

In this issue:

Land Trusts Making a
Difference in Wisconsin

Northeast Wisconsin
Land Trust - p2

River Revitalization
Foundation - p3

The Conservation Fund - p4-5

Wisconsin's commitment to
the land and YOU - p6

How do you connect
to the land? - p7

2013 Annual Report -
center insert



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Photo by Anthony Chammond



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Crosscurrents

a newsletter to serve the land conservation community of Wisconsin

Land Trusts: Filling community needs and connecting us to the land

My earliest memories are of fishing in northern Wisconsin with my family and the magic of time spent in the natural world. Those memories drew me to a career in conservation.

In the almost seven years since I joined the team at GWC, I've been proud to play a role in projects that have benefitted the land. But what has made all the difference—what has made my job truly inspiring—is what I've learned from, and about, people.

In service to Wisconsin's land trust community, we at GWC have the great pleasure and honor of meeting with and getting to know land trust practitioners, agency representatives, policy makers, funders, and the people across the state who care about the future of Wisconsin—all in an effort to understand their unique perspectives, the needs of their communities, and find ways to work together to advance our mutual goals.

Not only have these interactions led to great friendships and satisfying professional successes, they've also helped us understand the diversity of perspectives in Wisconsin.

People's passions lie in helping the sick get better, promoting better food systems, educating our youth, addressing climate change, making spiritual connections, improving water quality, simply cherishing quiet time outdoors, and many more.

Local land trusts *impact all these things*.

Through partnerships with local hospitals and schools; the protection of farms, quiet places, and meeting spaces; and through countless other creative conservation projects and alliances, land trusts are responding to people's passions and filling community needs.

So this edition of Crosscurrents is a tribute to them—all of Wisconsin's diverse, nimble, and progressive land trusts. I invite you to read just a few of their stories, and join me in thanking them for making a difference in all of our lives... for making the memories that inspire.

Michael Strigel,
Executive Director





**Wisconsin Land Trust—
Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust**

Project location: Green Bay's
west shore in Suamico

www.newlt.org

Our partners at Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust are helping pike get to prime spawning areas as wetlands are drained and converted to other uses.

Photos by Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust

“If we care about the waters of the Bay and the quality of our fisheries, land conservation on the west shore of Green Bay is crucial.”—Deborah Nett, NEWLT’s Executive Director

One Heckuva (True) Fish Tale

Protected Land, Healthy Water, Happy Fish

Each year Wisconsin’s Northern Pike begin an annual migration to reach their spawning grounds in temporary shallow wetlands. This fascinating pilgrimage is not new, but the challenges pike face along the way certainly are.

As wetlands are being drained and converted for other uses and streams are bisected by road crossings—sometimes blocking this migration—Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust (NEWLT) is ensuring that these amazing creatures reach their spawning grounds. Last year, NEWLT purchased 34 acres of ephemeral wetland property along Green Bay’s west shore that plays a critical role in the area’s pike migration.

Now when adult pike leave the waters of Green Bay, they swim up these and other tributary streams to find places to lay and fertilize eggs. Once hatched, pike fry also spend time in these wetlands growing strong before beginning their journey back to Green Bay. Pike spawning is a short-lived, almost magical, event to witness.

This new preserve is now open to the public and thanks to NEWLT and partners that include The Nature Conservancy, public agencies, foundations, and local residents, we can all enjoy the magic of pike spawning—and the benefits it provides our communities—for years to come.

Why We Care:

It’s perfect for fishing—

The bay’s warmer, shallower waters make it the most productive part of Lake Michigan for fish and other aquatic life.

It’s good for business—

Green Bay is important for commercial and sport fishing and is popular with other outdoor enthusiasts.

It’s part of the cycle—

The Northern Pike is a top predator in Green Bay, feeding on other fish to keep their populations in balance.

It’s at risk—

Pike populations in the Bay have been declining, and loss of spawning habitat is believed to be a major factor.

You drink it—

More than 10 million people get their drinking water from Lake Michigan.



Wisconsin Land Trust– River Revitalization Foundation

Project location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin
www.riverrevitalizationfoundation.org



“Connecting urban youth to nature in the city... instills a sense of stewardship of our natural resources [and] teaches job skills as well.”
–Executive Director Kimberly Gleffe

Through Milwaukee’s Earn and Learn Program the River Revitalization Foundation is growing connections to Milwaukee’s green spaces and creating opportunities to gain work-readiness skills among area youth.

Rooting Kids in Conservation

Do you remember your first job? Perhaps it was bagging groceries, babysitting, or mowing a neighbor’s lawn. These early experiences may not lead directly into dream jobs, but they do build a strong foundation of basic job skills and work ethic that help us fulfill our later career goals.

