



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

P.O. BOX 321, EAGLE RIVER, WI 54521-0321

PRICE COUNTY CONSERVATION PLAN 2016

*Protect wild & scenic northern
rivers and streams.*



North Fork of Flambeau River

*Preserve habitats for rare,
endangered and threatened species.*



Sailor Creek

*Preserve pristine “wild lakes”
and natural shorelines on
otherwise developed lakes.*



Coolidge Lake

WORKING TO KEEP THE NORTHWOODS THE NORTHWOODS!



NORTHWOODS LAND TRUST

PRICE COUNTY CONSERVATION PLAN

2016

Plan Summary

The Northwoods Land Trust Board of Directors adopted an updated 2016-2020 Five-Year Strategic Plan in December 2016. One of the goals of that plan was to prepare a Conservation Plan for Price County, Wisconsin, as the next phase planning project that would eventually include the remaining counties in the land trust's service territory. Funding for this conservation plan was provided starting in 2013 by the Wisconsin DNR Lake Protection Grant project #LPT 465-14, Price County Private Shorelands Protection Project.

In 2003, NWLT's Executive Director, Bryan Pierce, participated in a series of site conservation planning workshops as part of an Efroymson Fellowship Program sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and the Land Trust Alliance. Training and practical application on TNC's conservation planning process and MS Excel-based conservation planning workbook were provided during the workshops. The Nature Conservancy's conservation planning process focuses on a Five-S Framework. Those Five S's include:

- Systems - the conservation targets within a landscape and the natural processes that maintain them.
- Stresses - the types of destruction, degradation, or impairment afflicting each of the conservation targets within a landscape.
- Sources - the agents generating the stresses (such as subdivision, residential housing development, etc.).
- Strategies - the types of conservation activities deployed to abate sources of stress (threat abatement) and enhance or restore the system (restoration).
- Success - measures of biodiversity health and threat abatement for that landscape.

As part of the NWLT strategic plan update, a survey of conservation priorities and strategies was developed for the NWLT board and other members and supporters. The survey results and prioritization of strategic plan objectives were used to generate the list of Conservation Targets in Price County. The highest priority Conservation Targets include:

1. "Wild Lakes" as identified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource's Wild Lakes Program.
2. Large remaining natural shorelines on otherwise developed lakes.
3. Priority river and stream segments identified by the WDNR's Northern Rivers Initiative.
4. Old growth forest stands.
5. Endangered & Threatened Species habitat (included as a "nested conservation target")
6. Large blocks of unfragmented, productive forest lands.

Under the TNC methodology, additional "nested" conservation targets included the following: other river and stream properties, bogs and other wetlands, in-fill or contiguous properties for public or other conserved lands, and habitat managed for wildlife (ex. hunting lands). Additional conservation values such as public recreational use, scientific research areas, natural scenic beauty and productive lands (working forest and farm lands) are also taken into consideration.

The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Planning Excel Workbook was utilized to consider the stresses and sources of stress for each of the conservation targets. Priority strategies to abate each of the threats also came from the NWLT strategic planning survey. Such strategies include the use of donated conservation easements, acquisition of conservation easements, donations of land, the conservation buyer/seller program, registry program, landowner and public education, and media publicity to raise public awareness. Viability assessments of each of the conservation targets, their threats, and their strategies are included in the following pages as printouts from the TNC Excel workbook.

This Price County Conservation Plan highlights the breadth of the Northwoods Land Trust's efforts in the coming years, but will also be used to prioritize our land protection projects as we focus our limited financial, staff, and volunteer resources to "get the most bang for the conservation buck." The focus of these conservation targets and strategies is to help us do a more effective, efficient and strategic job of "Keeping the Northwoods the Northwoods." We will also use this plan to help us more effectively partner with other conservation organizations and agencies, including the Price County Lakes & Rivers Association, Price County Land Conservation Department, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, and others.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we hope that you will join us in helping to conserve natural shorelands, woodlands and wetlands in the heart of Wisconsin's beautiful northwoods. If you have any questions on the Northwoods Land Trust's Price County Conservation Plan, or on any of our activities, please contact our office at (715) 479-2490.

