart of the city of Rhinelander, providing hydro resources for the Rhinelander paper mill owned by Wausau Paper Company. Below Rhinelander, the wider and deeper river continues its southward journey into the Hat Rapids flowage, another broad water body controlled by the Hat Rapids hydroelectric dam.

Below Hat Rapids, the river again heads south and west through large blocks of forest lands as it leaves Oneida County and heads toward the junction with the



Popular for canoeing and kayaking, the Upper Wisconsin River is an outstanding recreational resource, a jewel in the northwoods.

Tomahawk River at the city of Tomahawk.

All along the way, the Upper Wisconsin River is a jewel in the northwoods, a precious resource for recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and natural scenic beauty. Recognizing its importance, the Northwoods Land Trust has identified the Upper Wisconsin River as one of our conservation priorities for focusing our land protection efforts.

With funding assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' River Planning Grant program, NWLT has just completed a direct mail education campaign providing our landowner conservation guides to all owners of larger segments of Wisconsin River frontage in Vilas and Oneida Counties.

Following in this newsletter are three more unique river properties (the Engstrom and Eggleston projects have been reported previously) which are protected in perpetuity thanks to the private landowners working in concert with the Northwoods Land Trust.

mission:

The Northwoods Land Trust (NWLTL) promotes conservation by private landowners of natural shorelands, woodlands, wetlands and other natural resources, as public benefits for present and future generations. The Northwoods Land Trust covers areas of Vilas, Oneida, Forest, Florence, Iron and Price Counties.

Phone: (715) 479-2490 Email: nwlt@northwoodslandtrust.org Web site: www.northwoodslandtrust.org

Northwoods Land Trust

Purpose:

- To provide education and utilize voluntary conservation options with private landowners.
- To preserve natural shorelands on lakes, rivers and other waterways for protection of water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, and natural scenic beauty.
- To conserve private woodlands and encourage landowners to manage their forest lands in an ecologically sustainable manner.
- To accept perpetual stewardship for secure conservation agreements with private landowners, such as easements, land donations and property acquisitions.
- To annually monitor NWLT land protection agreements.
- To seek support through donations, grants, endowments memberships and volunteers.
- To leverage our conservation efforts through partnering with other organizations and agencies.

Newsletter Editor: Bryan Pierce



Bill and Joy Vancos celebrate the signing of their conservation agreement with NWLT.

Bald Eagles on the Upper Wisconsin River

When one of the toughest decisions on a conservation project is how to best protect a huge nest in a giant white pine tree, and you are making those decisions while watching the adult bald eagles circling in to feed the young, you know you are protecting something special. And when that nest is located along a beautiful stretch of natural shoreline on the upper Wisconsin River, everybody wins.



Bald eagles have recovered from dangerously low populations, and the Upper Wisconsin River is prime habitat for eagle watching.

Bill Vancos and his wife, Joy, made a lasting commitment to ensure that their piece of “eagle heaven” will be protected forever with a land protection agreement, or conservation easement, granted to the Northwoods Land Trust. Located in the Town of Pine Lake, Oneida County, the land includes a highly-scenic peninsula which features over 1,200 feet of shoreline on the Rhinelander flowage of the Wisconsin River.

Bill inherited the roughly 24-acre wooded parcel from his father Matt Vancos. “My Dad purchased the property in 1946,” said Bill. “He and his two brothers and six sisters grew up in Rhinelander and spent a lot of time enjoying outdoor recreation activities. Dad and my uncle Tony had done a lot of fishing and hunting in this area of the river. They actually had a little shack on paper mill land to the north of our property that served as a hunting camp. When he was overseas, serving in World War II, Dad asked my grandmother to keep an eye out for any land in the area if it became available and to please buy it. This parcel came available and she purchased it for him.”

“Dad was a mechanic at the Chevy garage for many years, but unfortunately he passed away in 1970,” Bill explained. “I always think of Dad as having owned the land forever, but now I have actually owned it longer than he did. The property has been affectionately named ‘Up River’.”

