



# NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVANCY TRUST



*Saving Our Land*

We live in an ever-changing world and with that an ever-changing environment. With the growth of the world's population, and the development associated with it, the natural world we know and love is under increasing threat.

Passion, at the root of it all, points to a strong emotion one has inside, for someone, or something. A land trust keeps its promise by working with people's passion for their land. Through a conservation easement, North Central Conservancy Trust makes a promise that the land you love and cherish will be there forever – for you, your children, and all who wander it. If you own land, what you do with it is a personal decision. NCCT can provide an option that will hold its natural integrity forever. In return, it is an opportunity for you to leave a legacy of conserving the land that's loved for future generations.

It is with our passion for the land and people that we present you with personal stories from our current conservation easement land donors. Each of the following stories intends to broadly answer some of the most frequently asked questions about what a land trust promises and does. The beauty of the land can inspire us, and the stories rooted in those lands allow us to learn where we come from and who we are.



Don and Malena Otalora-Fadner

What is a conservation easement?



Byron and Margaret Shaw

What kinds of land can be protected by a conservation easement?



Alan and Laurel Young

How much is the gift of an easement worth?



Trudy and David Pederson

How long does an easement last?



James and Cathryn Butler-Eckberg

What are the grantee's responsibilities?



Dr. Alan Haney

How restrictive is an easement?



Steve and Andrea Brocken

What are the advantages and disadvantages of donating an easement?

## Otalora-Fadner

### EASEMENT

Set in a nook of hardy, mixed woods lie 44 acres of protected land, featuring meadows of wild lupine, acres of prairie, winding foot trails, ground-cedar, and one very happy dog named Socks. Landowners Don and Malena Otalora-Fadner have resided on this property for over 20 years. Don and Malena first learned about NCCT through his former colleague and NCCT board member, Tom Overholt. It was after he met Tom that Don created the Otalora-Fadner Easement.

He calls his land a sanctuary; a term he didn't use lightly when asked about his personal tie to it. As we walked down the first few feet of trail, he stopped to look over one of the many small hills. This spot holds a splendid amount of wild lupine in early summer. Karner blue butterflies, a federally endangered insect, can be spotted fluttering amongst the blue and purple flowers, gorging on sweet nectar. The beauty of all this lupine brings a smell that the eyes can't see. At this moment, I started to understand why he calls his land a sanctuary, and asked him if he could elaborate. Don said, "Walking the land is a ritual that is able to revive one's connection to the natural processes that ultimately govern all life and death. Caring for the land feels like a sacred obligation."

Winding down the path a few more feet brought us to a tamarack forest. As he looked around I followed his gaze to the crisp, cold ground-cedar shining brilliantly in the sunlight. "Ground cedar is an excellent indicator of a healthy forest. I had plant species specialist, Bob Freckmann, out on my land to view this amazing plant," Don beamed. It was a beautiful sight to view and I could smell its delicious scent as I rubbed it in between my fingers.

Our last stop was at the NCCT protection sign. He pursued a conservation easement to preserve his land forever while still being able to enjoy the benefit of owning it. Concern often arises with some landowners, who misunderstand that pursuing a conservation easement requires their land to be made public. This is not the case. The landowner has the choice to keep it private or make it public. I asked Don what he would tell someone who was considering pursuing a conservation easement and he stated, "Go ahead and do it! Why not? It's my sanctuary and I get the pleasure of preserving my land that I love. It's so simple."

Conservation is important in many different ways. Knowledge about current ecological issues is important, yet those issues are easily overlooked. NCCT provides an option for landowners to conserve land that might be of vital importance. It is our promise to keep that the land will be protected forever.



