



Wisconsin's Stewardship Fund

ENTERS A NEW ERA

Connecting
people with
nature

*“A true
conservationist
is a man who
knows that the
world is not given
by his fathers
but borrowed
from his
children.”*

• John James Audubon

Why Stewardship?

Building on a major conservation achievement.

Natasha Kassulke

In Wisconsin our natural resources are not just a part of our landscape, they're a part of who we are. As a state, we value our hunting and fishing traditions and access to nature — even for those who live in our largest metropolitan areas.

In his 2007-09 budget, Governor Jim Doyle recognized the importance of protecting these natural resources by calling on a major conservation achievement, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, and proposing its reauthoriza-

tion from 2010 to 2020. The Legislature agreed, and the annual bonding authority was increased from \$60 million to \$86 million for this 10-year period, which reauthorizes the fund while maintaining its historical purchasing power. Proponents of the increase argued successfully that as land prices increase so too must funding for Stewardship.

Land value appreciation in the last 30 years has put even solidly middle class families in the position of facing financial difficulty in passing land down to the next generation. Estate and property taxes are often more than the heirs can afford.

Lifestyle changes also warrant Stewardship reauthorization. Recreation continues to lead to organized activities rather than independent outdoor exploration. Stewardship is the primary tool that we have to purchase land close to population centers and provide opportunities for kids from all backgrounds to just “be” in nature.

Stewardship also provides public access to recreational areas in a time when farmland and forest fragmentation have created less opportunity for public access as compared to the past when large private holdings were open for exploration and recreation.

“The greatest threat to the vast majority of species that have called Wisconsin home for centuries is habitat loss,” says Signe Holtz, director of the DNR’s Endangered Species Program. “The Stewardship Fund is, by far, the best tool we citizens of Wisconsin have to maintain our natural heritage of plants and animals in natural communities.”

And, we are learning that some wildlife, in particular forest interior birds, need large blocks of undeveloped spaces to survive. En-

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund preserves valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protects water quality and fisheries, and expands opportunities for outdoor recreation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER HASSRICK PHOTOGRAPHY

dangered species also need special places for protection.

Continuing Stewardship, says Rep. Spencer Black (D-Madison), provides for state land protection by the DNR, local government and many nonprofit conservation organization partners. He adds that knowing that the program is extended to 2020 allows for long-range planning, negotiations with landowners, and continues a Wisconsin tradition of setting aside lands for public use today and for the future.

“I believe we have an obligation to future generations not only with our words, but our actions,” says Governor Doyle. “Since I took office, we’ve gone forward with projects forever protecting forests, parks, natural areas, wildlife habitat and shoreland.”

Stewardship lands also anchor a good portion of the state’s economy — from the \$11 billion tourism business to the \$22 billion forestry industry and the state’s \$4 billion hunting and fishing investment.

“The Stewardship Fund has helped us preserve great natural places like Straight Lake in Polk County — a wild undeveloped lake and surrounding areas with a rich, vibrant ecosystem that includes everything from northern pike to trumpeter swans — and the bluffs of La Crosse, and the more urban setting of Big Muskego Lake,” Doyle says. “Lands like these — some of Wisconsin’s greatest outdoor areas — are one of the main reasons why people want to live, vacation and move here.”

Wisconsin’s Stewardship Program continues the work of the Outdoor Recreation Act Program (ORAP) enacted in 1961 with the support of Governor Gaylord Nelson and renewed in 1967 with the support of Governor Warren Knowles. ORAP was Wisconsin’s first comprehensive, long-term land acquisition program. Over 31 years, the program protected 54,000 acres of land by collecting a one-cent per pack tax on cigarettes.

While revered as a pioneering program, ORAP was losing steam by the late 1980s. Then Speaker of the State Assembly, Tom Loftus, wanted to see the program reinvigorated and asked Black to head a committee to develop a new ORAP.

After many public hearings and meetings of a committee that included Knowles and former Natural Resources Board chair Harold “Bud” Jordahl — Nelson acted as a close advisor — the Stewardship Fund was born.

Stewardship goals were to be forward thinking, as well as bold enough to stand up to the threats to land in Wisconsin, including increasing development and changing land ownership patterns. The program also had to be cooperative involving partner groups and willing sell-

Straight Lake State Park, whose undeveloped shoreline was preserved with Stewardship Funds, contains an 850-acre mature forest block with some trees approaching 100 years old. It has a great fishery and has been nominated as an important bird area by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative. It is home to eagles and a pair of nesting trumpeter swans.

ERIC MARK



ers. And it had to be focused. After a few modifications, the fund was adopted and included in the 1989 state budget.

The name, “Stewardship,” reflected its mission. “Stewardship is a time honored tradition,” Black says. “It recognizes that we have an obligation to take care of our resources for future generations.”

It is a strong program locked into a 10-year investment instead of being tied to year-by-year support.

Black recalls the first Stewardship event, held in Albany on July 10, 1990. Participants rode bicycles to the site — 194 acres of wetlands and forests including habitat for an endangered plant and springs feeding the Little Sugar River. Since then, the Lower Wisconsin River was protected along with parts of the Kettle Moraine State Forest. Extensive trails were developed and important watersheds like Lulu Lake protected.

Almost 20 years later, the Stewardship Fund has protected about a half-million acres of what’s left of the best of Wisconsin, Black says. “It has preserved some very special places and expanded outdoor recreational opportunities.”

The program is successful because it works with willing sellers, looks at buying easements when it makes sense, and leverages match grants that allow a broader public to become invested.

The Stewardship Fund has arguably be-

come the largest conservation effort in Wisconsin. “I’ve been delighted beyond expectations,” Black says. “It would be a very different state if we didn’t have the Stewardship Fund.”

Stewardship has funded projects in 71 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties from the majestic solitude of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage to the urban Lakeshore State Park in Milwaukee. The program supports projects as diverse as acquisition of a pristine boreal forest in Ashland County to restoration of an urban riverfront in Beloit. And it is providing special places for residents and visitors alike to hike, bike, ski, hunt, fish, camp, canoe, learn and simply relax.

Growing support along with acreage

“Stewardship reflects the conservation and outdoor ethics of the people of Wisconsin, and is evidence that they want to get out and use these resources,” says Steve Miller.

Miller has closely watched Stewardship throughout its history, first, while working with the DNR wildlife management program and more recently as director for the Facilities and Lands Bureau. Among the Stewardship projects of which Miller is most proud has been protection and enhancement of 21,000 acres in the Lower Wisconsin River Basin from the vast Lower Wisconsin State Riverway to the tiny spring creeks that are home to wild populations of brook trout.

During the second era of the Stewardship



Otter Creek is located in Baxter's Hollow of the Baraboo Hills. The area provides the deep woods that forest songbirds need.

STEVE MEYER

program, Miller says, there has been a lot of discussion about how much purchased land is enough.

“We took a step back and took a long range look at what should, and what needs to be protected,” Miller says. “And that was the genesis of the Land Legacy Project. It helped put a frame around what the ‘green print’ could be for Wisconsin.”

The Land Legacy Report describes special places that will be critical to meet conservation and recreation needs for the next 50 years. Identified over a three-year process involving the public, nonprofit organizations and natural resource professionals, these Legacy Places are, collectively, what “makes Wisconsin Wisconsin.” Visit the Legacy website at dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/land_legacy. The report is available for \$15 plus tax and shipping/handling. Call 800-362-7253 or visit any DNR service center.

The third phase of Stewardship, Miller says, looks at the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in an attempt to classify, measure and ultimately provide for the preferences and needs of a statewide recreating public. Recent SCORP results show that more than 3.5 million Wisconsin citizens walk for pleasure, 2.3 million enjoy viewing and photo-

A BIPARTISAN BASE

The Wisconsin Legislature created the Stewardship Fund in 1989 to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. In the process, this innovative fund has proven that valuing and protecting our land and water resources is a tradition that crosses political lines.

This history of bipartisanship is reflected in the fund's name, which honors two of Wisconsin's most revered conservation leaders, Warren Knowles (Republican, Governor 1965-1971) and Gaylord Nelson (Democrat, Governor 1959-1963, U.S. Senator 1964-1981).

Since 1989, the Stewardship Fund has been adjusted several times from its original funding level of \$25 million annually. Governors Tommy Thompson and Scott McCallum, both Republicans, recognized the importance of maintaining the historic purchasing power of the Stewardship program, as has Governor Doyle, a Democrat.

graphing wildlife, two million enjoy bicycling and another 1.6 million enjoy fishing.

