



Preserving Land Since 1992

Open Spaces

2015 Annual Report

*Preserving the water resources, natural areas, and
working lands of Ozaukee and Washington Counties.*





Bratt Woods, Grafton

From the President



Dan

Daniel Dineen
President

Wow – what a remarkable year we had. OWLT added 320 more acres of protected land, launched our Great Rivers, Great Lakes Campaign with great success, built new partnerships and wrapped up the first phase of the Partners in Preservation aquatic invasive plant removal projects.

As you read through the Annual Report you will see just how much work was done in 2015. I must thank my board colleagues for all their dedication and support, our members and supporters and most of all our committed staff.

OWLT’s staff is recognized statewide for their professionalism and dedication to the land conservation community. Their efforts have made OWLT one of the most respected land trusts in the Midwest. That is why it is hard to say goodbye when one of them moves on and even harder when two valued members of our team leave. Mike Hoffer and Cody MacDonald were two special individuals that complemented the OWLT team. They took their role seriously and accomplished great things. They were dedicated to building our volunteer corps and took pride in making sure volunteers and interns were learning and having fun.

Both fellows would have loved to stay in Wisconsin and continued their good work with OWLT. However, family comes first. Mike moved back to North Carolina where his wife Janet took a new job (we thank Janet for all the volunteer graphic design work she did for us over the years). Cody followed his love to Denver where he recently accepted a job that will help local land trusts use tax credits to secure conservation easements. We sincerely thank Mike and Cody for their service and wish them well in their future endeavors.



Cody (left) and Mike (right) enjoy a nice fall evening at Spirit Lake.

Partnerships are Our Future



Shawn

Shawn Graff
Executive Director

The strong partnerships we have forged over the years have led to great things. From our first property deal, Sauk Creek Nature Preserve in Port Washington to Mequon Nature Preserve, Lion’s Den Gorge in Grafton, Zinn Preserve in Erin and our recent partnership with Glacial Lakes Conservancy and Sheboygan County to protect Amsterdam Dunes. As we look forward, partnerships and collaborations will play a huge role in our future success. We have several major projects in the works that rely heavily on partnerships to accomplish more than any one entity could accomplish on their own.

There is not enough room in this Annual Report to tell you of all the amazing projects we will be collaborating on but I want to give you a brief look at a few partnerships that will lead to great things in 2016 and beyond.



Curtes Farm, Town of Polk

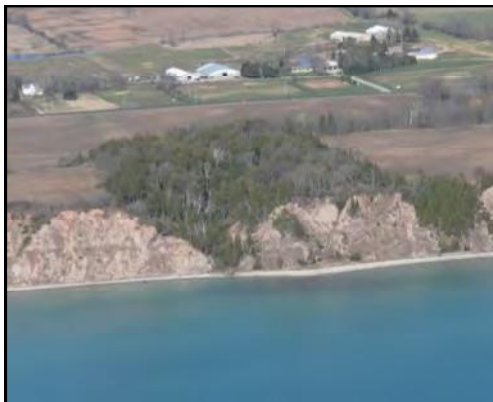
Partnership are our Future (Continued)

Mequon Preservation Partners – We were fortunate to receive grants from the Fund for Lake Michigan and the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to develop a comprehensive plan for land and water preservation in the City of Mequon. In addition to the City, OWLT will be partnering with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Ozaukee County, Wisconsin Wetland Association, The Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Conservation and Environmental Studies Program to develop a parcel by parcel analysis identifying lands that are most critical for protecting water resources, water quality and recreational opportunities.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program – OWLT, Ozaukee County, Washington County, MMSD, The Conservation Fund, Glacial Lakes Conservancy and several other partners were awarded a \$1.5 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The grant will allow partners to protect farmland and implement best management practices to improve water quality and reduce sediment and nutrient discharges in the Milwaukee River Watershed.

