



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

Leaving a Lasting Legacy for the Northwoods

Deerskin River Revisited!



Celebrating the protection of 75 acres on the Deerskin River in Vilas County are (from left): landowners Peter McKeever and Marena Kehl, NWLT board member John Bates, and NWLT Vice-President and first Deerskin River conservation easement donor Bob Martini.

The first time Marena Kehl and Peter McKeever canoed down the Deerskin River in Vilas County was a week after the dam was removed. "There was this great big, huge mudflat," said Marena. "I said to him, wow, those people might be upset because they lost their lake. But that lake was probably only 1½ feet deep."

"I wanted to see what it looked like right after the water went out," added Peter. "What was interesting was the mud was in such a stage you could see tiny little footprints, even mice - perfect footprints in the mud. We went back four weeks later and the grasses were already growing. The third time we canoed down it, the grasses had grown up pretty much by then."

Marena found the property on-line. "We were canoeing on the river when I saw it," Marena said. "I was looking for property on a lake, but just for the heck of it, I asked a realtor to go see it. I just fell in love with it."

"The first time Peter saw it, we parked out on Brandy's Shack Lane and walked in on the driveway," she added. "I was standing on the porch because I wanted to see his face when he saw the place. He just burst into this big grin!"

"We got the land in 2005," he stated. "When we went in and looked at it initially, I thought 'this is going to be a helluva lot of work. There's no running water. There's no electricity. It's just going to be nothing but hard work.' But it is a very wonderful, quiet, beautiful place."

"The cabin was the attractive thing, and the amount of property," Peter

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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.

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Deerskin River - continued

recalled. “There are parts of it we probably still haven’t seen. There are very few places that are as secluded as this. I still haven’t gotten very close to the northeast corner.”

“The 4 or 5 guys who owned our place before us had all graduated from Ripon College at the same time,” Peter said. “They bought this place and called it ‘Racks and Cackles.’ They came up here to hunt deer and turkeys and fish in the river.”

“There are still spots on the river that are like quicksand,” said Marena. “It is clearly not stable.”

Retired DNR State Rivers Coordinator, NWLT board member and previous Deerskin River conservation easement donor Bob Martini discussed the issue: “It’s a slurry. A lot of the sediments haven’t moved through yet. It takes 25-30 years sometimes for a dam removal case to revert back and for the river to establish and stabilize a channel. You can still see it undercutting.”

“The Deerskin dam was originally used for moving logs,” said Martini, “but I think the main goal there was for water for the drives down below. They’d hold water back from all these little tributaries, blow them all at once, and let the water go for a big flush. But if you look in the sediments, it’s loaded with all kinds of cut logs, so they were logging there, as well. That’s one of the reasons a lot of these big boulders are broken up with real jagged fractures. They blasted the boulders if they were obstructions to the channel on the log drives.”

“What’s really interesting is there are at least three different kinds of wetlands,” observed Marena. “One is all leatherleaf, one is all reeds, and the one in front had prairie grass that was over Peter’s head the first year we bought it. The second year it was lower grass, and now it’s hummocky grasses and sedges that come up about to your waist.”

“It’s fascinating to watch it grow in,” she noted. “I love the open valley, but it’s very clear that in another 5 years, we won’t be able to see the river.” “We’ve cut some of the alder and willow, from time to time, to maintain a view of the river,” added Peter.

The couple has also seen lots of wildlife. “Just this summer we got wolves,” related Peter. “We heard one at night in July that was close. I was back up here in August with my son, and we also heard one at night. The next night we heard another right at dusk. The third night we didn’t hear any, but the fourth night, I howled, and a whole pack howled back. Sound carries, but they sounded pretty close. Then I found tracks in the road. We had a bobcat in the yard in August, and black bears are becoming more common.”

“We also had a moose,” said Marena. The couple has a photo of a moose from a trail camera a friend had put up. “We found tracks three weeks after the picture was taken, so we knew it was still hanging around,” Peter added. “I’ve seen eagles too from the cabin land right on the shore of the stream.”