“The power of Stewardship is that it conserves the state's most important natural habitat while purchasing perpetual public access for all state residents,” says Todd Holschbach, director of government relations for the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Holschbach says Stewardship fosters public-private partnerships that allow citizens to play an active role in protecting natural resources. The Nature Conservancy, for example, works with private landowners, businesses, government and other conservation organizations to conserve more than 139,000 acres of the state's most outstanding lands and waters. TNC uses science-based planning to identify lands that need protection and then leverages private matching funds.

“It's proven to be a wise investment,” Holschbach says.

Fine tuning

“Stewardship also has proven to be a successful program,” Miller says. “Now we are fine tuning it.”

Besides increasing the bonding to maintain the purchasing power of Stewardship, the reauthorization (Act 20) requires that administrative rules outline a process by which the Natural Resources Board may restrict public access for one or more nature-based activities, and how such decisions may be reviewed. These nature-based outdoor activities are hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking and cross-country skiing. DNR must report annually to the Legislature identifying lands where public access has been restricted or prohibited and the reasons.

Public comment sessions were held and DNR Secretary Matt Frank appointed a 30-member Citizen Advisory Committee to provide input on the rule.

“The advisory group represents various recreational constituencies, local units of government and land trusts,” Frank says. “Working together, these members will help ensure that we continue to provide broad public access to lands acquired through Stewardship purchases or grants, promoting all forms of outdoor recreation.”

At the first meeting in July 2008 Frank said, “The Stewardship program is near and dear to the hearts of people in Wisconsin. And we can be a model for the nation. It is about how we relate to nature and how Wisconsin citizens can access that...I can't think of a program at the DNR that means more to future generations. And I think we should celebrate that we are now going into the third decade of Stewardship.”

Building blocks for future stewards

“As a member of the Natural Resources Board,

I think protecting land for the future is the most wonderful thing we do,” says Christine Thomas, Wisconsin Natural Resources Board Chair and Dean of the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

“Stewardship is not just important, but critical to the future of outdoor recreation as the population increases because not everyone can afford to have their own piece of paradise. There are people who would never have an opportunity to walk in the woods with their grandchildren if not for public land,” she says. “Some of the best of what we do as an agency and as citizens is the Stewardship investment that we make for the future.”

Thomas’ favorite Stewardship project is the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest in Forest, Florence and Marinette counties. The Nature Conservancy and the state worked together to conserve more than 64,600 acres of forests, wild lakes and rivers in northeastern Wisconsin. The land transaction was the largest in state history, and working forest conservation easements keep the land open to the public for recreation and guides forest management in a sustainable manner. Funding came through a combination of Stewardship funding, Federal Forest Legacy funding, private equity from Conservation Forestry LLC, and its consortium partner, Forest Investment Associates, and private funds raised by The Nature Conservancy. “For decades citizens have been enjoying the fruits of managed forests, but we are at a time when many of these forests are at risk of being sold off and fragmented. With the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest, the new benefit we obtained is a guarantee for the citizens of the state that land would be accessible to them in the future as it has been for decades.”

Students at UW-Stevens Point, Thomas says, are very much tuned into outdoor recreation, are users of public land and understand their

responsibility as future stewards.

“Many students are financially strapped, but because they have access to Stewardship lands that are open to the public for free,” Thomas says, “they can afford to get out and enjoy the resources. Some also work on public lands through summer jobs, internships and volunteer activities.”

As they work and play, these future stewards of our public lands are connecting with nature and finding out that clean lakes and rivers, lush forests and abundant wildlife — these things, together, are Wisconsin, Thomas says.

Natasha Kassulke is creative products manager for Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.

“The Stewardship Fund has fulfilled its promise to the people of Wisconsin by preserving thousands of acres for use by sportsmen, conservationists and nature enthusiasts alike. The time, however, has come where we must devise a new program and strategy to ensure Wisconsin enters the 21st century as America’s environmental leader.”

• Governor Tommy Thompson on Stewardship Reauthorization in 1998

STEWARDSHIP IN A NUTSHELL

Under the Stewardship Fund, about 500,000 acres in 71 of 72 counties have been protected. Where does the money come from to pay for Stewardship? The state sells bonds to investors to pay back the debt over 20 years. This spreads the cost over time so it is shared with future public lands users. Debt payments come out of tax revenues, so all taxpayers in the state contribute to the Stewardship Fund, and benefit from its investments. Together land trusts and local governments have also raised over \$130 million to match grants through the Stewardship program.

What does the public think of Stewardship? There is strong public support. A recent bipartisan poll conducted by The Nature Conservancy found that nearly 90 percent of Wisconsin voters agreed that even in tight fiscal times the Stewardship program should be a priority. A Wisconsin Public Radio/St. Norbert’s College public opinion poll showed that 76 percent of residents support state acquisition of conservation land.

What kinds of recreation are permitted on Stewardship lands? About 92 percent of all lands protected by the Stewardship Fund are open for public hunting, and 97 percent are open for fishing and other types of recreation, including hiking, wildlife watching, biking and more. Those lands not open to hunting include heavily used urban parks and trails like Lakeshore State Park and the Hank Aaron Trail in Milwaukee.

Are local governments compensated for loss of tax base? Yes. Each year, DNR makes property tax payments to all municipalities where the state owns land. This is called a payment in lieu of taxes or PILT. The state paid \$7.9 million in 2006 to local governments to make up for lost property tax revenue. While there are differences in how PILT payments are made depending on acquisition date, under the current program, local governments typically receive more money through PILT payments on land acquired after 1992 than they would have through regular property taxes. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau has this to say about PILT: “Although the formula for calculating aids in lieu of taxes is intended to produce a state payment equivalent to what is paid in property taxes, in practice, state payments typically exceed the property taxes that would have been paid because the purchase price of conservation land has routinely exceeded the property’s assessed value.”

Source: *Legislative Fiscal Bureau Informational Paper 60* — “Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program,” January 2007

PROGRAM FUNDING HISTORY:

- 1990 to 1999 at \$25 million/year
- 2000 to 2010 at \$46 million/year for two years and \$60 million/year for eight years
- 2010 to 2019 at \$86 million/year (Beginning July 1, 2010)

NEW STEWARDSHIP ALLOCATIONS

(Beginning July 1, 2010)

DNR and county land acquisitions	\$45 million
Grants to Nonprofit Conservation Organizations (minimum)	\$12 million
Board of Commissioners of Public Lands acquisitions	\$ 2 million
Ice Age and other trails	\$ 3 million
Recreational boating aids	\$ 2.5 million
DNR property development	\$10 million
Local Units of Government assistance grants (maximum)	\$11.5 million
Total:	\$86 million