Prepared by: Bryan Pierce, Executive Director

Drafted - 12/18/2016

Adopted by the NWLT Board - 3/24/2017



Conservation easement property on the Sailor Creek Flowage protected by Sue Kartman and Cindy Walters in 2015.

Price County Overview

Price County is in the heart of Wisconsin's northwoods and lies some 60 miles south of Lake Superior. According to the Price County Land & Water Resource Management Plan (2009), it is the 6th largest county in Wisconsin with a surface area of 1,275.5 square miles (816,322 acres) and is ranked 22nd in water acreage for the 72 counties in the state. Approximately 1.8 percent of the surface area is covered by water. Ninety percent of the county lies in the Upper Chippewa River Basin. The remaining ten percent is in the Upper Wisconsin River Basin.

The watershed drainage system consists of twelve watersheds and portions of three watersheds. The major rivers are the North and South Forks of the Flambeau, the Elk River, and the North and South Forks of the Jump River. There are 35 large dams and 42 small dams in Price County.

Price County includes two cities (Phillips and Park Falls), three villages (Catawba, Kennan and Prentice), and 17 unincorporated towns. Overall resident population numbers have changed little in the past century. In 1920, the population of Price County was more than 16,000. Between 1920 and 1990 the population varied between 14,000 and 15,600. The US Census indicated a total county population of 14,159 in 2010, basically flat in growth over the last 50 years from the 14,370 persons counted in the 1960 Census.

Price County is generally rural. The 2000 population density was about 13 people per square mile compared to a statewide average of 99 per square mile. According to 2007 population estimates, the cities of Park Falls (2,371), Phillips (1,483), and the villages of Catawba (140), Kennan (167), and Prentice (631) make up 33.6 percent of the county's population. From 2000 to 2010 population generally declined in incorporated areas and increased slightly in unincorporated areas.

According to the Price County Land Data Summary (Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service, 2008), less than 1% of the county's land surface area is urban (approx. 5,363 acres). Agricultural crop and pasture land accounts for about 12% of the land area (97,500 acres). Wetlands such as bogs, swamps and marshes make up over 65,000 acres or about 8% of the surface area of the county. About three quarters of the land is forested (nearly 620,000 acres). Non-industrial private woodland owners are estimated to own over 265,000 acres.

While Price County has had a relatively low population density, development pressures have increased over recent decades through demand for new permanent and seasonal waterfront homes. Over 30% of the housing stock in the county is for seasonal, occasional or recreational use. The county is clearly serving as a location for vacation and second homes.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' *Wisconsin Lakes* publication, Price County features 437 lakes. A total of 161 of those lakes are named. There are 78 constructed impoundment lakes (5,058 acres). The lakes total 15,129 acres or about 1.8 percent of the surface area of the county. Butternut Lake, in the northern part of the county, is the only lake over 1,000 acres. There are 335 lakes of 50 acres or less. All of the lakes over 500 acres have public access while only 19 percent of all county lakes have public access.



Perch Lake

Development pressures are high on those lakes due to their desirable locations within and near the extensive 128,300-acre Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, 20,700 acres of state land, and 68,100 acres of Price County Forest public recreational lands. About 28% of the land in Price County is in public ownership.

Most of the topography within the county is rolling, with some steeper slopes in the southeastern portion. The elevation ranges between 1,450 and 1,700 feet above sea level. The topography is of glacial origin and includes the two highest points in Wisconsin (Tim's Hill: 1,952.9 ft. and Pearson's Hill: 1,950.4 ft). Glacial deposits are generally oriented northeast to southwest.



A report by the Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (March 2006) predicted that most of the remaining undeveloped lake shorelines in northern Wisconsin will be developed by 2015. Subdivision and residential development pressures are the most critical threat to lake and river resources.

