In June, the Natural Heritage Land Trust purchased an 80-acre conservation easement on a scenic hill in the Town of Cross Plains, directly across the Black Earth Creek valley from Festge County Park in western Dane County. The conservation easement helps maintain the beautiful view across the picturesque valley from the overlook at Festge County Park. This fulfills a goal of the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan.

The conservation easement was purchased for less than fair market value thanks to the generosity of the landowners—Mike Festge, Sue Hineline, and Cindy Regan. The landowners are the children of Otto and Evelyn Festge who donated the initial acreage that would become Festge County Park and worked with the DNR on numerous conservation projects on the family farm. Through this new conservation easement, the Festge family legacy of conservation continues. Sue reflects, “The family has always loved to spend time on the land to enjoy nature—walk in the woods, enjoy the flowers, pick berries, observe wildlife, listen to the birds, plant hundreds of trees. We want to carry that forward to future generations.”

The property is mostly a hardwood forest, but roughly 11 acres are actively farmed, and a small area of dry prairie remains on the top of the hill. The prairie hosts a population of the state-threatened Hill’s thistle and state-endangered small skullcap. Over the years, the Festge family has invested a lot of time restoring the prairie by clearing trees and brush.

Across the valley at Festge County Park, volunteers have been actively clearing invasive vegetation from the oak woodland and prairie that hosts the grand overlook of Black Earth Creek. The transformation has been nothing less than astonishing. The approach to the overlook, which was once a thick tunnel of buckthorn, is now an open vista of majestic oaks and returning native ground cover.

The viewshed from the overlook is now even more special and worth continued protection. Conservation easements are the perfect tool to accomplish this goal. By purchasing only the restrictions needed to satisfy conservation goals, the Land Trust saves taxpayer money and keeps the land in private ownership and on the property tax rolls.

Thanks go to the Festge family for selling the easement at less than the fair market value and to the Dane County Conservation Fund, Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Northeastern Wisconsin Audubon Society’s Wisconsin Land Fund, and Natural Heritage Land Trust members for making this project possible.

Westport Drumlín Day
Saturday, October 1, 2011
1:00 – 4:00 pm

Although it is small in area, the Westport Drumlín State Natural Area, east of Waunakee, provides a very detailed illustration of Wisconsin’s rich natural heritage of prairie and oak savanna. As you visit the drumlin, try thinking about it in the same way as you might about the Brazilian rainforest, the African Serengeti, or the Florida Everglades: a beautiful, biologically-rich, but imperiled place.

Bring your friends and family and join us for a fun afternoon in the great outdoors. You will hike the ancient drumlin and learn about prairie plants, oak savannas and more from the experts. There will be time to socialize. Refreshments will be served.

This event is free of charge, but space is limited and pre-registration is required.
To register or learn more, please contact Heidi Habeger at heidi@nhlt.org or (608) 258-9797.
New members: thank you for joining

New members are a breath of fresh air. In total, 30 new members joined the Natural Heritage Land Trust this spring.

Anonymous (4)  
Dede Bangs  
Connie Bettin  
Conrad & Margaret Campbell  
Tom & Winn Eckert  
Elaine Gadzicki & Jim Malter  
Richard S. Grant & Stephanie E. Reynolds  
Ron & Audrey Haessig  
Julie Hankes  
Mark Hazelbaker  
Jean Knickmeyer  
Fred Kamnetz  
James & Betty Manson  
Nancy McGill  
John & Cindy Mehl  
Nancy Mladenoff  
Mark Regan  
Ron Rosner  
William Rowe  
Roy & Beverly Runstrom  
Dennis & Judy Skogen  
Doug & Janet Wadsworth  
Eleanor White  
Wisconsin Archeological Survey, Inc  
Nancy Worcester  
Carol Ziesemer  
Rich & Andrea Zietko

These new members join over 700 active members of Natural Heritage Land Trust in supporting local land conservation. The Land Trust will use contributions made by all members to do what we do best: permanently protect prairies, rivers and streams, wetlands, woodlands and working farms in the greater Dane County area.

New member contributions this spring were matched dollar for dollar, up to $2,000, by board and staff members: William Van Haren (Blue Mounds), Roz Gausman (Town of Dunn), Angela James (Madison), Mike Dubis (Cross Plains), Mariana Weinhold (Shorewood), Darcy Kind (Madison) and Jim Welsh (Madison).
Henslow’s Sparrow sings

On May 7, 2011, Land trust Conservation Specialist Caleb Pourchot led a bird walk for Land trust members. Development Committee member Natalie Erdman welcomed everyone to rattlesnake ridge, a 290-acre conservation easement north of Dodgeville which protects a wooded ridge and valley landscape along Sneed Creek. In general, the birds were quiet that morning; however, a Henslow’s sparrow, an uncommon and inconspicuous bird, perched up in the grass and sang for all to see and hear. The Henslow’s sparrow’s numbers are declining largely because of habitat loss. It was inspiring to see this threatened bird thriving on permanently protected land!

