

**10/5/06**

## **Land Trusts Celebrate Conservation Successes**

Gathering Waters Conservancy, a statewide non-profit conservation organization, hosted its 4<sup>th</sup> annual ***Land Conservation Leadership Awards Celebration*** on Thursday, September 28<sup>th</sup> at the Monona Terrace in Madison. Nancy Pierce and I represented K/RLT at the event and came away energized and encouraged about the state of conservation in Wisconsin. It was a joy to celebrate the successes of the four award winners recognized that evening.

### **Local Land Trusts Build Partnerships and Leverage Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Funding**

Besides the leadership and perseverance of the award winners, common threads in their efforts were building partnerships with other organizations and leveraging contributions from these with matching funds from the Wisconsin Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund.

Locally, with a very similar approach, and particularly Knowles-Nelson funding, The Caledonia Conservancy was able to purchase and permanently protect over 20 acres of old growth beech-maple forest called the Tabor Woods.

Following these examples, K/RLT is seeking partners and Knowles-Nelson funding to preserve land along the Des Plaines River in Pleasant Prairie. We are currently negotiating with two parties on purchases totaling 30 acres.

### **Gathering Waters Conservancy Announces Effort to Preserve Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund**

Common to the projects of the Celebration winners and those of the local land trusts, is Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funding. It is the only source of significant state revenue available to land trusts for permanently protecting high value natural areas in Wisconsin. With the Stewardship Fund up for renewal in three years, GWC announced at the Celebration that they were launching a major initiative to educate the public and legislature on the importance of continuing the program. Without it land trusts would not be able to bring stories like those of the four Celebration award winners. And more importantly, the people of Wisconsin would see many pristine natural areas developed rather than preserved for the enjoyment of all.

Following is the press release from GWC which preceded the Awards Celebration.

### **Conservation Award Winners Exemplify Partnerships**

In today's world of tight budgets and competing priorities, public-private partnerships are more important than ever in conserving our natural resources. This year's four award winners have successfully forged partnerships between private citizens, businesses, organizations, and local and state governments to protect spectacular natural areas.

“Our award winners have proven themselves as masters of collaboration,” said Althea Dotzour, interim executive director of Gathering Waters Conservancy. “By leveraging the strengths and resources of their partners, they have been able to accomplish more land and water conservation than any of them could have done alone.”

Dotzour credits the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, Wisconsin’s premier land protection program, for making each of the award winners’ accomplishments possible. To date, the Stewardship Fund has been used to permanently protect 450,000 acres statewide. In addition to funding state land purchases, Stewardship has provided \$50 million in grants to land trusts who have matched the state’s investment dollar-for-dollar.

“This event is an opportunity to recognize and thank the people who strive for excellence in land conservation,” says Dotzour. “Our award winners have created new models to demonstrate how people can work together to protect the places that make Wisconsin a great place to live.”

The event will be co-hosted by John Torinus, CEO of Serigraph Inc. (a recent Green Tier inductee), and Art Harrington, president of Gathering Waters Conservancy.

For more information about the event or this year’s award winners, visit [www.gatheringwaters.org/awards](http://www.gatheringwaters.org/awards) or call (608) 251-9131.

Gathering Waters Conservancy’s mission is to help the people and communities of Wisconsin protect their land and water by strengthening the state’s land trust movement.

## **Gathering Waters Conservancy's 2006 Land Conservation Leadership Award Winners**

*Conservationist of the Year* – **Kristen Wilhelm** is a founding member of the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy, Vice-Chair of the City of Franklin Environmental Commission, and staff member with the River Revitalization Foundation. Through Kristen's vision, tenacity and passion for land protection, Milwaukee County citizens are guaranteed access to pristine natural areas in the heart of expanding urban development. Most recently, Kristen worked tirelessly over the course of several years to protect the Fitzsimmons Woods area in the City of Franklin. Franklin Woods is made up of more than 20 acres of high quality maple-beech forest, containing woodlands, wetlands, and rare flora and fauna, and was purchased with the help of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Funds by the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy in February 2006.

*Land Trust of the Year* – **The Nature Conservancy – Wisconsin Chapter** has set an outstanding example of conservation innovation and leadership. In 2006, The Conservancy played an instrumental role in the protection of the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest project, the largest land conservation transaction in state history. By partnering with the State of Wisconsin, Conservation Forestry LLC and Forest Investment Associates, TNC helped protect over 64,000 acres of hardwood forest in northeastern Wisconsin. The Wild Rivers project, through conservation easements and public ownership, preserves public recreational access to wild rivers, lakes and forest, while ensuring sustainably managed working forests. This historic conservation success would not have been possible without the hard work of the staff and board of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin.

*Policy Maker of the Year* – **The City of La Crosse** has made tremendous contributions to the preservation of over 700 acres of blufflands along the Mississippi River. Since 2001, the City has partnered with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy to implement the La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program. This collaborative conservation initiative works to protect the region's signature landscape feature – an eight-mile stretch of the Mississippi River Blufflands bordering the city. Through this partnership, over \$1 million dollars have been raised for land acquisition, protecting almost half of their 3,000 acre goal. Neighboring towns are watching La Crosse closely, and it appears that this collaboration will become a model for other upper Midwest communities.

*Harold "Bud" Jordahl Stewardship Award* – **Geoffrey Maclay** is a founder and president of the Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation, and founding member of Gathering Waters Conservancy. He has long been recognized as "one of the fathers of Wisconsin's land trust movement," and has been a lifelong advocate for private land conservation. For more than thirty years, Geoff has led efforts to protect over 2,000 areas of natural areas, wetland, woodland and other valued land resources within the Cedar Lakes Watershed. Recently, Geoff has worked closely with the DNR, the National Park Service and the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation to protect some of the last remaining Kettle Moraine topography in Washington County.

*If you are interested in helping K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Spring/Summer Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at [www.krlt.org](http://www.krlt.org).*

*Chuck Haubrich is president of the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust, president of the Seno Woodland Education Center, and treasurer of Gathering Waters Conservancy, the Wisconsin land trust coalition.*