

WISCONSIN update

Spring 2017

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Chiwaukee Prairie © Willard Clay Photography

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Conservation Spotlight

Otter Creek, Baxter's Hollow © Steve S. Meyer



Our trademark work of protecting Wisconsin's lands and waters continues with these projects completed between September 2016 and January 2017.

Baxter's Hollow, Sauk County

We added 40 acres of forest to our largest preserve in the Baraboo Hills. Lovely Otter Creek winds through Baxter's Hollow, and more than 40 species of birds breed there, making the Hollow one of the most important nesting areas for forest-dwelling birds in southern Wisconsin.

Honey Creek, Sauk County

Honey Creek Valley, nestled into the western edge of the Baraboo Hills, is rich in wildflowers and birdsong. We added a little over 70 acres to our Honey Creek Preserve, connecting two disjunct pieces of the preserve and expanding on the forested area protected alongside Wisconsin Society for Ornithology land for warblers and other migratory songbirds.

Catherine Wolter Wilderness Area, Vilas County

We protected a little over three acres at this Northwoods preserve. It is located in the heart of the Wolter Wilderness Area and includes the final piece of unprotected shore line on Upper Aimer Lake. The expansive forests and wild lakes make this preserve a great place to walk, snowshoe and enjoy the beauty of nature.

Chiwaukee Prairie, Kenosha County

We protected just over 58 acres at Chiwaukee Prairie. See pages 4-5 for more details.

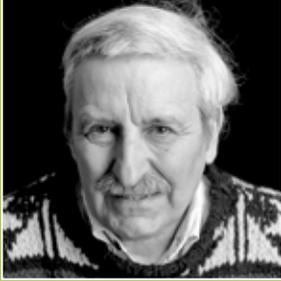
Mink River, Door County

Through a combination of acquisition and a conservation easement, we protected four parcels of land totaling 135 acres at Mink River Preserve. In the process, we expanded the preserve so that it now extends from the marshes of the Mink River Estuary on Lake Michigan to the Niagara Escarpment on the Green Bay side of the Door Peninsula. The land protects river shoreline, dolomite cliffs and wetland habitat that is important for the rare Hine's emerald dragonfly, many species of migratory and breeding birds, and for replenishment of groundwater.

A Door County couple donated a conservation easement on their 70 acres at Mink River, along with funding that will become part of an endowment we use to meet our obligation to regularly monitor the easement. Their land provides important habitat for migratory birds, and we are grateful for their generous gift to protect this special place.

The Great Lakes We Depend On Depend On Us

Our five magnificent Great Lakes are the world's most abundant source of available fresh water, and we depend on them for everything from drinking water to transportation, irrigation and recreation. Today, the lands and waters in the Great Lakes region face bigger threats than ever before, due in large part to our dependence on them. But there's still time to save the Great Lakes we love. Learn how The Nature Conservancy is helping to protect and restore the Great Lakes we all depend on. Visit nature.org/greatlakes



In Memory: Dr. Hugh Iltis

In December, the world lost a great conservation champion, and The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin said goodbye to the last of its three founders, Dr. Hugh Iltis.

“Hugh was a force of nature and for nature. He inspired us with his passion for Wisconsin’s special places,” said Mary Jean Huston, who directs the Conservancy’s work in Wisconsin. “In addition to being one of our three founders, Hugh is also personally responsible for making the case to conserve many of Wisconsin’s best places; places like Chiewaukee Prairie, Spring Green Prairie and the Baraboo Hills.”

In 1960, together with Gene Roark and University of Wisconsin Madison professor Joseph Hickey, Hugh founded The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. Aware that special places were being lost and, along with them, the plant and animal life they harbored, he joined with others who firmly believed in the importance of conserving our native habitats for future generations.

Hugh served on the Conservancy’s board for 16 years, when the organization was entirely led by volunteers. His knowledge of plant taxonomy and systematics was invaluable in helping the fledgling organization identify and prioritize the natural areas it would seek to protect.

