

Kenosha/Racine Land Trust
Community Newsletter for November 30, 2003

Land trust makes great strides in protecting local landscape

By Chuck Haubrich

The end of the year and the first cold winds of winter come at a time of renewed optimism and opportunity for the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust.

In 2003 we have completed two projects that permanently protect 24 acres, and we have begun work on four new projects. When these projects are finished, total land protected will have increased from 92 acres just a year ago to 484 acres. The protected acres come from conservation easements on privately owned lands and on commonly owned lands in conservation subdivisions.

Why the sudden increase in activity this year? There is no one reason, but rather a growing recognition throughout the community of the value of open space, the need to protect it, and the ability of the Land Trust to assist in those efforts.

Helping individual landowners

Aldo Leopold, the famous Wisconsin conservationist, wrote about developing a land ethic in his 1949 book, A Sand County Almanac:

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

A primary goal of the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust is to help landowners who have such an ethic protect their land from development. Leopold would be pleased to hear that increasing numbers of Racine and Kenosha County landowners are contacting the Land Trust to do just that. These people love their farmland, prairie, woods, and wetlands and loathe the thought of the land being bulldozed some day for another development.

In the past few months K/RLT has met with two landowners to explain how a conservation easement could protect their lands. I look forward to relating their stories after completing their easements.

Applying the land ethic to developments

The Land Trust also partners with communities with a similar land ethic to help create conservation subdivisions, developments that permanently preserve a portion of the land. Working with developers is not at odds with the Land Trust mission of protecting land; these co-operative projects ensure that a significant portion of each subdivision is set aside for conservation. In some cases, farm fields are restored to ecologically productive

environments. Other easements may specify that land stay in agricultural production. In any case, large tracts of land are kept intact, rather than being subdivided.

The Kenosha/Racine Land Trust can support conservation subdivisions by holding or co-holding the easements on protected subdivision lands, by helping to create land restoration plans, and by monitoring the conservation lands to ensure compliance with easements. We can also assist and educate subdivision homeowners who want to learn more about the unique features of their common environmental lands.

Building an unusual development

A forward-thinking ordinance in the Town of Caledonia now ensures permanent protection of 40 percent of the land in urban developments and 60 percent of the land in rural developments. Working with the Town and Legacy Development, K/RLT recently accepted a conservation easement for the Woodland Pines subdivision. Legacy brings this unique subdivision to Caledonia for people seeking single-family home living in a wooded area without the typical yard maintenance.

What makes this development unusual is that this relatively small urban development contains 20 single-family homes on only 9 acres and still preserves about 70 percent of the total land. To make this possible, residents will own only their house footprint and 15 feet around it. The remaining land, which consists mainly of pine forest and wetlands, will be owned and managed by the subdivision residents and protected from further development.

The Kenosha/Racine Land Trust jointly holds the easement on the conserved lands with the Town of Caledonia. The land trust will monitor forest and wetland improvement plans, as well as ensure overall easement compliance.

Connecting preserved areas

Conservation subdivisions are a good start, however, past practice in Wisconsin, has been to consider each subdivision as a separate entity. When these preserved lands lie isolated from each other, their environmental benefit is severely limited.

The next step up the ladder is a community neighborhood plan that connects environmental corridors and optimizes land use. Aldo Leopold himself recognized and wrote about the need for community development plans that include careful consideration of the environment.

One goal of the current Town of Caledonia neighborhood plans will be to connect open lands as much as possible. Along with the 60 percent open space requirement for rural area subdivisions, the potential exists to create large, contiguous, environmentally productive natural areas. Leopold would say that Caledonia is beginning to develop a land ethic.

Learning more

If you would like to receive the land trust newsletter, or learn about options for preserving your own land, or help us support local land use planning and open space preservation, contact me at the numbers given below.

And to further understand the concept of a land ethic, I highly recommend reading [A Sand County Almanac](#). Although the book is not light reading, those with a serious interest in conservation will surely find it inspiring. Even though it was written more than fifty years ago, you will be amazed at its relevance to the development issues most communities face today.

Chuck Haubrich is president of the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust, Inc., which protects open space and natural areas in Racine and Kenosha counties. Learn more about K/RLT at www.krlt.org. Contact the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153. Telephone 262-552-6861 or email info@krlt.org.