Joy grew up in Ripon and she and Bill met while going to college in Stevens Point. They returned to Rhinelander where Bill works as the Human Resources Manager for Wausau Paper. “We have one son, Jonathan, who went to college in Milwaukee and stayed down there where he is now married and working as an accountant,” said Bill.

“We would love to see the land remain in the family, so it is our hope that Jonathan and/or our two nephews will someday take over ownership of the land,” Bill said. “My goal is that, even if they don’t live around here, they might have a cottage to come back to as part of their family roots. That may not materialize, but at least I will die a happy man knowing that someone else will never have the ability to slice the property into small parcels.”

As recreational property, “I refer to it as my stress relief,” Bill commented. “I like to go up there and do things like cut fire wood. In the evening after work, we will cookout and then take the pontoon boat out on a cruise of the river. I can just go up and putz and have a lot of fun, and it is just a short drive back to the comforts of home,” he said.

(Continued on page 3 - Eagle heaven)

You Can Help!

The Northwoods Land Trust is a non-profit, tax exempt conservation organization. Your gift of cash, stocks, bonds or other financial support is fully tax deductible as charitable contributions under federal law. Donations of property or conservation easements may also provide tax benefits while promoting the conservation of our northwoods.

Eagle heaven - *continued*

Bill noted that the property has been enrolled in the Managed Forest Law program for the past twenty-six years. “The last time we had it logged a friend did it using a small tractor and pulp trailer. We didn’t want the land to get chewed up like it can with the larger equipment. We intended to thin out some of the pines, so we asked the forester to come in and mark the trees for us. We wanted his professional opinion on how to do it.”

“I have only good things to say about the program,” Bill said. “They were excellent to work with. They didn’t try to force us into anything that we did not want to do.”

“We are managing mostly for wildlife, especially deer and grouse,” Bill explained. “When I was younger, there were more grouse on the property, so we are hoping they will come back. When we harvested the last time, the white birch were dying and the aspen were getting old, so we wanted to harvest those along with the jack pine. It is amazing how it opened up the forest floor when those mature trees were cut down. It was almost like time-lapse photography watching the new seedlings grow and letting it take its natural course.”

The bald eagles have been nesting on their peninsula’s giant white pine for about eight years. “The first couple of years we didn’t notice babies,” said Joy, “but then for several years in a row they ended up with one young in the nest.” “This past year, after a summer where two young survived, we had a unique situation where the two yearlings came back to the nest along with the adults,” Bill added. “It was kind of like having kids going away to college and then coming back home,” he laughed.

“While every year is fun to watch, the year that both young made it was especially interesting,” Bill said. “It is so much fun watching the young ones as they first stand on the outside of the nest and let the wind blow in their wings. And the first week that they start flying they are just giddy, like little kids, squawking and having so much fun gliding.”

“One day I saw one of the juveniles flying and an adult ran right into it, sideswiped it and put it into a spin,” he noted. “I thought maybe the adult was sending a signal that it was time to leave the nest, but it didn’t because all four were still there after that. I don’t know what the adult was trying to teach or show the young one, but my eyes were wide open watching the collision above my head.”

“There are so many interesting things to see at the property,” Bill observed. “I ran into two bear last year; see an occasional fox, lots of deer, and the turkeys are settling in pretty well. I’ve seen as many as six or seven in a group. This is definitely my most favorite place to be.”

Bill has seeded clover on the logging trails and even planted a food plot for wildlife, but not for hunting now. “After my Dad passed away, I hunted for a couple of years, but the camaraderie just wasn’t the same,” he said.



These 24 acres of productive woodlands will never be subdivided for multiple new residences thanks to Bill and Joy Vancos.

“I have a very good friend that I met through the Kinship program who likes the property too, so we spend a lot of time up there,” said Bill. “Last year was the first year for the food plot, but when the corn started coming up, it was eaten right away. We were feeding the wildlife; they just weren’t waiting until ‘dinner time.’ There were turkey feathers and deer hoof prints, so I’m not sure if one or both of them were eating it, but they were both in there. This year we fenced off the corn to let it grow, and added oats and three apple trees.”