In April 2017, he was inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of

Fame posthumously in recognition of the tremendous impact he had on conservation in Wisconsin, nationally and globally. We share a few comments from friends and colleagues who supported Hugh’s nomination.

“Hugh stressed conservation from the time he first set foot on the University of Wisconsin campus. Carrying on in the tradition of John Muir and Aldo Leopold, he made everyone who would listen aware of the beauties of Wisconsin, of the way they had been ravaged, and of the importance of conserving them and creating a stable state that would remain beautiful for generations to come.” **Peter Raven, President Emeritus, Missouri Botanical Garden**

“Dr. Iltis was the co-describer of the fourth known species of *Zea*, namely *Z. diploperennis*, a perennial species found in 1978 in the Manantlán mountains of Mexico. Subsequently he was recognized as the godfather of Mexico’s newly established Manantlán Biosphere Reserve. That discovery of perennial corn has had a profound influence on the selection and adoption of new disease resistant varieties of corn for Wisconsin and other parts of the globe.” **Orie Loucks, Former Chair, the Scientific Areas Preservation Council of Wisconsin**

“Hugh Iltis has been a friend of ours for over 40 years. If you’re a friend of his, you are,



LEFT: © Brent Nicastro ABOVE: Hugh Iltis (right) and Phil Sander at Chiewaukee Prairie in 1966. © The Nature Conservancy

by default, a student of his because not a moment goes by when you aren’t learning something. It is because of our association with a force like Hugh that in 1988 we bought a 120-acre woods and fallow crop field surrounded by a nice fringe of remnant prairie and savanna with a nascent population of state-threatened, federally-endangered Kameron blue butterflies. We have dedicated our retired lives to its restoration and management. The butterflies have increased 200 fold.”

David and Shelley Hamel

A distinguished scientist, teacher, environmentalist and passionate spokesperson for conservation, Hugh dedicated his life to understanding our natural world and conserving it. We miss his passion and the bold voice he gave to the lands, waters, plants and animals we love and work so diligently to protect.

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Land Purchase Protects Life-giving Water at Chiwaukee Prairie

From marsh marigolds and shooting stars in spring to gentians and blazingstar in late summer and fall, Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area is beautiful in all seasons. But watch where you're walking or you may get your feet wet.

Chiwaukee Prairie is a series of undulating sandy ridges and wet swales that developed as water levels in Lake Michigan dropped after the last glacier retreated from Wisconsin. This mix of wet and dry habitats is one of the reasons the prairie is home to more than 400 different wildflowers, grasses and other plants.

"A consistent flow of groundwater is a key ingredient to the diversity of life at Chiwaukee Prairie," said Nick Miller, Nature Conservancy science director in Wisconsin. "The water feeds the fens and wet prairies, providing the moisture and nutrients like calcium that enable rare plants like grass-of-Parnassus and lesser fringed gentian to survive."

Last winter, The Nature Conservancy protected just over 58 acres of land west of Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area in Kenosha County that is vital to the flow

of water that maintains the health of the globally-important wetlands.

The property, which the Conservancy purchased from a Wisconsin development corporation is a critical groundwater recharge area for the adjacent State Natural Area. When rain falls on the dry, sandy portions of the property, it infiltrates through the soil into the water table below and eventually flows east to the prairie. At some places in the prairie, this groundwater comes to the surface, bathing plants and walking shoes alike.

Proposed development of these higher, drier parts of the property into mixed use residential and commercial space would have threatened the supply of groundwater the prairie depends on. It would also have eliminated one of the largest expanses of plant and wildlife habitat remaining in this rapidly-

urbanizing area along the coastal corridor between Milwaukee and Chicago.

"Groundwater modeling done by the U.S. Geological Survey predicts that development of the land west of Chiwaukee Prairie could have dropped groundwater levels in the fens and wet prairies by as much as several feet, threatening some exceptional wetlands and rare native plants," Miller said.

A Haven for Wildlife

Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area is part of the Chiwaukee Prairie Illinois Beach Lake Plain. This 4,500-acre landscape represents the highest quality remaining coastal area in southeast Wisconsin and in all of Illinois, and was designated a Ramsar Wetland of International Significance in 2015.

