

# landscene

Winter 2009

Natural Heritage  
LAND TRUST

## Wildcat Bluff: a Wisconsin River landmark conserved

Earlier this year, the Natural Heritage Land Trust permanently protected Wildcat Bluff, a prominent landmark on the upper end of Lake Wisconsin in Columbia County. The 160' sandstone bluff and 20 acres of forest and cliff face will forever be enjoyed in their natural state because of the generosity and strong conservation ethic of Richard Merrill and his family.

Wildcat Bluff came into Richard's family about 80 years ago when his wife Manetta's grandfather purchased it as a retirement getaway. Her grandparents loved the land and spent as much time there as possible. Manetta spent countless summer days sitting in the small cottage on the bluff with her grandmother, knitting. Outside, there were ponies and Jack, the pet crow that could fly only in circles. On wash day, the ponies would drink the soapy water and ol' Jack would pull the pins off the clothesline.

Richard first visited the property with Manetta shortly after they were married in the late 1930's. It was the same then as it is today – an oak woodland with a majestic view over the Wisconsin River. They spent their days walking the trails around the property, taking in the view, and canoeing. Richard and Manetta's children became the fourth generation of the family to enjoy the bluff. Richard would hike with them up and down the steep bluff to get to the river, hiding the fact that a public landing was accessible by car. The strenuous effort was part of the ex-

perience of the bluff.

As Richard and Manetta grew older, their sense of responsibility to preserve this special place for future generations deepened. They knew they wanted to somehow permanently protect it. Sadly, Manetta passed away in 2004. Richard decided afterwards to take action and he eventually found the Natural Heritage Land Trust.

Through the conservation easement the Land Trust now holds on the property, the unspoiled panorama of Wildcat Bluff enjoyed by the many boaters on the river is permanently protected. The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program provided funding to help permanently protect the bluff.

**Committed, conservation-minded landowners like Richard Merrill make the preservation of our precious local landscape possible.** Richard still visits the bluff regularly to maintain the cottage and soak in the splendor of the river and the trees. He anticipates a day when the land will no longer be in the Merrill family, but he rests assured that this special place in his family's history will forever provide future generations with the same gifts it has given him.

PERMANENTLY  
PROTECTED



JEFF STROBEL

Land Trust Executive Director Jim Welsh and landowner Richard Merrill at Wildcat Bluff.

**PERMANENTLY  
PROTECTED**

## Native American cultural site protected

The Land Trust and the Ho-Chunk Nation protected additional burial mounds at Kingsley Bend Mound Group.

In October the Natural Heritage Land Trust and the Ho-Chunk Nation permanently protected a piece of 2,000-year-old Wisconsin culture. The acquisition of roughly three acres adjacent to the Kingsley Bend Mound Group along the Wisconsin River south of the Dells adds to the preservation of Wisconsin's rich Native American history.

According to State Archaeologist John Broihahn, the Kingsley Bend area contains large, domed-shaped mounds encircled by earthen birds that swoop toward the Wisconsin River and bear-shaped mounds that prowl along the ridges. Over 80% of the burial mounds reported in Wisconsin have been destroyed over the last 170 years, making this acquisition all the more significant.

In addition to protecting four burial sites and buffering the main mound group from incompatible development, the acquisition offers more public space for appreciation of the mounds and the progress the Ho-Chunk Nation has made in restoring the oak savanna there.

The Wisconsin River is a precious resource and the Land Trust is proud to have completed its sixth project along it. The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program provided funding for this acquisition.

## Discovering Westport Drumlin

Have you ever explored a drumlin? On September 26th, a group of Land Trust members hiked up Westport Drumlin, part of the Empire Prairies State Natural Area east of Waunakee.

Several Land Trust members were on hand to describe the natural history of the drumlin. John Mason talked about the geology of the drumlin, describing how glacial action nearly 20,000 years ago created the elongated hill. Nicole Staskowski and Nancy Schlimgen helped hikers identify prairie plants, including stiff aster, downy gentian, and Indian grass.

The Land Trust acquired 73 acres on the east side of Westport Drumlin this spring. The Land Trust's goal is to establish a 360-degree prairie and grassland buffer around Westport Drumlin and improve public access to this important natural and educational resource.

MARIO QUINTANA



Land Trust members learned about Westport Drumlin during a fall field trip. From left to right, standing: Tom Brock, John Mason, Martha Frey, Dan Cornwell, Dan Reed, Kelda Roys, Scott Reich, Cary Reich, Larry Hitch; kneeling: Nancy Schlimgen, Kate Wipperman, Jeff Strobel, Dave Bernier, Pat Bernier, Brad Glass, Barbara Glass, Nicole Staskowski, Lou Bruch, and Jim Welsh.



## Legacy Circle Profile: Jim O'Brien

**J**im O'Brien sat down with the Land Trust's Martha Frey to talk about his recent legacy gifts to the Land Trust. Jim is Professor Emeritus, East Asian Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin – Madison. He and his wife Rumi were awarded the 2009 Prairie Enthusiasts of the Year Award. In addition, Jim is President of Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

**Martha:** Why do you support local land conservation?

**Jim:** Local land protection is a worthy cause. My wife Rumi and I like being out on the land, particularly on prairies close to home. We find that we enjoy a place even more when we help preserve it.

