The White River News

Fall 2006

White River Landowner Meeting Set for October 25

Over the past several years, a number of surveys have revealed that most White River landowners and river users share a common belief: that the water, land, natural resources, and rural character of their community should be protected and preserved.

On public land, that sort of protection may be achieved by the passage and enforcement of laws or other restrictions. On privately-held land, however, conservation of a river or watershed depends on the concern, knowledge, and actions of many individual landowners, each of whom may have somewhat different priorities and desires for their land.

The White River Citizens Involvement Committee was formed by a group of White River landowners and river users who believe that landowners in the White River watershed have enough in common in order to work together to preserve and protect the river they love.

In order to start putting survey results and other concerns into action, the WRCIC is inviting all White River landowners, river users, and other concerned citizens to a meeting at 7:00 p.m. on October 25 at the Town of Kelly town hall.

The purpose of the meeting is to inform private landowners about the wide variety of conservation options available in the White River watershed. Some of these options include: creating resource-protection easements, adopting land-management practices that would reduce erosion and improve water quality, selling land or easements to the state or to a land trust, and more.

These issues will be discussed at the October 25 meeting. Representatives from the DNR, regional land trusts, the county land conservation district, and others will be on hand. Please come with your questions and ideas! The Town of Kelly town hall is located at 27525 Maple Ridge Road.

This meeting is funded through a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' River Protection program. The grant also will enable interested landowners to meet one-on-one with a conservation professional to discuss various options in more detail. ●

A stretch of the White River as it flows through the Town of Kelly.

And the survey says...

A number of community surveys in the past several years reveal a strong desire among area citizens to protect and preserve the natural resource quality and rural character of their home communities.

Bayfield County Land Use Survey (2000)

◆ 95% of respondents feel that the surface waters of Bayfield County (lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands) should be protected from degradation.

◆ The top three issues of concern among respondents are: water quality protection, natural resource protection, and maintenance of rural character.

Bad River Watershed Association Landowner Survey (2002)

◆ 85% of respondents are "concerned" or "very concerned" about degradation of wildlife habitat in the White River watershed.

◆ 83% of respondents are "concerned" or "very concerned" about runoff and erosion in the White River watershed.

Town of Kelly Land Use Plan Survey (2000)

◆ 89% of respondents feel it is important to protect the water resources in the town.

Town of Gingles Land Use Plan Survey (2001)

◆ 87% of respondents feel it is important to preserve and protect the unique characteristics and natural resources of their town (woodlands, wetlands, wildlife, water quality, etc.).

One-on-One Meetings Available to Interested Landowners

The White River Citizen Involvement Committee has hired veteran conservationist Diane Daulton to coordinate one-on-one meetings with White River watershed landowners who are interested in learning more about conservation options that may be developed for and applied to their lands.

Diane Daulton

Diane is currently the regional administrator for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, or CREP. This program is a federal-state-local partnership that provides funding to eligible landowners in the Lake Superior basin (that includes the White River watershed) who want to enroll their agricultural lands into conservation practices, such as planting buffer or filter vegetation along the river, establishing wildlife habitat, or restoring wetlands or waterways on their land.

CREP is one of the many options White River landowners may consider in pursuit of their conservation goals.

In addition to her work with CREP, Diane is familiar with the many other conservation programs and options available to interested landowners in the region. She recently worked as County Conservationist with the Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, & Iron Counties' Land Conservation Department, an organization that works to promote sound land and water stewardship through education, technical support and program delivery in Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas and Iron Counties. In that role, Diane administered various federal, state and local conservation programs throughout the four-county region of northwest Wisconsin.

Diane will be available this fall to meet one-on-one with interested landowners. She will provide information on conservation options, serve as liaison between landowners and government agencies and other organizations, and generally help interested landowners through the process of establishing and meeting conservation goals on their land.