Additional data and maps providing an overview of Price County are included in the *Price County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (2009)*, prepared by the Price County Land Conservation Department. That summary includes information on location/geography, soil associations, groundwater, watersheds, lakes, rivers and streams, floodplains, wetlands, impaired waters, national, state & county scientific and natural areas, demographics, land use and ownership, soil erosion and sedimentation, and Florence County water quality performance standards and prohibitions. The Price County LWRMP information will not be repeated in this plan document, but a copy is on file in the NWLT office. Excerpts from this information will be included where appropriate in discussions of the Conservation Targets below.

Conservation Targets (“Systems”)

1. Wild Lakes

As part of the Wisconsin DNR’s Northern Initiatives, a Wild Lakes Program identified and rated lakes over 10 acres in size with little or no existing development. These lakes would qualify as “irreplaceable jewels of the north that could be put in trust for the public to use and enjoy in perpetuity.” With its relatively low population and housing density, it is not surprising that Price County includes a number of rated Wild Lakes that could receive enhanced protection. A total of 18 lakes were identified as “wild lakes” in Price County, however those include four lakes under 10 acres in size. The highest rated Wild Lakes are Long (Boyd’s), North Spirit, Kabol, Meadow, Little Bass, Johnson and Perch. A map of private lake properties illustrating the rated Wild Lakes in Price County is attached.

Protected with a conservation easement, Perch is a “wild lake.”

While some of the listed Wild Lakes have been protected with publicly-owned shorelines or through recent conservation easements (ex. Perch Lake), others have been significantly developed since the Wild Lakes Program was initiated including Price Lake with the subdivision of over 20 small residential lots.

Stresses & Sources: Subdivision and development are the key threats to protecting Wild Lakes, based on increasing seasonal and year-round residential development in Price County. The DNR Northern Initiatives report in 1996 noted that at the current rates of development, nearly all privately-owned lakes in northern Wisconsin will have some level of development within the next 10-15 years. The recent recession and slow-down in the real estate market has only delayed the development trend for a brief period.

2. Large Remaining Natural Shorelines on Otherwise Developed Lakes

According to the *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report*, “Wild, undeveloped lakes are not the only ones worthy of conservation and protection efforts. Many lakes with housing along their shore, even substantially developed ones, have ecological and environmental value.”

The Northwoods Land Trust recently conducted a project to identify all of the privately owned properties in Price County which have about 500 feet or more of natural lake shoreline frontage remaining. A geographic information system analysis of digital ortho-photos, coupled with hard copy parcel/plat maps, was used to generate town maps illustrating the natural frontage parcels.

When linked with the property tax rolls, a listing of property owners was generated for those natural lake shoreline parcels. A direct mailing of NWLT’s *Landowner’s Conservation Guide - Protecting Your Northwoods Property* was conducted in July 2016 to the 374 new landowners identified. A total of 672 parcels were identified on the lakes in Price County with 500 feet or more of undeveloped shorelines. Those parcels were owned by 383 landowners. A map of those selected lakefront parcels is attached.

The extensive lake shoreline development in Price County has resulted in some lakes with little or no natural shoreline remaining. Protection of even small pieces of natural frontage may be critical on those lakes for such ecological functions as bass and panfish spawning areas and green frog reproduction (studies indicated that frogs were gone when the average lake lot size was reduced to the state shoreland zoning standards of 100 feet of minimum frontage). Nutrient enrichment from phosphorus runoff and sediment loading into the lakes due to development impacts seriously threaten water quality, resulting in increased importance for protection of natural vegetative shoreland buffers. A 2016 *Journal of Fisheries* article on “A Fish Habitat Conservation Framework for Minnesota Lakes” noted that “a density of 10 docks/km of shoreline was selected as the level of shoreline disturbance where significant detrimental effects to fish communities and habitat are expected to occur.” This level of development translates to approximately 328 feet of shoreline per dock.



Sailor Creek Flowage

Three waterbodies in Price County have been listed by WDNR as Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) for the purpose of regulating point-source pollution discharge permits. These ORW waters receive the highest level of protection and include two lakes: Cochran Lake and Tucker Lake. No point-source discharge is allowed to these waters unless the quality of the discharge equals or surpasses the quality of the receiving water body. No lowering of current water quality is allowed.

