Protecting the Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Site

Land Trust purchased 35 acres last year

The Natural Heritage Land Trust and a local group called the Patrick Marsh Conservancy purchased a 35-acre parcel of land within the Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Site near the City of Sun Prairie last September. “We bought the property to increase the amount of wildlife habitat at Patrick Marsh and provide more opportunities for people to enjoy natural areas near where they live,” said Jim Welsh, Executive Director of the Natural Heritage Land Trust.

The Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Site encompasses 785 acres, but only a portion of it has permanent protection. The Site includes a 225-acre state Wildlife Area that provides important habitat for more than 100 species of birds. It is used by outdoor enthusiasts who hike and picnic in the area and by Patrick Marsh Middle School students who use it as an outdoor classroom. The Site also includes a former Native American village and hunting ground.

“This property is a gem in terms of its conservation, cultural, and historic values and in terms of the educational opportunities it provides,” said Jeanne Behrend, President of the Patrick Marsh Conservancy. “We’re delighted we could protect it.”

Because of its conservation and recreation values, the Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Site has been identified for protection in Dane County’s Parks and Open Space Plan 2001-2005 and in the Department of Natural Resource’s Land Legacy Report. The latter is a list of the 228 places in the state that are critical to protect to meet Wisconsin’s “conservation and recreation needs in the next 50 years.”

The Land Trust purchased the land with funds from the City of Sun Prairie, the Dane County Conservation Fund, the State’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Ducks Unlimited, and contributions from local residents, businesses, and service organizations.

Land Trust plans to buy an additional 22 acres this year and needs your help to make this happen

The Land Trust is planning to buy a 22-acre parcel that is adjacent to the land it bought last fall. It must do so by July 2005. The appraised price for the parcel was

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Land and Trail near Cave of the Mounds protected

Lands and views around Cave of the Mounds, a National Natural Landmark, are now permanently protected thanks to Dane County, the Natural Heritage Land Trust, and landowners who placed a conservation easement on a nearly 30-acre parcel of land.

Cave of the Mounds is just east of the Village of Blue Mounds in western Dane County. It is recognized by the Chicago Academy of Sciences as "the significant cave of the upper Midwest." Because of the variety and delicacy of its limestone formations, the Cave is referred to as the "jewel box" of America's major caves. It attracts tourists from throughout the region and helps bolster the local economy.

"We are thrilled to have been able to protect this beautiful, wooded parcel of land with the help of the Natural Heritage Land Trust and the County of Dane," said Mark Rooney on behalf of the Rooney family (the landowners) and Cave management team. "We now have the opportunity to teach our guests to honor and appreciate the history and integrity of this place while resting comfortably in the knowledge that it will be forever protected."

In addition to protecting the natural setting of Cave of the Mounds, a section of the popular Military Ridge State Trail is now buffered from development. Furthermore, the conservation easement allows Dane County to create a new recreational trail between the Military Ridge State Trail and Brigham County Park.

Dane County and the Land Trust co-hold the conservation easement. The Land Trust will monitor and enforce the terms of the easement.

For more information about the Cave, see: http://caveofthemounds.com/.

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$681,000, but the owner decided to sell the property to the Land Trust at a significantly reduced cost. The acquisition will cost approximately $518,000. The Land Trust expects to raise approximately $422,000 from county and state sources and is working to raise the remaining $96,000 from private foundations, businesses, and individuals.

The Sun Prairie Area School District is also working to acquire land within the Natural Resource Site. If we're all successful, we will have collectively protected nearly 300 acres at the site.

You can help buy this 22-acre parcel by sending a check to the Natural Heritage Land Trust with a note that it's for Patrick Marsh or by responding to the financial request that will arrive in your mailbox shortly.
Town of Middleton to consider creating its largest park

The Sunny Side Seed Farm is one of the largest undeveloped tracts of land remaining in the Town of Middleton. It could become the largest park in the Town, if residents vote to make it so at a special Town Meeting at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, May 17, 2005 at the West Middleton Elementary School.

The nearly 300-acre property is located in the northwestern area of the Town of Middleton along Highway 14. The property includes wetlands, prairie, and more than 130 acres of woods spread across a rolling landscape. It also provides a large recharge area for water infiltration into Black Earth Creek, a regionally important, nationally renowned trout stream. From high points on the property, one can see Blue Mounds, which is 14 miles away.