Diane will speak at the October 25 landowners meeting (see article on page 1). She also may be contacted by phone at (715) 360-8888 or email at abdicrep@bayfieldcounty.org. ●

Land Trusts Provide a Flexible Conservation Tool

Many landowners who develop close ties to their land also care deeply about its future. Land trusts offer tools with which landowners can design and guarantee long-term protection strategies for the land they love.

The land trust movement is one of the fastest growing conservation movements in the country. Currently there are more than 1,200 local and regional land trusts nationwide, protecting more than 20 million acres in all 50 states. In Wisconsin there are more than 50 local, regional and statewide land trusts that collectively protect more than 100,000 acres.

Land trusts also may be called "conservancies," "foundations," or other names. They are distinguished by their first-hand involvement in land transactions or management.

This involvement can take many forms. Some land trusts purchase or accept donations of land or of conservation easements. Some manage land owned by others or advise landowners on how to preserve their land. Some land trusts help negotiate conservation transactions in which they play no other role. They may work with other nonprofit organizations and sometimes with developers. A land trust may do one, several or all of these things, but its focus is meeting a landowner's conservation and financial needs.

Land trusts have many advantages as a vehicle for protecting land. As private organizations, land trusts can be more flexible and creative and can generally act more quickly than government agencies, since they are not restrained by politics and procedures. They are able to negotiate with landowners discreetly, confidentially and quickly.

A land trust's nonprofit status brings a variety of tax benefits. Donations of land or easements to land trusts may provide the donor with various tax savings. Properly structured land trusts are exempt from federal and state income taxes, and sometimes from local property and real estate transfer taxes as well. Nonprofit status is also an advantage in raising funds from a variety of sources.

Most landowners are interested in retaining ownership of their land, but would like to see it protected in some way after they are gone. In this case, a conservation easement is the best tool. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.

Conservation easements are customized to each property. A land trust will work closely with the landowner to draft a document that reflects the landowner's vision for the future of the property. The landowner decides what to protect the land for, and what to protect it against. Many easements have restrictions on sub-division or additional residential units, while other easements retain building sites where they do not impair the land's conservation values.

The creation of conservation easements offers a landowner many benefits:

Great flexibility: the landowner decides what to protect and how best to protect it.

Continued ownership: conservation easements allow landowners to continue to own and use their land and sell it or pass it on to their heirs.

Continued protection: future owners of the land are bound to all the terms of the easement. The land trust is responsible for enforcing these terms.

Financial benefit: Landowners may realize a number of financial benefits by placing land in conservation easements. ●

White River Celebrated at Summer Fish Boil

The White River is an extraordinary resource, say those who know and love it best. Flowing gently through Bayfield and Ashland counties before merging with the Bad River, it flows through large tracts of undeveloped land-an increasing rarity in a time when riverfront property commands premium prices on the real estate market.

In recognition of the White River's unique qualities, members of the White River Citizen Involvement Committee held their first-ever "White River Celebration and Fish Boil" Friday.

The event, held at Mason's riverside town park, included fishing and water-quality demonstrations. It brought private landowners and conservation officials to speak informally and to share some freshly boiled whitefish with onions and potatoes.

White River Committee Vice Chairman Bill Heart said the event was an outgrowth of the 2004 expansion of the White River Fishery Area by some 7,500 acres in Bayfield County.

"We are working to inform landowners about what their options are for this corridor of the White River," he said.

Heart noted that much of the river frontage was privately owned.

"We are very interested in protecting this corridor; it's a gorgeous area," he said. "I have been interested in it for years and years, and now we are finally starting to do something to protect it."

Heart said one of the reasons for the celebration was to thank the landowners along the river for their efforts on behalf of the river, as well as to get them to meet informally with Department of Natural Resources officials and Department of Tourism Secretary Jim Holpren.

Heart said there were many things that made the White River special. "It's a very wild area that has very little access," he said. "The corridor is about 20 miles long and only Highway 63, Maple Ridge Road and Sanborn Avenue cross it. The section between Maple Ridge Road and Sanborn Avenue is very wild, very undeveloped. I've been on all of the rivers around here, and you get on this corridor, it's like you are in a whole different world. It's completely different from any river around here."

