Waubesa Uplands Preserved

By Jean Meanwell

It is autumn in the Waubesa Wetlands and in the uplands owned by Dr. Alice Watts. The sandhill cranes that nested here, the resident blue heron on the pond, and the willow flycatcher will soon be leaving on their annual migration. Yet, they will be able to return next spring, and for successive springs to come, to a land still covered with marsh marigolds, wild iris, and jacks-in-the-pulpit. An arrangement worked out between Dr. Watts and Bill O’Connor of the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation ensures that these vital uplands will be preserved from development.

Conservation Easement Signed

Recently, Dr. Watts signed a deed of conservation easement to the Foundation and the American Farmland Trust, located in Washington, D.C. The DCNHF will be responsible for administering and enforcing the easement. As an additional part of this agreement, she donated two adjoining plots to the Nature Conservancy.

This easement covers eight acres of prairie restoration, five acres of woodlands, a 1500-tree walnut grove, and a five-acre pine plantation. The land tract also includes 180 acres of prime farmland which must perpetually remain as farmland or else revert to meadows. It cannot be developed.

A Family Project

This land conservation is due not only to the perseverance of Dr. Watts, but also to the enthusiasm of her naturalist sister, Mary Sondern and her husband, Clarence. They have been assisted in the implementation of their ideas by their resident land manager, Donald Sands. Together they planned and planted the prairie restoration and the spring recharge area.

The prairie restoration is dotted with big bluestem and evening primrose among the Canadian rye and is brightened with colorful patches of coneflowers and black-eyed Susans.

The spring recharge area is planted with Scotch, Norway, and white pines in addition to the original woodlands. This buffer zone protects the clarity of the three springs behind Dr. Watts’ house. The flow from these springs is estimated to be at the rate of 300 gallons a minute—a constant source of cold, pure water for the wetlands below.

Also on this upland property is Murphy’s Creek which flows from the adjacent Barney’s Swamp to the Waubesa Wetlands. At the suggestion of neighbor Cal DeWitt, a 50-foot natural buffer zone will be preserved on each side of the creek which is a natural flyway for the many birds in the area.

Preserving a Valuable Resource

The Waubesa Wetlands below Dr. Watts’ land is a former glacial bay of the lake itself. It is considered to be the best wetlands area in the southern counties of Wisconsin. Home to a great variety of plants, birds, and animals, it contains such rarities as Blanding’s turtles and lesser fringed gentian. Evidence of long ago Native American campsites on the edges have been found by Mr. Sands. He has an extensive collection of arrowheads and spear projectile points he has located in the area—some dating as far back as 8000 years.

Preserving these valuable wetlands means preserving the uplands as well. Dr. Watts and her family have understood that. It is because of their concern that Dane County has this heritage preserved for future generations.
From the President

Dear Friends:

One evening this past summer, I had the pleasure of attending a board of directors meeting of the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation on the shore of Lake Mendota, watching an orange sky gradually change to purple. Board members were there to hear how Wisconsin Conservation Corps personnel, under the direction of University staff, might be able to correct erosion problems in Wally Bauman Woods.

That piece of land, also known as the Lower Eagle Heights Woods, has been a pathway for silt and debris into Mendota for decades. But one of the responsibilities that comes with conserving land is the ongoing stewardship of that property. And Heritage Foundation members considered it their job to address a problem that predated our involvement by many years.

It’s that kind of dedication to wise use of land and protection of our natural heritage that makes people sit up and take notice of this organization.

One group that noticed us recently is the American Farmland Trust, a national land conservation organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C. AFT helped us with a major project designed to protect a spectacular wetland (see page 1), and then invited us to work with them on a major new effort of theirs in the Midwest.

All of which is to say that the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation is making the kind of waves it was created to make. I’m proud to be a part of it, and I hope you are, too. But please remember that we need all the help we can get.

One way you can help is by renewing your membership promptly. You’ll find a convenient way in this newsletter. You’ll also notice that several families have memorIALIZED loved ones with a contribution to the Foundation. These and other contributions are always appreciated. But don’t hesitate to call us about a parcel of land you think has conservation potential, or about someone who would like to receive information about our work.

