# Land-Water-Wildlife

A Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust Publication

Fall 2016

NORTHEAST WISCONSIN
LAND TRUST
*Preserving Our Natural Heritage*

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Land Matters

is published by Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust, a non-profit, member supported, conservation organization dedicated to preserving lands that protect our waters, landscapes and natural habitats for this and future generations.

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NORTHEAST WISCONSIN LAND TRUST
Preserving Our Natural Heritage

# Feathers Flew

## Connection to Places that Foster a Conservation Ethic

By: Roy Valitchka

Alarmed chickens cackling to the peak of the hen house as Dukee barked and eggs were broken in the melee. My mother came running, and I realized my good will effort to gather eggs with my trusted dog was going to end in a scolding and possibly more.

Curiosity and exploration were the nature of a blond six-year-old boy dwelling with mother, dad and sister on 10 acres of beautiful Green Bay west shore land adjacent to Oconto City Park.

It was the early World War II days with rationing and essential food hard to come by. Eggs were valuable commodities. Our farmer neighbor Mr. Bahrke provided milk and sometimes sour milk that my mother made into delicious cottage cheese. I still can see her straining curds through a cheese cloth bag and enjoyed the results on a crust of fresh home baked bread. Our Victorian era home backyard was Green Bay, Oconto City Park on the north and the farm on the south.

A treasured toy was a fleet of toy boat, replicas of war ships much in need of a place to sail. A perfect opportunity presented itself. Mother was washing and "blueing" (a then whitening agent ) lace curtains to be attached to wooden pin mounted curtain stretchers and allowed to dry in the sun.

While she was busy pinning curtains, I stepped up and leaned over the laundry tubs of blue water and began sailing my flotilla. Oops! I fell in head first only to be pulled to safety by mother who then grabbed a pan of clean water. I took off for the bay not knowing what to expect with mother in hot pursuit. Her effort was to no avail. For several weeks thereafter I was "little boy blue".

Green Bay was a fertile body offering our family five gallon pails of large perch. Relatives who worked the defense plants in Chicago who had gas coupons came there to fish.

Another day a conservation warden came with a wounded swan. What a marvel! That white bird with black trimmed head was huge, and I felt compassion for such a wonder. In those days we could wade far into the bay for the sand was firm and water clean. In winter our parents would take us on sleds across the ice to watch ships plying the canal between Green Bay and Lake Michigan. At night, it was mystic to see twinkles of diamonds across the water defining another shore.

Mr. Bahrke's geese crossed the fence line and nested on our south border. The ganders were no neighbors, and chased my sister and me nipping our posteriors when we came too near. I honor the domain of nesting geese to this day.

City Park and creek to the Bay was bordered by a tall box weave fence that ran from Collins Avenue (County N) to the bay shore. An ancient white pine held a swing from which one could watch squirrels run the flat topped fence back and forth, back and forth.

Our frontage road was plowed in winter by a horse drawn grader. Dukee chased the horses, got buggy whipped before the operator fell off the grader and broke several ribs.

New adventures awaited when we moved to 618 Madison Street. A rail siding ran parallel to Madison Street so I was able to visit and watch switch engines come and go from the wood platform until a huge sliver lodged in my bare foot. A rail employee branished a knife to aid sliver removal. He chased a limping blond fearing the knife across the field where mom removed the object instead.

Those were days when horse drawn wagons loaded with blocks of ice were delivered for the ice box. We and others had no electric refrigerators. Little did I know then that the chunks sucked on came from the Oconto River where up-stream was a paper mill, a hardwood factory and other effluents. I didn't die but became aware of pollution. Not too far was the Bond Pickle canning company north west of Hwy 41 and State 22. One could roam among huge vats of fermenting pickles and dodge the puddles of pungent leaking brine.

My name changed in those days as well, to "Tarz" a namesake for then popular Tarzan of the Apes books and comics. I was a tree climber and learned the safest to climb – not pine, evergreen, birch or willow for sap, pitch and weakness. Box elder was best with its spreading limbs.

An old flour sack tied to a belt and a paddle became hunting gear as I ventured into the marsh behind my grandparent's home off 7th Street. Huge leopard and bull frogs were quarry and when caught and cleaned by me, grandma made us wonderful deep fried frog legs. At one time I recall the Riverside bar served frog legs Friday nights for about 5 cents a basket.

My father took me on hikes and had me close my eyes to identify scents of plants and sample various berries, both bitter, sweet and "ugh". We found wild asparagus along old railroad right of ways and road ditches, and I learned to identify poison ivy, poison sumac and tree species.