Heart said, despite its wildness, the river still needs help. He said sedimentation from development, agriculture, and other human activities have hurt the productive fishery, increasing the need for protection and work to restore the river.

"This used to be a wonderful trout stream, and it has become degraded over the years," he said.

Heart said restoring the river would be "a constant battle for the rest of our lives."

One tool in that fight is the ability of the DNR to acquire conservation easements. He noted that the easements are only obtained from willing landowners.

"It's kind of an amazing process," Heart said of the White River Citizen Involvement Committee. "The really neat part of this whole thing is the fact that it has been citizen-driven. There was a small group of us that started in 2001 to try and protect the river, and we are finally doing something." ●

–A version of this article first appeared in The Daily Press *on July 24, 2006*

Top: Bayfield Regional Conservancy Director Ruth Oppedahl, at right, talks with White River landowners about conservation options.

Middle: Boiled white fish, onions, potatoes, and home made desserts met with an enthusiastic crowd.

Bottom: Longtime White River landowner Ron Koshoskek was among many speakers who voiced thanks for the work done so far on the White River, as well as hopes and concerns for the future.

The White River Citizen Involvement Committee was formed in 2005 to serve as an information resource for White River landowners and river users, as an advocate for the protection and preservation of the White River, and as an advisory group to the Wisconsin DNR regarding the management of any state-acquired land in the newly expanded White River Fisheries Area segment of the watershed.

Publication and distribution of this newsletter was made possible by a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources River Management Grant.

White River Advocate: Myron Anderson

About five years ago, Myron Anderson called up a couple of friends who he knew loved the White River as much as he did. The small group got together to talk about the future of the river, especially a particularly wild stretch that cuts a deep ravine through the clay soils of Bayfield and Ashland Counties.

That small group changed and grew over time, and ultimately became what is now the White River Citizen Involvement Committee, whose purpose includes educating private landowner along the river about conservation options for their land.

Over those years and through the changes, Myron Anderson has remained at the center of the effort, and continues to be motivated by the same desires that inspired the first get-together.

"I've been using that river for 60 years—canoeing, fishing, even swimming in it," he says. "I've always enjoyed the remoteness of it, the wilderness feeling of it. I know a lot of the landowners around here, and I would say many of them share that feeling."

Myron Anderson, at right, meets with Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle (left) and Rep. Gary Sherman on the banks of the White River in the summer of 2004.

At 76, Anderson has farmed his Ashland County land for most of his life, and today would admit that he is only semi-retired. He continues to design and build forage harvesting machinery. He calls it a hobby, but some of his creations have made their way into use at the USDA's Dairy Forage Research Center in Madison, Wis.

The White River has been his local retreat, though he acknowledges that it is this very remoteness that is attracting the interest of developers.

"There's a place for development and a place for commerce, but I also think there need to be a few places in every part of the country that should be kept in a wild condition, some place you can go to get away," he says.

Anderson is aware that his efforts may actually draw the kind of attention to the White River that he wishes to avoid.

"I don't mind people knowing about a place like the White River," he says. "But I don't want to see it promoted or commercialized. I see it as a retreat for local people.

"You know, those of us who live up here put up with the cold, with the low wages, and all that. I think a place like the White River is our reward for that, a place right nearby we can go and not have to fight big crowds."

In that spirit, over the years Myron Anderson has introduced his children and grandchildren to the White River, paddling them through the remote stretch from the Maple Ridge landing to the flowage at Highway 112. Before too long, it's likely his eight-year-old great-grandson will take the trip, and the tradition will continue. ●

Public land and property taxes: what's the effect?

The 2004 decision to expand the state's White River Fisheries Area Expansion Project has brought some landowners the option of selling their riverfront land to the Wisconsin DNR. However, a common worry when private land becomes public is: what will happen to the town's tax base? The answer is: pretty much nothing.