Making Allies – OWLT, Fondy Food Center, MMSD and The Conservation Fund have been selected by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to participate in a “Making Allies for Healthier Communities” pilot project. This project is funded in part by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation allowing LTA to facilitate a planning process to help the partners address shared issues. The partners are coalescing around the issue of farmland preservation in the greater Milwaukee area. The partners have a deep and intimate connection to the land. Fondy relies on the land to provide fresh produce to its markets. OWLT was founded by area residents concerned about the rapid pace of development and the loss of farmland and natural areas. MMSD recognizes the importance of land as a vital green infrastructure component that has enormous capacity to absorb and store rain and melting snow, and filter sediments and pollutants before water enters the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. LTA will be documenting the planning process and anticipates sharing our success with other communities around the country.

Cedar Heights Gorge – It’s been a long time coming but we are getting close to completing the Cedar Heights Gorge / Clay Banks acquisition. This is a four-way partnership between OWLT, Ozaukee County, City of Port Washington and the Highview Group, LTD. The Cedar Heights Gorge / Clay Banks Preserve will consists of a 105-acre property with 1.25 miles of Lake Michigan Shoreline. It contains two natural areas and is located just a quarter mile north of Lion’s Den Gorge. OWLT will assist the County and City in the acquisition of the property. Similar to our Lion’s Den Gorge project, OWLT will place an easement on the property and will transfer ownership to Ozaukee County. Highview Group, LTD will develop the property to the west into residential lots, vineyard and winery. The Highview Group, LTD (and eventually the homeowner’s association in the adjacent subdivision) will provide annual funds to OWLT for the maintenance of the preserve.



Cedar Heights Gorge

Also see the story about our Pukaite Woods partnership on the back page.



Milwaukee River, Grafton

“We build up friendly debts in life, but don't always have the pleasure of paying them back directly.”

Franz Metcalf



Steve Henkel
Land Protection Director

Land Protection Matters

Over the past few years, we have been filling our cozy corner of the web with news of our endeavors in land protection and stewardship. We have had many successes, to be sure. As an example, since our last annual report we have added 320 acres of wetlands, fields and forests to our nature preserves. Acres protected: that’s an important way to measure success, but by no means the only way.

With many of our purchases, the landowner picked up the phone or stopped by OWLT to see if we were interested in buying their property. These owners had invested in their land for decades, sometimes across generations. When it was time to pass it on, they understood the land would be well tended by a community dedicated to taking the time to walk, watch and listen to the land and its inhabitants before deciding what would come next. The owners felt that the land trust was the logical successor steward. They felt they owed a friendly debt to the land, and wanted to repay it. That’s a deeper level of success.

Some of the land we acquire has aged prematurely over the last 100 years or so, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the land was subject to an extreme makeover that didn’t turn out so well. If so, there was likely a backhoe involved. Part of OWLT’s mission is to help repay debts owed to the land. Maybe those words are not in our mission statement, but the idea is.

Protecting a parcel of land through acquisition or a conservation easement is an important first step in paying down that outstanding balance. But that’s just the beginning. Now comes the tricky part. What should we do with this particular plot of land? You probably have run across the term Active Listening, maybe as part of a team building exercise. It’s pretty much what we do in step two with the new parcel of land and its inhabitants, as well as with our conservation partners and the larger community. It is harder than it sounds, especially when you are certain that you already know the answer. But we have been walking the path for a while, and I think we are doing better.



Katie Weber installs an acoustical monitor.

A couple of our recent efforts:

Throughout the Summer and Fall of 2015, OWLT began a more detailed assessment of the agricultural landscapes on three of our preserves. We are observing how past or current cropping practices on those lands have impacted or continue to impact features such as soil structure, infiltration, erosion and nutrient balances. For each property we are trying to figure out how to restore, or simply encourage, a more functional and sustainable natural system.



Shannon Preserve, Saukville

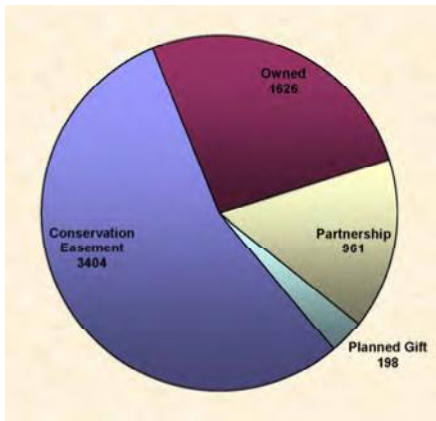
Land Protection Matters (Continued...)