Stresses & Sources: Similar to Wild Lakes, subdivision and development are the primary threats (stresses) on the remaining natural lake shorelines. Now is a critical time to protect some of these last remaining natural shorelands. On developed lakes, seasonal and recreational housing has moved beyond the typical small summer cottage or single-family residence, to “starter castles” over ten thousand square feet in size, as well as large multi-family developments.



Sailor Creek Flowage

3. Priority river and stream segments

Starting in 1997, as part of the Northern Initiatives, WDNR began a Northern Rivers Initiative to identify a prioritized list of river and stream corridors that warrant additional protection based on their high ecological significance, outstanding natural scenic beauty or special recreational values. A total of 1,494 river and stream segments were ranked in 20 northern counties. In Price County, a total of 61 river and stream segments were identified as priorities, with the Flambeau River from Crowley Dam to Big Falls Flowage, South Fork of the Flambeau River, South Fork of the Jump River, Hay Creek, North Fork of the Jump River, Elk River, Springstead Creek, Foulds Spring, Pine Creek and Sieverson Creek being the top-ranked segments.

The Jump River and the Upper Forks of the Flambeau River were identified as priority aquatic sites within the Central Upper Peninsula ecological drainage unit of the Great Lakes Ecoregion by The Nature Conservancy’s 2002 *The Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregion: A Conservation Plan*. The Jump River and Upper Forks of the Flambeau River and Jump River were also identified as Legacy Places within the 2006 *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report*. The *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report* described the Jump River as follows: “The entire river corridor has remained largely intact and supports a diverse aquatic community structure with several rare elements and few problems with exotic species.” The Upper Forks of the Flambeau River consists of the stretches of the North and South Forks upstream from the Flambeau River State Forest. In particular, “the North Fork provides one of the longest river wilderness experiences in the state. Currently river users can paddle from the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, through the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, and down to the Flambeau River State Forest. Significant portions of this 65-mile stretch are in public ownership and managed to provide a wild setting along the water.”

The South Fork of the Flambeau River in Price County was listed by WDNR as an Outstanding Resource Water for the purpose of point-source pollution discharge permits. Exceptional Resource waters include Class 1 trout streams. WDNR has classified 29 streams or stream segments as Class 1 trout streams.

Stresses and sources: In general, development has been slower on rivers and streams than on lakes. That is rapidly changing however as available undeveloped lakefront property is becoming more scarce. Subdivision and development of river and stream riparian areas is the greatest threat to protection of these systems as demand for new seasonal and year-round residential development increases.

4. Old-growth forest stands

By far the vast majority of Price County forests have been cut-over and burned within the last century. However, pockets of hemlock-sugar maple-yellow birch forests and other old-growth habitat types do exist, sometimes in isolated parcels and along protected lake shorelines. There are no federally-designated Wilderness Areas within Price County, although stands of old-growth forest do exist on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and are designated as Research Natural Areas. Other old growth sites exist on Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands' (BCPL) properties, including a number of tracts of land that were never sold to private entities for logging. Old growth hemlock is also known to exist within the Timm's Hill County Park.

Price County is also the site of 11 State Natural Areas designated by the WDNR Bureau of Endangered Resources as tracts of land in a natural or near-natural state: Memorial Grove Hemlocks, Tucker Lake Hemlocks, Foulds Creek, Little Willow Drumlin, Riley Lake, Elk River Valley, Doering Woods, Jump River Woods, North Fork Pines, Oxbo Pines and Bass Lake Peatlands. About half of these SNAs have an old-growth forest component. NWLT may be able to play a cooperating role in helping to permanently conserve additional old-growth and/or State Natural Area quality sites in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, WDNR, BCPL, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands and other agencies and organizations.

The *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report* identified the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and the Flambeau River State Forest as Legacy Places with the highest levels of conservation significance and recreational importance.

Remaining privately-owned old-growth forest stands are likely to be small, isolated tracts. To the extent possible, protection of those tracts that are “buffered” by maturing, second-growth northern hardwoods and conifers would be preferable, especially when those tracts may be “in-fill” properties or contiguous with other public lands. NWLT is not aware of any maps identifying remaining old-growth forest stands on private lands. Identification of old-growth protection opportunities will likely occur during on-site visits with interested landowners.