So why the essay? **Few today can look back 70+ years on an idyllic life in an historic small town where life was open for the taking. I developed a deep appreciation for the out of doors, water and nature – a conservation ethic that dwells within me to this day.**

I won't ever again dump my infant brother out of a buggy on an unauthorized stroll – yes I got into trouble. On the other hand, the Oconto brewery is now part of a subdivision. Bond Pickle no longer exists; it is part of a commercial development. Old Laureman's Department Store, where I first marveled at a visit from Aunt Jemima making pancakes with Log Cabin Syrup is no more.

By the time I was in eighth grade and visiting my grandparents one could not wade the Bay, City Park beach was closed because of pollution. The shore line today in many places is masked by invasive towering fragmities and helter skelter old buildings dot the shore areas.

What is left in the well of my 78 years is appreciation for Oconto, its wonderful Bay location, history and a still warmth that pervades each time I visit or show my wife and our children and grandchildren that "that's where I lived; here is city park, the remains of the Bahrke farm or the Beyer home." We haven't waded out to the Lindsey field grave site in the marsh land, but in my mind's eye I see the graves during forays for frogs and adventure.

I'm not a "last child in the woods" but an old guy who wishes more children had a past to become part of nature as I. My regret is that 70 years later we haven't conquered pollution of air, water or land. **But we're trying!**

# A Path to Preserving Land:

## The steps of putting conservation easements on private land

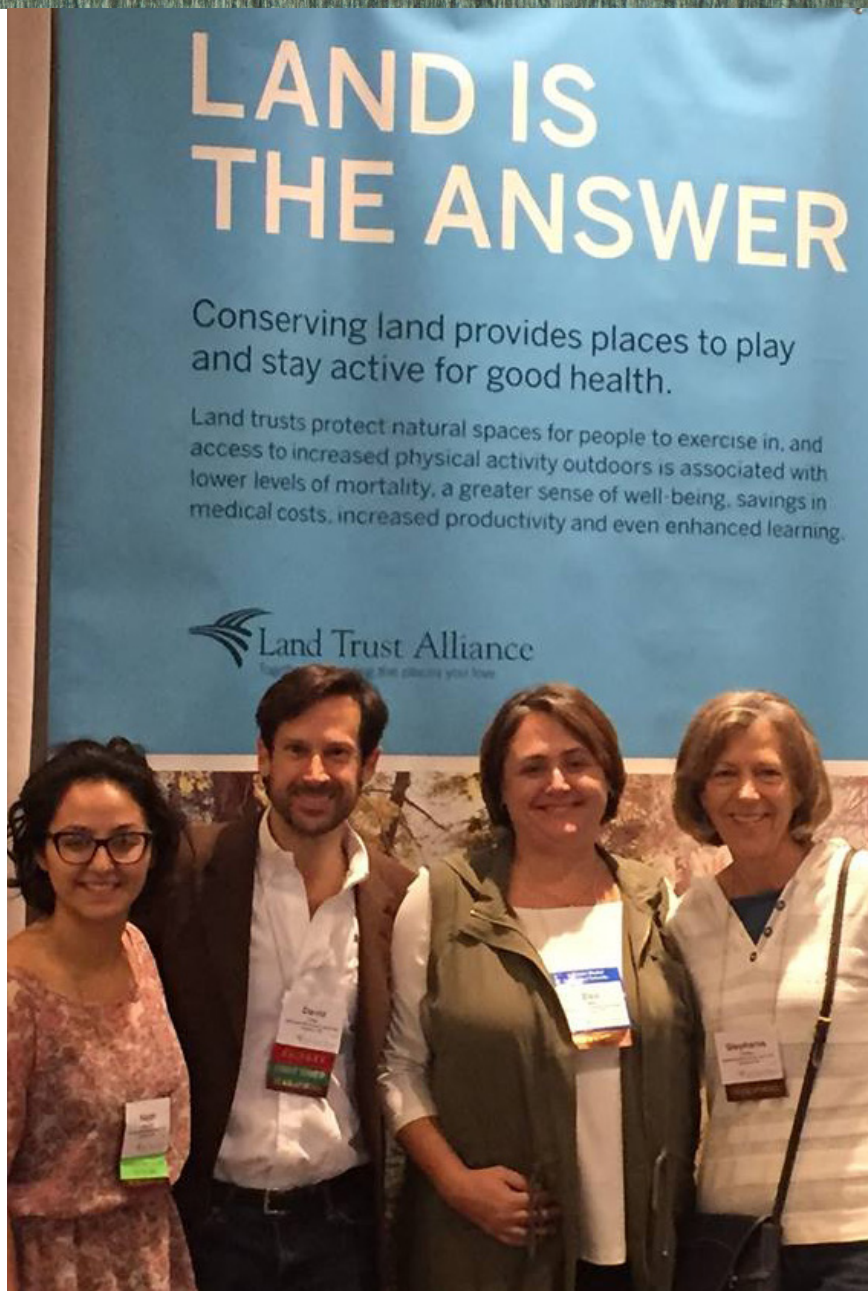
Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust conserves land in many different ways. However, the process usually starts with a phone call. A call to the NEWLT office from someone who cares deeply about their land and a realization that something someday could actually happen to it and it could be gone forever.

