



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

HELP LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR THE NORTHWOODS

Wisconsin Land Trust of the Year Award Winner!

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

Fall 2010

Dr. Walter & Donna Gager - Working Together to Protect the Future

By Trisha Moore, NWLT Conservation Specialist

*"A dream you dream alone is only a dream.
A dream you dream together is reality."
-John Lennon*

While writing the story of Dr. Walter and Donna Gager's (Pewaukee, WI) recent conservation easement donation, I considered all of the efforts they have put into protecting land in the northwoods for future generations. The couple is volunteering, promoting conservation, has protected their own 120-acre property, and they are teaching their children and grandchildren appreciation of that land.

What I realized in listening to their stories during a recent visit to the property, is how often Donna and Walt credit each other in the success of reaching these goals. They truly dreamed this dream, and made it happen, together.

Walt and Donna Gager both have family roots in the northwoods. Walt's family came to the area for the same reasons many did in the early 1900s, the logging era. Walt's father worked as a timber cruiser for a local logging camp in the early 1920s. Partnered with him was an American Indian who was hired to hunt for the loggers in the camp. Many years later, Walt went to visit and talk with this work partner. He found that while the pair was hired to do those two tasks, Walt's father did a lot more hunting than marking of timber as he enjoyed it so much! "My father built a vertical log cabin on Fifth Lake in 1927," said Walt. "It is still standing."

Walt's father went on to graduate from the University of Wisconsin Medical School and practiced in Rhinelander for 20 years. His mother's family (Bolger) arrived in Canada in 1831 from Ireland and ultimately settled in Minocqua in the late 1800s.



Dr. Walter and Donna Gager realized their dream of conserving in perpetuity 120 acres of wildlands in the town of Pelican, Oneida County.

Donna's family immigrated to the U.S. in the 18th century settling in Kentucky. Her great grandparents also came to the northwoods during the logging period late in the 19th century.

Walt and Donna both graduated from Rhinelander High School. Donna attended and graduated from UW-Madison with an education degree. After a four-year stint in the Navy, Walt went to Marquette University and finished medical school there. The couple married in 1955. The Gagers have returned to Rhinelander regularly over the 54 years of their marriage.

Walt continued on with specialty training in neuro-ophthamology and joined the staff at Marquette University. While he stayed on the faculty half-time for 30 years, Walt also went into private practice in Waukesha. The couple resided in the Milwaukee area, but continued to make frequent trips to the northwoods. They bought their current cottage in 1974.

Donna and Walt have three children: Kathie, Walter, and Scott, and four grandchildren. Donna chose to leave

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mission:

The Northwoods Land Trust (NWLT) 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



Gager wildlands - continued from page 1

teaching to stay home with their children. After the kids were grown, Donna went back to school in Madison, commuting three hours, to pursue her passion of working with plants and designing gardens. She earned a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture.



Donna and Walt Gager have been actively involved as volunteers with The Nature Conservancy, Waukesha County Land Conservancy, and the Moen Lake Chain Association, as well as the Northwoods Land Trust.

"That's what was so exciting about buying this property," explained Donna. "I was studying landscape architecture and my subspecialty was native plant communities. I had my own laboratory right here. I wrote some papers on comparisons of this property to woodlands in southern Wisconsin."

Donna continues to stay active in landscape architecture working with the Milwaukee Art Museum Garden Club. She has recently taken an interest in history and is the curator of the Mecikalski Stovewood Building (circa 1899) in Jennings, WI. Donna used this historical building for a project, submitted it to the National Register of Historic Places, and the Kohler Foundation funded the restoration in 1984-1987.

While Donna keeps busy with museum work in both Milwaukee and Oneida Counties, Walt has volunteered for WXPB public radio in Rhinelander. For the past several years, Walt could be heard on Thursday afternoons during "Your Favorites." Hosting the radio program was a way for him to continue to listen to and share his collection of 78 rpm records. He recently served as President of the Moen Lake Chain Association, and also lectures annually to the Learning in Retirement group sponsored by Nicolet College.