When the DNR acquires land for public use, it makes payments for property taxes at the same level as any other property owner. Land purchased by the DNR is removed from the tax roll, but to compensate for the tax base loss, each taxing jurisdiction (town, village, school, etc.) receives an aid payment equivalent to property taxes.

According to state statute 70.114, the DNR pays "aids-in-lieu-of-taxes" equal to property taxes that would have been paid had the land remained in private ownership. This statute has applied to land acquired by the DNR since Jan. 1, 1992.

Here's how the program works:

◆ The DNR purchases a parcel of land. At the end of the year following purchase, regular property taxes are paid. The seller pays a prorated share for the months they owned the parcel and the DNR pays the balance.

◆ In January of each subsequent year, the DNR makes an aid payment which is equal to or greater than the amount of tax that would be due if the land were still in private ownership.

◆ In order to make aid calculations, the DNR's purchase price is substituted for the estimated fair market value shown on the property tax bill that was due the year of the purchase.

◆ This means that the value used to calculate the DNR's aid payment is guaranteed to be at least as high as the estimated fair market value established by local assessment.

◆ Each year the purchase price is adjusted to reflect the change in values in the taxation district where the land is located. This adjustment is based on the change in the equalized value of the taxation district. For example, if the value of the taxation district goes up 10 percent, the value of the DNR land is adjusted up 10 percent.

◆ Each year the adjusted purchase price is multiplied by the taxation district's level of assessment to determine a current substitute "assessed value." This value has been adjusted for changes in land value since the year of the purchase and for changes in the level of assessment in the taxation district.

◆ In January, the DNR sends each taxation district an aid payment. The amount of the payment is calculated just like a tax payment; the DNR multiplies the current mill rate for each taxation district by the adjusted "assessed value" of the DNR land within the district. On or before Feb. 15, the taxation district treasurer pays the appropriate share of the aid payment to each taxing jurisdiction. ●

DNR Secretary Scott Hassett Visits White River

Top state officials continue to take interest in the White River as a place where landowners and resource managers are taking good care of watershed resources.

State Representatives Bob Jauch and Gary Sherman have been frequent visitors to White River events, as have officials from the DNR and Department of Tourism. Two summers ago, Governor Jim Doyle stood on the banks of the White to praise the conservation work being done there.

The latest visitor to the White River was Wisconsin DNR Secretary Scott Hassett, who toured the river's south fork on August 28. He was there to learn about the South Fork Habitat Project, a multi-faceted trout habitat rehabilitation plan created and implemented by local DNR employees.

DNR fisheries technician Cris Sand, who drafted the project proposal, led the tour and explained the south fork's importance. He said the tributary is the highest-quality headwater feeder to this part of the White River and has the most advantageous temperature for the trout fishery.

"It's a tremendous source of cold water to the White River main stem, and it's very important to the trout," he said. "But given predictions for climate change, it's a little scary ... These cold-water feeders are incredibly important."

While brown and brook trout will eat and grow bigger downstream in the warmer Bibon Swamp area of the White River, they have historically come back to the south fork's rocky, cooler region to spawn, Sand said.

Sand and his crew have been working in-stream to narrow its channel, provide overhead cover and reincorporate rocky streambed conditions—all so that trout are more likely to spawn.

Some of the strategies they've used include building boom covers, which are wooden slabs placed in the stream that create dark, hospitable nooks for trout; and wing dams, which jut out into the stream to redirect the current. They've also worked to slope the banks to prevent erosion, and they've brought in excavators to move boulders from nearby land into the stream in order to speed up its flow, washing away sediment to reveal original spawning substrate.

According to crew member Paul Riordan, the project's work began well before the in-stream phase that started May 15. In the fall of 2005, the crew began clearing trees to make the access roads, and then hauled rock onto the site and made boom covers through the winter. Now, Sand says the in-stream work is more or less done, leaving the crew with the task of replanting the road and streambed areas with native grasses and plants.