Stresses and sources: Habitat fragmentation of old growth forest stands is the biggest threat to protecting these tracts. By its nature, logging is incompatible with protection of old-growth forests. Once logged, it can take hundreds of years for forest stands to regenerate into true, old-growth forest conditions. However, forestry practices may benefit some stands that are regrowing toward old-growth conditions by encouraging management for mature, climax forest species.



The greatest irreversible fragmentation threat to retaining old-growth forest tracts is conversion by subdivision for seasonal and year-round residential development. As lake and riverfront properties become less available and less affordable, more wooded backlands are being subdivided throughout the region.

5. Large blocks of unfragmented, productive forest lands

The 2006 *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report* noted that just over one million acres of privately-owned forest lands in Wisconsin that have been enrolled in one of the forest tax programs (ex. Managed Forest Law or Forest Crop Law) are open to the public for hunting and fishing. In the past, most of these lands have been re-enrolled after their 25- and 50-year contracts expired. “However, these large working forests are now undergoing rapid ownership changes and a significant number of acres are being withdrawn from the programs. Over 90% of the industrial forest lands have been sold in the last few years.” Industrial and corporate forest lands include about 56,300 acres in Price County.

As noted earlier, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and Flambeau River State Forest were both identified as Legacy Places. “Several large blocks of land, much in County Forest or industrial forest ownership, surround the Flambeau River State Forest. Maintaining these large blocks of working forest would help to buffer the state forest, offer excellent outdoor recreation opportunities, and provide an important source of wood fiber for paper and lumber.”



Large working forest conservation easements help sustain the economy.

Fragmentation (parcelization) of large blocks of productive forest lands threatens to literally change the landscape for forest-based industries and traditional public outdoor recreational uses. As the economics of the forest industry have changed over the past decade, and sales values for residential development sites along lakes and rivers have rapidly increased, the property tax benefits of the forest tax programs are not preventing the large working forest blocks from being fragmented and developed.

As noted earlier, non-industrial private woodland owners are estimated to own over 284,000 acres. Some of these lands are contiguous with, or in-fill properties within, larger blocks of national and county forest lands. Price County owns and manages about 68,100 acres of forest lands. Significant conservation benefits can accrue from protecting private lands adjacent to or within other public lands, especially related to forest fragmentation and protection of environmental corridors.

Large blocks of unfragmented forest lands can provide critical habitats for “nested conservation targets” including endangered and threatened species, protect lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and other water resources, and conserve significant habitat areas that can be managed for wildlife and plant communities. Examples of nested conservation targets are listed below.

Stresses and sources: Habitat destruction or conversion of these large blocks of productive forest lands through subdivision for residential development is the greatest threat to protecting these habitats. Many of the large forest blocks contain valuable lake and riverfront shorelands, which are highly sought after by developers. As undeveloped lake and river properties become scarce, there is also increasing pressure for development of wooded subdivisions, increasing the demand for parcelization and conversion of forested backlands.

Nested Conservation Targets

Critical habitats for endangered and threatened resources are recognized as ecologically important sites for conservation. Identification of endangered and threatened species and their habitats is one of the components of the documentation of conservation values that occurs within the ecological baseline information for each NWLT project area. A WDNR Natural Heritage Inventory listing of known occurrences of rare species and natural communities in Price County is on file at the NWLT office.

Recognizing the sensitivity of information on critical habitats for endangered and threatened species, detailed maps have not been produced. Many of these sites already overlap with the above primary conservation targets, but would provide added incentive to making conserving these lands a priority.

Interior forest species such as the pine marten, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, and bobcat can be considered nested conservation targets within old-growth forest and large unfragmented forest tract conservation targets.