Land trusts like the River Revitalization Foundation (RRF) are working to provide similar types of job training opportunities to young adults in the Milwaukee area.

RRF is a land trust that works diligently for environmental conservation, public access, and recreation in Milwaukee’s river watersheds. Since 2008, it has also provided opportunities for area high school and post-graduate students to gain exposure to the natural world and job experience as part of the city’s Earn & Learn Community Work Experience Program.

Executive Director Kimberly Gleffe describes the importance of this experience, “Connecting urban youth to nature in the city through employment as ecological restoration interns not only instills a sense of stewardship of our natural resources but teaches job skills as well, providing a firm foundation of experience that carries with them.”

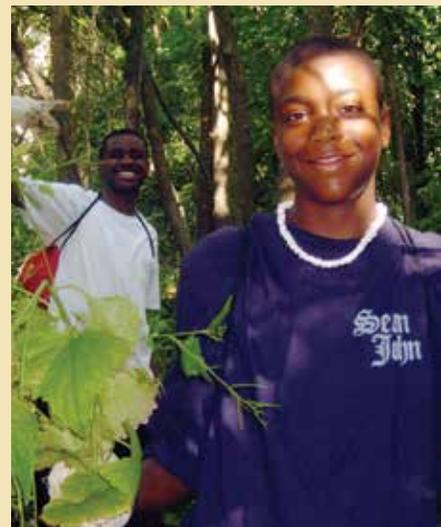
Guided by student mentors from UW-Milwaukee, program participants learn to identify plants, remove non-native species, plant natives, and lead guided hikes on trails they have cared for. There is a daily connection with the outdoors, fostering excitement about the city’s green spaces.

Through Earn & Learn, RRF and other non-profit organizations are providing Milwaukee’s youth with work-readiness skills while starting them on the path to achieving their dreams.

According to Marcell, one Earn and Learner, “This experience will help me get other jobs. I learn basic job skills and how to follow rules. I hope to be a music producer in the future. Earn & Learn helps me get the basic skills I need to do that.” From conservation to making records, that’s music to our ears.

“This experience will help me get other jobs. I learn basic job skills and how to follow rules. I hope to be a music producer in the future. Earn & Learn helps me get the basic skills I need to do that.”–Marcell, an Earn & Learn participant

Photos by River Revitalization Foundation



A Working Forest Forever

“Working lands” is a term often heard in the conservation community, but what does it mean? Typically it refers to farm, ranch, or forest lands which ultimately produce food or timber. What gets lost in this description is the value that working lands provide to communities beyond these important functions.

During the past year, Wisconsin has seen its largest land conservation project (a “working lands” project) take shape. The Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest protects an astonishing 67,285 acres of working forest land in northwest Wisconsin. The project was made possible through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and a partnership among the Lyme Timber Company, The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Vital to the Economy

Each year, the Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest provides more than a thousand Wisconsin jobs and brings in \$34.1 million through employment, timber sales, and taxes. Under the working forest protection agreement, Lyme Timber will continue its operations and sustainably manage the forest with a plan approved by the DNR.

Photo by Alyssa DeRubeis, WDNR



Land trusts across the state are working to protect forested areas, like the Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest, which provide benefits for our economy, environment, and way of life.



Photo by Thomas Meyer, WDNR

The Karner Blue Butterfly (above) and Kirtland's Warbler (left), both species at risk, depend on the habitat provided by contiguous, working forests like the Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest.

Vital to the Environment

The Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest holds one of the largest tracts of Pine Barrens left on the planet—a rare, globally-threatened ecosystem. Pine Barrens provide critical habitat for several threatened and endangered species such as the Kirtland's Warbler and Karner Blue Butterfly.

This project also plays a critical role in protecting the region's water supply by protecting groundwater resources, 13.2 miles of streams, and 75 lakes and ponds. Eliminating the possibility of development ensures that the forest continues to filter water before it enters our aquifers.

Vital to Our Way of Life

To further serve the community, the land will be open to the public for hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, skiing, bird-watching, and even motorized recreational activities. As a result, this land will serve as a preserve, a playground, and a place to both come together and get away.

The Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest is a beautiful reminder that “working lands” have an even deeper meaning and impact than the important products they produce.

Wisconsin Land Trust–The Conservation Fund

Project Location: Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest

www.conservationfund.org



“What sets projects like the Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest apart is not just the practical and lasting conservation, but the impact that this land will forever have on the people and institutions, habitats, traditions and values, and the culture that define a place.”

–Tom Duffus, Vice President of The Conservation Fund - Midwest Region

What is the Stewardship Program anyway?

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is a tremendously successful state program that provides funding for land purchases for outdoor recreation and the protection of working forests, critical natural areas, wildlife habitat, and water quality in Wisconsin. It's done a lot of good for the people of Wisconsin over the last 20 years.

