



# Geneva Lake Conservancy Connections

Protecting the environmental character of the Geneva Lakes area

Spring 2014

## Letter from the Chairman

Over the winter, the Geneva Lake Conservancy has been actively planning for its future. We have built an engaged organization team that wants to do more for the communities that we serve. Over the last few years, we expanded our advocacy efforts and added to our protected lands. Even with these successes, we feel we can **and should** do more. So, we have developed these four initiatives.

### Proactive Quality Land Protection

We will continue to be increasingly proactive, in promoting our land protection efforts and in learning how to be more skilled in obtaining quality easements on some of the pristine land that surrounds our lakes area of focus. There are wonderful natural areas, in and around our lakes. Protecting these natural areas, for wildlife, is a real positive, in and of itself, but it also serves to maintain the character of the area.

### Broader Advocacy and Education Efforts

We are strengthening our advocacy, for controlled lake shore property zoning. We are researching and will educate our constituents, on best practices, for our shoreland activities, to protect our lakes. Our recommendation for Shoreline Buffer landscaping is one example. We are now looking at how to better care for our piers – more to come.

### Aid the White River County Park.

We offered to help Walworth County, with its White River County Park, by submitting a proposal to help draft a master plan for the natural areas of the park and by assisting it to set up a “Friends Group” for the park. The park has wonderful natural areas that need only to be cleaned up, to be a great place to observe nature and kayak. We want to help the County get off on the right foot, with this project.

### Begin Preparations for Accreditation

We are updating our land protection files and reserving legal defense and stewardship funds, to prepare for accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance Commission. We view this process as an opportunity to make our organization more disciplined and more secure and intend to do it right. We believe this effort will make our organization better at what it does, now.

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## Newsletter Naming Contest Winner Announced

Erin Swan of suburban St. Louis, Mo., submitted our new newsletter name. She credits her family with connecting her as a child and a young adult to the vitality and serenity of the Geneva Lakes area – a connection that continues.

In that her mother served as muse as Erin worked on name possibilities, she will be sharing the Conservancy tote bag of goodies with her mother.

## White River County Park

On March 4, the Walworth County government officially became the owner of 196 acres in Lyons Township to be added to the County's public park system.

For more than a year the County worked on the purchase, acquiring the land for \$1.91 million, half of which was financed through a Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Grant. The property, located at the intersection of Short and Sheridan Springs Roads, features 9,200 feet of frontage on the White River, a spring-fed quarry, and established trails as well as old-growth forested areas and a prime agricultural area.

The County is hoping to open the park to the public in the beginning of summer after improvements have been made to the property. They include a parking lot, boat launch, and restroom.

The Conservancy advocated for the purchase of the property and has submitted a land-management proposal to assist the County develop a master plan for the park.

## 2013 Holly Ball Honors Gail Hibbard

On December 7, 2013 the Geneva Lake Conservancy (GLC) held its annual winter gala fundraiser, Holly Ball Goes Hollywood, at Big Foot Country Club in Fontana. As part of this annual fundraiser, the Conservancy recognizes an individual for conservation contributions to the area. This year the award was presented to Gail Hibbard.

Charles Colman, GLC Chairman, presented the award to Hibbard. "Gail Hibbard has set an example through her consistency, dedication and follow through. We are thankful for all of her efforts in the restoration of the oak savanna and prairie in Fontana. It is our honor to present this award to an individual who leads by example."

Hibbard's commitment to conservation spans a lifetime and was recognized by the Geneva West Chamber of Commerce in 2012 with the Fontana Citizen of the Year Award for her tireless efforts on behalf of the Village, demonstrated through constant public service. Work on the CDA (Community Development Agency) in Fontana began in 2006, and soon after on the Village Parks Commission. Gail fostered a partnership with the Village, Fontana Garden Club and village residents to enable the restoration of the prairie and oak savanna in Fontana. Deemed one of the best examples of prairie restoration by noted native plantsman Roy Diblik, the momentum for this project is due to Hibbard's unfailing commitment. Restoration expert Tom Vanderpoel said Hibbard is "dedicated and determined to bring native ecosystem restoration to Fontana, in both the prairie and the oak savanna". The corp of volunteers dedicated to the restoration project is a testament to her leadership.



Charles Colman, Chair of the Conservancy, presenting the Conservation Stewardship Award to Gail Hibbard.

# Fire: Nature's Way of Weeding and Feeding

By Ron Martin, Midwest Prairies LLC

Spring is a time of change in our natural world. Mild temperatures, warm rains, birds returning to nesting grounds, and fire sweeping across the prairies. All of these events took place in the upper Midwest for thousands of years and maintained the natural balance of plants, animals, and insects until European settlement changed everything.