Important Bird Areas (WDNR 2007) are critical sites for the conservation and management of Wisconsin's birds. The Flambeau Headwaters and Bootjack Muskeg were both recognized for their importance to birds. On the Flambeau Headwaters, "The lakes and wetlands host concentrations of waterbirds and provide breeding habitat for osprey. The conifer dominated forests are rich in neotropical migrants such as olive-sided flycatcher, yellow-bellied flycatcher, wood thrush, golden-winged warbler, black-throated blue warbler, and Canada warbler. This site contains significant populations of blue-headed vireo, Blackburnian warbler, Magnolia warbler, and pine warbler. Old red and white pine stands provide excellent habitat for evening grosbeak, red crossbill, and white-winged crossbill." On the Bootjack Muskeg, "A diverse assemblage of conifer-loving birds breeds here, including several signature swamp conifer and open bog species such as gray jay, boreal chickadee, palm warbler, and Lincoln's sparrow."



Northern Goshawk

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2006) recognized three Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA) within Price County. Conservation Opportunity Areas are places in Wisconsin that contain ecological features, natural communities, or Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) habitat for which Wisconsin has a unique responsibility for protection when viewed from the global, continental, upper Midwest, or state perspective. The three COAs include the Bootjack Bog (Muskeg), Flambeau River and Upper Flambeau Woods.

Large blocks of significant habitat areas that can be managed for wildlife (ex. areas managed for game species) and other native plant communities (ex. natural bogs and other wetlands), may be conserved as added benefits through projects focused on the primary conservation targets. Since retention of natural shoreland frontage is ecologically important on all lakes, rivers and streams, protection of significant stretches on lower priority waterways should also be considered where opportunities arise.

Conservation Strategies

As noted earlier, strategies to abate each of the threats were also prioritized in the NWLT strategic planning survey. In priority order, these strategies included the following:

- #1 - Donations of perpetual land protection agreements (conservation easements).
- #2 - Donations of conservation land to NWLT (ex. bequests, outright gifts or reserved life estates)
- #3 - Acquisition of perpetual land protection agreements (may use public grant funding and/or bargain sales)
- #4 - Purchase of conservation land (may use public grant funding and/or bargain sales)
- #5 - Conservation buyer program linking conservation-minded land buyers and sellers

Following are brief descriptions of the specific conservation strategies. More complete descriptions of the land protection tools can be found in NWLT's packet of information provided to landowners: *Landowner's Conservation Guide Protecting Your Northwoods Property*.

Land protection agreements - The top priority strategy, and the one NWLT has used most successfully to date for permanent land protection, is the use of donated land protection agreements, also known as conservation easements. These agreements run with the deed of the land in perpetuity, providing lasting protection. The land remains private property and may or may not be accessible to the public (most donated easements to date are not open to public access). The land can be sold or passed on to heirs, but the conservation terms of the easement remain in place forever. The land trust takes on the responsibility to annually monitor and legally defend each conservation easement. This strategy is appropriate to abate threats of subdivision, development and fragmentation for all of the conservation targets.

Donations of land - Landowners who wish to conserve their property, but who may not physically be able to manage it, who do not have any heirs to pass it down to, or who have heirs who they know would want to convert the property for development, are potential candidates for land donations to NWLT. These can be done outright (with income tax deductions for the full fair market value of the property), through a reserved life estate, or through a bequest in a will. This conservation strategy is an appropriate tool to abate threats of subdivision, development and fragmentation for all of the conservation targets.

Purchase of land protection agreements - In instances where landowners cannot afford to donate the full value of a conservation easement, NWLT may be able to purchase conservation easements, possibly at a bargain sale rate (the landowner contributes part of the value of the easement while the land trust purchases the remaining value). NWLT's limited resources can be leveraged through state, federal or foundation grant programs such as the state Stewardship Fund, Lake and River Protection Grant programs, federal Forest Legacy program and private foundation grants. This conservation



strategy is an appropriate tool to abate threats of subdivision, development and fragmentation for all of the conservation targets. However, due to high costs of acquisition, this strategy may be most appropriate for the highest priority projects or where grant funding is available.