Bill and Joy learned about the Northwoods Land Trust when they saw a newspaper article on Beverly Engstrom putting a conservation easement on her Wisconsin River property near Rhinelander. Financial advisor Tim Hagen also recommended working with the land trust.

“The land trust is an excellent program,” said Bill. “I love the thought of people going down the river, and as they look over at this property, it will appear wild to them forever. I don’t want it to look much different than it looks like right now. It doesn’t have to change at all on my account.”

According to NWLT Executive Director Bryan Pierce, the conservation agreement for the property will keep any buildings further back from the shoreline than local regulations require. “Bill and Joy, working with the assistance of Attorney Peter McKeever, have specified that any structure will need to be at least 100 feet or more from the shoreline,” he said. “The forested shore land buffer zone will also be left intact except for a single access trail and a maximum 15-foot wide view corridor to the river.”

“One of the great advantages of a conservation agreement is the flexibility it provides to create provisions that best protect the unique conservation values of each property,” said Pierce. “In this case, the Vancos family and the land trust worked hard to protect a bald eagle nest which has been a focal point for the property and which has provided many great wildlife-watching rewards.”

June Wedell protects her Upper Wisconsin River property

By Willa Schmidt

June Wedell has a deep love for her 37.2 acres in the Town of Conover in Vilas County, a richly wooded parcel with a 465-foot segment of the Wisconsin River along one of its corners. She especially cares about the pines, birch and other tree varieties that flourish there and wants to make sure they'll always have a place. To realize her dream, June signed a land protection agreement, or conservation easement, with the Northwoods Land Trust to protect her land in perpetuity.

In 1983 June and her since-deceased husband Chuck Jones came up to visit a friend in the Conover area. Both were still working full-time in southern Wisconsin, June as a nurse and Chuck as an over-the-road truck driver hauling structural steel. But Chuck was an enthusiastic deer hunter, so they decided to purchase some land with the intention of eventually moving there permanently.

They looked around, but some properties didn't have enough trees, and lake frontage was too expensive. Luckily a neighbor of their Conover friend wanted to sell, and when he walked them over his land, they liked it right away. "It was all woods, all trees, except for the buildings, and of course the river was there," June explains. A house was already there too, expanded by the previous owner from a hunting cabin, and a garage with an apartment above as well. They bought the property and drove up every other weekend from their home in Darien.

Very quickly the long drives became wearisome. The couple decided to move up permanently and advertised for work in the *Vilas County News-Review*. Fortunately both had marketable skills; June promptly received an offer from a local hospital and was able to make the move in June of 1985, with Chuck following her in December. "That winter (1985-86) everybody was saying 'This is the worst snow we've had in ten years,'" she laughs, "and we just had wood heat. That was our first winter, and I said if



June Wedell signs a conservation agreement to protect her 37+ acre managed woodland property along the Upper Wisconsin River.

we make it through this, we've got it made!" They survived, June dividing her time between the hospital and home nursing, and Chuck, who was handy, taking remodeling jobs and eventually driving truck for companies in Antigo and Eagle River.

When Chuck died in 1998, June knew she wanted to stay on. She eventually moved to Eagle River and still works part-time. In 2006 she remarried (to Art) and became June Wedell. "As long as I can keep going, I'm going to stay up here because I really like it," she says. "I really, really like the woods. I like the elbow room, the fresh air, the quiet, I like to hear the animals—it's just nice. I want it to stay that way too, so I'd say that's one of the main reasons I wanted to do the conservation easement."

"For now, it's my place to go, to get away from the big city of Eagle River! City life is just not for me, I'm really not that kind of a person," she added. The terms of her agreement with Northwoods Land Trust call for no subdivision of the land and limiting any expansion of existing residences to a total aggregate footprint of 3000 square feet within the Residential Zone.