Don and Malena Otalora-Fadner

*"Walking the land is a ritual that is able to revive one's connection to the natural processes that ultimately govern all life and death. Caring for the land feels like a sacred obligation."*



Wild Lupine Field



Crisp Ground Cedar Plants in the Tamarack Forest



NCCT Protection Sign

# Shaw

## EASEMENT

History can be preserved with a simple decision and one option: a conservation easement. Byron and Margaret Shaw have lived in their “130-year-old house” for over 50 years. In their early years of living here, they used this property as a small hobby farm. They had a few cows, pigs, and chickens to supply most of their food. Those times have since passed, but new hobbies emerged from being able to be on their land. Among wood-turning, gardening, and managing their large amount of prairie, they also make wine with grapes from their small vineyard. I noticed many vast meadows and wondered how much they have that is prairie. Margaret and Byron beamed, “We have over 50 acres of prairie and do biennial burns on half of it every year. In the summer, they are in full bloom, attracting many species and visitors. In a sense, we are proud to have seen what we have been able to create from our land.”

They’ve known of the concept of a conservation easement for many years, but it took time to decide to put one on their land. Before even considering a conservation easement Byron suggested, “Talk to your family before you decide to pursue a conservation easement, especially if they have strong ties to the land.” Living on the land, Byron and Margaret learned to cherish it, as did their children, who grew up on the land. Byron was a soils and water resource professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) for many years. Their children followed and attended UWSP, studying natural resources. Today, they both have careers in which they maintain their own efforts towards preserving the natural world. Margaret said, “Our overall goal is to be able to cherish our property forever.” I understood what Margaret was saying because, as I looked down at my feet inspiration struck with awe.



Byron and Margaret Shaw

*“Talk to your family before you decide to pursue a conservation easement, especially if they have strong ties to the land.”*



*Blooming Wild Plum Trees*

*“We have over 50 acres of prairie and do bi-annual burns on half of it every year. In the summer they are in full-bloom.”*



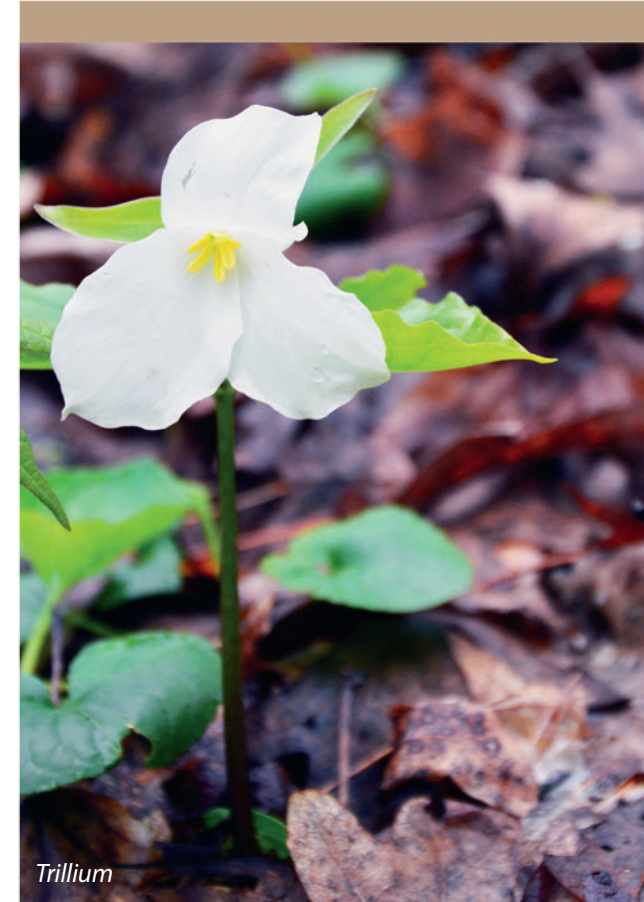
*A Charming Row of Grape Vines Offers the Promise of Fall Wine*

I saw a brilliant white trillium flower speckled with dew. Many of the trilliums were in bloom along the ground, but a few have yet to open, and were waiting for the sun’s rays.

Gliding my fingers along the big bluestem grass in one of the many prairies, I could smell a sweet fragrant flower in the distance. We neared a field where I noticed some blooming wild plum trees. It was a beautiful sight to take in, and Byron stated, “The former dean of UWSP’s College of Natural Resources, Daniel O. Trainer helped me plant this row of trees, a few wild plum trees, and shrubs along this wind break. He was a good friend of mine, and, in a sense, his legacy is maintained here with these plants.”