We are also continuing to inventory the vegetation and wildlife on our protected properties and throughout the region. Whenever we can, we walk or sloop our way through an area to look for whatever will sit still long enough to be seen. That's easier to do for plants than for animals, because we are such a noisy bunch. And so, to help with the listening part, we recently purchased some hi-tech gadgets to record the songs and sounds on our preserves for later identification by biologists and/or equally hi-tech acoustical recognition software. We'll keep you posted on what we find.

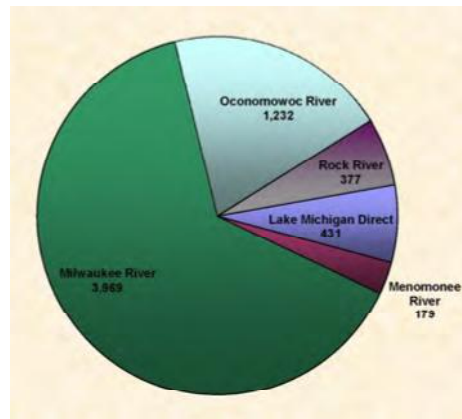
Running the Numbers

As noted, in 2015 we added 320 acres to our protected land holdings. The current breakdown is shown below:

BY PROTECTION METHOD



BY WATERSHED



Thanks to the many individuals, families, corporations and public agencies that made these conservation projects possible.

Great Rivers...Great Lakes - A Fresh Water Preservation Campaign

In late 2014, OWLT launched a four year strategic effort to identify and protect an additional 2000 acres of critical habitat in Ozaukee and Washington Counties. At that time our total investment need was estimated at nearly \$12 million. One year into the project, OWLT had already identified several parcels for preservation and the need for that total investment is quite clear. The impact of this project will be far reaching, with major water resource outcomes such as reduced flooding and reduced nutrient loading to the streams and wetlands in the Milwaukee River Watershed.

Since our 2014 launch, OWLT along with the Wisconsin Department of Resources, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, local municipalities, individual donors and foundations have invested over \$4.4 million in the acquisition of nine new properties totaling 527 acres. Not a bad start.



Mayhew Preserve — one of the properties protected with Great Rivers/Great Lakes.



Dedication Schoofs Preserve



Cross Country Skiing at Schoofs Preserve



Ryan Wallin Joins the OWLT Team

As the new Stewardship Director at OWLT, I bring a well-rounded background to the organization and a soul that feels right at home in southeastern Wisconsin. I grew up here, developed my passion for nature here, learned what is right and wrong here, and with the help of the stars found my way back. My first ten years were spent in West Allis, where I picked up many of my personality traits as well as my first understanding of nature and urban development; they don't mix. I moved on to Elm Grove, a self-designated "bird sanctuary", where I lived adjacent to the middle school's woodlot. This stand of mature timber mixed with wetlands was my playground, fishing hole, hiking trail, and adolescent sanctuary within nature. Most are not as fortunate to be embedded in such a peaceful and earthy setting so close to the big city. I was, and am grateful for it!



Ryan Wallin
Stewardship Director

My education beyond high school wandered a bit as I listened to the critics talk about how little money and few jobs exist in the natural resources discipline. As I did throughout my childhood, I did not comply and follow suit. Instead, I ended up at UW-Stevens Point where I completed my undergraduate degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management. Later, I earned my graduate degree with honors in Environmental Policy and Management, with a fish and wildlife management emphasis.

My first professional position was with a nation-wide, non-profit organization that concentrated on wildlife disease education workshops and collecting samples; chronic wasting disease (CWD) was at the top of our list. A large portion of my position was funded by CWD money and the position eventually dried up and all but disappeared. In the summer of 2012 I took a position with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources as a Fish and Wildlife Biologist. This position was highly associated with timber harvest activities, but allowed me to gain experience with scientific research design, endangered species processes, habitat conservation and land management plans, habitat inventory and analysis, geographic information systems (GIS), forest health, silviculture, and landscape level management regimes. The folks, landscapes, and wildlife I worked with were some of the best.