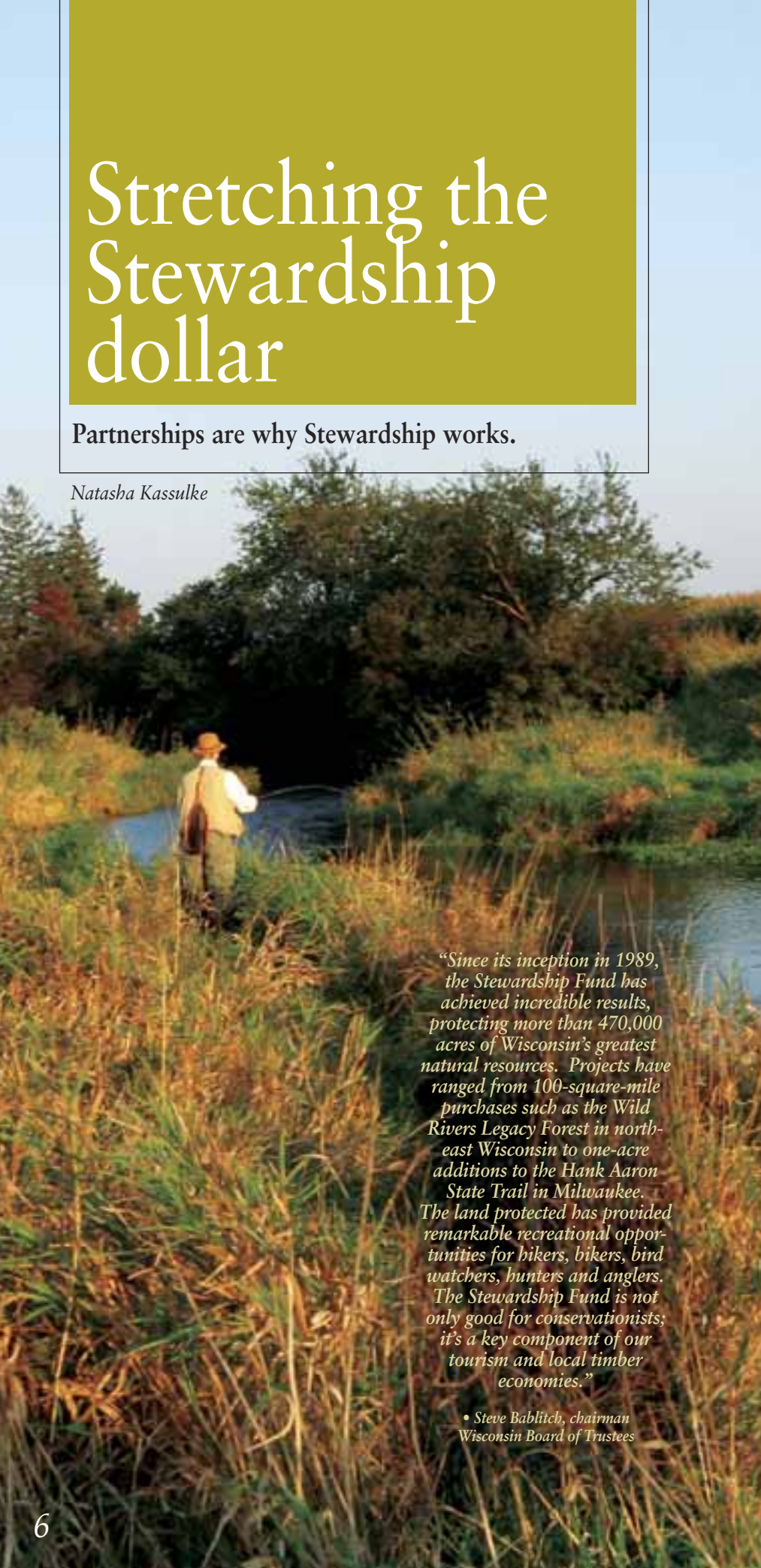
EXPLORE STEWARDSHIP LANDS

The DNR is electronically identifying Stewardship lands for customers. An interactive website helps the public find Stewardship properties, learn about property acquisition history and discover activities they might enjoy there. To access these maps, visit the DNR homepage at dnr.wi.gov and click on the “Maps” link under the “Favorites” heading and then go to “DNR Managed Lands.” To learn more about the Stewardship program visit dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cfa/lr/stewardship/stewardship.html

Stretching the Stewardship dollar

Partnerships are why Stewardship works.

Natasha Kassulke



“Since its inception in 1989, the Stewardship Fund has achieved incredible results, protecting more than 470,000 acres of Wisconsin’s greatest natural resources. Projects have ranged from 100-square-mile purchases such as the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest in north-east Wisconsin to one-acre additions to the Hank Aaron State Trail in Milwaukee. The land protected has provided remarkable recreational opportunities for hikers, bikers, bird watchers, hunters and anglers. The Stewardship Fund is not only good for conservationists; it’s a key component of our tourism and local timber economies.”

• Steve Bablich, chairman
Wisconsin Board of Trustees

“The DNR cannot accomplish its mission by itself. We absolutely need our nonprofit and local government partners,” says Mary Rose Teves, chief of the DNR grants section in the Bureau of Community Financial Assistance. “How lucky Wisconsin is to have partners who bring money and expertise to the table to conserve special places for future generations. Other states are not so fortunate.”

Many agree. The Stewardship program’s success is in its collaborative nature. Partners are involved at every level — from willing sellers working with the state, to local government and nonprofit conservation groups interested in leveraging funds, to State Parks Friends groups providing people power to maintain the lands and provide environmental education.

Janet Beach Hanson, the first to administer the Stewardship grants to nonprofit conservation organizations, says “Stewardship gave citizens — private landowners — the chance to get directly involved in conservation.”

“Local governments also are seeing the success of Stewardship and they are submitting highly competitive grant proposals,” says Amy Bradley, a DNR Stewardship grant manager. “In fact we’ve had over \$25 million in grant applications this year from local governments with \$8 million in allocations.”

DNR land acquisition

The key to land acquisitions is matching a willing seller with conservation projects of regional or statewide importance. Stewardship, and ORAP before it, have been fortunate to draw from a strong conservation ethic among our citizens and those in authority who consider our land deals as an obligation to responsibly protect land, explains DNR Real Estate Director Dick Steffes.

After negotiations are complete, DNR asks for permission to get an appraisal. If the selling price is over \$350,000 two appraisals are needed. The DNR then reviews the appraisal and presents an offer.

As in the private sector, a title search and survey are done, if needed. If the purchase is over \$150,000, it must go to the Natural Resources Board for approval. All purchases also need governor’s approval. After approval, the DNR draws up a contract and the landowner and DNR move to closing, assisted by a title company.

“I’ve seen records of negotiations going on for more than 30 years,” says Steffes. “There is a lot of emotional attachment to land, and some negotiations take a lot of trust building.” One selling point is that the land is then open to the public so the seller can always visit, which

may not be the case if the land was purchased by another private party. The state's ability to resell that land is very limited and guided by statute."

Steffes says DNR priorities for land purchase include lands with significant benefit to endangered resources, privately owned parcels within DNR managed land, land that provides public access to public property, rare opportunities such as a paper company deciding to sell off a large tract, lands that make sense to purchase in concert with other entities such as federal partners, and Natural Resources Board and citizen priorities.

"The state pays a fair price — a fair market value," Steffes says. "We come from a tradition of paying fair market value based on appraisals consistent with professional practices, fairness and respect for landowners and focusing on important conservation needs. These are all needed to ensure the public trust and produce conservation accomplishments over the long term."

Working forest easements earn about \$350 to \$450 per acre. Fee title lands sell for \$1,500 to \$7,000 per acre with the average about \$3,000 per acre.

Steffes says one of his favorite purchases is the Rainbow Flowage in Oneida County, which involved 50 years of negotiations with the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company.

For about 70 years, the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company (WVIC), a private corporation that operates 21 reservoirs to regulate uniform flow in the Wisconsin River, had been the steward of the Rainbow Flowage located in the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest.

When WVIC had to sell the land because of restrictions on foreign ownership, it looked to the state as a buyer.

"We had plenty of potential buyers interested in developing the land," says Bob Gall, president of WVIC. "But we also had an underlying stewardship philosophy."

After some price negotiating, WVIC agreed

to sell to the state. In 2004, the Natural Resources Board approved a \$7.04 million purchase using Stewardship funding to preserve almost 5,200 acres of primarily undeveloped forest land and 63 miles of frontage on the Rainbow Flowage and nearby Pickerel Lake. The deal worked out to about \$1,400 an acre.

The Flowage is a highly productive fishery and offers habitat for eagles, osprey and many species of waterfowl.

When the deal was completed in 2007 and 2008, WVIC also donated an additional 3,869 acres of submerged land at the Rainbow Flowage and 6,402 acres at the Willow Flowage,

and have learned more about property rights and how they may be shared among a number of people," Haag says.

He gives the example of a Bayfield County project involving three properties — the Nourse Sugarbush State Natural Area, the Bayfield/Mt. Ashwabay ski hill and 560 acres in between.

There were concerns that the spectacular views the properties provided might be developed and no longer open for public use. Mt. Ashwabay offers cross-country and alpine skiing featuring stunning views of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and the Chequamegon National Forest. The Nourse Sugarbush



MARIO QUINTANA

The Patrick Marsh Natural Resource site is an educational and recreational area northeast of Sun Prairie in Dane County. The property, a protected ecosystem, easily could have been destroyed without the efforts of many individuals, organizations and governmental agencies working together.

Gall says. Today, the land is managed for wildlife habitat, forestry and outdoor recreation including hunting, shore fishing, hiking, bird watching and cross-country skiing.

"All the pieces were in the right place at the right time to allow the Rainbow purchase to happen," Gall says.

One aspect of Stewardship that DNR Real Estate Section Chief Doug Haag says he most appreciates is that it gives landowners, whether they are an international corporation or a long-time local landowner, a conservation alternative when they decide to sell.

"Stewardship has created a lot more focus on land and water conservation," Haag says.

Since Stewardship began, he says he has seen a tremendous increase in partner involvement and sharing knowledge, skills and funding.

"We've learned to layer funding sources

site had a long history of maple sugaring — for hundreds of years the Ojibwe tapped the large trees. In the summer, this area is the center of tourist activity in the region with the Big Top Chautauqua outdoor music festival drawing thousands of people to its performances. This tract also is at the core of a northern mesic forest that has been identified as a flyway for migratory birds.

Two years ago, the DNR proposed that the state acquire 400 acres in the area from Plum Creek Timberlands at a cost of \$1,088,000. Two hundred acres would be acquired for the Nourse Sugarbush State Natural Area and 40 acres for the Pikes Creek State Fishery Area. The remaining 160 acres would be held for sale or traded with Bayfield County or a local land trust.