Both Walt and Donna are active volunteers with the Northwoods Land Trust. The Gagers' commitment to volunteering with NWLT has been a valuable asset to the organization, and they have helped out in a variety of ways including currently as property monitoring volunteers. Volunteering also helped develop a working relationship with NWLT, which led to the protection of their northwoods property in 2009.

In 1985 Walt and Donna bought the 120-acre property across the road from their lakefront cottage primarily to protect the area from further development. While serving on The Nature Conservancy board of trustees for six years, Donna learned about land protection options. Both Walt and Donna were also involved in the Waukesha County Land Conservancy and gained knowledge of conservation easements through these two organizations.

(Continued next page)

Left: Donna and Walt Gager bought this 120-acre wooded property primarily to protect it from further development.

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.

Gager wildlands - continued from page 2

Walt and Donna read about the Northwoods Land Trust in a newspaper article and became interested in the work NWLT was doing in Oneida County and surrounding areas. Walt commented, "I started to volunteer with Bryan (Pierce, Executive Director of NWLT) and we decided that would be a good place to put our property."

In December of 2009, the Gagers signed their 120-acre woodland property into a conservation easement. They still maintain private ownership of the property and reserved the rights to build a storage building on a one-acre building zone, continue with approved forest management, and use the property for recreation. The conservation easement maintains the property as one indivisible tract of land with no other development allowed outside of the building zone.

The Gagers are committed to having the property remain in its natural state. This native habitat includes a mixed northern forest with trees such as aspen, paper birch, red maple, balsam fir, white, red, and jack pines, black cherry, white spruce and northern red oak. Some eastern hemlock, basswood and white ash also occur.

They both would like to see the woodland begin to recover more of its northern hardwoods. "I am especially fond of white pine, so I was thrilled to see more white pine on the property...but, it is the hardwoods that make up the bulk (of the property)," said Donna. "I would like to see no invasive species on the property," Walt added.

This upland forest provides ideal habitat for many animals like the timber wolf, flying squirrel, deer, bear, fox, coyote, and diverse bird species. The habitat also includes variety of ferns and other plant species.

Ephemeral wetlands, also known as vernal ponds, are found in several places on the property. These sites provide additional vital habitat for wildlife, especially during the springtime for breeding frogs and salamanders.

Walt and Donna's three children and four grandchildren



Ephemeral wetlands, or vernal ponds, like "Lake Donatu" on the Gager property may only hold water during the spring and early summer, but are important breeding areas for many frogs and salamanders.



As NWLT volunteers, Dr. Walt and son Walter Jr. (far left) meet with conservation easement donor Sarah Perry to conduct the annual monitoring visits for her protected property.

are aware of the terms of the conservation easement. They understand that while recreation and forestry are allowed, there can be no further development or roads.

"I think they have a pretty good handle on it," Walt explained. "We tell them all the time what we are doing and why. We keep asking and teaching (the grandchildren): 'What is that fern? What is that tree?'" Donna added that they are going to learn even more: "Some of them are learning to hunt. When they are out there with their grandfather and the other hunters they learn to appreciate the trees and (wildlife)." The Gagers recognize that it is important for their children to understand what the conservation easement and the land are about so that they too can pass that knowledge on to the next generation.

Walt and Donna have used their own experience to encourage other landowners to protect their properties as well. They hosted a gathering in their home and invited neighboring landowners to hear about the Northwoods Land Trust's efforts to conserve woodlands and shorelines in the area. Executive Director Bryan Pierce spoke and the crowd was receptive to the possibilities.

Walt shared that while the process of putting a conservation easement on your land could be an expensive one, the tax advantages greatly offset that cost. Walt and Donna Gager have shown both their family and neighbors that it is possible to keep the land they love intact.