"Together with our partners at the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund,



LEFT: Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area in bloom. © Barbara Jean Slane

TOP: Chiwaukee Prairie provides important habitat for resident and migratory birds including this green heron. © Kent Mason

RIGHT: Map of Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area. © Stephanie Judge/The Nature Conservancy



“A consistent flow of groundwater is a key ingredient to the diversity of life at Chiwaukee Prairie.”

—Nick Miller

the Wisconsin and Illinois departments of natural resources, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Village of Pleasant Prairie, and the Lake County Forest Preserve District in Illinois, we have protected thousands of nearly contiguous acres in this unique and beautiful lake plain for native plants and wildlife,” said Stephanie Judge, Conservancy land protection specialist who negotiated the recent acquisition.

The Lake Plain, including the recently acquired land, is a high priority stopover site for migratory land birds, in particular the migratory shore birds and waterfowl that move up and down the shore of Lake Michigan through the densely-populated area that includes the cities of Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine and Chicago. One example is the piping plover, which is endangered in Wisconsin and the U.S., but recently made a comeback on Lake Michigan in Green Bay.

“By protecting these diverse wetland habitats, The Nature Conservancy has ensured that hundreds to thousands of

migrating birds will have suitable places to stop, rest and forage along the shore as they migrate every spring and fall,” said Kim Grveles, Avian Ecologist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The Lake Plain is also home to one of the largest and most well-studied populations of Blanding’s turtles, a rare species in Wisconsin and an endangered species in Illinois. According to Gary Glowacki, wildlife biologist with the Lake County Forest Preserves in Illinois, who is doing research on Blanding’s turtles at Chiwaukee, the land just acquired by the Conservancy will offer important buffer habitat for this species. Blanding’s turtles depend on both wetland and open upland habitat for survival. Females will travel up to three miles to lay eggs in dry, well-drained soils.

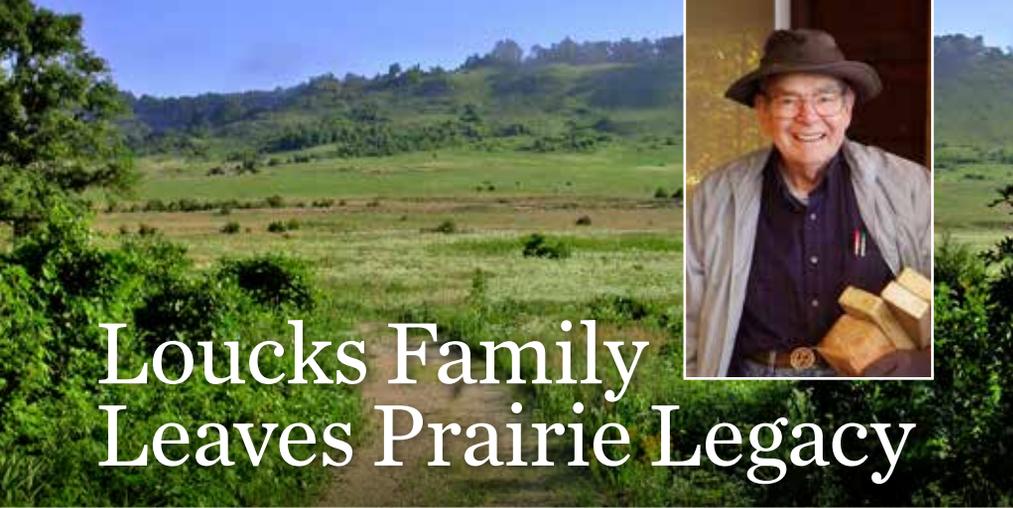
Restore the Land and the Water Will Flow

“Protecting this piece of land was the first step to safeguard the groundwater flow to Chiwaukee,” Miller said. “But much of it was tiled and drained for agricultural use,

and the water the prairie should receive as cool, clean, calcium-rich groundwater is instead being shunted through culverts into ditches. So the next step is returning the land to a more natural condition to help restore some of the groundwater flow Chiwaukee Prairie has lost.”