With best wishes,

Norman C. Anderson
President

Never a Bet

By William P. O’Connor

The private conservation movement has expanded dramatically since the 1960s. Today more than 500 “land trusts” or “conservancies” like the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation focus private action on the preservation of natural areas and other conservation land resources.

The main force driving this new conservation movement is the commitment of citizens to the long-term values of their communities. But, like other nonprofit activities, private land conservation is encouraged by federal and state incentives, including the income tax deductions for conservation contributions.

It’s no surprise that the new tax bill—the most sweeping revision (reform? simplification?) since the first federal tax on income was imposed in 1913—will change some of the incentives and values affecting conservation related gifts.

If you’ve considered supporting private conservation by joining a conservation group as a member or making a donation of land, a conservation easement, cash, stock or other property, it is worth considering the timing of your donation. Most of the new provisions take effect for gifts made beginning January 1, 1987.

Here are some highlights:

- **Reduced Rates**: Rates will be lowered from a range of 11% to 50% to a simpler two-rate system of 15% to 28%. (Another 5% is levied on some higher income taxpayers.) The higher rates in effect this year make 1986 donations advantageous for practically all of us.

- **Non-itemizer Deduction**: In 1981, charitable donations were
made deductible by those who use the standard deduction. Beginning next year, donations will no longer be deductible, except by those who itemize. It is worth renewing your membership before year’s end.

- Gifts of Appreciated Property: Gifts of land, conservation easements or other property which has increased in value remain deductible at the fair market value of the property. But a portion may be subject to “alternative minimum tax” for some taxpayers.

The descriptions above are necessarily sketchy. If you are considering support for the Foundation, feel free to call for additional information on conservation donation opportunities.

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**Exhibit, Catalog Worth Sharing**

The Foundation recently produced a beautiful and informative booklet to guide visitors through the exhibit “The Changing Landscape” currently on display at the Museum of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

The booklet, _The Changing Landscape_, is worth owning in its own right. Like the exhibit, the text highlights changing attitudes toward land held by Dane County residents over the years, including the urge to contest, the glorification of the pastoral scene, nature for recreation and the need for conservation.

A special section of the booklet describes the private conservancy techniques available for use by the Foundation to conserve precious parcels.

Illustrations include several Jim Young photographs of sites preserved by the Foundation which were specially commissioned for the exhibit as well as reproductions of Historical Society images on display.

The booklet is on sale for $3.00 at the Museum (on the State Street corner of the Capitol Square) where the exhibit remains on display through November 23rd. It is provided free of charge to new members.

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**Especially For Members**

**Directors at Work**
The Foundation Directors recently:

- Accepted an unrestricted gift of $60,000 from an anonymous donor;
- Authorized acceptance of a gift of land in Sauk County to be used for trade purposes;
- Appointed William P. O’Connor Conservation Director;
- Discussed the possibility of a joint project with American Farmland Trust aimed at conserving farmland and reducing the cultivation of marginally productive farmland;
- Appointed Director Cal Dewitt to serve as land steward for the Watts property.

**Can You Help?**
Call the Foundation office, 258-9797, if you would like to make our goals a reality. We need people to help on committees (membership, land stewardship, public relations, newsletter) as well as occasional help with mailings.

**Typewriter Needed**
If you’ve gotten yourself computerized and have an idle typewriter, the Foundation office will put it to good use. Call 258-9797.

**DCNHF Memorials**
Contributions to the Memorial Fund have been made in honor of: John R. and Adelaide Yost; June, the sister of Geri and Connie Malak.

Please consider the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation when making your memorial bequests.

**Membership Reminder**
Many of you will be wanting to renew your membership soon. Though we will be mailing out reminder notices, you could help us save money by using the enclosed envelope. When you renew you may choose as a special gift either the elegant black and sepia poster or the charming color booklet, both commemorating _The Changing Landscape_, the inaugural exhibit of the State Historical Society Museum. Please indicate your choice on the enclosed renewal envelope.