Ryan explains bluff erosion at Discovery World

In late 2015, I was offered the Stewardship Director position with OWLT and a chance to come home! The decision was easy, but leaving the immense beauty of Washington and the relationships I built there was very difficult. What would be thought of as a consolation prize by some - moving home close to friends and family, getting back to my roots, a shifting approach from timber removal to building habitat, a chance to give back to my community, and the opportunity to start a career with a great organization I believe in – ended up being the grand prize to me.

I look forward to working with all of the great OWLT volunteers.

Ryan Wallin
Stewardship Director



Cody MacDonald, Burn Boss



Marilyn Schlotfeldt bird watching at Forest Beach

Stewardship Update

Our current stewardship activities span 31 properties totaling roughly 1,670 acres. Eight of our preserves are on the Milwaukee River, four have frontage on Lake Michigan, three are designated as State Natural Areas and one is the only migratory bird preserve in the Great Lakes Region. It's a lot to take care of but thanks to our dedicated volunteers and seasonal helpers we are able to accomplish great things. Here are just a few of the 2015 highlights.

Youth Corp Program — This year we hosted an AmeriCorps crew of 7 devoted individuals from across the country, hired four land steward interns from local universities, a law school intern, an equipment and maintenance intern, and partnered with the Wisconsin Workforce Development program to provide meaningful employment for disadvantaged youth. Along with the strong support of our dedicated volunteers, we were able to make significant improvements to our preserves, keeping them safe for the public while strategically working to provide the proper and unique care land ethics entail.



2015 AmeriCorps Crew



Japanese Knotweed Removal, West Bend

Partners in Preservation — We wrapped up our Great Lakes Restoration Initiative 'Partners in Preservation for Invasive Species Removal' project. OWLT partnered with over 50 local governments, agencies, and non-profit organizations throughout the life of the project and together have treated and protected 1,635 acres of wetland, riparian, and shoreline habitat from the invasion of phragmites, Japanese knotweed, lyme grass, purple loosestrife and other common wetland invaders. These invasive plant species were of particular concern, They severely degrade Wisconsin's native ecosystems, and can require large amounts of resources when they become well established.

Burn Crew— Matured as a prescribed burn team. Six of our crew members were trained by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. We built a fire suppression trailer and trained new volunteers. We had eleven separate burns – all successful with no drama.



Prairie burn at Forest Beach

OWLT Achievements of 2015:



Buckthorn removal at Spirit Lake, Mequon

- Spirit Lake: Acquired in June, and spent considerable effort cleaning up the grounds around the building, fixing the pier, and removing buckthorn and other invasive plant species.
- Donges Bay Gorge: Cleared the entrance of buckthorn and honeysuckle, improved the parking, extended Wendy's Way trail, removed a large section of dilapidated fencing, made repairs to the old pool house, and stabilized the bridge.
- Lynn Preserve: Cleaned up debris and stabilized the old barn.
- Zinn Preserve: Finished the 350' boardwalk and pier, improved the entrance and added a kiosk and signage.
- Hames Preserve: Added a parking area, signage and planted trees.
- Trained staff in chainsaw safety and together with our volunteers removed hazardous ash trees (and large buckthorn) from our properties.
- Mayhew Preserve: Added a parking area and signage.
- Schoofs Preserve: Acquired in June, and added a parking area and signage.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Daniel Dineen
President

John Torinus, Jr.
Vice President

Chris Ford
Second Vice President

Manish Gupta
Treasurer

Marjie Tomter
Secretary

Brenda J. Bowers, PhD
Cheryl Brickman
Shannon Buending
John Capelle
Donald P. Gallo
Michael Nast
Karen Sidders
Frank Volpintesta
Charles Williams