After settlers built homes, barns, and wooden fences, fire was cursed. Even the mention of fire struck terror in the hearts of people.

Needless to say, this brought an end to burning and the beginning of plowing, which drastically changed the landscape. Any land too rugged to plow was grazed, and the cattle replaced the fires by grazing on woody stems, which kept the brush under control. Fire has a way of sorting out plant species into three basic groups: fire tolerant, fire intolerant, and fire dependent.

The growing point for most native prairie plants is below ground, while the growing point for most woody species is above ground. Wind-swept fire quickly racing over the dormant prairie grass consumes the dry thatch, exposing the dark soil. Soot and black ash draw heat from the sun to warm the soil and quickly jumpstart the root crowns into green life. Without fire, the thatch builds up and reflects the sunlight and insulates the roots, keeping them cold for weeks longer.

The burning process also returns many important nutrients to the soil, which is taken down to the roots with the spring rain. This is why you see the amazing green foliage and brilliant flowers in the years following a prairie burn that have been absent a long time. Prairies that haven't been burned for several years are noticeably shorter and bloom later.

Cool-season grasses, weeds, invasive species, and woody plants gain an advantage when prairies are not burned for long periods. Late-spring burns can negatively impact early-blooming spring flowers, such as pasque flowers, so you want to have a diverse burn cycle that has a rotation of burns in early spring, late spring, and fall. You also should skip a few years if invasive brush is not an issue.

Streams that wind through native prairie grasses generally flow clear and have less sediment than streams that have become overgrown with trees and brush along the banks. The deep and fibrous root systems of the warm season prairie grasses do a much better job of holding the soil and preventing erosion. Roots of most trees and brush are coarse and shallow, resulting in poor soil-holding capacity, which can be seen along many streams in southern Wisconsin.

Bur oak trees are one exception in the world of trees when it comes to fire. Bur oak seedlings develop a huge root system early in life that can store a large amount of energy capable of regeneration if a fire burns off the top. I have seen 18-inch bur oaks completely burned off in a prairie fire only to re-sprout from the roots to a height of 30 inches by the end of summer, passing the original height. The root continues to gain mass, and if the top is burned off again it will rebound to new heights until the thick corky bark insulates its vitals to the point where the tree can survive the fires unscathed. The value of bur oak trees in the natural community cannot be over emphasized, as 90 percent of woodland and savanna wildlife depend on the sweet nutritious acorns for survival.

Consider the fact that warm-season grasses have the ability to pull carbon from the air and deposit it in their roots, which can go down as much as 10 feet. Through natural attrition, about one-third of these roots dies and decomposes each winter, leaving an open channel in the soil for rainwater to find its way down and recharge our groundwater and keep our wells working and our streams flowing.

The prairie states of the Midwest are known as the breadbasket of the world with the deep rich, black soil created by thousands of years of prairie communities that have been maintained by fire. This soil was created by the decaying roots of the native prairie plants.

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# Fire: Nature's Way of Weeding and Feeding

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OK, so fire is fine for the plants that have adapted to fire for their advantage, but what about the birds and animals. How does fire affect them? Most prairie fires occur in early spring or fall when birds are not nesting and baby animals are not in the prairie. On occasion I have discovered a turkey nest that was burned and the eggs were lost; however, turkeys frequently re-nest to raise a second brood.

Consider the effects of not burning. Invasive species and brush would replace the flowers and native grasses; the grassland birds would lose their habitat entirely and be gone. The insects that are attracted to the flowers no longer would be available for birds to feed their young. By eliminating fire, the entire community may collapse, while an occasional prescribed burn could enhance and maintain the community.

So the next time you see the black ash and soot of a prairie fire you will know that it is not just the result of a bunch of pyromaniacs playing with fire. Rather, a highly skilled crew of folks is putting the natural forces of nature in motion to keep the prairies blooming, the birds singing, and the water flowing clear into your well and lake.

## Conservancy Announces 2014 Board

Don Huml has joined the Geneva Lake Conservancy Board of Directors, bringing 35 years of financial, operational, and managerial experience of business and a passion for land conservation.

In 2010 Don retired from Greif Inc., Delaware, Ohio, having worked there since 2002 as executive vice president and chief financial officer. Previously, Don worked at Snap-on in Kenosha and Saint-Gobain in Valley Forge, Pa.

Having received a bachelor's degree in business administration, marketing/economics, from Marquette University and an M.B.A. in finance from The Fox School of Business, Temple University, Don's career focused on financial and strategic decision planning to gain a competitive market advantage.

Don is a graduate of Badger High School and is married to his high school sweetheart, Joyce. They spend time in Boca Grande, Fla., and when they are in the Geneva Lakes area spend time between their home on the south shore and their historic farm in Lyons Township.