“I think we have dreams about the property that will outlive us,” commented Peter. “I wanted to build a cordwood sauna. Am I ever going to get around to building a cordwood sauna? I’m going to keep thinking about it, but will I ever get it done? It’s permitted anyway, under the easement. We have a network of trails too, that partly were there, and partly we’ve continued to build. Half of the work is just maintaining what you’ve already done.”

Marena has a different dream. She wanted to reserve a larger, 5-acre area for a limited number of livestock and agricultural/garden plantings: “This sounds stupid, in a way, because survivalists kind of weird me out. But due to climate change, and since I don’t know what it’s going to be like in 25 years, it was important to me to have some of the property reserved for one family at least to be totally self-sustainable. I chose the high ground for the 5 acres because it’s the flattest and does have the best soil. Everything else is really sandy. Where the cabin sits is the highest point.”

Marena first taught high school English in Seattle. Moving to Madison, she worked as a psychotherapist, then a clay sculptor, and also taught English as a second language for several years.

Peter is an attorney with a long history of working with land trusts throughout Wisconsin as a consultant and as a former state director for The Nature Conservancy. He has represented other NWLT conservation easement donors and has also conducted training workshops for the NWLT board of directors and staff.

Peter has two grown children and Marena has one. “It was important to me, to get this easement done before we die, because we don’t want our kids to fight about it,” said Marena.

“That’s the thing,” added Martini. “It gets harder every generation.”



Once part of a shallow flowage, since the dam was removed the Deerskin River continues to stabilize its natural channel. The property includes about 1,200 feet of stream corridor (2,400 feet of frontage).

Part of the Potato (River) Perpetually Protected

June 25th, 2016, was a big day for the Northwoods Land Trust. Over 50 people attended NWLT’s Annual Meeting and Interstate Falls dedication at the Town of Kimball community center near Hurley, WI. A surprise event though was the signing of a new conservation easement that helped us reach new milestones of conserving more than 11,000 acres of land and 58 miles of natural lake, river and stream shoreline.

The land protected with this easement is notable for more reasons than helping NWLT reach new benchmarks. As landowner Jim Perry shared with the audience: “One of the features of this particular region [of the Potato River] was that prior to our acquiring it in 1999, Wisconsin Trails magazine had listed it as Wisconsin’s #1 skinny-dipping spot. How can you resist that?”

Altogether, the conservation agreement that Jim and Joy Perry signed protects 99 acres in western Iron County, Wisconsin. The site includes roughly 625 feet of highly scenic shoreline on the Potato River. Filled with riffles and rapids, part of the river also flows canyon-like over a small waterfall.

The property also includes about 3,300 feet of corridor (over 1¼ mile of frontage) on Barr Creek, a small Class I trout stream that provides spawning waters for native brook trout. Barr Creek was also identified by the DNR Northern Rivers Initiative as a priority stream and was designated as an Exceptional Resource Water (ERW) in Iron County. Iron County Forest land abuts the northern border of the conserved land, and part of the route of the North Country Scenic Trail runs through that area.

Just downstream from the Perrys’ property on that Iron County Forest land are two larger chutes called Potato River Falls, which has a popular public viewing area. Hikers exploring the Potato River Falls also benefit from the natural scenic beauty of the smaller falls and rapids now protected with the Perry conservation easement.

The Potato River was ranked #5 of 40 priority river and stream segments identified in Iron County by the WDNR Northern Rivers Initiative as having significant natural resource values and warranting enhanced protection. The Potato scored highest in rare species, fish habitat, fish community and scenic quality.

The Potato River is also designated as an Outstanding Resource Water (ORW), defined as a



About 625 feet of scenic frontage on the Potato River in western Iron County borders the property, which is also contiguous with Iron County Forest land.

“Wisconsin Trails magazine had listed it as Wisconsin’s #1 skinny-dipping spot. How can you resist that?”

- Jim Perry



Jim and Joy Perry (left) granted a conservation easement as part of the NWLT Annual Meeting held on June 25th.