Purchase of land - Land acquisition through fee simple purchase is another conservation strategy suitable for all conservation targets, especially acquisition at a bargain sale. NWLT could take on the long-term stewardship responsibilities for the property purchased, or could serve as an intermediary for eventual transfer of the property to a unit of government or other conservation entity for protection and management. High initial transaction and on-going management expenses, issues related to property tax exemption, and conservation priorities are all factors that should be weighed in deciding whether or not to pursue land acquisition. Some state, federal and foundation grant support may be available to leverage NWLT's limited resources. Other conservation partners (Trust for Public Land and Conservation Fund) may be able to provide short-term loans for acquisitions that must be transacted before other funds are secured. To date, NWLT has only utilized this strategy for one property (Interstate Falls in Iron County) due to the high overall costs. Outright purchase of land is likely to be utilized only rarely.

Conservation buyer/seller program - The conservation buyer/seller program links conservation-minded land buyers with sellers of land they would like to see conserved rather than split up and developed. Conservation sellers can place a conservation easement on their property before listing their property for sale, ensuring that the conservation values will remain intact regardless of who owns the land in the future. People interested in purchasing these conserved properties can benefit by enjoying the privacy, seclusion and natural setting the easement property offers, and may also be able to purchase larger properties at less cost due to the reduction in fair market value associated with a conservation easement. NWLT does not replace the need for real estate professionals, nor does it get involved in any direct negotiations. The land trust may, however, serve as a conduit to link interested conservation buyers with conservation sellers. Properties sold with conservation easements on them, or to conservation buyers who will then put a conservation easement on it, can be an effective tool to limit subdivision and development threats to all of the conservation targets.



Other strategies:

Land registry program - The conservation area registry program is a non-binding, handshake agreement where the landowners express their interest in land conservation and the land trust provides technical assistance. NWLT's field work, mapping and document drafting results in a basic land registry plan for the property. While the landowners enrolled in the registry program do not commit initially to conservation in perpetuity, the land registry program does serve as a more intensive landowner education process and first step toward more permanent preservation. This conservation strategy is relevant for all conservation targets, but does not directly result in abatement of threats to conserving the property. The registry program is provided as requested only.

Managed Forest Law - While not a conservation program of NWLT, the state Managed Forest Law (MFL) is an important tool in this region that can complement and reinforce other conservation protection strategies. MFL enrollment does result in significant property tax benefits to the private landowners, something that conservation easements currently cannot guarantee. NWLT refers interested landowners to the local DNR foresters, and works to ensure that conservation easements placed on appropriate woodlands and swamps are compatible with enrollment in the MFL program.

The MFL program is a 25- or 50-year contract with the Department of Natural Resources and there are some penalties for withdrawal. The program can help to serve as a deterrent to subdivision and development threats for most of the conservation targets (preservation of old growth forest tracts and unproductive wetlands may not be eligible for the program). However, many acres of land enrolled in MFL have been removed from the program in recent years regardless of the penalties due to the high development values of the properties. Combining a Managed Forest Law contract with a conservation easement can, however, provide for permanent land protection as well as multiple tax benefits to the landowners.

Private landowner education - As a targeted audience, providing landowner education is a key first step in moving toward permanent land protection. The Price County lake shoreland owner direct mail education project is an example of a NWLT targeted landowner education program. NWLT's *Landowner's Conservation Guide - Protecting Your Northwoods Property* was prepared and printed in 2005, with updates in 2008, 2011 and 2016. Using a geographic information system, as well as Price County map and tax parcel information, the lake owner project provided direct mail distribution of the landowner's guide to owners of all lake shoreland properties with about 500 feet or more of remaining natural shorelines. The mailing also included all owners of natural shorelines on DNR-listed "wild lakes." This strategy is an appropriate first contact tool for all of the conservation targets. Additional landowner fact sheets and other information can also be produced and utilized with interested land-owners to answer further questions and assist with the land protection planning process.



The Lobermeier family hosted a guided field tour on their Coolidge Lake conservation easement properties.