A \$40,000 donation from Murphy Oil USA's Superior Refinery helped cap the pur-

chase of another 160 acres. Along with donations from individuals and businesses, the Murphy Oil gift triggered matching support from the Stewardship Grant Program totaling \$240,000 and investment of funds from Bayfield County, which will hold permanent title to the land. The land will remain accessible to the public and in forestry use.

“This is an important piece of property for the community, for skiing and for scenic enjoyment,” Haag says. “This project embodies the community conservation ethic that makes Stewardship so successful and brings government home to people. Stewardship gives land owners a conservation alternative. We are fostering a stronger land ethic in a subtle way. These negotiations occur at mom and pop kitchens and sometimes in large board rooms.”

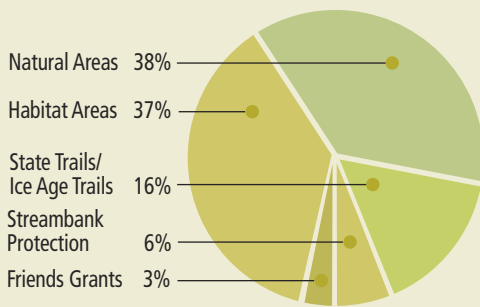
There are basic contracts and massive legal documents, but they all end up with the same result — a warranty deed.

Nonprofit conservation organizations (NCO) land acquisition

One of the more innovative and popular features of the Stewardship Fund is its grants program for nonprofit conservation organizations, or land trusts. Wisconsin is home to more than 50 of these citizen-run organizations, which work in communities across the state to protect natural resources.

“Land trusts are an excellent community-

NCO-FUNDED GRANTS



based complement to state and local government,” explains Vicki Elkin, policy director for Gathering Waters Conservancy.

“Not only do they provide a way for citizens to get involved in conservation, but land trusts also raise private funds to match state dollars.”

Gathering Waters is the nonprofit service center working to strengthen Wisconsin land trusts through technical assistance and statewide education.

“When Gathering Waters started in 1994 there were only 12 land trusts in the state,”

Elkin says. “Now more than 50,000 people are members of a local land trust.”

Stewardship has allowed land trusts to work strategically, explains Elkin. With predictable funding for high quality projects, land trusts can do more than just respond to scattered opportunities.

Why should nonprofit conservation groups help carry the load? “Because we’re losing some of our most precious places every day,” says Elkin. “People see the landscapes around them changing. Places they’ve always loved are suddenly converted to residential or commercial use. They want to take action, and land trusts allow citizens, working directly with private landowners, to permanently protect some of these places.”

Land trusts are already moving people onto these lands. They use the properties as classrooms and host field trips and volunteer work days.

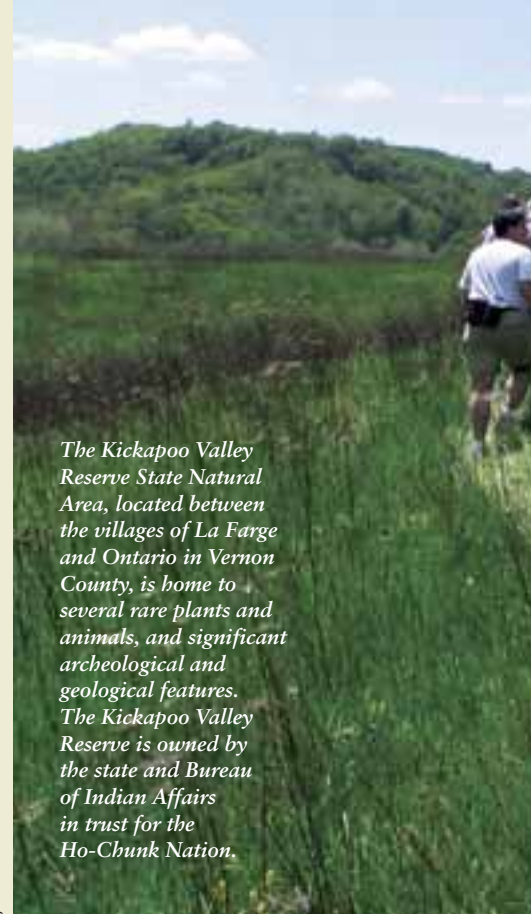
“We are in a tough budget time, and we can’t rely on the state to fund all the needs. Stewardship and the matches the land trusts are able to raise are a way to stretch the state’s dollars,” Elkin says. “We all need to work together to be creative about how we will reach our conservation goals.”

“The Stewardship Fund has been instrumental in the growth of the land trust movement across Wisconsin,” agrees John Torinus, board member of The Nature Conservancy and Ozaukee Washington Land Trust. “Without matching public dollars, we would not have this powerful and passionate group of land trusts all working to save the most precious pieces of land and water. Wisconsin is way out ahead of most other states in terms of saving its best pieces of the natural environment. That leadership role could not be done with private dollars alone.”

As an example, Torinus cites the Donges Bay Gorge Stewardship purchase in summer 2008. Stewardship kicked in \$2,256,500 for the purchase of 23.1 acres featuring over 1,200 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline, a ravine and most of Donges Bay Gorge in Ozaukee County.

Donges Bay Gorge is a stop on an international migratory flyway, home to 16 uncommon plant species, three plant species that are in jeopardy of becoming endangered, and a pair of nesting bald eagles named Kurt and Katie and their offspring. This is the first successful nesting by eagles in southeastern Wisconsin in over 100 years.

The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust has matched the Stewardship grant with three donated properties, which have been designated as natural areas of significance by the South-eastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commis-



The Kickapoo Valley Reserve State Natural Area, located between the villages of La Farge and Ontario in Vernon County, is home to several rare plants and animals, and significant archeological and geological features. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is owned by the state and Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for the Ho-Chunk Nation.

JESSICA BOLWAHN

sion. Another major partner in the acquisition is the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. The district has given the land trust a \$600,000 grant from its Greenseams Program in exchange for a conservation easement that will prohibit future development of the property with only a few exceptions, such as a parking lot and trails.

“The project simply would not have been possible without the Stewardship Fund,” Torinus says.

The Natural Heritage Land Trust (NHLT), a leader in protecting natural and agricultural lands in Dane County, has leveraged Stewardship funding for 17 projects.

“Stewardship helps create confidence among donors that the project will happen,” says Jim Welsh, executive director of the NHLT. “It helps us tell donors that the state is stepping up to the plate...Stewardship backs up all the talk and makes these projects happen.”

Among the special places the NHLT has helped protect using Stewardship dollars are key areas of the Black Earth Creek watershed and Cherokee Marsh in Madison. Preserving the 990-acre Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Area is an ongoing collaboration among the DNR, NHLT, Patrick Marsh Conservancy, Dane County and the City of Sun Prairie. The Stewardship Fund has provided over \$750,000 in grants to match their fundraising efforts.

Kim Wright, DNR grants manager for the nonprofit portion of Stewardship, worked for The Nature Conservancy when the first Stewardship program was passed into law. “There



■

“The Stewardship Fund unites all lovers of the outdoors in their quest to make Wisconsin a desirable place to live. It provides an excellent opportunity for protecting the environment while still allowing us to use available resources. It is rare in the way that it satisfies both environmentalists and hunters alike. In a world where conflict seems to take over almost every aspect of our existence, we must preserve this innovative and insightful piece of legislation.”

• Julia Kolberg
 UW-Madison student majoring
 in biological systems engineering
 (The Daily Cardinal, August 29, 2007)

were many more unique lands needing protection than there were organizations with the capacity to do so, prior to Stewardship,” she recalls. She says Stewardship has transformed local groups of concerned citizens into viable conservation organizations, deepening a lasting conservation ethic in Wisconsin by making it possible for people to preserve special places in their own communities.

Wright points to the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage area as an example of preserving high quality prairie and grassland habitat amid a viable agriculture community. In 2008, Governor Doyle announced a \$405,200 Stewardship grant to The Nature Conservancy Wisconsin to purchase 153 acres in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage area in Iowa County. The funds were used to expand Thomson Prairie, part of the Barneveld Prairie State Natural Area within the heart of the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, an extensive grassland landscape supporting a high concentration of prairie and oak savanna remnants.

The Thomson Prairie Stewardship purchase represents one of the best opportunities to protect grassland birds, such as upland sandpiper and a rare insect, the red-tailed leafhopper. It will also substantially increase the permanent grass cover and provide habitat for the state endangered regal fritillary butterfly and two plant species of special concern — marbled snout and prairie turnip.