How does it benefit Wisconsinites?

It's helped protect over **500,000 acres** of Wisconsin's natural areas in **72 Wisconsin counties** that provide access for outdoor recreation, critical habitat, and cleaner air and water.

It made possible Wisconsin's **largest ever land protection deal**; tens of thousands of acres that will be managed for sustainable timber production and public recreation (see the story "A Working Forest Forever" on page 4).

It leverages partnerships with state, local and private organizations interested in **conserving natural places** for future generations to enjoy.

The Stewardship Program and You

Our government relations program was particularly busy this year. Together with you, we crafted policy strategies, met with legislators, contacted media, wrote letters, and made phone calls to defend the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (see sidebar) as the Legislature debated the state's biennial budget. Thank YOU for all you've done to make your voice heard.

We are disappointed that the final state budget cut the Stewardship Program by \$63.5 million between now and 2020. Combined with cuts made in the last state budget, the legislature has now eliminated more than 40% of the funding from this widely supported and successful program.

On the bright side, **we are heartened** by the thousands of contacts Wisconsinites like you made to your elected representatives to tell them how much the program matters. We will continue to work with you now and in the future to ensure the program remains a cornerstone of Wisconsin's proud conservation tradition.

A strong, well-funded Stewardship Program continues to be important to Wisconsin because:

- We rank last among our neighbors Minnesota and Michigan in state-owned public land.
- With a 15% projected population growth in Wisconsin in the next 20 years, the demand for public recreation opportunities will also grow.
- Lack of public access is cited repeatedly as a significant threat to our state's sporting heritage.
- Availability of timber and fragmentation of forestland are major concerns in some areas of the state. The Stewardship Program helps to ensure that large blocks of forest remain in sustainable timber production.

Fortunately, land trusts are increasingly seen as valued partners at every level of government, and the amount of Stewardship Program funding available to land trusts has grown from \$8 million per year in 2010 to \$12 million per year today—despite the cuts to the program on a whole. Looking beyond 2013, we will continue to build strength with new and existing coalition partners and allies. We will continue to make the voices of individuals and the land trust community heard. And we will continue to champion the program and the legacy of the conservationists for whom it was named.

"Investments in clean water, natural resources that support jobs, and wild places for kids and families to fish, hunt, and explore are essential for a strong economy and healthy communities. People across this state have made it clear that the Stewardship Program is a priority."—Mike Carlson, GWC's Government Relations Director



We asked people across Wisconsin...

How do you connect with the land?



*"I spend my time studying ecology during the week, then **spend my free time hiking with friends, bird watching, and photographing wildlife.** I guess my life really revolves around the land in my community... all the more reason to conserve it!"* –**Evan Eifler**, UW-Madison

*"**Together, we connect with the land** through diverse outdoor activities ranging from water fowling in Door County with our Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, Ajax on Indian Creek to canoeing and having lunch with our granddaughter, Chloe, (and sometimes even a Rocky Mountain Elk) at the headwaters of the West Fork of the Chippewa River."* –**Ben and Sue Niemann**, Couderay Waters Regional Land Trust and GWC board member, and wife



*"**My personal connection to the land is by providing my children and others with hands on experiences** in gardening, farming, and engaging them in opportunities to help keep our rivers clean and instilling in them the importance of our water-nibi (ojibwe)."* –**Kaye Garcia**, Forest County Potawatomi Foundation

*"**One of the most frequent ways I connect with the land is by walking my black lab 'Bud'** on the Red Cedar Trail. It's a rails-to-trails DNR project that starts right in Menomonie and follows along the river of the same name—it's very handy, beautiful in every season, and good exercise for both of us."* –**Bob Fitzwilliam**, West Wisconsin Land Trust



Gathering Waters Conservancy's mission is to help land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

Gathering Waters Conservancy

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We asked people across Wisconsin...

How do you connect with the land?

*"Every morning I begin by taking seed to the bird feeders. The turkeys are always there waiting to see what lands on the ground. I go to the barn to feed the horses and my gelding whinnies his greeting. That signals the crows to fly in because I always drop a few peanuts for them en route to the barn. **It is a wonderful way to start the day.**"—Marjie Tomter, Owner of Walkabout Farm and Ozaukee Washington Land Trust board member*

*"I connect with the land because I really like playing outside. I like being outside when I'm on the swings and when we are doing campfires. I also like going canoeing on trips with my mom and my dad and my sister because **it's a good way to figure out where you are.** It's fun to be out in the wild. And sometimes you might see a muskrat swimming by. I like going on hikes because you might see chipmunks or squirrels or a fox. And sometimes **it's really nice to see how nature really is there.**"—Andrew Dotzour, Age 7*