(Continued on page 7)



Munninghoff Marsh - An Earth Day Celebration!

Ann (Munninghoff) Eshelman and Scott Eshelman coordinated and hosted the annual Sustainability Fair at the Newbold Town Hall in Oneida County on Earth Day, April 22nd, 2016. With a group of school students and many others as witnesses, they also signed a conservation easement with the Northwoods Land Trust to permanently protect the 210-acre Munninghoff Marsh on the Rhinelander Flowage of the Wisconsin River.

“This is a very special day for our little family,” said Scott. “The simplest way I can explain what we are doing today is that we are giving a gift to nature. We are proud and happy to give that gift to nature, and it is a gift that will keep on giving forever.”

“Why is this property significant? The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has determined that this is one of the truly ecologically significant pieces of land in the state (see sidebar),” Scott noted. “We are fortunate to be able to see virtually every species of bird that flies through Wisconsin. Besides eagles and osprey and songbirds, we think there is a nesting pair of swans on the marsh. That would be a first, but we know they are trumpeter swans because we hear them very early every morning.”

“Not only is there a plethora of bird life, every fish commonly found on the upper reaches of the Wisconsin River is also here,” he observed. “We are particularly proud that there is a very plentiful stand of wild rice. We love to have people pick wild rice and to share the property in any way we can. It is a wonderful resource and we are happy to share the responsibility of protecting it with the Northwoods Land Trust.”

“I am really pleased to look at the young people in the group and think about the future of the property,” stated Ann. “But what is really ringing in my mind today is the history of the property. My parents, Paul and Marian Munninghoff, bought that property in the 1940s. My Dad fought all the way to the State Supreme Court in order to retain control over that flowage property, and won at every step of the way.”



2010 aerial photo by Ron Eckstein of Munninghoff Marsh looking northwest.



Witnessing the Earth Day protection of the Munninghoff Marsh are (from left): NWLT Vice President Bob Martini, Scott Eshelman, Ann (Munninghoff) Eshelman, local school students attending the Sustainability Fair, and NWLT Executive Director Bryan Pierce.

“It was always of real concern to my parents, and some of you here can verify it, that the property would be protected and not somehow fall into the hands of real estate people who would subdivide it and sell housing lots along the riverfront,” said Ann. “It was always a quandry to my parents how they would do that.”

“Both of my parents are gone now,” she continued. “I don’t think they ever heard of a land trust or conservation easement, but if they had, they would have jumped on that as a possibility. I know for sure that my father and mother would be happy.”

“Everything just came together this week, and it seems so amazing to me because today is the 100th anniversary of my mother’s birth,” Ann said. “She was born April 22nd, 1916.”

“I know that she would be extremely pleased to look at these young faces and know that her

property, which she watched over with extreme vigilance, will continue to be watched over and stay in good shape. Now she is handing it on to the future for your use and enjoyment and for you to continue to preserve it.”

Munninghoff Marsh - continued

An Ecological Assessment

In a 1995 letter to Bob Martini, DNR North Central District, at the time of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s relicensing of the Rhinelander paper mill dam, DNR Wildlife Biologist Ron Eckstein provided the following assessment of the Munninghoff Marsh:

“Here is some information characterizing the plant and animal values associated with that portion of the Rhinelander Flowage known as Munninghoff Marsh.”

Landscape Values

This is a very large wetland complex with extensive beds of emergent vegetation. Lowland hardwood forest and upland mixed forest surround the wetland. The great landscape value is the large size of emergent aquatic beds. This size of emergent marsh community is rare in northern Wisconsin. In addition, the wild rice beds rival the Kakagon Sloughs as the largest, most diverse beds in northern Wisconsin.

Wildlife Values

The large size of emergent aquatic beds provide habitat for a wide range of wetland wildlife. Munninghoff Marsh holds the largest concentration of migrating waterfowl in three counties. Large numbers of wood ducks converge on the emergent aquatic beds by August. The marsh attracts many species of waterfowl compared to other wetlands in the region.

