



## **BOG PURCHASE ENHANCES NATURAL AREA**

### Protecting Muskeg - A Native Wisconsin Landscape

In July 2023 the Northwoods Land Trust (NWLTL) purchased 40 acres of privately-owned land in Springstead in southern Iron County that sits like an island surrounded by conserved land. Its acquisition is unique among NWLT-owned properties in that it is entirely comprised of muskeg bog habitat.

While it is relatively small in size, it adds to the vast framework of protected lands in an ecologically significant region. On three sides it's bordered by the Springstead Muskeg State Natural Area, and to its south the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Price County.

Muskeg look like hummocky carpets of sphagnum moss with scattered, stunted swamp conifers. Muskeg is a term of Algonquian origin translating roughly to "moss bog" or "grassy bog." Their acid loving plants and trees including white pine, black spruce and tamarack provide refuge for many sensitive species of amphibians, insects and birds.

Because the muskeg existed at the time of Euro-American settlement, the Springstead Muskeg State Natural Area was

designated in 2002 as a way to conserve this representative sample of the state's biological diversity. It is one of the 694 State Natural Areas (SNA) formed since 1951, when this first-in-the-nation nature preserve system was started by the Wisconsin legislature to conserve outstanding examples of native landscapes, significant geological formations and archeological sites.

Collectively, the SNA lands account for only about 1% of Wisconsin's land base, yet the vast majority of rare plant and animal species are located there.

Two-thirds of SNA land is owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), as is the case with the Springstead Muskeg. One-third of SNA land is owned by nonprofits, federal agencies, educational institutions, counties, municipalities and even private landowners.

These partners have designated or dedicated their land as SNA through agreements with the DNR. Dedications offer a significant level of protection through state statute. Essentially these agreements

Plants within the Springstead Muskeg State Natural Area include leatherleaf, swamp laurel, tussock cottongrass, bog Labrador tea, blueberry, bog cranberry, few-seeded sedge, three-leaved false Solomon's seal and wild rosemary.

*Photo by Joshua Mayer*

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are a special type of legally binding conservation easement that use Articles of Dedication.

“As a representative of the State Natural Areas Program, I can say with confidence that we share the enthusiasm of NWLT for this land purchase. We look forward to continuing with NWLT to build on land protection efforts in this ecologically-diverse region,” said DNR Northwest Region Ecologist Ryan Magana.

It’s likely that NWLT’s 40 acres will be a future addition to the Springstead Muskeg State Natural Area to afford the benefits that come with this additional level of protection. SNAs will continue to grow in size and number as threats to the state’s biodiversity grow apace.

“Purchasing this property presented an opportunity for NWLT to do one of the things that land trusts can do best – act quickly to facilitate the protection of important land that becomes available when public agencies oftentimes can’t do so. By securing this parcel for permanent protection, NWLT serves as a vital partner in the broader effort to protect sensitive and rare natural areas in northern Wisconsin,” said Kari Kirschbaum, NWLT’s Land Protection Director.



The land, now named the Springstead Muskeg 40, is open to the public, although minimal use is expected

**“WE SHARE THE ENTHUSIASM OF NWLT FOR THIS LAND PURCHASE.”**

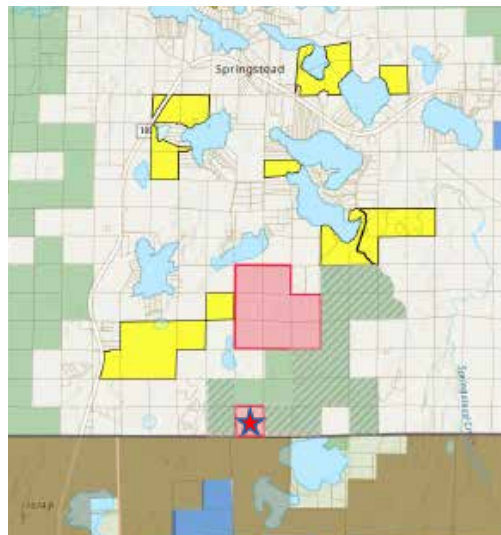
**- RYAN MAGANA, DNR**

due to the remoteness and difficulty of access. It’s a property that requires wearing muck boots and a sense of adventure, as well as good map and compass skills.

