



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

PROTECTING OUR WOODS & WATERS

FALL
2024



PURCHASE PROTECTS RARE MOOSE HABITAT

The Little Bear Creek Project

by John Bates, NWLT Board Member

The Northwoods Land Trust's recent addition of the Little Bear Creek Conservation Area, a 40-acre property with nearly 2,300 feet of frontage on Little Bear Creek, is notable for its expansive shoreline and the associated wetlands. But perhaps most exciting is that the parcel is by the far western edge of the massive Powell Marsh State Wildlife Area, and within this general area a pair of breeding moose have produced calves in recent years.

If you've not seen a moose before, they are the world's largest ungulate, weighing from as little as a 700-pound female to a 1,400-pound male, and standing up to seven feet tall with antlers over four feet long. Moose prefer to browse in young second-growth forests and brush, a common forest community in the Little Bear Creek Conservation Area.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimates that the state's moose population is between 20 and 30 animals. Of those, the majority

don't live here. Instead, most are young bulls wandering down from Minnesota and Michigan's Upper Peninsula looking for love. The DNR believes that there generally are no more than two to four cows in the state, so out of the 20+ animals in the state, there's about 20 lonely bulls out there looking for those few females. The DNR also states there is no active breeding population, but that may not be the case as evidenced by the successful calving seen in the Powell Marsh area.

According to A.W. Schorger's book *Wildlife in Early Wisconsin: A Collection of Works*, before Euro-American settlement, moose were most numerous in the northwestern part of the state – Douglas County followed by Bayfield and Burnett Counties. Unregulated hunting diminished the population, and by 1900, moose were considered extirpated from Wisconsin. In the 1960s, however, moose began to be spotted in the northwestern portion of the state as the Minnesota population increased and some wandered south into Wisconsin.

The Little Bear Creek property acquisition adds to an extensive mosaic of protected lands.

Little Bear Flowage (pictured) is on state land, located just to the south of NWLT's 40 acres.

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Moose are not recognized as an official Wisconsin resident species, although the Department of Natural Resources estimates the state's moose population is currently 20-30 animals.



A bull moose on the nearby Bear River. A large bull eats 50+ pounds of food a day! Photo by Bill Draves

Unfortunately, the very few moose we have today are threatened in areas where deer densities exceed 10 deer per square mile, and this density is exceeded throughout most of northern Wisconsin. This is due to the presence of *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*, a parasitic brainworm which causes severe neurological damage and is carried by white-tailed deer. This parasite has proved to cause high mortality in moose populations, but doesn't harm the deer.

Moose are also threatened by our warming winters. The moose's long and hollow outer hair coat, with its dense soft

undercoat, allows it to easily withstand intense cold. Moose are so well insulated that winter temperatures of 23°F will make them pant. In summer, as low as 57°F can cause moose to begin to suffer from heat stress. Even higher summer temperatures will cause moose to stop eating as they try to stay cool. This in turn leaves them more vulnerable to starvation in winter. In addition, animals that enter the winter in poor health are more likely to have poor reproductive success in the spring due to either re-absorption of the fetus, still-born calves, or calves that are too weak at

birth to rise and suckle. The bottom line: Moose require cold winters and cool summers, and the colder the better.

Northern Wisconsin is at the southernmost edge of the breeding range for moose, so our Little Bear Creek property is part of a very special "moose nursery" where at least one pair of moose appear to be reproducing. How long they will survive in our rapidly changing climate is up for grabs, but protecting their habitat is essential if they are to have a chance. We're betting on the Little Bear Creek property contributing to their survival.



The Little Bear Creek parcel was purchased by Northwoods Land Trust in May 2024. It includes 40 acres with 2,273 feet along Little Bear Creek in the Town of Sherman (Iron County). The project goals are to protect significant wildlife habitat and water quality, and connect to other conserved lands.

The property has direct access from State Hwy 47 and includes a small cleared area for parking. It is comprised of a mix of forested uplands and wetlands, with the creek running through the heart of the parcel. State land surrounds the parcel.

The expenses related to this project were supported by grants from Caerus Foundation, John C. Bock Foundation, Modestus Bauer Foundation, Wisconsin Land Fund, and gifts from the Swisher family and Bacon family. Additional grants are pending.

RECREATION & CONSERVATION INTERTWINED AT MINOCQUA WINTER PARK

The Park is Now an All-Season Destination

Minocqua Winter Park has drawn in visitors to Minocqua and beyond since it opened in 1979.

“Winter Park has long been a successful joint partnership of the Town of Minocqua and Lakeland area’s Nordic ski community since its inception,” says Dave Kozeluh, chair of the nonprofit Minocqua Winter Park Foundation’s Land Stewardship Committee. “The Park Foundation has developed a network of over 100 km of multi-use trails that today depend on the cooperation of 20+ private, corporate and government landowners,” adds Dave.

In the past, the land surrounding Winter Park was owned by timber companies and was at risk of being sold off and developed. Ken Aldridge, Park Foundation vice-president, acquired nearly 3,200 acres of land so that it wouldn’t get fragmented. “Since all the ski trails were on private lands, and Winter Park operated on annual permission, its future was at risk. We brought in the Northwoods Land Trust, preserved the land with a conservation easement in 2011, and secured a brighter future for Winter Park,” says Ken.

The easement protects the woods and waters around Winter Park, and ensures they will remain natural, without threats of development in future years. “This easement is unique for our organization. It balances public recreation with conservation of natural resources. It is a great tool to preserve all of the qualities

of the park. We’re honored to support the stewardship of this land,” says Ted Anchor, executive director of Northwoods Land Trust.

More recently, the Park Foundation’s board of directors formed a vision to expand operations beyond winter activities for greater public use and enjoyment. They have been busy realizing their vision. “We have built additional wilderness trails for classic skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, biking, and have truly become a four-season venue,” says Ken.

The trail up Squirrel Hill, where the historic fire tower sits, was improved and is now available year-round. Fall drive up days allow anyone access to the top to enjoy scenic views of protected forestland and the meandering Yukon Creek and Squirrel River.

Biking of all sorts has become a popular activity at the park. In addition to offering 2.5-miles of single-track mountain biking trails, a selection of regularly mowed ski trails are open to cyclists throughout the summer and fall.

In 2023, an 18-hole disc golf course opened, nestled in the pine and hardwood forests. It is a challenging course due to the glacial features, with eskers and potholes, climaxing at the top of Squirrel Hill. In 2024, the course accounted for at least 898 park visits, welcoming players from 18 US states.



The 3,195-acre conservation easement, named the Winter Park Pines Nature Preserve, surrounds the chalet area owned by the Town of Minocqua.

“While the conservation easement focuses mainly on winter recreational values, the terms were written to accommodate other uses. It’s great to see the expanded public use of Winter Park as it affords visitors an immersive outdoor experience,” says Ted.

To check out all of the activities at Minocqua Winter Park visit www.minocquawinterpark.org.

NWLT is hosting a ski outing in March, see our calendar of events.



Photo by Minocqua Winter Park



View of Yukon Creek and protected forestland. Photo by Minocqua Winter Park



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NWLT PROTECTION TOTALS

15,100 acres	83 miles
of land conserved	of shoreline protected

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UPCOMING EVENTS

WINTER LAKE ECOLOGY PROGRAM

JANUARY 23, 2025 at 1:00PM
at Trees For Tomorrow in Eagle River

SNOWSHOE HIKE

FEBRUARY 20, 2025 at 1:00PM
at Holmboe Conifer Forest in Rhinelander

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI THROUGH CONSERVED LANDS

MARCH 6, 2025 at 1:00PM
at Minocqua Winter Park

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