Sand said the project's funds mostly came from trout stamp revenues, but that the local Wild Rivers chapter of Trout Unlimited also helped significantly. Bill Heart, president of the TU chapter, said that he hasn't fished much in the area lately because he's been disillusioned by the river's trout offering in recent years.

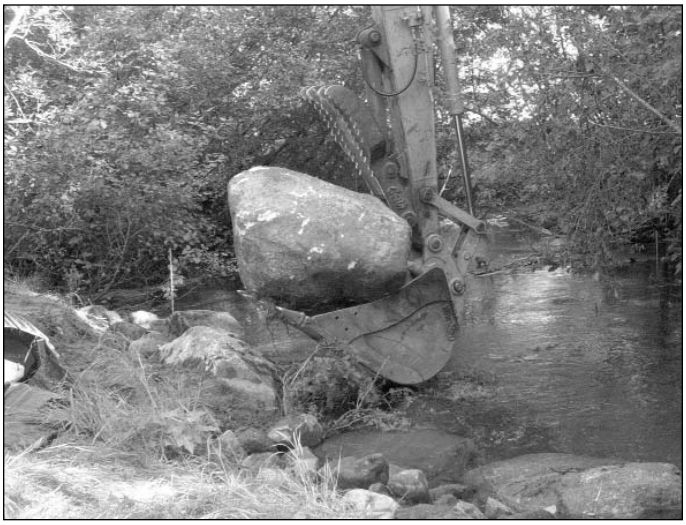
"I haven't in the last couple of years—there were a lot of smaller fish," he said. "But this is really going to help."

Jim Bishop, public affairs manager for the DNR's northern region, thought the afternoon excursion was a chance to show Hassett the innovative work that's happening up north. He also thought it might help the secretary to keep the northern region in mind when he's in the legislature and networking with possible funders.

"He can turn around, with firsthand knowledge, and say, 'I got my boots dirty,'" Bishop said. "That kind of thing gets a lot of respect." ●

–A version of this article first appeared in Ashland's The Daily Press *on August 29, 2006*

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary Scott Hassett (standing third from right), joins a DNR crew and Trout Unlimited local chapter president Bill Heart (kneeling) for a tour of the White River South Fork Habitat Project.



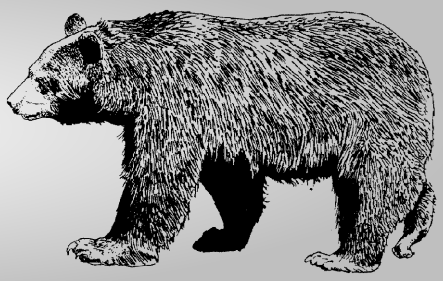
An excavator positions a huge boulder into the stream. These added boulders will help speed up stream flow, which in turn will wash away sediments and expose higher quality spawning beds for trout.

White River Citizen Involvement Committee
P.O. Box 1033
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806

FALL 2006 ◆ THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT THE WHITE RIVER

White River Landowner Meeting

7:00 p.m.
October 25, 2006
Town of Kelly Town Hall, 27525 Maple Ridge Rd.
Don't Miss It!



WHITE RIVER CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE
P.O. BOX 1033
ASHLAND, WI 54806

Committee Members

Craig Gilbaugh, Chair
White River watershed landowner
(715) 682-3415
cegdc@hotmail.com

Jean Hansen, Secretary
White River paddler
(715) 765-4608
jhz@cheqnet.net

Myron Anderson
Concerned citizen
(715) 682-2273
shirleyjean@hotmail.com

Bill Heart, Vice-Chair
Trout Unlimited chapter president
White River watershed landowner
(715) 682-5307
wwheart@cheqnet.net

Verne Gilles
Town of Kelly board member
White River watershed landowner
(715) 682-4408
vgill@ncis.net

Wisconsin DNR Land Managers for White River Fisheries Area

Dave Lindsley
(715) 685-2921
David.Lindsley@dnr.state.wi.us

Scott Toshner
(715) 372-8538 ext. 121
Scott.Toshner@dnr.state.wi.us