The Conservancy welcomes the return of board member Dennis Jordan. He served on the board from 2004 through 2012 and brings with him knowledge of local conservation issues.

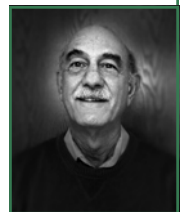
Born and raised in Waukegan, Ill., Dennis attended Southern Illinois University, obtaining his B.A. in political science and history, and later attended Montana State University, earning his M.P.A.

Dennis' experience in city administration began in 1986 in Litchfield, Mich., and his career has taken him to Sturgeon Bay, Wis., McHenry, Ill., and Berlin, Wis. His tenure with the City of Lake Geneva as city administrator began in 2003, where he is a vital component of city government administration and planning process.

Dennis resides in Lake Geneva with his wife, Diane.



Don  
Huml



Dennis  
Jordan

## Thank you for our Volunteers...

Al Hermansen and Charles Obligato for their continued work at Hermansen woods • Martha Cucco and Nancy Williams for the new look of our bulletin board • Lynne Frost for helping with a mailing • Jim Frost for working on the updated newsletter design • Mary Roth for her unfailing help with office work • Mac Six for helping around the Mill House • JaNelle Powers for helping with the Spring Membership Mailing

- A heartfelt thank you to the 2014 Holly Ball Committee •

## Thoughts on Pier Painting

The process of pier painting is increasingly coming under scrutiny. As you walk the shore path on Geneva Lake in the spring and early summer, you may see a pier being prepared for painting and feel dismay as you watch the painters scrape and power-wash paint chips into the lake. What can be done to avoid this thoughtless pollution?

Ask your pier painting professional to use a penetrating water-based stain. Sherwin Williams in Lake Geneva recommends Deckscapes for all pier and deck projects. This is especially effective on new pier wood.

Stains don't peel since there is not a film build-up, and they penetrate and move with the wood. Stains also can be used over existing paint, and over time the pier wood will be completely covered by stain.

Be sure that your pier is painted under optimal conditions. All products have recommended temperatures for application, and if these are observed the applied product will adhere better. For example, Deckscapes recommends a surface and air temperature of at least 50 degrees for 48 hours after application. This applies to both day and night temperatures.

Be sure you are painting clean, dry wood. It is tempting to want your pier painted just after it is installed in the spring. Remember that the pier has been stacked all winter and needs time to dry out before painting.

Insist that your pier painter dispose of the paint chips properly. Prep work is the biggest component to successful pier painting, and the piers need to be scraped, power-washed, and sanded to get the loose paint and dirt off.

Ideally, the prep work should be done on shore. If your pier has been installed, the paint chips should not be allowed to go in the water. In fact, the DNR will issue a littering ticket if a DNR official sees someone allowing paint chips or paint to go into the water!

The environment that piers exist in is detrimental to stain/paint applications. The sun heats up the boards and brings moisture up from the water and through the wood, which causes the finish to buckle and peel. A thoughtful approach to pier maintenance will benefit the environmental quality of our lakes.

Tired of painting your pier year after year? Consider materials other than wood for your pier. Contact your pier installer for recommendations.

## Volunteer Spotlight

The Conservancy extends a heartfelt thank you to Al Hermansen for his continued support of the organization.

Al's continued hard work, dedication, and support of our restoration efforts at Hermansen's Woods, donated by Al to the Conservancy in 2001, is a spectacular example of stewardship of valuable land in the Geneva Lakes area. His faithfulness to the woods is beyond appreciated.

Pulling weeds, removal of invasive species, path maintenance, garbage removal, and even bringing in friends to help with projects are just a few of the ongoing efforts this man puts into his "labor of love." Everyone much appreciates his generosity and countless hours. Thank you, Al! We look forward to another year of fun at the woods!

The Conservancy will continue its restoration efforts in the 15-acre woods this coming year. Want more information or are you interested in helping with restoration work? Contact Lynn at the Conservancy today!



Al Hermansen pictured by the native garden at the entrance of the woods. The garden was planted in the summer of 2013.

# 2014 Calendar of Events

**Wednesday, April 23**

## ***Will Allen, Founder and CEO of Growing Power***

**6 pm, Carrie Ann Room at George Williams College of Aurora University, Williams Bay**

This is a unique opportunity to hear visionary Will Allen, son of a sharecropper, basketball player, ex-corporate leader. Allen founded Growing Power in 1993 to provide safe and healthy foods to communities by providing training and hands-on experiences. *The New York Times* said Allen “has achieved a certain momentum for his efforts to bring the good-food movement to the inner city.” Join us to hear Allen, “a farmer of Bunyanesque proportions,” articulate his thoughts on the good-food movement.