Under the Northwoods Land Trust name on every newsletter is the quote "Help Leave a Lasting Legacy for the Northwoods." Part of NWLT's mission includes "conservation of natural shorelands, woodlands and wetlands...for present and future generations." People often ask us how long a conservation easement stays in place and we answer, "In perpetuity."

Forever is a long time, but working together with landowners like the Gagers, the Northwoods Land Trust is helping make those goals and dreams of conserving land reality.





A Tribute to Jerry Parker

By Bryan Pierce, Executive Director

The Northwoods Land Trust and many others lost a great friend on August 12th with the passing of Jerry Parker of Phelps at age 78. Jerry fought a long battle with cancer. His loss will be felt for many years to come.

When I served as the Vilas County UW-Extension Resource Agent, I met with Jerry and his wife Ginny at their home when they hosted initial meetings to form the North & South Twin Lakes Riparian Association. Jerry's family has a long history on South Twin Lake. Jerry and Ginny moved to the lake full time in 1993. Jerry became the founding President and a true leader for NSTLRA.

Few people may remember now, but his early efforts resulted in a DNR grant project in partnership with the Vilas County Land & Water Conservation Department to post large signs at boat landings to prevent the spread of aquatic exotic species. This project pre-dated the current emphasis on prevention of invasive species infestations. Ironically, one of the expensive signs was vandalized and thrown into North Twin Lake. Within six months Eurasian watermilfoil was found at that very landing. Jerry's lake work then shifted to include milfoil eradication and control.

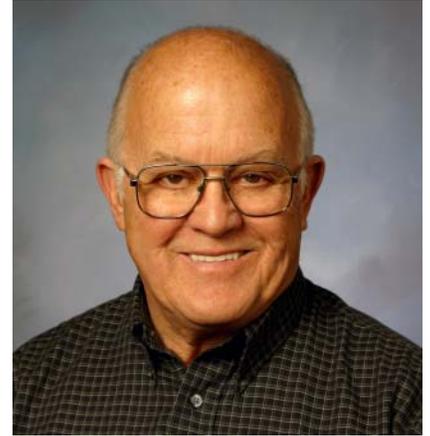
Jerry took his lake volunteerism to another level and served on the Vilas County Lakes Association board of directors. In that role, he helped plan lake leader training workshops, including one held in June of 2000 at Trees For Tomorrow where land trusts were first discussed.

As part of VCLA, Jerry supported the Vilas County lakes classification and shoreland zoning effort, an intense process of revision of Vilas County's shoreland zoning ordinance - one that has since become recognized as a model in Wisconsin. As a realtor, I'm sure Jerry took some flak for his support of more stringent standards, but he always believed that increased protection of lake shorelines would also protect lake water quality and lake property values. He was willing to fight for what he thought was right.

Jerry's visionary work continued through his efforts to revitalize both Phelps, with the Phelps Community Development Corporation, and Land O' Lakes, through the Chamber of Commerce and other volunteer groups. He was also steadfast in his resolve during all of the controversies, setbacks, and ultimate success in developing a local land use plan for Phelps. It is equally ironic that Governor Jim Doyle re-dedicated the State Highway 17 improvements in downtown Phelps on the same day as Jerry's funeral, since he played a crucial role in seeing those improvements become a reality.

When we thought to recruit the initial NWLT board of directors, Jerry came to mind immediately for his expertise as a real estate agent, his great enthusiasm, and his outstanding conservation ethics. He was a founding and continuing board member, and helped NWLT grow.

Jerry provided valuable technical assistance with several important land transactions, including donations of both conservation and "trade" lands. These donations are vital for the longterm sustainability of NWLT.



Jerry Parker was a founding member of the NWLT Board of Directors.

Our hearts go out to Ginny, sons Jeff, Jonathan and Jerry, daughter Jill, seven grandchildren, and all the other members of the extended Parker family. We hope they know that Jerry's legacy will continue to grow from all of the wonderful conservation and community achievements he helped to foster here in the northwoods.

Jerry was a true friend and true conservationist. We will all miss him dearly.