**Martha:** What planned gifts have you made to the Natural Heritage Land Trust?

**Jim:** I made an IRA distribution gift which paid for the Land Trust's appraisals of land at Westport Drumlin, east of Waunakee. And I designated the Land Trust to be the secondary co-beneficiary, along with The Prairie Enthusiasts, for an annuity.

**Martha:** Why did you choose to make an IRA distribution gift?

**Jim:** By supporting the Natural Heritage Land Trust with an IRA distribution gift, I was able to stretch the money. When I made the IRA distribution gift, I did so tax-free, thus I could make use of the full value from the IRA.

**Martha:** Why are you helping preserve Westport Drumlin?

**Jim:** There are two primary reasons. First, I like protecting rare lands because they represent a connection with the distant past. Second, I have confidence in the people who designated the Westport Drumlin landscape as worthy of protecting.

The Natural Heritage Land Trust is grateful to Jim and Rumi for their generosity.

The **Legacy Circle** is a group for people who choose to leave a land legacy by remembering the Natural Heritage Land Trust in a will or through other planned gifts.

Legacy Gifts make a difference. In 1986 Dr. Alice Watts left 115 acres to the Land Trust in her will. The proceeds from the sale of the property, which was permanently protected by a conservation easement, fund local land conservation to this day.

For more information about the Legacy Circle or planned giving, please contact us:

**Web:** [www.nhlt.org/plannedgiving.php](http://www.nhlt.org/plannedgiving.php) **Phone:** 258-9797 **E-mail:** [martha@nhlt.org](mailto:martha@nhlt.org)

## An Evening of Nordic Walking at Hickory Hill



On September 30th, Land Trust members hiked through hickories, maples, and oaks to reach the top of Hickory Hill Conservancy Park in the Village of Cross Plains and enjoy a beautiful fall view of the Black Earth Creek valley. The Land Trust helped the Village create the park in 2006. Members learned about the new Ice Age Trail segment which crosses Hickory Hill and tried out a fun form of exercise using Nordic walking poles provided by Fontana Sports Specialties.

**Dan Erdman and Jane Hyer on top of Hickory Hill Conservancy Park overlooking the Black Earth Creek valley**

Thank You to our Fall Hike Sponsors



## Legacy Gift Options

Legacy Gifts can take many forms. Bequests are the most common type. A **bequest** is a gift that you make in your will or trust to a named beneficiary that is effective at your death. By making a bequest to the Natural Heritage Land Trust, Inc., you create a lasting legacy for yourself and your family, reduce the potential for estate taxes to be imposed on your estate when you die, and retain the benefits of the assets while you are alive. The Land Trust would be honored to accept your bequest of cash, securities, real estate, or other tangible personal property.

You may also benefit the Land Trust by naming it as a beneficiary of your **life insurance policy**. In certain circumstances, your premium payments for the policy may be deductible.

**Through 12/31/09**, you can transfer funds tax-free from a traditional or Roth **IRA** directly to the Land Trust if you are age 70.5 or older. Because the distribution will not be counted as income for the traditional IRA owner, you will not be able to claim a charitable contribution deduction for the transfer. You may, however, benefit from making a charitable gift from your Roth IRA. Either way, you will benefit from knowing you made a big difference to the Land Trust for many years to come. You may also designate the Land Trust as a beneficiary of your traditional IRA or Roth IRA. Your estate will benefit from a charitable gift deduction for the transfer.

Consult your attorney or tax advisor about the various tax benefits and restrictions that may apply to your specific situation. The Land Trust is available to you and your advisors to answer questions or help arrange a planned gift. For more information, call Martha Frey at 258-9797.



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**Volunteers at one of the fall work parties at Patrick Marsh, restoring oak savanna wildlife habitat. A grant from the Natural Resources Foundation's C. D. Besadny Conservation Grant program enabled the Land Trust to purchase some of the equipment used by the volunteers.**

**YOU HAVE HELPED PERMANENTLY PROTECT 6,341 ACRES OF CHERISHED LOCAL LAND SINCE 1983**

The Natural Heritage Land Trust protects natural areas, wildlife habitat, working farms, healthy lakes and streams, and recreational land to provide a high quality of life in the Dane County region.

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**Thank yous:**

- Shirley Droste for preparing membership mailings.
- Heidi Habeger for providing advice on setting up our Facebook profile.
- Nicole Staskowski for coordinating and leading four field trips this year.
- Angie and Andy Wilcox-Hull, David Rice, and Heidi Habeger for participating in a focus group about our website.

**Make your year-end contribution today**

Please fill out this form and return it to Natural Heritage Land Trust, 303 S. Paterson St., Suite 6, Madison, WI 53703. *If you prefer to donate online, go to [www.nhlt.org](http://www.nhlt.org).*

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