I wondered what else others could gain by pursuing a conservation easement because it seemed clear that they wanted their cherished land to be remembered, but what more did Byron and Margaret want? Byron studied water and soils for many years, so his input was, “It keeps a buffer to have these lands, and some areas have natural groundwater recharge. It helps create a buffer to preserve water quality. We are doing our part for the water system. In particular to our location being in Portage County, the Little Plover River has been drying up, in part, due to mostly agriculture practices. If these can be better managed and reduced, the river might have a chance of surviving. The Plover River Watershed in general needs protection, and is such a crucial natural resource for central Wisconsin.” With a statement such as this, it was even clearer to me why a conservation easement could be an option for a variety of individuals. Just as there are many different species in a prairie, there are many different ways in which people can do their part for our natural world. Margaret stated, “We might not directly see how preserving our land will affect our grandchildren, but we can be sure and keep a promise that even our grandchildren’s grandchildren will always be able to at least see what we have cherished for nearly 50 years.”

*Special note: This article was first published in June 2016. Margaret Shaw resides on and cares for this beautiful property. Sadly, Byron passed away in October, 2016. Byron was inducted into the WI Conservation Hall of Fame in April 2023 and his conservation legacy will live on forever.*



*Trillium*



# Young EASEMENT



## Alan and Laurel Young

*"We don't know what others will gain by pursuing a conservation easement, but the land will gain. The biodiversity, life, and trees will gain."*

There was a somewhat familiar sense as I approached Alan and Laurel Young's land. Gardens were hugging the exterior of the house, and there was a delightful chorus of birds chirping in the distance. They have lived on their beautiful 77-acre property for nearly 50 years, and have had a conservation easement on it for about twelve years. About ten years ago, they decided to give ten acres to their daughter and son-in-law so that they could live near them and aid with the upkeep of their land.

Not far in the distance, I could see the top of the nearby hill, which held a very special memory for their two daughters. This special place is where they would pretend to cook oatmeal in the stump of an old hemlock. Sometimes it's hard for people to see what actions could be made now to affect the future in a positive way. Laurel and Alan Young knew that by pursuing a conservation easement, it was understood that their actions today would ultimately protect the future of the land and the oatmeal-tree. Alan took in a deep breath and said, "I don't know what others will gain by pursuing a conservation easement, but the land will gain. The biodiversity, life, and trees will gain. It's a very special place, and we are so happy to have lived here for as long as we have." They hope that their children will take over their legacy and ties to the land. Their land embodies a lot of history. Heating their house with only the wood from their property for many years, they also have magnificent gardens that hold many varieties of vegetables that have held a historical legacy for many years. Alan stated, "In 1863, a man who lived on their property gave a Norwegian some land for homesteading. When the title of the land passed to another in the early 1900s, it stated that the landowners had to provide fresh, in-season vegetables to the nearby nursing home facility." In a sense, their vegetable gardens have maintained a historical preservation.



*The Vegetable Gardens Maintain a Historical Preservation*



*"Having land protected in this area has proven to be a positive impact, but what about in other areas of Portage County?"*

Alan and Laurel stated, "Protecting this land and our woods will forever maintain its biodiversity. We are adjacent to state land, are close to the Tomorrow River, and have surrounding neighbors with conservation easements. We feel as if we have contributed to the diversity in the area." It's the investment that was significant for them when they pursued their conservation easement about twelve years ago. They have appreciated the



Aside from the cost, the ultimate decision is whether or not one is willing to pursue the limitations, as well as the legacy of a conservation easement. "I've seen otters slide across the top of the snow, and heard owls hoot and coyotes howling. When we see subtle things as such, we feel secure in the fact that things will be protected forever from the action we took by pursuing a conservation easement," Alan stated. Everything has an impact that is either positive or negative. NCCT is striving to make that positive impact for the beauty of Wisconsin and the life of its citizens.

tax benefits since then, but overall they have enjoyed seeing the diversity remain intact. Sometimes, when individuals start to pursue a conservation easement they are turned off by the cost of it. There are some up-front costs to initiate work on an easement, but there is also the potential for significant tax benefits. All costs and donations can be used when one calculates income-tax liability. I asked Alan what he would tell others if he could change his conservation easement and he said, "If we could go back and do it over again, we would have saved up a bit more money and pursued this conservation easement earlier."