This event is cosponsored by the Conservancy, the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, and George Williams College of Aurora University.

**Friday, April 25**

## ***Sand County Tribute***

**11:30 a.m., Pier 290, Williams Bay**

Enjoy a luncheon overlooking the waters of Geneva Lake where musician songwriter Tim Southwick Johnson will perform songs from his album, *Sand County Songs*, inspired by early conservationist crusader Aldo Leopold and his iconic book, *A Sand County Almanac*. The program is a tribute to Leopold’s best-known published work and the continued relevance of his environmental ethics in today’s modern landscape.

**Thursday, July 17**

## ***Stonebeigh Farm Walkabout***

**Lyons Township**

Settled in 1842, this restored and loved farm is one of the earliest settlements in Walworth County, and guests will view prairie grasses, wildflowers, vegetable gardens, woods, and more. Guest speaker Peter Layton, founder and CEO of Tallgrass Restoration, is a perfect fit for this occasion, as his firm has had a great impact on the restoration work in the Geneva Lakes area and, coincidentally, helped with the restoration work of this bucolic farm.

**Saturday, October 4**

## ***Shore Path Walk***

**8 a.m., Fontana lakefront**

The seventh annual JPPT Lake Walk will benefit the Geneva Lake Conservancy. This fully underwritten event is designed to be a great day of exercise, accomplishment, and fun. Walkers are given a route map and pace guide to keep them on track for their chosen mileage goals of 3, 6, 10, or 21 miles. Fully stocked aid stations are setup roughly every three miles to maintain energy and motivation and sag support transports personal gear to the various rest stops and provides aid if needed. This is a great opportunity to accomplish a goal, promote good health, enjoy the beauty of Geneva Lake, and support the Geneva Lake Conservancy all in one day. Registration opens May 1. 100 percent of the proceeds benefit Geneva Lake Conservancy.

**Saturday, December 6**

## ***Holly Ball***

**Big Foot Country Club, Fontana**

Join us for this significant annual fundraiser that includes a live band, dinner, mini-mall, and the presentation of the Conservation Stewardship Award. A long-favored tradition, this year marks the 33rd annual Holly Ball.

# Letter from the Chairman

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To achieve these goals, we are in the midst of upgrading our organization, by adding a staff person. Our ongoing internal management needs are limiting both our Land Protection and our Community Outreach Managers' ability to give adequate attention to their primary responsibilities. Adding such an employee will permit a better balance of the workload of our Staff, so that they have the time to use their skills, within our communities of focus, more broadly. This additional employee's presence will constitute an important transition for our organization. It will make us stronger, better organized and more responsive. It will help us do a better job of communication and education. Of course, we need your support, in this expansion, but we believe that it requires only a small increase in funding, from the past two years' levels. You can expect to see positive results, as our initiatives produce better results for our communities.

As always, thank you for your support.

Charles L. Colman – Board Chair

## Thank you to our Sustaining Sponsors:

John & Linda Anderson

Carol Bernick & Bob Fates

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Jeff & Molly Keller



## Share the Vision and Donate Now.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible Membership donation:

- \$50 Naturalist  \$100 Steward  \$150 Advocate  \$200 Protector  \$250 Guardian  \$500 Benefactor  
 \$1,000 Stewardship Society  \$5,000 Preservation Society  \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other

Donor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I would like to be a volunteer:

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Call me when you need help

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Mill House restoration and maintenance

Summer or Winter Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mill House Gardens  Data Entry

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Educational programs

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Event volunteer

Mailings

**We need your email addresses so we can keep you up to date with the latest GLC news!**

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to: Geneva Lake Conservancy | P.O. Box 588 | Fontana, WI 53125

262 275 5700 | 262 275 0579 fax

Email: [GLC@GenevaLakeConservancy.com](mailto:GLC@GenevaLakeConservancy.com) | visit our website at: [www.genevalakeconservancy.org](http://www.genevalakeconservancy.org)



# Geneva Lake Conservancy

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## Sand County Tribute

BENEFIT LUNCHEON & GUEST PERFORMANCE

*That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but  
that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.*  
- Aldo Leopold

**FRIDAY APRIL 25, 2014**

**PIER 290 • WILLIAMS BAY, WI • 11:30 AM**

Enjoy a luncheon overlooking the waters of Geneva Lake where musician songwriter Tim Southwick Johnson will perform songs from his album, Sand County Songs, inspired by early conservationist crusader Aldo Leopold and his iconic book, A Sand County Almanac.

The program is a tribute to Leopold's best-known published work and the continued relevance of his environmental ethics in today's modern landscape.



**\$75 PER PERSON • RSVP BY 04/18/2014**

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