Special thanks to conservation easement land owners Brad and Barbara Glass for hosting the field trip. And thanks to Madison Audubon Society for providing loaner optics for the bird walk.

Volunteer Web Developers Kevin St. Angel and Tim Mair

Thanks to volunteers Kevin St. Angel and Tim Mair, the Natural Heritage Land Trust has a new and improved website. The new content and photo manager application, written by Kevin, makes it quick and easy for NHLT staff to update the web site. Website highlights include: Interactive map of permanently protected lands; photo gallery featuring pictures from field trips; and safe and secure processing of credit cards via PayPal. Membership Coordinator Heidi Habeger collaborated with Kevin and Tim on the new website.

What other web sites have you developed? Tim: Kevin and I work at Sony Creative Software where we are part of the team that designs and programs SonyCreativeSoftware.com and ACIDplanet.com. Kevin: The first site I created was for the Illinois Pollution Control Board in 1995. Before working for Sony, I managed a web boutique out of the Steven’s Point area. We ran the websites Chef’s Catalog, Paragon Gifts, Indiana Botanic Gardens, Bits & Pieces, Stewart Outdoors, and many more.

What are your roles at Sony Creative Software? Kevin: I am Director, eCommerce. Tim is Art Director.

Why do you provide pro bono web development services to NHLT? Kevin: I am sympathetic to conservation causes. In college I minored in biology and considered a career in environmental work, but instead pursued web programming. In 2004 I designed the Land Trust’s website as part of the Knupp and Watson Goodstock program, which my wife Erica started. That was seven years ago, and I’ve been volunteering ever since.

Which NHLT permanently protected lands have you visited? Tim: Hickory Hill which is near my home in Cross Plains.

What would you tell a friend to encourage them to support NHLT? Kevin: NHLT has a very high protected acres per staff member ratio. Something like 7,000/3.5! In other words, NHLT is an effective land conservation organization with really low overhead. When you contribute to NHLT, you know your money will be put to good use.

Check out the new conservation lands map. Go to www.nhlt.org and click on “map” in the upper right hand corner of the home page.

Additional land protected at Kingsley Bend

In June the Land Trust assisted the Ho-Chunk Nation in purchasing an additional 17 acres of land at the Kingsley Bend Mound Group just south of the Wisconsin Dells in Columbia County. Located on the east side of the Wisconsin River, Kingsley Bend contains several large dome-shaped mounds and a variety of animal-shaped effigy mounds. The new acquisition buffers the mound group from incompatible development and helps preserve the landscape in which the mounds were created. This is our second project at Kingsley Bend: in 2009 we helped the Ho-Chunk Nation protect a three-acre tract with several burial mounds. The total permanently protected acreage at Kingsley Bend is now 52 acres. The site is open to the public; if you visit Kingsley Bend, please respect the cultural features by not walking on them.

Conservation easement land owner Barbara Glass and Land Trust member Dr. Pam Heilman. (Inset) This henslow’s sparrow (Ammodramus henslowii) sang for Land Trust members on the spring birdwalk at Rattlesnake Ridge.
YOU HAVE HELPED PERMANENTLY PROTECT 7,294 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.

Rural Preservation continues in the Town of Dunn

In March, the Town of Dunn and Natural Heritage Land Trust permanently protected 38 acres along Lalor Road, which is designated as a “Rustic Road” by the Wisconsin DOT because of its scenic beauty. This was our third conservation project along Lalor Road and it adds to the many hundreds of acres protected in the Lalor Road/Waubesa Wetlands area.

The property is owned by descendants of William Lalor, an Irish immigrant that settled here in 1848. The original 150-acre Lalor farmstead immediately to the north was permanently protected in 1999.

Since 1997, we have helped protect nearly 2,700 acres as part of the Town of Dunn’s groundbreaking Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program—the first in Wisconsin. This highly successful program has helped to maintain the viability of agricultural operations in the town, preserved its scenic, rural character, and created buffers for high-quality natural resources. We thank the people of the Town of Dunn for their continued support of this program and our members for making our work on these projects possible.

Thank you to the Westport Drumlín kiosk team

“In the end, we conserve only what we love. We will only love what we understand. We will only understand what we are taught.” Baba Dioum, Senegalese Poet

During May and June, Tom Brock, Judy Borke, and Dave Mickelson did research, wrote text, and gathered images for the new Westport Drumlín kiosk. The purpose of this informal education project is to help visitors enjoy the native prairies and oak savannas at Westport Drumlín, understand the geology of the area, and appreciate the history of the Town of Westport. Cary Reich is designing the kiosk display. The new kiosk will be unveiled in the fall.