*Oatmeal Tea House Hill*

# Pederson

## EASEMENT

Though it lies only five miles outside of Stevens Point, Trudy and David Pederson's land is in an area that almost feels like one walked through the wardrobe of The Chronicles of Narnia. There are so many trees, the Wisconsin River is right down the road, and some of the barns from the early 1900s are still standing. Since 1977, they have lived in the old log home that was built by David's grandfather, and took nearly eight years to pursue their easement. Trudy expressed as she gazed out the window, "When we first purchased the land it [the house] was small and we remember just sitting in the middle of it recognizing the fact that we just signed the papers and it was ours. It was a wreck, but later we found that underneath the house was a hidden beauty; it was a log house."

Most conservation easement donors have a reason for their passion to protect their land. I asked David what his thoughts were, and he stated, "Having worked on it and cared for it: those were the things that have tied us to the land over the years. We also use the land by cutting firewood, exploring the creeks made by the rains of spring, make gallons of maple syrup, and have planted over 2,000 pine trees. Over the years we added more acres from neighbors as it became available, totaling about 53 acres." Being able to use the land and live on it is a synergistic relationship. However, sometimes there are other reasons and more purposes to pursue a conservation easement.

"What initially drove us to pursue a conservation easement was the pressure with development. Before the nearby road became Highway 10 we worked so hard to protest the development within our area and we won. The town then decided to update its comprehensive plan and denoted our area as an 'area of natural importance.'"



Trudy and David Pederson

*"By preserving the land, it might help others understand the importance of open space and decreasing pressure with development in areas of natural importance."*



Natural Spring

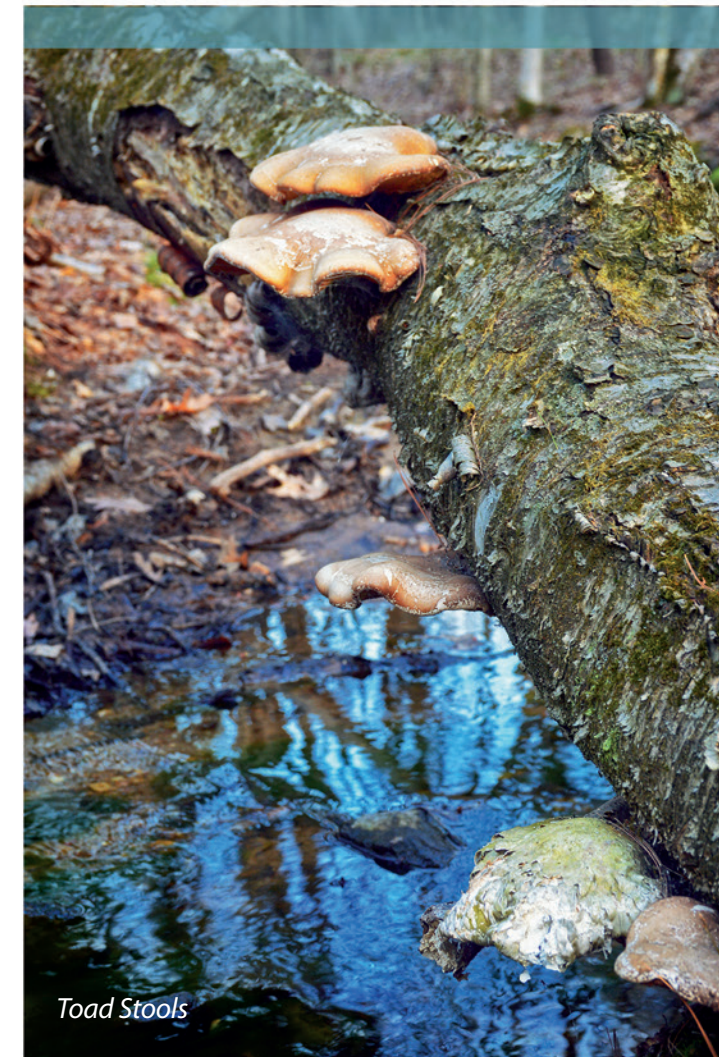


*"The little bit of property we have here in contrast to the rest of the land in America will be forever maintained in a natural way."*



