



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

Leaving a Lasting Legacy for the Northwoods

NWLT Launches Old Growth Forest Initiative



Large, super-canopy white pines often tower over old growth forests of eastern hemlock, sugar maple and yellow birch trees.

Old growth forest stands are characterized in part by the presence of trees older than the 125-year average of trees growing since the first clearing of the pines in the late 1800s all across northern Wisconsin.

Nearly all of the forests in the northwoods region were cut over and burned during the late 1800s and early 1900s. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), *only about one percent of Wisconsin's old growth forests remain intact.* However, pockets of eastern hemlock, sugar maple and yellow birch forests and other old growth habitat types do exist, sometimes in isolated parcels or along protected lake shorelines.

Old growth forest is generally identified as unharvested or minimally-harvested woodland which is defined by the presence of large trees older than the 125-year average age of trees growing since the first clearing of the pines. Other defining features include a diversity of characteristic plant and animal species, multi-layered vegetation, canopy gaps, large snags and cavity trees (standing dead trees), and large fallen logs and limbs (coarse woody habitat).

The federally-designated Headwaters Wilderness Area, Blackjack Springs Wilderness Area and Whisker Lake Wilderness Area on the Nicolet side of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest are sites with some protected old growth forest, including old growth hemlock, yellow birch and sugar maple with large, supercanopy white pines and red pines. The Sylvania Wilderness Area nearby at Watersmeet Michigan is also a great area to view old growth forest.

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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 in Vilas, Oneida, Forest, Florence, Iron, Price and northern Langlade Counties.



The accreditation seal recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

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Additional stands of old growth forest exist elsewhere within national and state forest lands and on Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands' (BCPL) properties. BCPL in particular holds a number of tracts of land that were never sold to private entities for logging.

The northwoods region also features State Natural Areas (SNAs) designated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Bureau of Endangered Resources as tracts of land in a natural or near-natural state. A number of these SNAs have old growth forest components - including the Holmboe Conifer Forest State Natural Area now owned and managed by NWLT on the outskirts of Rhinelander.

Remaining privately-owned old growth forest stands are rare and are likely to be in small, isolated tracts. To the extent possible, protection of those tracts that are "buffered" by maturing, second-growth northern hardwoods and conifers would be preferable, especially when those tracts may be "in-fill" properties or contiguous with other public lands.

Size, continuity and habitat linkages are considered especially critical for conserving all of the conservation values of old growth forest. Priority sites would be those adjacent to, or

providing environmental corridors between other protected old growth sites.

The last remaining privately-owned old growth forest stands have not been comprehensively identified or mapped to date. Some individual old growth sites on private lands are known, but other ecologically-significant properties may exist and their locations and sizes are not currently known. That is the focus of NWLT's new Old Growth Forest Initiative.

With grant funding support from the American Natural Heritage Foundation and Mueller Family Charitable Trust, NWLT is launching a pilot project to try to identify the remaining stands of privately-owned old growth forest.

We anticipate this project will just be a first step. The ultimate goal of the Old Growth Forest Initiative is to work with private landowners on a voluntary basis to encourage protection of these last remaining old growth forest habitats on private lands.

The project will focus on private lands in Vilas County as a pilot study area. We hope the methods used to identify and map private parcels with candidate old growth forest sites can be replicated for the other counties in the NWLT service territory including

(Continued next page)

Old Growth Forest, Young Forest Initiative & Managed Forest Lands

A large majority of the private lands that the Northwoods Land Trust helps to conserve are actively managed for forest products. Most of those properties are enrolled in the state's Managed Forest Law program, which provides property tax incentives that help landowners keep their forest lands in tact.

A forest management plan prepared by a professional forester is required prior to any commercial timber harvesting on all of our conservation easement properties. Our primary goal is to prevent "high-grading" of the forest where only the best trees are cut and the poorest quality trees are left. A good forest management plan with a long term view also protects and manages soil, water, wetlands, riparian areas, aesthetic quality, recreational opportunities, natural communities, and fish and wildlife resources.

As we have highlighted in previous newsletters, some of our landowners also participate in the Young Forest Initiative with a primary focus on regenerating aspen stands through shorter rotation clear cutting. These young aspen forests particularly benefit game species such as white-tailed deer, snowshoe hare, ruffed grouse and woodcock. Non-game species such as golden-winged warblers also nest in early successional forest stands.

With the Old Growth Forest Initiative, the Northwoods Land Trust is not "taking sides" regarding timber harvesting. Rather, we are encouraging private landowners to consider their own objectives and what strategies might be most appropriate for the type of forest habitats they own and want to protect.

Rare old growth forests, renewing young forests, and selective management for high quality northern hardwood and conifer saw timber are all options and opportunities for private landowners to help protect the diversity of the northwoods!



Naturalist, author and newest NWLT board member John Bates (with backpack) leads a tour through an eastern hemlock stand on the Holmboe Conifer Forest State Natural Area by Rhinelander.