Public education/media - Raising the public's awareness of the need, timeliness, opportunities and options for conserving land is an important component for NWLT's long-term protection efforts. Public awareness is also vital for generating continuing public support for conservation strategies and funding sources. Newspaper press releases, radio and television interviews and public service announcements can all be utilized to raise general awareness. Presentations targeted to other audiences such as lake and other conservation organizations, service clubs, retiree groups and others can also help to generate additional interest and support for NWLT's conservation programs and projects. Participation in selected events with tabletop display materials can also help to raise general public awareness, and should be selected based on potential impact.

Strategic Goals & Objectives for Price County Conservation Plan

The following pages highlight specific five-year strategic goals, strategies and objectives for the Northwoods Land Trust's conservation efforts in Price County. These planning components were prioritized during NWLT's strategic planning process, and are provided here in more detail.

PRICE COUNTY CONSERVATION PLAN Five-Year Strategic Goals & Strategies

TARGETS	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE				
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1. Wild Lakes	Landowner Education - NWLT's Price County project to include a direct mailing to all owners of shorelines on the wild lakes list in 2016. Conduct landowner face-to-face meetings, site visits and conservation assistance as requested by interested landowners. Permanently protect additional wild lakes through conservation easement donations and land donations.					
						
						
2. Remaining natural lake shorelines	Landowner Education - NWLT's Price County project to include a direct mailing to all owners of 500 feet or more of natural lake shorelines in 2016. Conduct landowner face-to-face meetings, site visits and conservation assistance to permanently protect natural lake shorelines. Permanently protect additional remaining natural lake shorelines on otherwise developed lakes through conservation easement donations and land donations. Partner with local lake organizations whenever possible to fund easement donations and leverage funding resources for any acquisitions.					
						
						
3. Old growth forests	Property identification - NWLT has little information available on privately-owned tracts of old growth forest, so property identification is a critical need. Evaluate the Old Growth forest initiative after the pilot project is completed to determine if the project should be expanded to Price counties - cost/benefits or find a more efficient way to I.D. where they may exist (word of mouth of DNR Foresters/Wildlife Specialists and landowners) Conduct on-site property visits with interested landowners to identify site-specific old growth stands and natural area quality habitats warranting preservation. Permanently protect additional old growth forest stands and natural areas through conservation easement donations and land donations.					
						
						
4. Priority rivers & streams	Conduct a conservation options direct mailing to Northern Rivers Initiative priority river and stream segment property owners in 2017-18. Utilize the GIS system to identify these landowner contacts.					
5. Forest lands	Develop a landowner outreach program to owners of larger woodland properties in Price County (2019-2020) based on the GIS system developed for lakes and rivers.					

PRICE COUNTY CONSERVATION PLAN Five-Year Strategic Goals & Strategies (continued)

ALL TARGETS	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE				
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Conservation Partners	Maintain communications with other active conservation groups in the region. Refer potential projects to other partners as opportunities arise.					
Volunteer Easement Monitoring	Coordinate the volunteer easement and property monitoring program: a. Recruit volunteers and conduct volunteer monitoring training. b. Continue annual volunteer monitoring of conserved properties.	 				
Conservation Easements	Complete at least two conservation easement projects in Price County by the end of 2016. Complete other conservation easement projects in Price County as requested.	 				
Land Donations	Work with private landowners to receive land donations as outright donations, in wills, as reserved life estates or through other strategies as opportunities arise.					
Land or Easement Purchases	Consider land or conservation easement acquisition projects for protection of the highest priority conservation targets - utilize state and other grant programs for matching funds.					
Conservation Buyer Program	Conservation seller listings on the NWLT website - only as requested. Keep a listing of potential conservation buyer interests and available conservation properties with existing easements for sale or other priority sites.					
Registry Program	Complete additional Conservation Area Registry Program enrollments/plans within the NWLT service territory only as requested.					
Landowner Guides	Prepare and distribute conservation guides to interested landowners from contacts received through personal recommendations, telephone, email, web site, media publicity and other sources.					
Landowner Education	Prepare three newsletters annually, featuring completed conservation projects, and distribute to NWLT members, supporters and interested landowners. Utilize the NWLT website and social media, media press releases, public events at conserved sites, event displays, open houses and educational presentations as invited.	 				