Birch Stand

Oftentimes, people who pursue an easement become confused, and are hesitant about the documents that are associated with it, so David explained, "The process of a conservation easement was a bit difficult. We often times wished we had more input, advice, or counseling from current conservation easement donors. If others are pursuing a conservation easement, it is important that they do research, talk to others, and be thoughtful in their process. We wanted to protect the integrity. It's not what you want to keep, but you have to decide what you don't want to happen which is broad and made it difficult for us to decide what we wanted for the land or what we wanted to happen to the land; for us it was never an issue of cost for the easement. On top of the land, we had a tie to the preservation of the log home." NCCT doesn't have the capability to enforce preservation of buildings, but we do have the option to create a 'building zone' within the easement. This makes it possible to do restorations and preservations without disrupting the entire property. There are many other flexible options for people to consider which make it all the more feasible to consider a conservation easement. "By preserving the land, it might help others understand the importance of open space and decreasing pressure with development in areas of natural importance.



Toad Stools

We are doing our part in giving back to society and helping the change that is occurring on the environment. The little bit of property we have here in contrast to the rest of the land in America will be forever maintained in a natural way. The natural spring gives back to the Wisconsin River as well," Trudy and David explained. By deciding to pursue a conservation easement, most land donors feel that they have given back to society and are helping the environment.

# Butler-Eckberg

## EASEMENT

The sun was setting behind the trees as I pulled up to a magnificent, cedar-wood house. There was a solar panel in the distance soaking up the last of the rays before the night descended. James and Cathryn Butler-Eckberg have lived here for almost 40 years, and first learned about NCCT from other easement donors, Kathy Powell and Steve Griswold, and Lowell and Christine Klessig. This



James and Cathryn Butler-Eckberg

*"In some respects, we feel that having entered our land in a conservation easement will be our most enduring effect in our lives."*

is a common occurrence; most landowners learn about easement donations from their neighbors or friends. James and Cathryn both stated, "Our immediate neighbors and a family member later entered into conservation easements so that, including the nearby state land, a larger area of forest and wildlife habitat was preserved." Living on their land and aiding the forest in its growth led them to pursue a conservation easement. "We've spent the majority of our adult lives here, building a house, raising our sons, trying to be good stewards of this land. Our house has abundant views of the forest, so we feel a connection to this beautiful natural place and its other inhabitants. We have been concerned with forest fragmentation and felt that an easement would prevent that." Pursuing a conservation easement allows individuals to protect the integrity of their land in a variety of ways they would like.

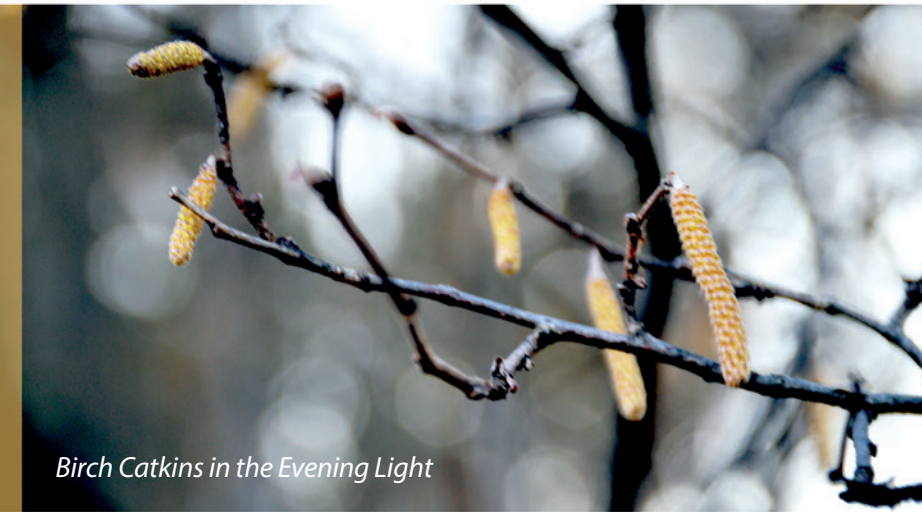
James and Cathryn led me down a sunlit, birch tree-lined path to overlook the vast landscape of the terminal glacial moraines. The crisp air filled my lungs as I turned in circles gazing out over this beautiful landscape. This spot is one of their favorite outlooks during this time of the year, "It brings the feeling to you that the land is not just yours, but that you are a part of it and that people in the future may have this same appreciation."