Sustainable forestry is important to June. An unsatisfactory logging experience in 1989 led her to seek assistance, which came in the form of a group organized by Don Peterson of Forest County. The Partners in Forestry Cooperative was formed to help small landowners manage their woodlands for diversification, sustainability and to avoid fragmentation. June attended its initial

(Continued on page 6 - Sustainable forest)



The Upper Wisconsin River twists and winds through part of June Wedell's forested property in Vilas County.

Hat Rapids farmstead conserves Wisconsin River shoreline

Harry and Candy Whidden have a soft spot for abused horses, donkeys, dogs, cats and many other animals. Their roughly 24-acre farmstead has become a haven of loving care for animals that now at least are living a good life, even if they've clearly had troubles in the past.

The Whiddens' love for animals also extends to a love of the land, especially this scenic spot overlooking the flowage above Hat Rapids dam south of Rhinelander. Large hemlocks, yellow birch, sugar maple and white pines in a climax forest habitat guard the steep banks of the historic Wisconsin River.

"Candy and I do not have children," said Harry. "We were concerned that when we either passed on or moved on to other places, whoever took over the property might not care as much as we did. They might develop it or do other projects that aren't in line with the care of the land."

"The land is a gift for us to use while we are alive," Harry explained. "We don't own it, we use it. We want to make sure that the land we have is retained in custody for its best use – the pastures that will sustain and support the animals, and the buildings that were built before Candy and I were born and continue providing comfort and shelter for the animals."

"You don't take anything with you, but you can leave things for other people intact, and that was my thought about protecting the land," Harry said. "I feel the same way," added Candy.

The Whiddens have a strong sense of the history of the property. "It is just a wonderful place. We have pictures from the time the dam went in showing the log cabin built in the 1920s," commented Harry. "The storm shelter is also a delight. It is a concrete box covered by dirt. The people who owned the farm before us took out copper tubing, copper kettles and cookers – and there is only one use for that (distilling alcohol), so it has a varied and colorful background."



Harry and Candy Whidden's historic farmstead provides shelter for abused horses, donkeys and many other animals in need of rescue.

"The land itself is so unique," he continued. "The river frontage has not been touched ever since we've been here - it is pristine. It is a delight to go back there and watch the wild turkeys from the time they can barely walk until they become adults. The animals use the wooded riverfront as a highway - there are lots of animal trails."

"All winter long we have eagles along the river," added Candy. "If we develop that area, then the eagles will have to move further down the road."

"I used to ride the horses out in the back and we used to have bobcats there," Candy observed. "But I haven't seen a bobcat in so long. We are losing a lot of habitat, it has got to stop sometime. We only have 20-some acres, but if we can just save that, let's go for it. Hopefully other people will do the same."

The Whiddens first learned about the Northwoods Land Trust through former NWLT board member Tim Hagen. Then neighbor Beverly Engstrom completed her conservation easement project on the Wisconsin River below Hat Rapids dam with the land trust.

"I grew up in Iowa City, Iowa," Harry said. "Where I used to go hunting, playing and roaming the woods is now all apartments, condominiums and parking lots. With this device (the conservation easement), hopefully we can keep this area unique. That's our goal."

Candy credits getting into the horse rescue program to her Dad. "My Dad brought home everything," she said.

"Most of the animals we have are rescued, adopted, abused and handicapped," added Harry. "Many of the horses and donkeys came from a place where they were starved, maltreated, malnourished, and with no medical care, so they are not rideable. But they are great for keeping each other company and being herd animals. The donkeys protect the horses from the wolves, wild dogs and coyotes. We never knew that until we saw a dog going out to where the horses were, and the donkeys turned on it and drove it off. The sheepherders used to keep donkeys for protecting the sheep from predators."

(Continued on page 6 - Farmstead)



Celebrating the protection of the farmstead are (from left) Mary Schwaiger, Harry and Candy Whidden, and John Huppert.

Sustainable forest - *continued*

meeting and soon found herself on the steering committee. Over 35 acres of her land are now in the Wisconsin DNR's Managed Forest Law (MFL) Program.

