



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT INFORMATION
Mike Carlson, Executive Director
608-251-9131 X13
carlson@gatheringwaters.org

Geneva Lake Conservancy Honored as Land Trust of the Year in 2020

[MADISON, July 20, 2020] – [Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts](#) honors [Geneva Lake Conservancy](#) as the 2020 Land Trust of the Year for its their outstanding conservation work.

From its humble beginnings in 1977, as the Committee to Save Geneva Lake, the organization has grown to protect and manage environmentally significant land in and around Walworth County, including waterways, natural areas, and working lands.

“While the Geneva Lake Conservancy has been in existence for many years, its positive impact has increased exponentially in terms of acquisitions, contributions, and membership during the past year,” said David Bretl, retired Walworth County Administrator. “Its efforts in land preservation, public education, and mobilization of support truly merit the designation of Land Trust of the Year.”

In 2019, Geneva Lake Conservancy protected 556 acres known as the [Holzinger Memorial Preserve](#). The area is habitat for the Blanding’s Turtle, a species of special concern in Wisconsin, and the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. The conservation easement, the largest recorded by a land trust in Wisconsin in 2019, opens the property for public exploration and enjoyment.

The Conservancy also purchased [Bromley Woods](#) in the town of La Grange. This 40-acre public preserve boasts an oak forest, kettle pond, rare oak savanna, and an established trail system. The Department of Natural Resources identified Bromley Woods as a Conservation Opportunity Area of global importance.

Along with land and watershed protection, another goal of the Conservancy is to engage the community and introduce people, especially children, teens, and young adults, to the wonders of nature.

With a generous donation from Jack Rohner in memory of his late wife, Geneva Lake Conservancy completed the [Helen Rohner Children’s Fishing Park in Williams Bay](#). The fishing park with its trout stream is the only wildlife area and nature center in Wisconsin dedicated to teaching children how to fish and appreciate the wonders of nature. Over 400 children visit the park each year to fish, dig worms, walk the Native American trail, listen to stories, and visit the amphibian pond. They will become Wisconsin’s next generation of fishermen and naturalists.

Geneva Lake Conservancy also co-sponsors the **Winter Solstice Bonfire and Pollinator Walks** at [White River County Park](#) to promote and fundraise for conservation projects at the park.

Since over 90 percent of Walworth County is privately owned, Geneva Lake Conservancy found ways to reach out to homeowners with informational and action-based programs.

“**Keeping It Blue**” is one of those initiatives. The educational program has built community awareness of the dangers of phosphorus run-off and blue-green algae blooms in Walworth lakes. In conjunction with the program, Geneva Lake Conservancy leads the Geneva Lake Task Force to proactively address rising phosphorus levels, monitor invasive

-more-

species in the lakes, and implement a vegetation management plan for the area.

The Conservancy also began the **Heritage Oak Program** to highlight the oak forests in Walworth County. The organization helps landowners care for old-growth oak trees, plants oak trees each year on managed properties, and replaces invasive vegetation with native plants that promote oak growth. At times, people also can buy young oak trees grown from native acorns and plant them at home.

Most recently, the Conservancy brought the [Conservation@Home](#) program to Walworth County. It's the first Conservation@Home program in the state. The program – first created by The Conservation Foundation of Naperville, Illinois – guides landowners who want to make their lawn more ecologically friendly. Volunteers who have extensive gardening and conservation experience meet with landowners to discuss the best plants for gardens and landscaping; they also discuss tips for removing invasive species. Volunteers show landowners how buffer strips, rain gardens, and [bioswales](#) help filter stormwater.

“Geneva Lake Conservancy is making a tangible, positive impact in Walworth County,” said [Mike Carlson, Executive Director](#) of Gathering Waters. “Through land acquisitions, conservation easements, and hosting educational programs and public events that engage the community, Geneva Lake Conservancy helps people understand the value of getting involved in conservation.

“In 2019 alone, Geneva Lake Conservancy added 200 people to its membership,” Carlson said. “This is clear evidence that people see and value the work Geneva Lake Conservancy does and the benefits the organization provides for the lake, the land, and the people.”

While Geneva Lake Conservancy enjoys the success of its efforts in Walworth County, the organization recognizes its responsibility as a member of the larger Wisconsin land trust community. Geneva Lake Conservancy remains active in support of Wisconsin's [Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program](#) and has participated in [Land Trust Alliance](#) advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C.

About Gathering Waters:

[Gathering Waters](#) helps Wisconsin's land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the state's land, water, wildlife, and way of life by strengthening nearly 50 [member land trusts](#). Land trusts are nonprofit organizations that permanently protect land. To make sure Wisconsin's land trusts are strong, sustainable organizations, Gathering Waters advocates for favorable public policies and funding, provides technical and educational resources, and increases awareness of the benefits land trusts bring to their communities.

###