Sanders Northwoods Memorial Fund

We recently received word that the Charles A. & Ida C. Sanders Northwoods Memorial Fund to support NWLT has now been fully capitalized through the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Thanks to additional contributions from Luida Sanders of Oshkosh, and also a memorial gift from Willa Schmidt in honor of Marguerite Christensen of Madison, this Fund has now been fully vested at the \$10,000 level as an endowment with the Foundation.

Interest from the Fund will now be distributed annually to help support the conservation efforts of the Northwoods Land Trust. For more information on how to contribute to this endowment, please contact NWLT at (715) 479-2490.



Gifts in Memory...

The Northwoods Land Trust has received memorial gifts for the following:

- * In memory of Elenore Streich - from the Streich family and Chet & Darlene Eaton.
- * In memory of Jim Korth and Steve Watry - from Ed Drager.
- * In memory of Henry D. Goldstein - from Jeff and Eloise Potter.
- * In memory of James McKee, John Cockrell, Margaret Shower and Chuck Reeves - from Marion Schoofs.
- * In memory of Jack Siepert - from Community Pharmacy in Madison.



WEEB Grant received for Oneida & Forest County Woodland Project

With grant funding assistance from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board's (WEEB) Forestry Education Grant program, the Northwoods Land Trust is extending our highly-successful landowner education and technical assistance program to focus on woodland owners in Oneida and Forest counties. The purpose of the project in 2010-2011 is to educate landowners about the voluntary options available through the land trust to conserve their productive forest lands.

"Many thousands of acres of former industrial forest lands have recently been put up for sale all across northern Wisconsin," said NWLT Executive Director Bryan Pierce. "Other privately owned woodlands have also become split up into more and more parcels, largely for residential development. The result is fragmentation of wildlife habitat and fewer areas able to be managed for sustainable forest products."

According to Pierce, the land trust is utilizing hard copy plat books, geographic information system (GIS) parcel maps and digital aerial photos to identify all land parcels in Oneida and Forest counties with 40 acres or more of undeveloped woodlands. Once the parcels are mapped on the GIS system, the owners of the selected parcels are identified using property tax rolls.

Each of the property owners will be direct mailed a copy of *"For the Love of the Land... A Landowner's Conservation Guide to Protecting Your Northwoods Property."* This packet includes current information on the various conservation options, tax benefits, conservation concerns and issues in the northwoods, and several "up close and personal" stories of how people have already protected their working forest lands, and natural lake and river shorelines.

"We will also conduct on-site visits and provide one-on-one technical assistance for interested landowners to help them consider their conservation options," he said. "For those committed to conserving their woodlands, we will prepare perpetual land protection agreements, also known as conservation easements."

"Under a conservation easement, the land remains private property and is still subject to property taxes, but future development is restricted," Pierce said. "With an IRS-standard appraisal, the landowners can take advantage of federal income tax benefits for the charitable deduction value of their conservation easement donation. Enhanced income tax benefits expired at the end of 2009, but a bill to extend those benefits has passed both the House and the Senate, so we are hopeful they will be reauthorized and apply in 2010 too," he noted.

"Our conservation easements are also written to be compatible with the state's Managed Forest Law program," Pierce said. "Many of the properties we work on are

already enrolled or will be enrolled in MFL, and any future timber harvests will be guided by a professional forest management plan."

"We would like to extend our special thanks to the Oneida and Forest County UW-Extension staff and Land & Water Conservation Departments for their cooperation and assistance with our landowner education projects," Pierce commented. We hope these efforts will result in commitments by landowners interested in leaving a legacy of woodlands for all future generations to come. With the successful completion of our previous Vilas County forestry education project, and the new WEEB grant funding, we are now able to replicate the process for Oneida and Forest counties."

The Northwoods Land Trust is a non-profit, tax-exempt conservation organization with a mission of helping landowners conserve their private shorelands, woodlands and wetlands. The land trust works in Vilas, Oneida, Forest, Florence, Iron and Price counties.