The Nature Conservancy has helped protect 1,823 acres in the Military Ridge area. It

has partnered with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service, DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever, Blue Mounds Area Project and The Prairie Enthusiasts to conserve native prairie communities. The Thomson Prairie property was originally approved for high-end residential development, but The Nature Conservancy negotiated with the developer and protected the property.

“One misconception is that the Stewardship grants program just gives out money, but it’s a very planned process often with several partner groups,” Wright says. “Conservation is a collaborative activity.”

Karen Blodgett, a DNR grants specialist in the West Central Region, works with nonprofit groups and points to a partnership among Pheasants Forever, Chippewa County, DNR and other local nonprofit organizations that has provided the public with 600 acres of prime hunting land at Hallie Marsh in Chippewa County.

Using Stewardship funds, private donations and federal funds from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Chippewa Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever over four years purchased 520 acres of wetlands, forests and former agricultural lands between Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls from private landowners. The parcels are adjacent to 80 acres owned by the DNR that was landlocked, Blodgett recalls. Pheasants Forever then transferred its land to the DNR for long-term pro-

tection and management, opening up the joined parcels to the public for hunting, hiking, wildlife watching and other recreation.

“Stewardship is a catalyst that gets these projects done,” Blodgett says. “For most of these groups, the motivating factor is protecting a special place.”

The Stewardship Fund also has been vitally important to the land conservation work of the Mississippi Valley Conservancy and its more than 900 members. As a regional, nonprofit land trust in La Crosse, the MVC has permanently conserved over 7,200 acres of bluffs, prairies, wetlands and streams in the Coulee Region since its founding in 1997. About 1,600 of those acres were funded through Stewardship.

The MVC works with private landowners and local communities on voluntary conservation projects in seven counties along the Mississippi River. In 2001, the City of La Crosse and the MVC formed a partnership with the state to protect the scenic and recreational values of an eight-mile stretch of bluffs along the Mississippi River.

These landmark bluffs were targeted for conservation by local citizens in the city’s comprehensive land use plan. Using funding from the Stewardship Fund, as well as matching dollars, the partners have protected more than 840 acres, which are open to the public for hiking, hunting, birdwatching and other recreational and educational uses. Work to preserve the bluffs is ongoing and as the MVC acquires the land, it transfers it to the city for

long-term ownership and management. The city grants a conservation easement to the MVC, which protects the land permanently for future generations.

“Stewardship is a cost effective conservation tool because it leverages matching funds,” says Tim Jacobson, executive director of the MVC. “It is effective, efficient and protects the natural beauty and heritage of these important places.”

In areas like La Crosse where tourism is a major economic driver, Jacobson says, preserving the landscape is critical to success.

Local units of government

They call them LUGs in the grants business. Local Units of Government have received more than \$84.4 million since the beginning of Stewardship for land acquisition and development projects. Equally impressive, these same communities committed over \$84.4 million to match the public’s investment in these projects.

This includes protecting more than 14,900 acres and grants for more than 765 projects. Stewardship funds, for example, contributed \$1 million to establish the Mequon Nature Preserve, a 438-acre natural area within Mequon in Ozaukee County. The partnership involves the City of Mequon, the Ozaukee Washington



For decades, Chippewa County residents have used a Town of Lafayette area known as Ray’s Beach as a popular public swimming area. Stewardship funding helped make this beach, which is located on the south shore of Lake Wissota, more accessible.

DNR FILE PHOTO

Xcel Energy and the railroad, a safe access point was established. The Town of Lafayette was willing to take over the area, maintain it and eliminate the erosion. Xcel Energy agreed to put \$50,000 towards area improvement and deed the land to the town for \$1. The county helped construct a safe railroad crossing to the beach area.

The area today is wheelchair accessible and includes a picnic space, restroom and boat dock. Development work was completed with cost sharing through the Stewardship Fund — \$149,193 of the total project cost of about \$306,032.

“Ray’s Beach is an excellent example of what can occur when everybody works together,” Hessler says. The beach opened in 2007 and is a model for other Stewardship projects.

Phoenix Park, in the City of Eau Claire, was once a blighted industrial area. It was contaminated with lead and heavy metals. But today, the area has been cleaned up and is a keystone in the economic redevelopment of downtown Eau Claire. Royal Credit Union built its corporate headquarters on half the site, and the rest was developed as park property.

Visitors find Phoenix Park home to a recreational trail, a shelter, festivals, concerts and a farmers’ market. Part of the Chippewa River Trail passes through it, and Stewardship was instrumental in funding the project at almost \$500,000 for land acquisition and trails development.

In 2007, Eau Claire received about \$210,000 from Stewardship to match local funds to buy the six-acre Domer Park in Eau Claire. The grounds

include a picnic area with trails, habitat protection along the shoreline and green space overlooking a fishing area. Domer Park houses some of the last undeveloped land on the river.

DNR facility development

While land purchases often attract the headlines, one of the most important functions of Stewardship is developing, repairing and maintaining state property. In fact, one-third of all development funding for DNR properties comes from Stewardship.

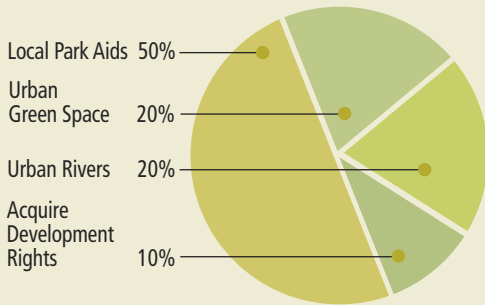
Stewardship has been used for everything from upgrading bathroom and shower facilities to creating park entrance centers and providing seed money for environmental education at places like Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area, Horicon Marsh and the Mead State Wildlife Area.

“Stewardship is the bread and butter of our recreational development program,” says John Hagman, DNR section chief for facilities management. “It funds the facilities that give people their first and often lasting impressions of our properties.”

“Because it is a stable fund, we can plan ahead,” Hagman says. “It gives our property managers hope that we will be able to meet some of their requests and fund critical needs and improvements. With Stewardship, we can keep the roofs on and expand recreational opportunities for people. It’s also a matter of health and safety.”

Stewardship funds have been used to repair wastewater treatment plants in areas such as Peninsula State Park. The Pottawatomie Lighthouse on Rock Island is the oldest of Door

LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS



Land Trust, Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the state.

Lavane Hessler, a financial assistance specialist in the DNR West Central Region works with LUGs interested in pursuing Stewardship funding. She offers three examples of Stewardship funded projects in her region that have changed the face of local communities: Ray’s Beach, Phoenix Park and Domer Park.

Ray’s Beach on Lake Wissota in Chippewa County was owned by Xcel Energy, and people were trespassing to get to the beach, crossing a dangerous railroad track owned by Wisconsin Central Limited Railroad Company. Erosion was extensive.

Through a wide partnership involving local government (the county and Town of Lafayette),

County's lighthouses. The Stewardship fund provided nearly \$63,000 in matching grants to the Friends of Rock Island for lighthouse restoration, maintenance and interpretive displays.

Stewardship funds were used to purchase a search-and-rescue boat to improve safety on Rock Island, and solar lighting to keep Rock Island off the grid. Stewardship also was used to reinforce the overhead tunnels along the Badger State Trail. And because of Stewardship, the DNR was able to open its first new parks in over 40 years — Lakeshore State Park in Milwaukee County and Governor Thompson Park in Marinette County.

"We have spent about \$1.75 million of Stewardship money on making our recreation

facilities accessible to all users," Hagman says. "We spent almost \$12 million on park toilet/shower buildings, \$8.6 million on park entrance and visitors stations, \$6 million on rail-to-trails projects and \$13.6 million on new and renovated campsites."

From a state parks perspective, Stewardship is critical, explains Kimberly Currie, DNR section chief for business management for state parks. "The Stewardship program gives us the stage for enhancing park amenities," Currie says speaking to the acreage purchased through the program.

"And every stage needs a production and a set," she says pointing to the park amenities the Stewardship Fund provides. 🍷

■
"The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund is Wisconsin's most important land conservation program. Without it, places like the Mequon Nature Preserve and Milwaukee's Lake Shore Park would never have been established."

• Arthur Harrington,
president of Gathering Waters
Conservancy and an attorney in the
Milwaukee office of Godfrey & Khan

FOUR WAYS LANDS ARE SET ASIDE

Stewardship Fund lands are set aside through outright purchases or fee title acquisitions, easements, partnership grants and donations.

■ OUTRIGHT PURCHASES OR FEE TITLE ACQUISITION

Fee title, also sometimes called "fee simple," is a real estate term that means the type of ownership gives the owner maximum interest in the land, entitling the owner to use the property in any manner consistent with federal, state and local laws and ordinances. For example, most homeowners own their land in fee title.