In 2003 she and a forester worked out a plan, which loggers followed carefully, to carry out a selective cutting that still provided ample compensation. In addition to upland aspen and birch, 24 acres of the land are managed for red and white pine saw timber. As part of the MFL plan, no more logging need be done for the next 20 or 25 years. About 12 acres of black spruce and tamarack swamp with typical wetland understory vegetation are another significant feature of the property.

When NWLT Executive Director Bryan Pierce was invited to a Partners in Forestry meeting as a guest speaker, June learned of the Land Trust's conservation options for private landowners. Here she found an additional way to carry her wishes forward. River property is a focus for NWLT, and as Pierce explained, the stretch of the Wisconsin between Eagle River and Lac Vieux Desert is in particular need of protection.

Asked what she enjoys most about her property, June mentions again the quiet, the good piney smell, "and just the looks of it. I like the trees, the color change of maples, birches, snow on the evergreen branches like a beautiful postcard, and of course, the little critters running around." She sees many canoeists paddling on the river,



About 35 acres of June Wedell's conserved property are enrolled in the Managed Forest Law Program for sustainable forest management.

and hopes to get out there soon herself. If she could come back in 100 years, how would she like to find the land? "A variety of trees, the animals still there, the colors," she says, "a lot like it looks now." Sustainable logging, not letting things get too old and fireprone, are also part of her vision, although she understands different landowners may have different goals.

"Go for it," is her simple message to anyone contemplating a conservation agreement. As someone who treasures her land in the present, but also sees the value of protecting it for those who come after, June Wedell sets a fine precedent. 

Farmstead - *continued*

"We are giving these animals a chance to live out their lives," said Harry. "We both feel strongly that we have an opportunity and we have the means to let them enjoy life like it should be."

"From the land trust's perspective, the part of the property that struck me right away was the steep slope with beautiful hemlock, yellow birch, sugar maple and oak forest all along the bluffline," said Bryan Pierce, NWLT executive director. "As we walked it we stepped lightly to avoid the spring seeps coming off of the hillside and running down into the river. With nearly 800 feet of entirely natural frontage, and open pasture space on top which otherwise would be subdivided and developed with houses, this is well worth protecting."

"If we can piece some more conservation projects together up and down the river, we will someday have a series of natural areas along the river that will be protected forever," said Pierce. "Some of it we obviously won't be able to protect, but when people see what somebody else does to preserve the land, then they may get the idea that maybe they can also do something similar."

"For a long time we were concerned, because we don't have any family," stated Candy, "but then we learned about the land trust. We said, 'Wow, there is something we can do.' I think there are a lot of other people out there who can do it too."

"I talked to the grandson of the lady who owned the property before us," Harry said. "He was really happy because he used to play there all the time, and he was glad to know it is not going to be developed. There are people who lived on this land who are thankful that it is not going to change all that much. Thank you to the land trust for providing the conservation easement so the land can continue the way it should be." 



The Whidden property includes nearly 800 feet of steep, pristine forested shoreline just above the dam on the Hat Rapids flowage.

Welcome to Fred Ridders!

The Northwoods Land Trust is very pleased to welcome Frederick Ridders to the Board of Directors. Fred is well-acquainted with land trust work as he is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Lakeland Conservancy, a local partner land trust focused on protecting the Lake Tomahawk area.

Fred is a practicing attorney from Verona, and also has a place on Lake Tomahawk. Fred notes that he comes from a family of conservation supporters. His mother was instrumental in working with Oscar Meyer to help start the International Crane Foundation. Fred's sister, Catharine (Betty) Beverly, granted a conservation easement to NWLT on her property in the town of Conover.

"I am very excited about participating with you in the Northwoods Land Trust," said Fred. "I am hopeful that I can play a role, as somewhat of a liaison, between the Lakeland Conservancy and the Northwoods Land Trust, and also be of some assistance in bringing more recognition to your organization in the Minocqua area."

We welcome Fred to the NWLT Board!