Oneida, Forest, Florence, Iron, Price and northern Langlade counties. The project could also be replicated throughout northern Wisconsin for other land trusts.

As a local land trust, NWLT works in cooperation with other conservation partners. NWLT is able to help permanently conserve additional old growth and/or State Natural Area quality sites on private lands in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, WDNR, BCPL, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, county and local governments, and other agencies and conservation organizations.

Habitat fragmentation of old growth forest stands is the biggest threat to protecting these tracts. By its nature, logging is incompatible with protection of old growth forests. However, current research is also seeking to identify forest management strategies which could help to enhance old growth forest characteristics on previously-timbered sites without precluding all harvesting on private lands.

There are some significant challenges to protecting old growth forest on private lands. Currently, property taxes are an impediment, especially when the most significant economic value (timber harvesting) would likely be precluded for conservation purposes.

Unless there are large contiguous managed areas also enrolled, old growth forest sites may not be eligible to participate in the state's Managed Forest Law (MFL) program which requires active timber management on 85% of the enrolled property. Landowners with old growth forest sites may therefore not be able to take advantage of the low property tax rates offered for keeping forest lands intact through the MFL program.

Selection of an appropriate land protection strategy would need to be made on an individual site and landowner basis.

The pilot project will involve the following tasks:

1. GIS mapping of all privately-owned

parcels in Vilas County of 10-acres in size or larger. Vilas County parcel maps will be acquired and linked with the current tax roll database. The GIS system will be used to select all private parcels of 10 acres in size or larger. Current digital orthophotos and shapefiles of existing building points will be utilized to conduct an initial visual screening of those parcels to eliminate sites that have obviously been developed or do not have old growth forest habitat types (such as open fields, aspen clearcuts, and pine plantations).

2. A panel of experts will be convened to do a visual screening of the remaining candidate parcels. The panel will view the digital aerial photos to look for such characteristics as tree crown size and certain tree species associated with the hemlock-hardwood and pine old growth forest habitat types. Digital aerial photos of known old growth sites will be used for reference during the visual screening. Suggested panel members may include representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, UW-Madison Department of Forestry & Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, and others with expertise and interest in the old growth project.

3. Parcels selected to remain as candidates will be further evaluated using stereo-paired aerial photos for three-dimensional visual screening. The stereo-paired aerial photos will be screened at local DNR field stations.
4. Because the parcels are private property generally without public access, the selected sites will also be visually-screened by experts using aerial reconnaissance.

5. The owners of all of the final selected parcels will be contacted with a direct mailing from NWLT of the Landowner's Conservation Guide. Specific information on the importance of old growth forests will be provided to each landowner.

6. NWLT staff will provide technical assistance and conduct on-site visits



Old growth forest habitats support a diversity of wildlife species, including nesting northern goshawks.

with landowners who express an interest in considering voluntary conservation options for their remnant old growth forest tracts.

Such options may include an old growth forest conservation area registry program, grants of perpetual conservation easements, conservation land donations, or purchase of conservation land or easements as resources allow.

NWLT will develop model conservation easement language and other strategies unique to protection of old growth forest while allowing for adaptive management as climate change, invasive species, natural disasters or other factors influence the long-term ability to sustain these sites as old growth forest.

Our hope for this pilot project is that at least two old growth site voluntary conservation projects will be implemented with private landowners. At a minimum, we will gain a much better perspective on how much old growth forest habitats still remain on private lands.

NWLT Annual Report of Contributions Received in 2014

Our sincerest Thank You to all of our continuing members and contributors, and welcome to our new members and supporters!

New Conservation Easement Donors

- 23.8 acres John & Timmie Clemetsen Family (LLC)
151 acres Elizabeth (Liz) Wywialowski

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- \$53,208 DNR Lake Protection Grant
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Please let us know if we have made an error so we can correct it in our database and in future publications. Thank you for your support!

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“Tour de Conservation” Bike/Hike Event

Land O’ Lakes will be the site of our next “tour de conservation” biking and hiking event sponsored by the Northwoods Land Trust. The combination bike ride and hike into one of NWLT’s protected properties will be held on Friday, August 21st starting at 1:00 p.m.

We will meet at the Land O’ Lakes town hall parking lot off of Hwy. B, and ride the paved bike trail to Little Portage Lake Road. The ride will loop south and will include a short hike into Perch Lake, the site of a 190-acre private property conserved by Sally and Bud Schlack. The Schlacks granted a perpetual conservation easement on their property in 2005 - one of NWLT’s first projects.

The conserved property includes about 3,200 feet of natural shoreline frontage on Perch Lake, a 14-acre seepage lake mostly fringed by bog. Perch Lake was identified as a “wild lake” by the Wisconsin DNR Wild Lakes Program.

The roughly 12-mile bike ride will loop around Little Portage Lake back to the paved bike trail, with a snack break at Black Oak Lake. There riders will have an option for a further 5-mile out-and-back ride on the paved bike trail, or a return trip to the parking lot.