■ EASEMENTS

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and the state, local government or qualified nonprofit conservation organization. The agreement places restrictions on the present and future property uses in an effort to protect its conservation values. The land remains privately owned and can be lived on, sold or passed to heirs. Conservation easements can be donated or purchased for a specific period of time or in perpetuity. A common easement would restrict development on a parcel.

When a landowner donates a conservation easement to a nonprofit, that landowner may be entitled to income, estate and property tax benefits. A gift of a conservation easement is considered a charitable donation. To qualify for an income tax deduction, the easement must be permanent,

must be donated to a qualified conservation organization and must serve conservation purposes.

Some landowners turn to conservation easements because of estate tax benefits. Placing an easement on a property generally reduces its fair market value since it restricts future development. This reduced value results in lower estate taxes, typically reduces property value, and may reduce their property tax bill.

The easement is attached to the property's deed and stays with the land, meaning that all future landowners must abide by the restrictions.

■ LAND DONATIONS

In Wisconsin, many lands and land rights are donated each year to land trusts and, to a lesser extent, to public agencies. Stewardship rules enable land trusts to leverage the value of donated properties to protect additional natural areas. "Land trusts can use land as a match, and it is sometimes easier to get people to donate land than money," says Vicki Elkin, policy director for Gathering Waters.

■ FEDERAL GRANTS

One of Stewardship's greatest strengths is attracting a diversity of matching grants. Stewardship uses state funds to leverage federal dollars through programs, such as LWCF, the Forest Legacy

Program, North American Wetlands Act and Coastal Wetland grants.

LWCF is the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, approved in 1964, which created a fund to match grants to states for outdoor recreation projects. DNR is the state agency responsible for administering LWCF funds in Wisconsin. LWCF pays up to 50 percent of approved project costs, up to \$750,000 for acquisition, while development/renovation projects are limited to a \$400,000 grant maximum.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is another federal grants program that complements Stewardship. The FLP is designed to identify and protect environmentally important private forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. No more than 75 percent of total payments can be paid by the federal government for the FLP purchases. State, local and private interests must come up with the remainder. Easements may include a variety of property rights but most often restrict development and subdividing.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act provides matching grants to partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects that benefit migratory birds and other wildlife. The act was passed, in part, to support activities under the North American Waterfowl Management

Plan, an international agreement that provides a strategy for the long-term protection of wetland and upland habitats needed by waterfowl and other migratory birds in North America. In December 2002, Congress reauthorized the act and expanded its scope to include the conservation of all habitats and birds associated with wetland ecosystems. Congress appropriated \$40.3 million to fund the Act's grants program in fiscal year 2008.

Additional program funding comes from fines, penalties and forfeitures collected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918; from federal fuel excise taxes on small gasoline engines to benefit coastal ecosystem projects; and from accrued interest on the fund established under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the program.

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is another matching option established in 1990. Under the program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides matching grants for acquiring, restoring or enhancing coastal wetlands. Funding for the program comes from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels. States then provide 50 percent of the total project costs.

With everything that goes into making Stewardship funds possible, it's easy to forget that its primary goal is making Wisconsin's natural assets accessible and attractive to all.

"We spend all this money on these lands, we want people to get out and use them, enjoy them and understand what activities they can do on them," says Elizabeth Kluesner, Nature is Our Business project coordinator. "They're not supposed to be a secret."

The DNR has put its ingenuity to the test by trying to attract diverse groups of people—including diversity of age, ethnicity, economic status and mobility capacities—to state lands. Kluesner says these efforts are essential and, since everybody's tax dollars pay for these lands, they should offer something for everybody.

Bruce Neeb, DNR government outreach team supervisor in Eau Claire, leads programs to underwrite costs of community projects and often works with Stewardship funds. Neeb says his biggest challenge with Stewardship dollars is making sure all the desired recreational opportunities are available.

"We've got a lot of different publics that are looking for access to outdoor recreational opportunities, and we try to balance those," he says. "[The renewal] created an assumption that Stewardship acquired lands would be available for some basic uses — hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing."

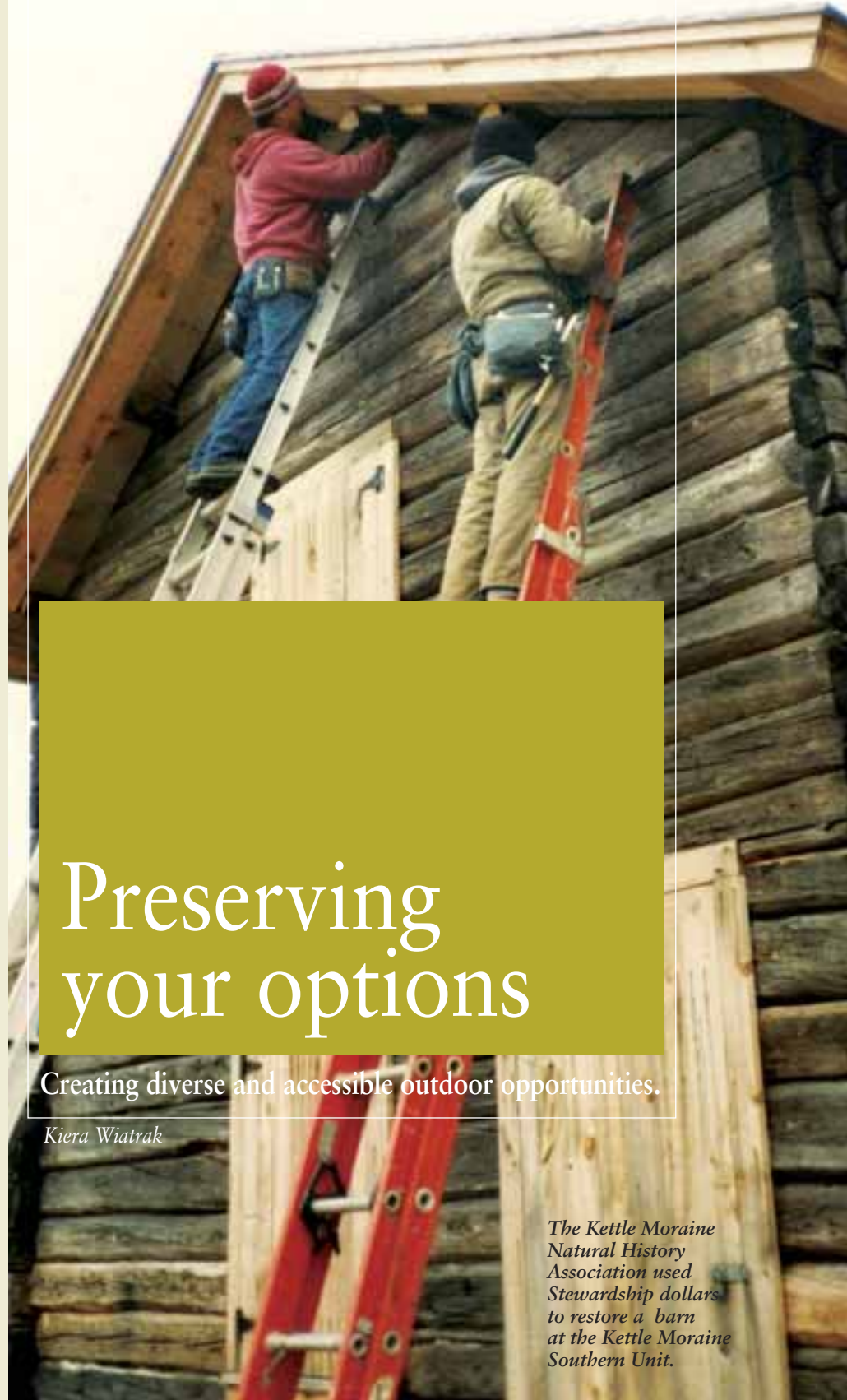
Regardless of what activities appeal to each individual or family, a primary goal of the program is providing Stewardship lands close enough to "make sure you don't have to own your own property to go out and enjoy nature," Neeb says.

These initiatives will likely benefit urban populations, whose densely populated communities and lower income levels often prevent them from experiencing the outdoors.

In fact, Neeb says that projects that acknowledge diversity of usage, income and population are more likely to be granted Stewardship dollars. Additional points are given to communities with populations of 50,000, 200,000 and 500,000 people. Also, projects in counties where the population has a faster growth rate are awarded extra points.

"Virtually anywhere in Wisconsin, urban, rural, north or south, you can get to Stewardship funded land quickly," Kluesner says.

Neeb points out that while "more conven-



Preserving your options

Creating diverse and accessible outdoor opportunities.