Terminal Glacial Moraines



*"We've spent the majority of our adult lives here, building a house, raising our sons, trying to be good stewards of this land."*

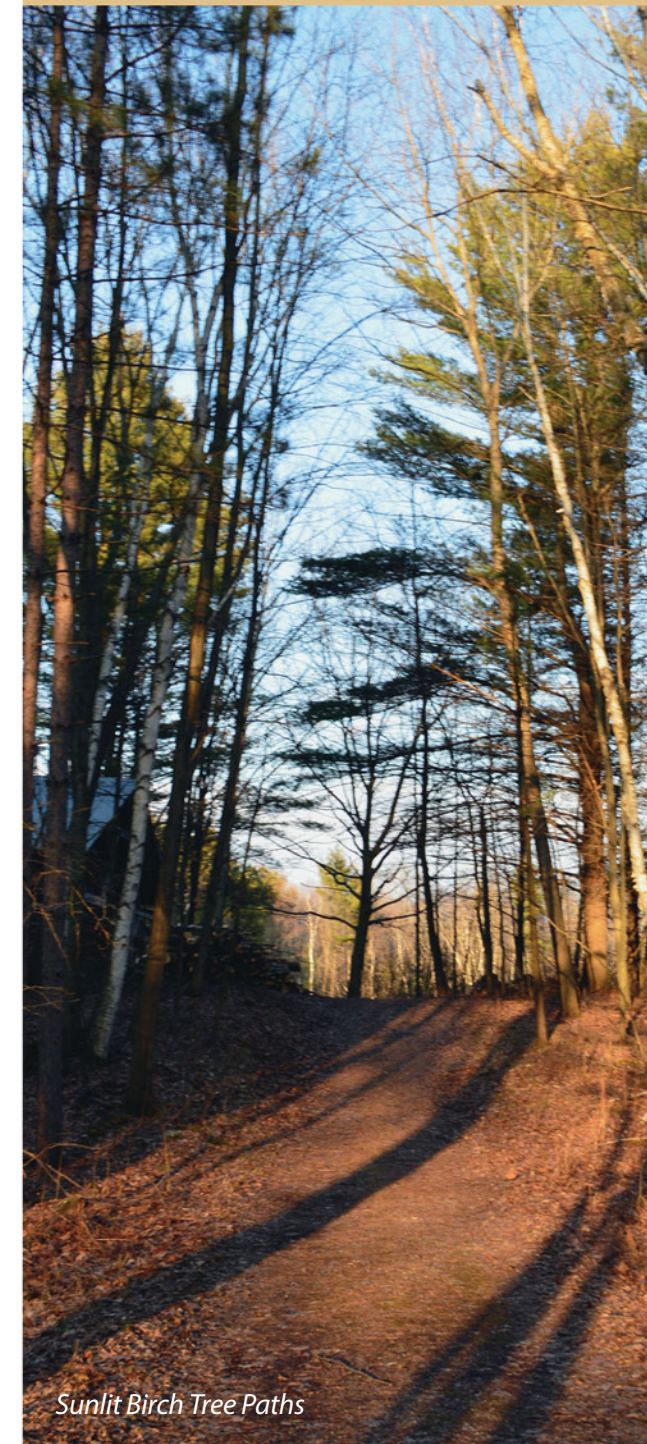


Birch Catkins in the Evening Light

Walking the land with conservation easement donors allows one to gain a different perspective every single time. It allows one to be inspired to learn their ties to the land. A little bit farther down this path, a large solar panel was soaking up the sun rays. James stated that this solar panel creates more energy than they can sometimes use to power their house.