*The expenses related to this project were supported by grants from the Caerus Foundation and Wisconsin Land Fund and a gift from an anonymous donor.*



**The Springstead Muskeg 40 is the newest parcel to be added to NWLT’s conservation areas.**



Map of Springstead Muskeg 40 (starred), surrounded by the Springstead Muskeg SNA (green), national forest (brown) & NWLT conserved land (yellow).



A “bearing tree” and land survey monument at the Springstead Muskeg 40.

## THE “FORTY”

After the treaties were signed with Indigenous peoples of America, the smallest area of land that could be acquired was reduced to a 40-acre parcel, engraining the “forty” into our culture.

When Wisconsin became part of the United States in 1848, most of the land was unclaimed by settlers. This unclaimed land became the public domain, was surveyed, and then sold through land offices in the form of patents.

The land was divided into townships (36 square miles), and sections (one square mile, or 640 acres, within the township). Sections are surveyed into smaller squares by repeated halving and quartering. A quarter section is 160 acres, and a quarter-quarter section is 40 acres. All of the various sized squares depicting ownership are on any plat map, tract book or patent book (going back to the earliest plat map in Wisconsin published in 1857).



In 1862, President Lincoln signed into law the Homestead Act, by which settlers could claim 160 acres of public land. Claimants were required to live on and improve their plot by cultivating the land. After five years, the original filer of the claim was entitled to the property, free and clear (except for a small registration fee). The phrases “front 40” and “back 40” referred to farm fields at the front and back quarter-quarter sections of land.

The establishment of standard east-west and north-south lines (township and range lines) meant that deeds could be written without regard to temporary features such as trees, piles of rocks and fences. This style of surveying with section lines made property descriptions far more straightforward than the old metes and bounds system.

Source: Wikipedia. Images are from the original land survey and notes for the muskeg property. <https://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/SurveyInfo.html>

## LANDOWNER FEATURE

Roland Rueckert



Roland Rueckert is known among the forest managers and ecologists of Oneida County for having a well-managed 300-acre woodland in Pelican Township.

His father and mentor, George Rueckert, inspired and cultivated his enduring love of the land. With an eye for the future, George corralled his four boys into planting government provided Norway pine on 200 acres of heavily cutover land that he purchased in 1950. Later, Roland acquired a neighboring 100 acres, which he planted separately.

Roland and his father made a fine team of land managers. Their approach was not to continue planting trees, but to cull the less desirable species and open the land in areas to let nature take its course. They enrolled in the Managed Forest Law Program, paid close attention to the maintenance of their forest roads, and protected the 1.5 miles of shoreline on the Pelican River.

When Roland's father died in 2002, it was up to Roland to continue management of the forest. In 2007, he placed his 300 acres in permanent conservation with the Northwoods Land Trust. Now, at the age of 91, he has moved from Rhinelander and resettled in Madison, where he worked as a renowned Professor of Virology at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. He is leaving the Rueckert forestry legacy to his nephew, Robin Rueckert, who will oversee the conservation easement forever protecting the family land. "While Roland has lived most of his life elsewhere, his heart has always been on the woods and lakes of the North," said Robin.

## ORDER APPAREL BY DECEMBER 1!

Just in time for the holidays, our storefront now includes Eddie Bauer full fleece zip-ups and a fleece beanie made of recycled water bottles. We still offer the Eddie Bauer fleece vests, canvas caps, poly/cotton t-shirts and knit hat, all made available through Vital Industries of Rhinelander. **Place your order by December 1st at [www.vital.industries/NWLT](http://www.vital.industries/NWLT).**



## BEAVER CREEK RECOGNIZED

Added to the Old-Growth Forest Network

The Beaver Creek Hemlocks Conservation Area in Iron County was inducted into the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN) on September 9th. A short ceremony and hike took place to celebrate the protection of our remaining old-growth forests. During the hike a few tree cores were taken revealing clues about the ages of some of the resident trees there.