Kiera Wiatrak

The Kettle Moraine Natural History Association used Stewardship dollars to restore a barn at the Kettle Moraine Southern Unit.

DNR PHOTO

tional tourist attractions are pricey," Stewardship lands provide free recreation that "families can enjoy every week if they want to," he says.

And, it seems to be working. James Buchholz, superintendent at Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboygan, says he has seen a large increase in ethnic diversity at the park over the course of 20 years.

He says minority populations in the area increased because of available jobs and churches that sponsored families, many of them Hmong. Buchholz says increased mobility for these populations due to purchasing cars for jobs, coupled with the close proximity of Kohler-Andrae, is probably responsible for increased minority visits to the park.

Eileen Hocker, a diversity coordinator with

the DNR Bureau of Law Enforcement, works closely with Hmong and thinks that population will benefit the most from Stewardship lands that allow access to hunting, a prominent part of their culture.

“[Stewardship lands] are going to be big for that community because it’s hard for many of them to know which lands are public,” she says. “They’re hoping that with all this publicity about Stewardship lands, everyone will know, which tracts are free and open and where they can hunt and know that they’re welcome.”

The Hank Aaron Trail that connects Milwaukee’s Miller Park Stadium to the Lake Michigan lakefront, “runs along the most densely populated and most racially diverse census districts in the state,” says Melissa Cook, DNR park and recreational specialist in the Southeast Region.

Cook has noticed that many of the paths in nearby neighborhoods are worn down where people are walking to the trail, and the trail allows people to bike to work and downtown instead of driving. Some users receive health insurance benefits because they are exercising and the trail provides an attractive alternative for people who can’t afford a health club membership.

“Some businesses that are close to the trail have started a health work group within the office setting . . . Programs that encourage people to walk at lunch time or to walk before or after work sort of rolled into a health awareness program,” Cook says.

Beyond the urban walls

Stewardship projects also aim to attract racially and economically diverse groups of kids to the lands. “Our population is getting more diverse in this state. In the future, the people who are going to grow up and take care of this land aren’t all going to be white, and they’re not all going to have rural experience,” Hocker says. “They’re going to grow up in cities or densely populated suburbs.”

Therefore, she says, it’s imperative to get children from minority populations to care about state lands so they are inspired to take care of them when they become adults.

Kluesner notes that the minority children of Wisconsin, who tend to live in urban settings, need these lands because they have few other opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

“An urban kid who just sees concrete needs to be able to get to an outdoor space and feel that different kind of experience,” she says.

But it’s going to be a challenge.

“There is one study that shows that a lot of the youth in Milwaukee have never seen Lake Michigan,” says Kate Zurlo-Cuva, a DNR staff specialist who has worked closely with the State



ALLEN MIDDENDORP

Lake Wissota State Park, northeast of Chippewa Falls, houses a popular interpretive and playground area thanks to efforts by the Friends of Lake Wissota State Park.

Parks Friends groups. “Through the Lakeshore State Park, the Friends are trying to create a gateway to natural resources and teach kids about what is out there, what it means to be involved in nature.”

Zurlo-Cuva says the Friends have added park amenities including benches and signs in an effort to attract Milwaukee youth. Annually, \$250,000 is available for Friends groups with a 50 percent match required.

Cook says 10 Milwaukee schools are participating in an art program to decorate the Hank Aaron Trail. The Friends group is sponsoring bike camps where kids from nearby schools can learn about bike safety. Cook hopes to use Stewardship dollars in the future to further link the adjacent neighborhoods to the trails and make the river more accessible via ramps that make it easy to get down to the river.

In addition to the Hank Aaron Trail, Kohler-Andrae has attracted a lot of Milwaukee’s urban youth.

“Quite a few school groups are bused here from the inner city Milwaukee area,” Buchholz says. “I think that encourages them to come

back when they have transportation of their own later.”

However, Carrie Morgan, who coordinates natural resources educational opportunities for kids for the DNR, thinks the growing cost of transportation is a problem. She hopes that funding can be found to supplement the cost of busing so kids can come out on field trips.

Back to the basics

Getting a diverse group of kids outdoors is challenging given television, cell phones and computers.

“I think one of the things we talk about frequently with respect to Stewardship, is how can families get back to basics?” Kluesner says. “There’s that time to just be in the outdoors without structure, without pressure, without other technology. It’s important in fighting childhood obesity, it’s important for fighting attention deficit disorder. [It’s important] for kids having an appreciation of the outdoors and bringing that into their adult lives.”

That point is exactly what Richard Louv highlights in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*.

Louv argues that today's youth have replaced nature with technology, which is largely responsible for depression, attention disorders and obesity.

"Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical and spiritual health directly to our association with nature — in positive ways," he writes.

Moreover, he adds that if children don't connect to the outdoors, they won't be motivated to take care of its withering state when they're adults. "How the young respond to nature, and how they raise their own children, will shape the configurations and conditions of our cities, homes — our daily lives," Louv writes.

Zurlo-Cuva says the Friends groups tend to highlight education in their projects.

about the outdoors.

"[At the zoo], they often have little stations along the way where you can stick your hands in boxes, or you can flip lids and look in," she says. "I think those kinds of things would engage kids a little bit better than just some flat panel."

Access for all abilities

Stewardship funds also are useful for making the outdoors accessible for people to ensure that their nature enthusiasm is met.

Andrew Janicki, DNR accessibility coordinator, hopes to use Stewardship funds to enhance the outdoor experience for people with disabilities. He suggests that state parks can make trails accessible by compacting dirt, or adding crushed limestone or granite. While it doesn't have to be paved, these materials are compact enough that wheelchairs can easily roll

across them. Visit dnr.wi.gov/org/land/parks/access/actrails.html.

Water accessibility is also a top priority. Janicki talks about establishing some accessible canoe campsites. At Pattison State Park, a plastic grid system is in the works to run along the beach, creating a trail that a wheelchair can easily cross.

Whitefish Dunes State Park and Kohler-Andrae each has a beach wheelchair with balloon-like tires that can trek through sand. In addition to the beach, people with mobility impairments can reserve a night in Kohler-Andrae's new accessible cabin, partially funded by Stewardship dollars. The cabin is available between May and October, but due to its popularity, reservations will probably have to be made far in advance.

Buchholz says one family told him that the cabin allowed their son to use a faucet for the first time in his life. The cabin faucet's height is adjusted to be within reach for people in wheelchairs. "It's giving people who visit here more ideas," Buchholz says, "for what they could do with their own homes."

Janicki says he will look into building more accessible cabins to complement the seven in

"This program unites politicians of both parties and people of all walks of life, from hunters and anglers to outdoor enthusiasts. Our natural resources make this great state what it is and are the fundamental part of our values as Wisconsinites. It was the vision of my father and of former Republican Governor Warren Knowles to create a means by which we can protect the waters and lands of this state."

• Tia Nelson
executive secretary Board of Commissioners of Public Lands and daughter of late Governor Gaylord Nelson

the Wisconsin state parks properties.

Creating a healthy economy

More than just nature benefits, Stewardship lands boost the economy of the communities they inhabit. According to a 2002 study, state park visitors spend over \$500 million a year in the communities surrounding their outdoor destinations. A significant chunk of this income comes from the pockets of out of town visitors.

"If you are a community that's looking to attract businesses, the fact that you have public lands that are easily accessible for employees can be billed as a reason why a business would want to locate there," Kluesner says.

While the parks have attracted tourists, the tourists have attracted environmentally conscious businesses.

Travel Green Wisconsin, a program that certifies businesses committed to conservation, has several green businesses in communities surrounding Stewardship lands.

"The data and information that we have about people who are taking outdoors vacations or day trips is that they want to spend their money at a place that is in line with their values related to the outdoors," Kluesner says.

Will Christianson, outreach coordinator with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, agrees. "I'm sure it's a symbiotic relationship," he says. "When they see and recognize [the Travel Green Wisconsin logo] in other businesses...they know that it's a business that's interested in preserving and sustaining the natural resources that make Wisconsin unique." 🍏

Kiera Wiatrak is an editorial intern with Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.



JEFF SAMIDA

High Cliff State Park in Sherwood features a reservoir known as the Butterfly Pond. A path, the 1.5-mile Butterfly Pond Trail, provides a safe recreational area for those with mobility concerns. Several accessible parking stalls are provided adjacent to the trail.

Some educational attractions that Friends groups built with Stewardship dollars include the Tamarack Trail signage at Kettle Moraine State Forest, an amphitheater at Whitefish Dunes State Park and a solarium at the Richard Bong State Recreation Area.