Last November, Dane County purchased 73 acres of the Sunny Side property for $1,765,000. The Natural Heritage Land Trust currently holds title to the property and is helping the County fund the acquisition. The County has an option to purchase the remaining 221 acres for $3,535,000. To help leverage its limited dollars, the County asked the Town of Middleton to provide up to half of the amount to acquire the remaining acreage. The County is not likely to purchase the land without financial help from the Town.

"In this project, Dane County cooperated with the potential developer of the property to set aside for preservation," said Kathleen Falk, Dane County Executive. "Now we're pursuing important partnerships with the Town of Middleton, the State of Wisconsin, the Natural Heritage Land Trust, and others to help fund this acquisition."

The Town of Middleton Plan Commission and the Park Commission support the project. On May 10th, the Town will provide information about the project and take public comments. On May 17th, residents can vote on the Town's involvement in the project.

For additional information about the property or the Land Trust's role in protecting it, contact Kate Wipperman at 258-9797 or kate@nhlt.org.

President's Circle Launched

To help ensure that the Natural Heritage Land Trust can accomplish its mission now and in the future, the Land Trust recently launched its newly-created donor club: The President's Circle.

Through an annual contribution of $1,000 or more, President's Circle members demonstrate their support of, and confidence in, the Land Trust and help inspire others to do the same.

President Circle members receive: an invitation to President Circle member-only events; inclusion of their name on our website for one year; inclusion of their name in our Annual Report; Landscapes, our bi-annual newsletter; our Annual Report; and notices of field trips and events. Most importantly, members help make it possible to leave a legacy of a healthy landscape for future generations.

If you would like to join the President's Circle, contact Meg Nelson at 258-9797 or meg@nhlt.org.

Land Trust gathers input on work in Black Earth Creek Watershed

The Natural Heritage Land Trust held two public meetings in late March to gather input on where it should focus its land protection efforts in the Black Earth Creek Watershed.

More than 40 people participated in the meetings that we held in the Villages of Cross Plains and Black Earth. Through small group discussions facilitated by University of Wisconsin-Extension staff, landowners and area residents talked about what they value about the watershed and about the places they would like to see protected.

"The Black Earth Creek Watershed covers more than 100 square miles. The information we gained from these meetings will help us focus our limited resources and meet the goals of people who live in the watershed," said Kate Wipperman, Conservation Specialist with the Land Trust. Wipperman is compiling the information from the meetings and will provide it to participants as well as to others who request it.

At its meetings, Land Trust staff explained how landowners can use conservation easements to help keep high quality soils and other important natural resources from being converted to other uses.

A grant from the Department of Natural Resources helped make it possible for the Land Trust to conduct these public meetings. To learn more about our work in this watershed, contact Kate Wipperman at 258-9797 or kate@nhlt.org.
Land Trust finalizes Site Conservation Plan for the Upper Sugar River Watershed...and completes parcel by parcel analysis of lands in focus areas

Following months of work, the Land Trust completed its Site Conservation Plan for the Upper Sugar River Watershed. This plan will guide our land protection work in this important area.

The plan identifies two focus areas within the watershed—the Verona Sugar River Valley and the area called the Leopold-Riley Game Cooperative. The river valley is important for its agricultural lands, recreational waterway, and scenic views. The Game Cooperative, which was founded as a hunting cooperative in 1931 by conservationist Aldo Leopold and area farmers, is important for its natural, recreational values, and historic values.

We also completed a parcel-by-parcel analysis of the lands in our focus areas to determine the conservation characteristics and the likelihood of securing funding to purchase conservation easements or other interest in the parcels. We will use this information to set priorities for land protection with landowners who want to protect their land.

Knapp & Watson Select Land Trust for “Goodstock” and the Land Trust gets a new web site

As a result of the generosity of the Madison-based advertising firm Knapp & Watson, the Natural Heritage Land Trust has a new web site. Last December, the firm selected 20 non-profit groups (from 80 applicants) to participate in the first-ever Goodstock—a 24-hour marathon session to develop marketing products free of charge for non-profit groups in Dane County. The Land Trust asked for help on its web site and received an entirely re-designed site. The Land Trust’s new web site is up-to-date and easy to navigate. Check it out at: www.nhlt.org.