Almost all of our native forests have been logged or otherwise disturbed. OGFN has recognized over 215 old-growth forests in 34 states. This is NWLT's 2nd conservation area to join the network and the 7th forest in Wisconsin to be recognized.



Top: John Bates (left) & OGFN's Nick Sanchez.  
Right: Troy Walters.



## A CORE REFLECTION

By TROY WALTERS

Every time I core a tree, I think of the "February – Good Oak" excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac* written by Aldo Leopold. In this excerpt, as Leopold cuts the oak, he goes back in time, recounting all of the things the good oak has been around for in its life.

A tree core, taken at the Beaver Creek Hemlocks Conservation Area, promoted my own reflection. With each revolution of the handle, I kept turning back the hands of time. When all was said and done, the cored eastern hemlock revealed about 130 years-worth of life, making its germination year around 1893, just 45 years after Wisconsin became a state.

Upon careful examination, one could even see that some years of growth were better than others, leading to the question of "what sort of environmental factors were present to allow for these things?" Perhaps it was just as simple as sunlight and water, but maybe the question begs a much more complex answer than that.

Fairly new scientific research demonstrates that trees are more sophisticated, alert and social than what we thought. For example, they communicate through networks of ultra-thin underground fungi root systems known as mycelia. I wonder what the interrelationships of the other neighboring trees were to this hemlock. Were they helping each other or competing for nutrients? Either way, the forest is much more mystifying than I ever imagined.



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## NWLT PROTECTION TOTALS

<b>15,051 acres</b>	<b>83 miles</b>
of land conserved	of shoreline protected

715.479.2490 | [northwoodslandtrust.org](http://northwoodslandtrust.org)

## GIVE BACK TO NATURE WITH A YEAR-END GIFT

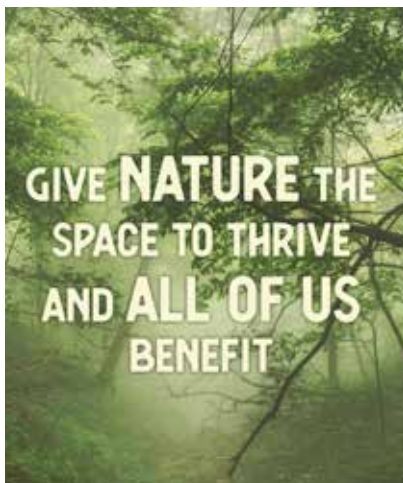
Conserved lands give us and our communities so much. They cleanse our water and air. Offer quiet areas to explore. Provide wildlife with a permanent home and room to roam. Keep us safer as the climate warms.

**Please show your support of nature through a year-end gift to the Northwoods Land Trust.**

A donation of \$50, \$100, \$250 or more will protect more land today for a healthy and sustainable northwoods tomorrow. Together we can leave a legacy of land for generations to come.

If you are a current donor, please consider a special gift in addition to your annual membership. Not a member yet? Give now to become one.

Use the enclosed envelope, go to [www.northwoodslandtrust.org/support](http://www.northwoodslandtrust.org/support) or scan the code.



### WINTER CALENDAR

**MICROMOON NIGHT HIKE**  
**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23 @ 6 PM**

at the Tower Nibiwan Conservation Area in Sugar Camp.

**SNOWSHOE HIKE**  
**TUESDAY, MARCH 5 @ 1 PM**

at the Holmboe Conifer Forest State Natural Area in Rhinelander.

Dates and times are subject to change due to weather conditions. More events may be added to the calendar. Visit our website for more information and to register at [northwoodslandtrust.org](http://northwoodslandtrust.org).



By Joshua Mayer