Income Tax Benefits Extended

Federal income tax benefits for qualified contributions of conservation easements had been enhanced for those granted in 2006 and 2007. Passed recently in the federal Farm Bill, the enhanced benefits have now been extended for easements donated in 2008 and 2009.

For those years, donors may utilize the appraised charitable contribution value of the conservation easement by deducting up to 50% (versus 30%) of their adjusted gross income in any one year. Any remaining balance may be carried forward for up to 15 additional years (instead of a 5-year carry forward period normally) - a great enhancement for many prospective donors!

Gifts Leave a Lasting Legacy

Marion Schoofs of Eagle River recently contributed memorial gifts to acknowledge the loss of sons by both Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bartman of Gurnee, Illinois, and Mrs. Virginia Weimer of Eagle River. Marion also made a contribution in memory of Marion Beutler, formerly of Brookfield, WI. Our sympathies go to the families and our thanks to Marion for these gifts as lasting memorials.



One of several natural lake and river shorelines in Oneida County protected with funding assistance from the John C. Bock Foundation.

NWLT receives grant from the John C. Bock Foundation

The Northwoods Land Trust is delighted to have received a \$25,000 grant from the John C. Bock Foundation to support our "Northwoods Riparian Forest Protection Project." This project will enable NWLT to help cover the transaction and long-term monitoring and enforcement costs for perpetual conservation easements granted on the Upper Wisconsin River and several lakes in Oneida County. Altogether, these projects will protect woodlands and wetlands on nearly a mile of undeveloped river and lake frontage. Our sincere Thanks to Sharon Bock and the Foundation Trustees for their support!



JOIN THE NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

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Membership Contributions

- Individual \$25
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- Conservator \$250
- Steward \$500
- Land Legacy \$1000
- My additional contribution of \$_____ is also enclosed.

Interests

- I have property I may wish to conserve, please send me the free landowner's guide.
- I am interested in becoming a volunteer to assist the NWLT.

Please make checks payable to:

Northwoods Land Trust, Inc.
PO Box 321
Eagle River, WI 54521-0321

- I am interested in the NWLT Council of Trustees.

YOU ARE INVITED! Wisconsin River Paddle & Preserve

The Northwoods Land Trust invites our members, supporters and any other interested guests to join us as we explore another unique wild place in the northwoods on **Saturday, August 30th**. This Paddle & Preserve canoeing and kayaking adventure will begin at **9:30 a.m.** at the Wisconsin River canoe access on Bridge Road, just one-half mile east of Hwy 47 and about seven miles north of Rhinelander. Vehicles will carpool to the takeout at the boat landing on Apperson Drive.

This leisurely paddle of just a few miles will first explore the Munninghoff Marsh, an area known as one of the most productive wild rice marshes in the region for fur-bearing animals. The flowage is also great for watching bald eagles, osprey, and many species of waterfowl.

Part of the paddling adventure will also feature an opportunity to view Bill and Joy Vancos' 24-acre conservation easement property. Protected in 2007, this project includes about 1,200 feet of natural shoreline frontage on a beautiful peninsula overlooking the Wisconsin River (see pages 2 & 3 of this newsletter).

We recommend wearing a hat, paddling clothes and footwear. Binoculars, sun screen and bug dope are also suggested. Snacks and beverages will be provided.

There is no charge for this event, however there is a suggested donation of \$15 for non-members. To RSVP, please contact the NWLT office at (715) 479-2490 or email us at nwlt@northwoodslandtrust.org.

Need paddling equipment?

Canoes and kayaks may be rented from the following places: Mel's Trading Post, Brown St., Rhinelander, (715) 362-5800; Hawks Nest Canoe Outfitters, Hwy. 70 W, Eagle River, (715) 479-7944; or Chequamegon Adventure Co., Hwy. 51, Minocqua, (715) 356-1618.



Known for its outstanding wildlife habitat, the Munninghoff Marsh on the Upper Wisconsin River will be one of the highlights of the NWLT Paddle & Preserve field tour on Saturday, August 30th.



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

P.O. BOX 321, EAGLE RIVER, WI 54521-0321

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