There is no charge for the event, but please RSVP to the NWLT office at (715) 479-2490 or email nwlt@northwoodslandtrust.org so we can plan for snacks and beverages. 




Help Needed to Save Interstate Falls!

The Northwoods Land Trust has a signed offer to purchase for our very first conservation land acquisition, but help is needed to close the deal! NWLT’s project would permanently protect public access to Interstate Falls, a popular waterfall on the Montreal River which forms the border between Wisconsin and Michigan.

We have raised over \$50,000 of the roughly \$100,000 needed to purchase the property IF matching grant funds are also available through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. As of this writing, NWLT’s grant application to the Stewardship Fund is still jeopardized by Governor Walker’s proposed freezing the Stewardship program’s budget until 2028.

The 38-acre parcel to be purchased includes scenic mixed forest with eastern hemlock, white cedar and rare Canada yew. It also includes about 2,500 feet of natural shoreline frontage on the Montreal River, a Class II trout stream.

The property would also be permanently open to the public for hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hunting, fishing and trapping.

“If the budget freeze remains, NWLT would have to try to raise another \$100,000 to be able to complete the purchase,” said Executive Director Bryan Pierce. “The closing date is August 28th, so we have very little time to try to raise those funds.” If anyone is interested in contributing to this project, please contact Pierce at the NWLT office at (715) 479-2490. 



Above: State Representative Beth Meyers toured the Interstate Falls property with NWLT Executive Director Bryan Pierce and Iron County UW-Extension Community Resource Agent Will Andresen. Not pictured is volunteer Ian Shackleford who coordinated the visit. We appreciate Rep. Meyers’ support!

Below: NWLT still needs to raise \$50,000 to \$150,000 to protect scenic Interstate Falls near Hurley .



NWLT welcomes John Bates to the Board

The Northwoods Land Trust is pleased to announce that John Bates has joined the Board of Directors. John is the author of seven books and a contributor to seven others, all of which focus on the natural history of the Northwoods.

John is currently working on a new book on old growth forests to be published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

John's poems have also appeared in five different art/science collaborations, several of which have traveled nationally. For many years, his nature column has been a popular, regular feature in the Lakeland Times newspaper.

John has worked as a naturalist in Wisconsin's Northwoods for 26 years, leading an array of trips all designed to help people further understand the remarkable diversity and beauty of nature, and our place within it.

As a private consultant to landowners, he has also prepared ecological assessments on a number of NWLT conservation easement projects.

John has also served on the Board of Trustees for the Wisconsin Nature Conservancy and the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and now serves



John Bates searches for plant species on a conservation site.

on the Board of the River Alliance of Wisconsin.

John and his wife Mary live on the Manitowish River in Iron County where they raised two daughters.

John stated that he joined the Northwoods Land Trust Board for two reasons: "it's filled with great people and has a great mission. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?"

We welcome John to the Board and look forward to being able to tap into his expertise!

NWLT Office Building Wish List

With the purchase of our new building in January, we are now in need of a number of pieces of equipment that will help us with maintenance of the building and grounds. Please give us a call if you are willing to donate any of the following:

- Lawn mower
- Snow blower
- Scraper-type snow shovel
- Lawn rake
- 6' & 8' step ladders
- Step stool
- 20+ foot extension ladder
- Floor lamp
- Queen size bed, side table, table lamp, small dresser
- Push broom
- Commercial carpet cleaner
- Shop vac
- Kitchen items - sharp knives, silverware, glasses, plates, bowls, pots and pans, serving spoons
- Tools - hammer, screwdrivers, socket set, pliers, wrenches, hand saws, power drill/driver, power sander, skil saw, sabre saw, table or radial arm saw, and lots of others...



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- ☐ 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 contributing to NWLT in my will.



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*Please remember the Northwoods Land Trust
in your annual and planned giving.
Give a gift that will last forever!*

Leaving a Lasting Legacy for the Northwoods

You are invited to the 2015 Annual Meeting at the new NWLT office!

The Northwoods Land Trust's 2015 Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, June 26th at our new office building in downtown Eagle River. While construction will certainly be in progress, we thought it would be fun to host the NWLT Annual Meeting at our new location to give our members and supporters an opportunity to see what is planned and what stage we are at with our renovation work.

The event will kick off with a free light lunch at noon with the NWLT Board of Directors. This is a great opportunity to get introduced to our exceptional board members, to get a tour of the current offices, and to learn about the renovation plans. All NWLT members and any others interested in the land trust are invited to participate.

Starting at 1:00 p.m., the NWLT Annual Meeting will be conducted including a "virtual tour" of the land trust's recent projects and activities, and a look ahead at the outstanding projects we have currently in the works.

If you know you will be able to join us, please contact the NWLT office at (715) 479-2490 so we can plan for lunch.

Directions: The new NWLT office building is located at 519 East Wall Street in downtown Eagle River. The site is just one block east of the Post Office and First National Bank. Parking is along Wall Street.



The 2015 Annual Meeting will be held at the NWLT office building on Friday, June 26th starting with lunch at noon.