



Monahan Easement Protects a Living, Working Forest

When Ed Drager and his sister Joann decided it was time to protect the Monahan Forest, they discovered a wonderful tool - conservation easements. Drager, who is now a member of the Board of Directors of the Northwoods Land Trust, grew up exploring the woods and waters of the Monahan Forest.

The Monahan Forest was purchased by his father (also named Ed) in 1932. The land was sold by Vilas County for \$92 of back taxes.

"Dad was born and raised in Eagle River and used to hunt out here," said Ed. "The County decided they needed to get some of the tax-delinquent property back on the tax rolls, so they sold a ton of land for back taxes in 1931-33. Dad picked out these nine forties. It was an island of timber in the burned out areas. They started hunting out here, and had an old tar paper hunting shack. In 1937, Dad bought the lumber and his hunting buddies helped him build a seasonal cabin we now call Monahan Lodge."

The 360-acre property consists of rolling hills with diverse forest and wetland habitats. It also features the headwaters springs of the Little Tamarack River, as well as a small lake. Drager still enjoys fishing for trout and bluegills.

Now Ed spends the summers there, arriving in mid-May and staying through the first or second week of October, when the fall colors have gone.

"We have no idea who Monahan was," said Drager. "I'm guessing he was one of the foremen for the lumber company that had a camp here. They cut the logs and skidded them east along the Little Tamarack to the Big Tamarack, and then to the Wisconsin River. They cut the hardwoods in 1919 to 1920 and skidded the logs north to the Clear Lake Road. There used to be a narrow gauge railroad that hauled logs to the mill at Star Lake. The lumber then went down to Milwaukee."

"My dad wanted to keep the land as a living forest," he noted. "We started logging it in 1945, cutting the popple and jack pine. In about 1950 we hired Dick, Lyle and Bud Slizewski for about three years to cut timber. They cut all the popple and balsam, most of the birch, and started selectively cutting red and white pine and spruce. They were the first ones I ever knew that had a chain saw - a two-man chain saw that weighed about 85 pounds."

"About every five to seven years, we would come in and do some more cutting," he said. "We had some large yellow birch around the fire tower that were cut around 1960, as well as some very mature oak and maple. My dad liked the logging."

Drager indicated that starting in 1987 they selectively cut most of the property. "We took some red and white pine and thinned the hardwood out," he said. "We started thinning again this summer, and also clear cut some two-acre openings to try to get some young red pine to grow. Next summer we've got some 65-70 year old mature black spruce to cut. We'll take the rest of the birch, and selectively cut some of the hardwoods. The black spruce we hope will reseed itself, just as we hope the openings will help to reseed the red pines. The white pine is coming in beautifully under the big red pine. We are getting good regeneration on hemlock and tamarack. We've also got a patch



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Ed Drager enjoys the view of Monahan Lake and his unique wind-powered aerators.

PURPOSE:

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, Forest and Oneida Counties and the surrounding regions.

Northwoods Land Trust Goals:

- To provide education on voluntary conservation options for private landowners.
- To utilize voluntary conservation options to conserve and protect natural resources in the northwoods region.
- To promote conservation by private landowners of natural shorelands on lakes, rivers and other waterways for protection of water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, and natural scenic beauty.
- To promote conservation of private woodlands and encourage private landowners to manage their forest lands in an ecologically sustainable manner.
- To serve as a legal entity to accept perpetual stewardship for secure conservation agreements with private landowners, such as easements, land donations and property acquisitions.
- To implement a systematic and site-specific monitoring program to ensure compliance with NWLT agreements and protection of NWLT-owned lands.
- To seek support in the form of donations, grants, endowments and memberships.

A big THANK YOU to Carolyn Burch for our new Northwoods Land Trust logo!

Newsletter Design: Gene Welhoefer
Newsletter Editor: Bryan Pierce

Private Lands *(continued from page 1)*

of ten year-old popple that is as thick as the hair on a dog's back. We've got a cutting plan every 4 to 6 years out to 2018."

"My dad wanted it to always remain as a working forest," Drager said. "There would always be big trees and young trees. For fifty-five years now, that is what we've been doing. I told my sister, that is what we should continue to do. That's what Dad wanted to do. He gave us the property, we should honor his wishes."

"My sister knew she had cancer, and she agreed with me that the conservation easement was the best way to protect the property because it goes on forever," Drager said. "If someone tries to sell it, they have to sell it subject to the easement. We put some fairly tight restrictions on it. My sister's health was failing, but she had worked as a paralegal in an estate planning department of a large Dallas law firm, so she was knowledgeable about this. We put the property into an irrevocable trust to provide funding for maintaining it in the family. In Wisconsin this can run forever. I put my half of the land in, which will ultimately also go to her kids. They will have the right to sell the land, but the easement will always stay with the property."

The conservation easement requires the land to be maintained as a sustained-yield forest, Drager stated. "It must be managed for mature trees, so it will always look about the way it is today. Trees will be planted if necessary. If there is a disease outbreak, we have to sit down with a forester and figure out what to do about it."