It is NCCT's responsibility to monitor and enforce both the reserved rights and the restrictions that are placed in a conservation easement. The monitoring is done once a year, and written records are maintained. Even though the solar panel was not yet constructed when the conservation easement baseline document was written, it was mentioned that devices for renewable energy could be constructed on the land. If this was not written in the original agreement, a violation might have occurred. I asked James if trying to decipher what to put in a conservation easement baseline document was difficult and he stated, "The benefits include being able to design the future uses of our land that were consistent with our vision for land preservation. The biggest con is that you have to relinquish some control over the property. If one is supportive of stewardship, this is not a significant disincentive. If we were to go back in time and change anything about our easement document, we would not change anything. We took the time to figure out what we wanted to preserve and how we wanted the land to be preserved." Cathryn mentioned that if someone were pursuing a conservation easement that they should talk with other easement donors to gain this perspective of how to be flexible while maintaining their desired conservation goals.

By the time I was ready to depart, the sun had already set behind the rolling moraines. Cathryn memorably stated, "In some respects, we feel that having entered our land in a conservation easement will be our most enduring effect in our lives." There are many trails and paths one can walk to make their legacy in this world, and James and Cathryn made the choice to protect their legacy with the trails and paths they walk every day.



Sunlit Birch Tree Paths



Large Solar Panel Soaks Up the Sun's Rays

# Haney

## EASEMENT

I've driven down many driveways, but this was definitely the most extensive and winding one I'd ever encountered. An old red barn and several other old buildings glowed through the trees as I came to the end of the road. Here resides Dr. Alan Haney, NCCT's former board president and Dean of the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point. We began our tour by viewing his homestead and an old, restored barn that is "120 years old". Dr. Haney stated, "When I purchased my farm in 2004 from the previous owner, he was very concerned that it not be developed. He hoped it could be preserved in pretty much its current condition, which was beautiful, although buildings had been badly neglected. He and I discussed a conservation easement, which he couldn't afford. I offered him a low price for the farm and told him if it was acceptable, then I'd put a conservation easement on the farm to prevent it from ever being developed. This was consistent with my wishes for the farm as well. He and his wife agreed. I then contacted Gathering Waters, who put me in touch with NCCT, about whom I had heard nothing about until then." It was a decision that would later be viewed very positively by him and others.

As we traveled down the first of over four miles of trails Dr. Haney has established, I couldn't help notice the many activities going on. He gets most of the produce he eats from his gardens, hunts deer on his land, and has canned up to five gallons of maple syrup per season (for dessert)! His values and ties to the land are evident everywhere. We stopped to view the passage of what Alan Haney calls an "old stage-coach passage". The history of this path intertwines with his childhood memories and his passion for the land.



Dr. Alan Haney

*"My hope is that my legacy will be seen as a contribution to the environmental quality of Central Wisconsin, in perpetuity."*

"I grew up on a small farm surrounded by extensive acreage my grandfather owned. I spent my early years walking the land with him, and hearing how the land had been in his family for four generations, and how it had previously been used by Native Americans. He took an interest in every tree, every bird, every acre, and I came to share his passion for the land. That passion led me to seek a place I could call my own. This farm is that place, where I can direct my passion for land conservation to a property deserving of protection."



*The North Woods Road*

is the only way I know to ensure that this property will be permanently protected. It is my wish, and my vow to the previous owner who loved this land as much as I now do. It was a noble action to have taken, and his love for the land motivated me."

Even though there are benefits to a conservation easement, there are disadvantages people should be aware of also. Dr. Haney stated, "I have the tax benefit, both in the cost of the easement as well as a reassessment for property value that has a greater long-term financial benefit. The only con is that I'm now tied to the restrictions I placed on the land, but I'm happy with them and was able to mold what I wanted from what was called a 'boiler template'. There isn't, so far, anything I would change if I were to do it over." The purpose of our organization is to give people options. It is not in NCCT's interest to force anyone to do anything. "Conserving the natural heritage of Central Wisconsin through the protection of land" is our mission.