The new property contains 11 acres of wetland and more than 20 acres of potentially-restorable wetland habitat. We have applied for additional funding to restore the wetlands by removing the drainage tiles and filling the ditches. We will also control invasive brush and trees and restore the remainder of the land to prairie and oak savanna.

Restoration will take some time. Meanwhile, we hope you will visit Chiwaukee Prairie and enjoy the beauty of the wildflowers and the birdsong. But watch your step!



Loucks Family Leaves Prairie Legacy

ABOVE: Spring Green Prairie. © Mike McDowell INSET: Dr. Orie Loucks. Courtesy of Loucks family

As a young botany professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the 1960s and 70s, Orie Loucks took his students into Wisconsin's forests and prairies to study the trees, flowers, grasses and ferns in much the same way his father did with him on their southern Ontario farm in his youth.

At the same time, Orie was helping the fledgling Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy protect special habitats in places like the Baraboo Hills and Spring Green Prairie. The organization was run entirely by volunteers during those years, and it was an amazing time of growth and land conservation activity.

Orie left Wisconsin in 1978 to take jobs first in Indiana and later in Ohio. He continued to champion conservation of native habitats, joining Nature Conservancy boards in both states and eventually serving on the Conservancy's global Board of Governors.

Upon his return to Wisconsin in 2015, Orie again directed his conservation energy toward The Nature Conservancy. He started with a series of meetings with staff regarding his vision for long-term management and maintenance of Spring Green Preserve.

Before his death in September 2016, Orie and Elinor, his wife of 60 years, and their children Eric, Kimberly and Ted made a gift to the Conservancy to support research and land management at the preserve.

"It was Dad's idea to make this gift, but we all have good memories of Spring Green Prairie and feel great about it," said Ted.

While on the Wisconsin board in the early years, Orie chaired the Spring Green Prairie Management Committee, helping to develop a management plan for the prairie and organizing volunteer work days to cut invasive trees and shrubs and

carry out prescribed burns to keep the prairie healthy.

"Dad knew that prairies needed continuous management to keep the invasive species from coming back," said Kimberly, "and he wanted the gift to support future management at Spring Green Prairie."

The Loucks family's gift will go toward an endowment to help pay for land management and support a two-year research study to learn more about the reptiles that live there.

"We will be working with Professor Josh Kapfer and his students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to better understand the population sizes, locations and movements of reptiles at Spring Green Prairie," said Hannah Spaul, Conservancy director of land management. "What we learn will help us make the best decisions we can about when and where to conduct prescribed burns and remove brush to benefit both the prairie vegetation and the reptiles."

Orie visited Spring Green Prairie for the last time in August 2016. Kimberly recalls that her dad looked across the prairie and marveled at the uniqueness of the prickly pear cactus, birds, reptiles and insects. "Dad said, 'Wouldn't this be a great legacy?'"

Yes, it will be thanks to a man who lived his passion for nature and passed it on to the next generation.

Leaving a Legacy

Making a bequest is a simple way to leave a legacy of land and water for future generations.

We are grateful to the eight individuals who made bequests ranging from \$2,000 to \$871,000 for a total of \$1,370,447 donated to the Conservancy between August 2016 and February 2017. Their gifts will conserve land and water in the Baraboo Hills, northern Wisconsin, Door County, Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, the Mukwonago River watershed and Brazil.

IN CELEBRATION

The Nature Conservancy has received contributions in honor of the following individuals between August 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017.

Mr. and Mrs. David S. Addison, Eric and MJ Andersen, Andy Cross, Loyce Y. Jones, Mark Kinzer, Max G. Lagally, Mary A. Marasco, Jon E. Pettibone, Trish Stocking

PRESERVING MORE THAN A MEMORY

Memorial contributions from the relatives and friends of the following people have been

received for the protection of natural areas both within and beyond Wisconsin August 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017.