Once we receive this important call, the very first thing we do is check out the land. We use GIS to navigate and explore right from our office. Geographic Information System or GIS is a mapping and analysis tool that provides maps of an area along with important habitat features. Once all of the in house research is complete, we follow up with the landowner and have them fill out an application for conservancy to be considered as a potential project.

Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust staff and Land Committee members review the application and evaluate it against our internal Project Selection Criteria and decide whether or not to pursue conservation. This Project Selection Criteria is based off of our strategic conservation plan that we developed with internal and external input to help decide the most critical lands to conserve.

After the project has been accepted, we work directly with the landowner to determine how to best protect the conservation resources of the property.

These properties are incredible lands that families keep close to their hearts. They are over 50 places that are protected forever. Lands that promote healthy forests and waters and a special area that families and friends can explore and develop an appreciation for the outdoors.



# 20 Years of Conservation Humbly began with:

# Dreams to Protect Water

Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust had a modest beginning. In September of 1994, Bruce Johnson, the first executive director of the land trust, formed a meeting to address non-point source pollution in our water ways and specifically the Fox River Watershed.

The group was made up of land conservation specialists and concerned citizens hoping to better northeast Wisconsin. With limited means at their disposal they felt like they had done all that they could do to prevent point pollution, so, they began to extend their outreach.

In order to do so, they set up a follow up meeting to talk with Wisconsin land trust specialists and WDNR employees. They were advised to start a land trust. Not very many people knew how to or what that even was!

With a steep learning curve ahead of them, the group attended to the Land Trust Alliance Rally Conference in California. The conference is an annual gathering with land trust's and conservation organizations from across the nation. They returned with an extensive amount of knowledge and resources to finally start their little land trust in northeast Wisconsin.

In 1998, thanks to the patience of landowner Pat Timm, 80 acres known as Timm's Woods was protected. Their first conservation easement and the start of something wonderful!

Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust evolved over time and instead of just focusing on the watershed it expanded its reach outward to focus on land, water and wildlife.

# 2016 Land Trust of the Year

The Land Trust of the Year award is a prestigious honor given out by Gathering Waters, the devoted organization dedicated to providing an alliance for Wisconsin's land trusts. Each year, Gathering Waters collects input from varying organizations and community members to make a decision. We are humbled to learn of the numerous people who stepped forward and vouched for our success. For the past 20 years, Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust has been preserving lands that protect our waters, landscapes, and natural habitats for this and future generations.

We have protected 41 properties by conservation easements and opened 9 public preserves. The preserved and restored acres total over 5,000 acres of land that will be preserved in perpetuity. This means that there are 31 miles of undisturbed shorlines and 638 acres of wetlands.

Thank you for partnering with us to protect so much land. We look forward to working with you in the future to restore and preserve even more!

# Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust's Annual Report Fiscal Year of 2015

| Balance Sheet | | Revenues and Expenses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assets | | Revenues | |
| Cash | $158,295 | Grants and donations (cash) | $470,810 |
| Other current assests | $2,126 | Other | $0 |
| Beneficial interest in assests held by Community Foundation | $124,313 | In kind | $41,000 |
| Conservation land, equipment and boardwalk, net | $979,406 | Investment income, net of $1,340 expenses | $6,027 |
| Total Assets | $1,264,140 | Total Revenues | $505,783 |
| | | | |
| Liabilities | | Expenses | |
| Current liabilities | $10,933 | Program | $167,915 |
| Total liabilities | $10,933 | Administrative | $43,615 |
| Net assets | $1,253,207 | Fundraising | $23,420 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Assets | $1,264,140 | Total Expenses | $234,950 |
| Increase in reserves: includes land purchased | | Change in Reserve | $270,833 |

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# 20th Celebration

After 20 years, Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust could not be prouder and we have so much to be appreciative of. The wonderful territory of northeast Wisconsin has so many passionate and caring people who want to see their land and land in Wisconsin preserved forever. Without considerate individuals like you, beautiful places like our northern forests and undeveloped lakeshores might not exist.

This passion for healthy land, was never more evident than it was at our 20th Celebration. With about 200 in attendance, we were once again reminded of all the loving people that care so much about land conservation. It was great to be able to reconnect with community members, to hear stories from landowners who conserved their land and care for it tenderly, and to meet individuals new to Wisconsin and the land trust. This event was an inspirational time that only increased our motivation to protect our special and natural places.