As I exited his winding driveway, his last statement was one that continued to stay with me: "My hope is that my legacy will be seen as a contribution to the environmental quality of Central Wisconsin in perpetuity. If you love the land, if you value the natural landscape, if you are at all concerned about uncontrolled development compromising in the future the landscape values we now enjoy, don't hesitate to pursue a conservation easement."



*The Sprawling Farm With Its 120 Year Old Barns*



*Yellow River Bridge for Trout Fishing*

The trail ends with a small, mossy wooden bridge lying across the Tomorrow River. As we paused, looking out over the bubbling river, I asked him what ties to his land he values most, and he stated, "Everything. The water, the trees, the birds, the animals, it is all part of the 'land' as defined by Aldo Leopold. We cut our own firewood, make maple syrup, manage our own orchard, plant huge gardens, looking every day to connect with the land. It would be impossible to single out any one aspect of this. I love nothing more than walking the land, watching the birds, taking note of spring wildflowers, controlling weeds, just connecting with it. Pursuing a conservation easement

# Brocken

## EASEMENT

Nearly all of NCCT's conservation easements are on properties still owned by the original donors. One exception is that of Steve and Andrea Brocken. About thirteen years ago, Steve and Andrea settled on one of Central Wisconsin's lands preserved through NCCT. They are the first second-generation conservation-easement landowners within NCCT. The previous owner was a cyclist, who placed bicycles in the trees to pronounce his legacy on the land. Yet they are not blatant, and seem to have melded in with the surrounding trees' features by appearing now as curvy branches. Steve moved here from Chicago and has since successfully raised seven large, grass-fed cattle without any farming background whatsoever. Most Wisconsin folk would be proud to have him living here. He is very appreciative of the land and the aspects of conservation dear to Wisconsin conservation leader Aldo Leopold.

This 30-acre property is one example of that conservation; hosting a plethora of wildlife, including Barred Owls, bobcats, red squirrels, wolves, woodpeckers, deer, and pond-loving mosquitos! Steve understands that all wildlife plays a part in the ecosystem. One cool evening the sun was setting behind the old, dense white pines that covered the back of the property. Before Steve and his ten-year-old daughter could react, a Barred Owl came down and scooped up one of their cats. It was at this moment when he realized how amazingly wild his property is. He stated, "It is a very cool experience to have access to nature right at the foot of our back door. It adds a whole new perspective to everything when you are able to experience everything out there." As shocking as the experience was for their daughter, she and his other two children have expressed their agreement to keep the house after Steve and Andrea die.

A house and land that have a conservation easement might seem limiting to a prospective buyer. This was not the case for Steve and Andrea. In fact, they viewed it as an advantage. Steve mentioned, "The restrictions on the land were easy to understand. Having this easement was a perk to the property and the only true thing I could protect with my lifetime on this Earth. The only thing that it would truly limit us from doing is logging, but why would I want to chop down the largest and most beautiful trees? Once they're gone they're gone forever." Even his neighbors know that they'll have woods to view forever and the wildlife that reside within it.



Steve and Andrea Brocken

*"I thought that having this easement was a perk to the property and the only true thing I could protect with my lifetime on this Earth."*



*A Barred Owl Surveys the Property*



*View of Kettlemade Pond*



*I Spy Bicycles!*

NCCT works with landowners to develop conservation easements that protect and preserve the conservation values of their properties. Conservation easements are especially important for protecting the agriculture, scenic, and environmental qualities of our landscape. The mission of NCCT includes education of both the public and elected officials about the value of conservation areas and the ways in which easements can protect them. NCCT works closely with town and county officials, and is affiliated with Gathering Waters, a state-wide land trust organization that helps to coordinate land-protection activities among more than 50 land trusts in Wisconsin. NCCT is also a member of the national Land Trust Alliance, which supports land protection across the country. These two affiliations are important to the success of state-wide land trusts and with your help you too can help protect and preserve the landscape of Wisconsin and keep your legacy alive.

*Where do I start for pursuing a conservation easement?*

Contact us directly at the following and we will be happy to talk and send you more materials:

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