Drager wanted the easement to limit future development on the property. "We can't build any more roads. If the cottage burns down we can enlarge it by 10 percent when we rebuild it, but it has to be on the same site. We can also build two more residences on the property, but they must be located at least 200 feet from the lake shoreline. And neither of the new places can be more than 2000 square feet."

"We cannot subdivide the property," he noted. "It always has to remain in one ownership. There can be no commercial operations at any time, gravel pits or mineral development. Pretty much it is just used to hunt and fish on, walk on and grow trees on. And we can live on it."

Drager worked through Trees For Tomorrow in Eagle River to implement the easement. "Trees For Tomorrow first came out here in 1945. They used the property for their classes – my dad used to walk the property with them." Jim Holperin, Executive Director for Trees For Tomorrow (and Northwoods Land Trust Board

Member) assisted Drager in establishing the easement.

A unique provision of the Monahan Forest easement calls for half of the proceeds from any timber harvest to be donated to Trees For Tomorrow. "We need to make a financial contribution to 'Trees' so they can come out and make an inspection each year," said Drager. "When you give someone a conservation easement, they become the easement holder and a guardian of the property. We keep a management plan in place, follow the plan and notify them when cutting is to occur. We give Trees For Tomorrow an accounting of the cutting. They can also disapprove the management plan if it is not in keeping with a sustained yield forest."

To achieve tax benefits from donating

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"Long after I'm gone, what my sister and I decided to do with this land will still be going on." Ed Drager

Charitable Contributions

The Northwoods Land Trust is a non-profit, tax exempt conservation organization. Your gifts of cash, stocks, bonds or other financial support are 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.

The NWLT Spotlight - Willa Schmidt

Willa Schmidt's love of the land stems from a piece of property her parents owned on Snipe Lake in Vilas County. Now she is working to turn that love into long-term protection for the land.

A founding Board of Directors member of the Northwoods Land Trust, Schmidt recently retired after serving 25 years as a reference librarian for the University of Wisconsin Memorial Library, the main library for the UW Campus. With B.S., M.S. and Ph.D degrees in German and library science from the University, she spent a year in Vienna on a Fulbright Scholarship working on her Ph.D. dissertation and visiting with relatives in Austria. She also worked in Washington, D.C. before returning to live in Madison.

While she enjoys the culture and lifestyle of the city, especially the ability to walk or bike to so many places, Schmidt has always spent as time in the summers as possible on Snipe Lake.

Willa inherited the roughly 17 acres of Snipe Lake property that her father and mother purchased in 1941 for \$1300. Growing up on the lake obviously left a big impression. "It was pretty empty for a long time, but then development took off on Snipe Lake," she said. "I hated to see it change."

In order to keep the landscape from changing further, Willa has been looking into putting a conservation easement on the property. "I don't have any close relatives in this country," Willa explained. "Not having someone to leave the land to has always been part of my consideration. I've been thinking about how to preserve the land for years."



Willa Schmidt, founding NWLT Board member, is looking into a conservation easement for her Snipe Lake property.

Schmidt has been a member of The Nature Conservancy for about 25 years, so the concept of a conservation easement is not new to her. She contacted other land trusts and attended training workshops on easements to become better informed.

Schmidt's background and interest in conservation lead to her joining the Northwoods Land Trust Board of Directors.

"I'm so happy this organization got started. I think it is perfect for this area," she said. "I am happy to try to do anything I can to promote it." With Willa also serving as Board Secretary, NWLT is very happy she is willing to share her expertise and enthusiasm too!



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| <input type="checkbox"/> My additional contribution of \$ _____ | |
| is also enclosed. | |

Interests

- ☐ I have property I may wish to conserve, please send me additional information.
- ☐ I am interested in becoming a volunteer to assist the NWLT. (Please list any special skills or interests).



Please make checks payable to:

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the easement, Drager hired an appraiser. “They appraise the property as a whole for fair market value, highest and best use under current zoning,” he said. “Then they appraise the values of the easement, what we have given away. The easement cut out about 45% of the value of the entire property according to our appraiser. That establishes our value as a gift to Trees For Tomorrow, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax exempt organization. This gives us a charitable deduction of 100% of the value of the gift for income tax purposes. We can only deduct up to 30% of our taxable income in one year, but this can be spread over a six-year period. For real estate tax purposes, the town assessor is also supposed to take into consideration the value of the conservation easement in reducing the assessed value of the property.”

NWLT Update

With assistance from board member Mary Schwaiger, the Northwoods Land Trust received our non-profit, tax-exempt status from the IRS in August. That is a major milestone as it ensures that any contributions of land, easements or other charitable donations to the organization are fully tax deductible.

A variety of educational presentations have been conducted for lake property owners and others on the voluntary conservation options that are available.

A traveling display and membership brochure have been produced and shared at lake fairs and other events. Informational publications were developed on personalized planning for conservation easements, tax benefits from land or easement donations, and the endowment funding needed for conservation easements. These tools are now being used with many interested landowners who have recently contacted NWLT with interest in conserving their properties.

For more information or to schedule presentations,
contact Bryan Pierce at home at (715) 479-7530.

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Address Correction Requested

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