ACTIVE EMERITUS

Virginia K. Bolger
Gary S. Casper, PhD
Allen Curtes
Kim Engel
Barbara Gilmore
Ronald Gritt, MD
Andrew J. Gumm
Jill Hepburn
Gaytha Hillman
Joanne Kline
Mary LaVelle
Raymond Lipman
Charles C. Mayhew, III
David Meissner
Marion (Genie) Meissner
Janet Montgomery
Mark Murphy
William S. Niehaus
Chester I. Nielsen, III
Alan Paul Price, PhD
James A. Reinartz, PhD
George E. Row
William F. Schanen, III
Steven C. Tews
Kine Icks Torinus
Anthony Warren
Advisory Board
John R. Dedrick
H. Robert Fuller
Martha Watts

LEGAL COUNSEL

John H. Lhost
Quarles & Brady, LLP

Coming Together for Preservation

In 2014, the City of Mequon along with the Mequon Thiensville Sunrise Rotary Club approached OWLT to join them in partnership to deliver greater environmental management of the 18-acre Pukaite Woods that is part of Mequon’s larger Rotary Park. OWLT accepted the offer, and in June of 2015, acquired the neighboring Spirit Lake Preserve adding 155-acres of protected land. The Milwaukee Audubon Society along with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District and US Fish & Wildlife Service partnered with OWLT in the purchase.



Bottle Gentian



Volunteer workday at Pukaite Woods

The contiguous nature of the properties offers Mequon and southeast Ozaukee County an opportunity to see and study a variety of native tree and plant species. The southern mesic beech-maple woodland contains old growth oaks and hickories, some dating back to the time of the first European settlers in Thiensville. A perennial stream flows through the properties to the Milwaukee River just a mile east, and a significant

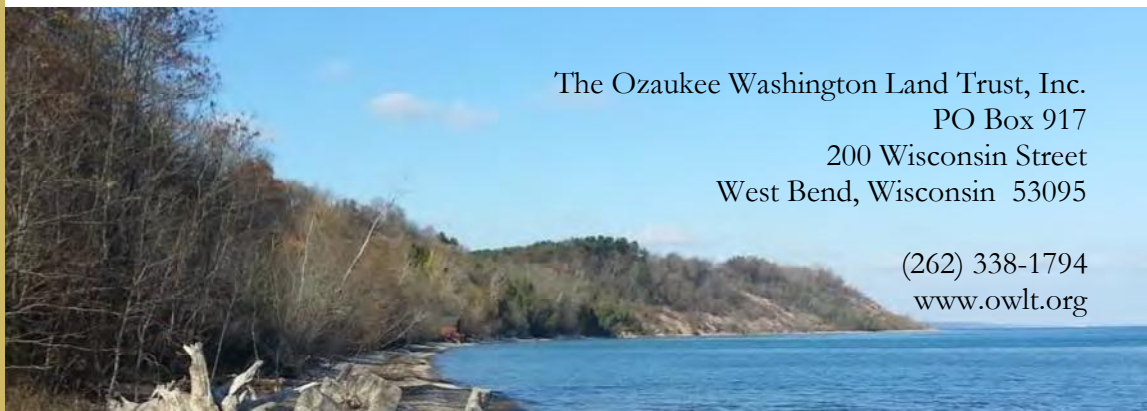
wetland track provides habitat to muskrats and migratory waterfowl, providing irreplaceable ecosystem services by storing rainfall to minimize flooding, and by retaining nutrients and sediments in runoff before they reach our streams and lakes.

Native bottle gentian, a late summer bloomer, grows on the outer edges of the Pukaite Woods. Banded owls have been heard communicating across property boundaries, and a stroll in the woods reveals the sound and sight of many other kinds of wildlife. Proper care of the natural areas will benefit the ecological health and wildlife habitat of the forest, wetlands, and tributary stream by re-establishing and preserving functional native plant and animal communities. Soon, an additional trail system will link the properties.



Christine Bohn hugs tree at Spirit Lake

The Pukaite Woods Partnership is a great example of how working with others helps to inspire action and provides a sustainable approach to land management.



The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, Inc.
PO Box 917
200 Wisconsin Street
West Bend, Wisconsin 53095

(262) 338-1794
www.owltr.org