Ben Anderson, Hilda Anna Helkenn Beyer, William Thomas Burt, Jan Chilsen, Cheryl S. Demark, Dean Faber, Judith Frahm, Paul G. Gengler, Jean Hoff, Hugh Iltis, Marsha Ernst Krueger, Gene Larson, Orie L. Loucks, Fred Lubber, Roy Lukes, David Medaris, David Middleton, Miriam Nathenson, Helen Reynolds, Edward Schumacher, Robin Stratton, Olive Thomson

2017 Field Trips Let's Get Outside!



Nature Conservancy field trip in Door County. © Bruce Ambuel

Explore our magnificent state on a field trip with The Nature Conservancy. To register, contact **Maureen O'Brien** at mobrien@tnc.org or **608-316-6426** unless noted differently. More details about each trip are on our Web site at nature.org/wisconsin in the Field Trips and Events section.

Oak Restoration for the Birds at Hemlock Draw

Saturday, July 8, 7:30 to 10:30 a.m.
Limit 20 people; register by July 5

Enjoy a summer morning hike to learn about the Conservancy's efforts to maintain oak woodlands and the importance of this work to the ecological health of the Baraboo Hills – especially the birds. Trip leaders Nature Conservancy Baraboo Hills coordinator Ann Calhoun and Mike Mossman, retired Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources ecologist, will share results of recent bird surveys and discuss how maintaining oak benefits bird habitat. The morning hike may afford the opportunity to see and hear bird species

utilizing the restoration area firsthand! This is a moderate level hike. (We will not descend into Hemlock Draw).

Regal Fritillary Butterflies at Military Ridge

Saturday, July 22, 10:00 to 12:00 noon
Limit 10 people; register by July 19

Join Conservancy land manager Caleb Klima for a hike through the prairie in search of the rare regal fritillary butterfly. No sightings promised, but chances are good in July when regals take wing. The prairie will be in bloom, so wildflower sightings are likely, and Caleb will share the story of 20 years of citizen science monitoring of regals. You'll want good hiking shoes as terrain is quite hilly.

Fall Color in Door County

Saturday, October 14, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Limit 30 people; register by October 11

Lulu Lake Preserve protects a wide variety of habitats, including prairie, oak savanna, sedge meadow, fen and bog. Our Southeastern Wisconsin Land Steward Jerry Ziegler will discuss the history of the preserve from use of the lake in the 1800s as an important source of ice for home refrigeration to the summer camps on the lake shore that served thousands of Milwaukee youth. September is also a great time to view late summer wildflowers. Light refreshments will be provided.

To register, contact **Sandie Custer** at scuster@tnc.org or **920-743-8695**.

Door County Festival of Nature

May 26 – 28, 2017

May is amazing in Door County! See wildflowers, warblers and more on field trips to Nature Conservancy preserves and other natural areas.

Visit RidgesSanctuary.org



Showy lady's-slippers © John A. Harrington

Wisconsin Nature Notes

In May, spring is in full swing in Wisconsin, and warblers and wildflowers are back! Wisconsin Nature Notes is your source for what's singing, blooming, creeping and crawling in the Badger State.

Listen in today! nature.org/wisconsinnaturenotes



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Thanks to Nature Conservancy members like you, 2016 was a great year of conserving the lands, waters and wildlife we all love in Wisconsin! Here's just a snapshot of what we accomplished together:

- protected 390 acres of Wisconsin's most beautiful and diverse lands and waters for wildlife and people
- planted 6,000 trees in Door County, and we're restoring oak trees in the Baraboo Hills
- brought fire back to 927 acres of prairies, savannas and wetlands on our own land and helped partners burn another 2,315 acres to keep habitat open and healthy
- graduated our first class of Wisconsin fellows and another great group of summer interns, empowering the next generation of conservation leaders.

See our beautiful slideshow with more highlights at nature.org/wisconservation2016.

Thank You, Nature Conservancy Members!



Bullfrog © Douglas Rodda



The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin is on Facebook! Get quick updates on our work and the latest nature news. Like us at www.Facebook.com/TheNatureConservancyinWisconsin today!