Munninghoff Marsh has the largest population of muskrats in three counties. Beaver and otter are common. Great blue herons, green herons, American bittern and sora rails are common. Least bittern and Virginia rail are present. Formerly yellow-headed blackbirds and black terns nested on the marsh.

The marsh is a major stopover for migrating tundra swans. There are several recent records of migration use by white pelicans and various species of terns. The common marshland birds nest here including a large colony of marsh wrens. One pair of bald eagles nest in a large white pine on the edge of the marsh and many immature eagles hunt the marsh. Two pairs of osprey nest just off the marsh and use it to hunt for fish. Harriers are a common sight as they hunt the marsh.

The macroinvertebrate community has not been investigated, but is likely quite diverse. Snapping, painted, and state threatened wood turtles have been recorded. I have not surveyed the marsh for amphibians, but know that bullfrogs and leopard frogs (both rare in the region) are present.

Natural Area Inventory

The 1984 DNR natural area inventory of Oneida County listed Munninghoff Marsh as NR-1 of statewide significance. DNR’s Natural Areas Section has a breeding bird census and plant species list from this period...

*By all standards this marsh is worth protecting. The wetland values are great; endangered species are present; it is a large area; the emergent beds are uncommon in the region; and, it is **the** best spot for people to canoe and observe wildlife in three counties.”*

“By all standards this marsh is worth protecting.”

- Ron Eckstein, DNR Wildlife Biologist



Beverly Engstrom photo.

lake or stream which has excellent water quality, high recreational and aesthetic value, high quality fishing and is free from point source and non-point source pollution.

Did you catch that Potato River Falls is north of their property and *downstream* from their falls? In most of Wisconsin, rivers run south. Barr Creek though flows north and is a tributary to the Potato River. The Potato River flows into the Bad River which flows north into Lake Superior. The conservation easement is therefore helping to protect part of the watershed of one of the world’s greatest fresh water resources.

“There’s a reason why we’re here,” shared Jim. “It’s all due to a person we knew who grew up in the Town of Kimball, by the name of Arne Salli, whose farm is just to the west of here [Kimball]. I grew up in the Wausau area, and met Arne who was my zoology and limnology professor at UW-Marathon County where I was a student from 1966-68.” Jim and Joy visited the farm many times, grew to love the area, and decided to search nearby for land to buy. Joy convinced Jim to think beyond recreating Aldo Leopold’s Shack; they have built a small four season cabin and screened room overlooking Barr Creek. “We’re really, really pleased to be a part of this area.”

During early visits with NWLT’s Executive Director Bryan Pierce, Jim related that he has a peculiar philosophical outlook on ‘owning’ land: “One cannot truly own land, but only care for and pay taxes on it. The land is perpetual and is really part of the commons.” As such, the Perrys have enrolled their “Barr Creek Camp” in the Wisconsin Managed Forest Law program as Open to public access. They welcome others to enjoy it without restrictions other than the prohibition of motorized vehicles on the paths.



About 3,300 feet of corridor on Barr Creek, a Class I trout stream, flows through the property.



Upstream from the large Potato River Falls, which is accessible to view on adjacent Iron County Forest land, is this smaller, but very scenic waterfalls on the Perry conservation easement property.

“Both Joy and I are botanists by training,” Jim continued. “I have all three of my degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison,” which include a B.S. in Zoology and Secondary Education, a Master’s in Botany and Zoology, and a Ph.D. in Botany and Plant Pathology. “I was a faculty member in Maryland for 10 years. Then, we returned to Wisconsin where I became the Campus Executive Officer and Dean at the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley. I retired in 2011.”

Joy also shared her background: “I grew up on a farm in Indiana. My graduate degree is in Plant Pathology, studying plant diseases. I taught Biology, Botany, Ecology and Environmental Sciences at UW-Fox Valley for 20 years.” Joy earned her undergraduate degree in General Biology at Purdue University. “We love this area and are really happy to protect this property,” she stated.