Zurlo-Cuva highlights an outdoor shipwreck exhibit at Whitefish Dunes State Park. "It encompasses the mission of the Stewardship program by getting people outdoors and learning at the same time," she says.

Morgan thinks adding hands-on attractions would be a step forward in getting kids excited

Not just quantity but quality

Protecting special places and endangered resources.

Natasha Kassulke

Fassett's locoweed (Oxytropis johannensis) is found only in Wisconsin.

THOMAS A. MEYER

owned by the state and WE Energies and protects thousands of acres of pine barrens, and the 7,784-acre Bibon Swamp SNA in Bayfield County, which is home to rare orchids.

“We can preserve places that are near and dear to the hearts of Wisconsin residents and visitors, such as the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area with its sandstone cliffs, pine trees and rare plants,” explains Thomas Meyer, a conservation biologist with the SNA Program.

“We are buying high quality natural areas,” adds Mark Martin, another SNA program conservation biologist. “They are not all large parcels. Some are small projects that provide rare habitat for endangered species.”

Both Meyer and Martin point to the Plainfield Tunnel Channel Lakes SNA in Waushara County as an example of a snippet of land that is critical to the health of one of our rarest plants. This 123-acre SNA is home to Fassett's locoweed, a federally threatened member of the bean

family that is endemic to Wisconsin and occurs only on the fluctuating shorelines of five lakes in central and northwestern Wisconsin.

Among his favorite preserves, Meyer cites Quincy Bluff and Wetlands SNA, which is a great partnership project between DNR and The Nature Conservancy-Wisconsin Chapter that protects a huge block of wetlands, forest and barrens in the bed of former Glacial Lake Wisconsin in Adams County. “The sandstone buttes rising above the lowland are really incredible,” Meyer says. “The Stewardship Fund helped rescue this wonderful landscape from being converted to cranberry beds.”

About \$680,000 in Stewardship funding was used to purchase 224 acres that became the Skunk and Foster Lakes SNA in 2003. This property was Gov. Jim Doyle's first Stewardship approval as governor. “The area has deep lakes that would have been developed otherwise,” Martin explains. “And the Ice Age Trail

runs through the land.”

Cassville Bluffs SNA in Grant County is another successful partnership between the DNR and a land trust. With Stewardship funding, the SNA Program and Mississippi Valley Conservancy purchased a 244-acre forest and prairie landscape on a bluff towering over the Mississippi River. Parts of Bark Bay Slough, Lost Creek Bog, and Port Wing Boreal Forest SNAs in Bayfield County were purchased through Stewardship and are widely used by migrating birds.

The primary feature at Moonlight Bay Bedrock Beach State Natural Area in Door County is the dolomite bedrock beach, which is periodically covered and exposed depending on Lake Michigan water levels.

THOMAS A. MEYER

Water is a common thread that runs through many SNAs. Moose Lake SNA, 1,113 acres in Iron County, is funded with Stewardship dollars, and features a lake containing a classic Northwoods Wisconsin fishery surrounded by old-growth forest. About 105 acres of the Moonlight Bay Bedrock Beach SNA in Door County was purchased using Stewardship in 1990-91 for \$615,000. The area protects more than three-quarters of a mile of Lake Michigan shoreline and a boreal forest along the Door Peninsula's northeastern coast. And Stewardship purchased 1,400 acres of the Tomahawk River Pines SNA in Oneida County from the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands. This area features several undisturbed stands of large red pines along a wild and undeveloped reach of the Tomahawk River upstream of the Willow Flowage. Its tall trees and isolated nature provide excellent nesting sites for bald eagles and osprey.

The Natural Resources Foundation has adopted the SNA program as one of its keystone projects and works to raise awareness of the program. The Foundation has developed a conservation endowment fund for natural areas management, which includes tackling invasive species, such as garlic mustard, restoration work, such as planting prairies and long-term management such as prescribed burns.

“These are legacy places that speak to what Wisconsin was once like.” Meyer says. 🌿

To learn more about Wisconsin's State Natural Areas visit dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/snal

Creating a forest legacy

Between 1997 and 2002, about 94 percent of Wisconsin's private industrial forestlands, or about one million acres, changed hands. Some of these lands were later subdivided into small parcels and re-sold — putting forest industry jobs, wildlife habitat and public access at risk.

The economics of land valuation is the culprit. Land is worth more as development property than as working forestland, and some companies are paying down their debts by selling off this land — often in smaller parcels, explains Rich LaValley, a DNR forest tax law field manager in Tomahawk.

Although the state has been able to acquire conservation easements on over 110,000 acres of these industrial forestlands, the rest of the 920,000 acres have no such easements that keep these lands in private hands and sustain public access for future generations.

"Stewardship maintains forest health and vigor for future generations," says Bob Mather, DNR bureau director for forestry management. "In forestry, size does matter."

Bigger tracts are easier to manage and provide greater benefits for wildlife and watershed quality. A goal of the forestry program has been to reduce fragmentation and ease costs to society. When cabins and homes are built into the forestland, fragmented parcels create greater demand for rural services and infrastructure like roads and utility corridors, and police and fire services.

Preserving large tracts of forestland and keeping them in production is equally important to the state's timber industry, Mather says, as these lands provide both economic and environmental benefits to the people of Wisconsin. Working forests are lands that are managed sustainably for the long term with harvesting and planting, and protecting endangered resources and water quality. The timber company may do the harvesting and planting, but it is monitored by the state to comply with the property management plan and compatible with forest management law.

"Because of the Stewardship Fund," LaValley says, "the state has been able to purchase easements on these large tracts of land to keep them intact. The state buys the development rights and public access so the land will not be developed and will remain open for recreation forever. In most cases the company still owns the land and manages it under a long-term forest management plan."

An example of such an agreement is the Wolf River Forest Legacy Project. In October 2005, the Plum Creek Timber Company, a real estate investment trust, announced that more than 18,500 acres of property near the Wolf River in eastern Langlade County would be permanently conserved through an easement with the state. The Wolf River area is important to those who use the land for hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching and other outdoor activities.

State easement acquisition took place over two years. Approximately 10,700 acres were purchased in 2005 and about 7,800 acres were purchased in the second phase in 2006.

The area includes frontage on the banks of Nine Mile Creek and the Lily River, Tyra Lake and a six-mile segment of the Ice Age Trail.

"There is a growing interest in recreational trails and the need to secure linear corridors and links to build a trail network to meet the needs of a wide range of recreational trail users," LaValley says. "Many of the companies I work with are interested in providing public recreation such as snowmobile and cross-country ski trails."

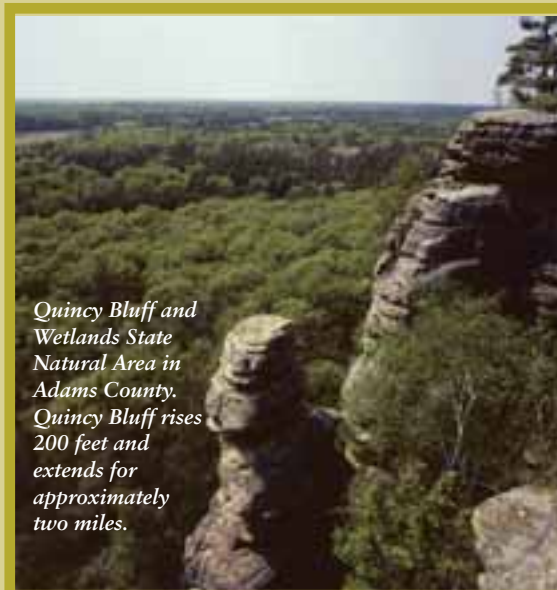
The Baraboo Hills Forest Legacy Area is an example of a different kind of project that involved several small landowners who, along with the public, benefited from Stewardship and the Forest Legacy Program. The Baraboo Hills project began in 2003 and was completed in 2007. The

bluffs are composed of the largest surface deposit of quartzite in the Midwest, and thus as both a landform and mineral lode, have significance. Agreements were reached with 16 property owners to buy conservation easements on approximately 1,000 acres of forestland in the Baraboo Hills.

The easements were negotiated through the Forest Legacy Program, a partnership between the DNR and U.S. Forest Service.

Conservation easements ensure that these privately owned environmentally important forestlands are protected from non-forest uses, such as commercial development. At the same time, landowners have the ability to use, manage, benefit from, and enjoy their property.

"Acquisition of easements from a grouping of smaller landowners, combined with a wide variety of other conservation efforts in the area, will help protect the long-term conservation and forest production values of the Baraboo Hills," Mather says.



Quincy Bluff and Wetlands State Natural Area in Adams County. Quincy Bluff rises 200 feet and extends for approximately two miles.

THOMAS A. MEYER