"As a member and volunteer-supported organization, we encourage the interest of anyone who would like to contribute their time, expertise or resources to help keep the northwoods the northwoods," he said. For more information, contact Pierce at (715) 479-2490 or email nwlt@northwoodslandtrust.org.



Owners of productive woodlands in Oneida and Forest counties will be the focus of a Wisconsin Environmental Education Board grant project.

Conservation Buyers Wanted!

Contact the NWLT office for more information or to arrange a site visit at (715) 479-2490.

** Surrounded by Chequamegon National Forest

A 148.5-acre holding within the Chequamegon National Forest in the town of Eisenstein, Price County, is available for sale by owner to someone interested in keeping this property intact. The land features diverse habitats for wildlife including about 30 acres of old fields, with the rest a mix of coniferous and deciduous woodlands, black spruce swamp and other wetlands.

Road access is off of State Highway 182 east of Park Falls and west of Springstead. The site is also located near the South Fork of the Flambeau River. The asking price is \$297,000.



** River Bend Conservation property

This Wisconsin River site is well-wooded with a mixture of hardwoods and pines. It is gently rolling with approximately 16 of the 75 acres tamarack and black spruce swamp. The elevation is high along the river with moderate to steep slope. There are excellent roads and trails, and diverse flora and fauna (river photo on right).

The 35 acres that includes 870 feet of river frontage is under a conservation easement that allows no building. The adjacent parcel up river is also protected with a conservation easement. Of the 75 acres, 70 are under Managed Forest Law. The 5-acre building site borders the blacktop road that runs along the easternmost line.

The ideal candidate is someone who loves nature, may or may not love to hunt and fish, and enjoys their privacy while still being just 7 miles from Rhinelander amenities.

The asking price for this Wisconsin River property is \$250,000. The owner would consider a land contract.



** 21-acre Conservation parcel on Harmony Lake

Located just north of Eagle River in Vilas County, this property also has a perpetual conservation easement on it. The land features about 1,500 feet of natural shoreline frontage on a private lake.

Harmony Lake is an 88-acre, clear water seepage lake (see photo on right). It has good fishing for largemouth bass and panfish. The frontage is sandy, with tall red pines lining the banks. Harmony Lake was identified as a "wild lake" by the Wisconsin DNR Northern Initiatives: Wild Lakes Program.

There are no buildings of any kind on the property, however the conservation easement allows for a 30,000 sq. ft. building zone to be surveyed. The easement permits construction of one single-family residence with a total maximum total horizontal footprint for all structures of 2,500 sq. feet. Forestry is allowed, and 18 acres are currently under the Managed Forest Law program. The property is listed with Eliason Realty of the North.



** Oneida County Lakefront property

The owner of a scenic, wooded 40 along with a 5-acre adjacent parcel west of Rhinelander seeks a conservation buyer interested in preserving this property with frontage on Dumbbell Lake. Just a few miles from the city, the site is a refuge for wildlife in the middle of other, more developed lake lots and subdivisions.

The 40-acre parcel includes roughly 150 feet of lake frontage. Dumbbell Lake is about 11 acres in size. The 5-acre adjacent lot provides road access for the site.

Shoreland-wetlands on the land also protect part of larger Sherry Lake. The asking price is \$140,000.



** Premier property in the Nicolet National Forest

A unique opportunity for someone to help protect a large forest block within the Nicolet, this 560-acre property surrounds a 177-acre spring lake. There is an existing small cottage and sugar shack on the property.

The site includes an estimated 10-12,000 feet of frontage on the lake, which has excellent fishing. The lake was recognized as a "wild lake" by the Wisconsin DNR Northern Initiatives. A public carry-in boat/canoe/kayak access is located on the outlet stream, but there is no public boat landing on the lake. Road access is off of State Highway 70 east of Eagle River.

The owner was offered \$8 million by a developer, but indicated they would be willing to do a bargain sale for land protection purposes.