Joy and Jim met in the Botany Department at Madison. So far, they have discovered well over 100 plant species on their Iron County property. And their German Shorthair periodically points an endangered wood turtle. Their three-page and growing plant list, by both common and scientific names, is included in the baseline documentation report for the conservation easement.

Jim summed things up well regarding their feelings about conserving the land: “We’re never going to leave here. We have a place picked out on the property where our ashes are going to be scattered. So, we’re really happy to be able to be part of this - forever.”

Hayes Family donates “Trade Land” parcel

When Lawrence Hayes lived in the Milwaukee and Madison areas, he purchased a woodland parcel in the town of Sugar Camp in Oneida County with the thought of building a cabin on it. Then in 1970 his job took him and his family out east to Washington, D.C., and he wasn’t able to utilize the property as he intended.

When Lawrence passed away last year, the property was transferred from his estate to his four children - Peter Hayes, Amy O’Donnell, Laura Hayes and Erin Hayes. Looking for options for the 7.58-acre property, the family expressed an interest in gifting the land to a land trust and contacted NWLT.



Towering white pines are remnant old growth forest habitat on one of the new conservation projects supported by the Hayes family’s trade land donation.

After visiting the property, NWLT determined that it was too small to meet our minimum conservation criteria for permanent protection of off-water parcels (generally 40-acres or larger). The family instead decided to donate the property with the understanding that it will be sold as “trade land,” with the proceeds to be used to conserve other lands in the northwoods.

NWLT received the land gift in March. We are pleased to announce that we have been able to recently close on the sale of the parcel. The funds received from the sale of that parcel are now being used to work on two very significant new conservation projects in Oneida County that are currently in progress.

Our sincere thanks to the Hayes family for their gift in support of NWLT’s land protection work! 🌲

NWLT Thank Yous

Our wish list published in our last newsletter has resulted in several gifts. Special thanks for these donations to help our work:

- Pruning saws for invasive species removal - Ron & Jan Eckstein.
- New post hole digger for installing sign posts - John & Jan Huppert
- Video projector for the visitor center - Sue Kartman.

Anonymous Gifts

We also want to acknowledge three special gifts from donors who wish to remain anonymous:

- A gift of stocks was made through NWLT’s brokerage account.
- A major gift from an IRA distribution will enable NWLT to complete several new projects.
- An outright donation of 96 acres of conservation land in Vilas County (more details will follow in the next newsletter).

Correction

Walt & Donna Gager were missed on the 2015 list of contributors published in the last newsletter. If anyone else notices an error, please do let us know so we can make the correction. Thanks to all! 🌲



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Leave a Lasting Legacy for the Northwoods

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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

Interstate Falls update

At the NWLT Annual Meeting on June 25th, the Interstate Falls property was officially dedicated and gifted to the Town of Kimball. The new entrance sign was unveiled by long time previous landowners Don and Nancy Siebert. The area is now recognized as the "Siebert Scenic Conservation Area." The sign is visible from U.S. Hwy. 2 just west of the intersection with U.S. Hwy. 51.

Since the property was purchased by NWLT, we have also had the boundaries surveyed and marked, installed boundary signs, re-routed the hiking trail, cleared several old vehicles off the property, and had a new gravel parking lot constructed.

But we aren't done yet with on-site improvements. We are currently contracting for the installation of safety railings above the falls and hope to also install a stairway and viewing platform below. A trail kiosk sign is also in the plans.

As always, contributions toward these projects are appreciated and can be sent to either the Town of Kimball or NWLT. We appreciate all of the support we've received as this unique conservation project continues to move forward as an important resource for the local community!



Past and current board members and staff participating in the Interstate Falls dedication were from left: (front row kneeling) John Huppert, Pete Davison, Bill Dickens, (standing) Cathy Techtmann, Sandy Lotto, Mary Schwaiger, Trisha Moore, Meta Reigel Brandt, Willa Schmidt, Bryan Pierce, Kirk Mueller and Dan Wisniewski.