**** Interstate Falls Conservation Buyer sought**

Along with local volunteers, NWLT is seeking help to preserve public access to Interstate Falls, an eighteen-foot waterfall on the Montreal River. The waterfall is a scenic attraction at the edge of Ironwood, Michigan, and Hurley, Wisconsin. NWLT hopes to secure permanent public access along the existing 0.3-mile trail on the Wisconsin side of the Montreal River. The property containing the trail and the Wisconsin side of Interstate Falls was listed for sale in May of 2007. The property is 38.7 acres and includes nearly a half-mile of Montreal River waterfront.

We have already received over \$50,000 in pledges toward the costs of protecting public access to the waterfall and river. However, we still need one or more conservation buyers for the property who would be willing to purchase the land long enough for NWLT to acquire a perpetual conservation easement on it.

The site could then be re-sold, but with the access easement in place. People interested in learning more or making a pledge should contact NWLT at (715) 479-2490.



Proceeds from the sale of this 100-foot lot on Pickerel Lake will support NWLT's northwoods conservation efforts.

**** Pickerel Lake Lot for Sale by NWLT**

Donated to NWLT for the purpose of supporting the conservation of the northwoods, this buildable lot includes 100 feet of frontage on Pickerel Lake. Located west of Eagle River in the town of Cloverland, the parcel is about one acre in size with a west-facing sunset view.

The lot lines and corners were recently re-surveyed and marked. An overhead electrical utility line crosses the back side of the property. According to the surveyor, the sloping shoreline is suitable for a walk-out residence.

Pickerel Lake is a 293-acre lake. Bass and bluegill spawning beds are just off the shoreline of the parcel on the firm bottom lake bed. The lot is forested with red pines, white pines, northern red oak and aspen. The site is all high ground with no wetlands.

The property is listed with Century 21-Burkett & Associates in Eagle River. Contact Susan Carr at (715) 479-3090. The listing price is \$132,000.



JOIN THE NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

HELP KEEP THE NORTHWOODS THE NORTHWOODS!

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Address: _____

City: _____

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E mail Address: _____

Membership Contributions

- Individual \$25
- Family \$35
- Supporter \$50
- Founder \$100
- 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.
- I am interested in the NWLT Council of Trustees.

Please make checks payable to:

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

**You are cordially invited to:
NWLT's Fall Banquet & "Bald Eagles" Program**

"Bald Eagles" will be featured in a special presentation by respected DNR wildlife biologist Ron Eckstein for the Northwoods Land Trust's fall banquet. The event will be held the evening of **Saturday, September 18th** at Holiday Acres Resort east of Rhinelander.

The state's leading expert on both bald eagles and osprey, Ron will share his longterm research and unique experiences with eagles in the northwoods. Ron also monitors the osprey population throughout northern Wisconsin.

Once endangered, bald eagles are a true wildlife management success story in Wisconsin and across the country. However, significant threats still remain on both their breeding and migration ranges.

Many landowners with large stretches of natural lake and river shorelines have bald eagle nesting and hunting habitat on their properties. Several NWLT conservation easement donors currently have active bald eagle nests on their protected properties. Eckstein will share his recommendations for landowners on how to best protect these eagle nest sites into the future.

Ron is a longtime friend and supporter of NWLT. We are very pleased to have him as our featured presenter.



"Bald Eagles" will be the featured presentation by DNR wildlife biologist Ron Eckstein at NWLT's fall banquet.

Schedule: The banquet will begin at 5:00 p.m. with an open cash bar. At 5:30 p.m. our buffet style dinner will feature roast top sirloin, herb baked chicken, and a delicious "strawberry supreme" dessert. The "Bald Eagles" program will follow the dinner.

Cost is \$30 per person.

Reservations are required by Friday, September 10th. Please mail a check payable to: Northwoods Land Trust, P.O. Box 321, Eagle River, WI 54521.

Don't miss this fun opportunity to meet the NWLT board, conservation easement donors, supporters and members interested in northwoods land protection.



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

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

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