



Geneva Lake Conservancy Connections

Spring 2021

Preserve and advocate for Walworth County waterways, natural areas, and working lands

CONSERVANCY RECEIVES ZABLER FARM DONATION

The Geneva Lake Conservancy and Howard and Bev Zabler announced recently that they have completed the donation of 61 acres of the Zabler family farm to the Conservancy.

The Zabler farm is a well-established conservation farm located in the Village of Rochester in western Racine County. It is a part of a Primary Environmental Corridor and provides habitat for the Blanding's turtle, a state and federal endangered species, as well as numerous other wildlife.

Originally a family dairy farm, the third-generation of Zabler family owners, Howard and Bev Zabler, envisioned a full land restoration for the conservation of native species as their best stewardship of the land for restoring environmental health and maintaining ecosystems for wildlife. From 1996 to 1998, they restored the cropland to a 36-acre native Wisconsin prairie and 13 acres of wetland and planted 7,500 native trees.

The Conservancy will continue to manage it as a private preserve with educational tours and fundraising events for the public at least four times a year. Howard and Bev Zabler continue to own the adjacent 16 acres that include the farmhouse, barn and other buildings. When the Zablers vacate that property, the 61 acres will be open to the public for hiking and wildlife viewing.

Howard's grandfather, Ernest Zabler, the son of August and Mary (Teut) Zabler, grew up in Rochester and bought this parcel of land in the early 1900's from the Oldenberg family to start his own dairy farm. His son, Wallace E. Zabler, who was born on the farm in 1914, joined the Navy in 1932 and became a WWII POW in Burma when his ship, the USS Houston, was sunk. He fortunately survived this ordeal and returned home in 1945 to marry his sweetheart, Donna Peck, the daughter of another local founding family and dairy farmer.

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Yellow coneflowers grace the Zabler Farm prairie .

The coronavirus have impacted all of our lives, and as the vaccine becomes available, the Conservancy is planning on resuming events. Consult the enclosed calendar for information on fishing classes, prairie walks and special events. The Conservancy's board and staff want to thank all of our supporters for their contributions to preserving the beauty and health of Walworth County that inspires us all during this crisis. We encourage you to visit our nature preserves to experience the renewing and healing powers of nature. More information on our nature preserves and activities you can do with your family are available on our Website

at: www.genevalakeconservancy.org.

61-ACRE FARM DONATION (continued from page 1)



Howard and Bev Zabler, whose land ethic led to their donation of the Wallace E. Zabler Nature Preserve to the Conservancy.

They bought Wallace's family farm in 1960, renting out the buildings and cropland, while maintaining the yard and planting over 50 trees there. His son, Howard, mowed the lawn and flagged the tree seedlings he sighted to mow around, raising 20 or so self-seeded trees to maturity. Wallace and Donna, moved to the farm in 1968 and stayed there through their retirement, with Howard joining them on college breaks and taking care of them in their final years. Howard and Bev began shared ownership of the land in 1992.

The property will be known as the Wallace E. Zabler Nature Preserve and a dedication of the preserve will be held in May 2021.

"Howard and Bev Zabler have been excellent caretakers of this scenic land and we are honored that they have entrusted us to continue this role," said Tom Nickols, Vice Chair of the Conservancy. "Their donation protects this land and its high

conservation values for future generations and is an invaluable gift to the community.

The Conservancy has protected more than 2,800 acres of land in Walworth County and has expanded its mission to include the Burlington area. During a community conversation with Burlington residents in 2018, residents said they needed to protect more of the rural farms in the area from subdivision and development.

"The Zabler farm is an example of land with high conservation value that should not be developed," said Karen Yancey, the Conservancy's Executive Director. It is in the Honey and Sugar Creek watershed, one of the Conservancy's focus areas, and helps preserve the open lands in the charming community of Rochester, she said.

The Conservancy is working with other landowners in the Burlington/Rochester area to protect open lands with high conservation value.

HAPP PROMOTED TO ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Janet Happ, Director of Development, has been promoted to Assistant Executive Director. This reflects her excellent work in fundraising and member development as well as her ability to take on broader responsibilities in the Conservancy's future, said Executive Director Karen Yancey.

"Janet has done an exceptional job of carrying out her development responsibilities and has now taken on strategic responsibilities in other areas as the Conservancy fulfills its conservation mission," said Yancey

Janet's history with the organization began in 2012 when she joined as Manager of Fundraising and Community Outreach. Over the last nine years, her responsibilities have grown to include the native plant sale, donor and new member outreach, managing the Web site and working with landowners on conservation easements. She has also played a valuable role on the Water Alliance For Preserving Geneva Lake, leading the effort to get CD3 boat cleaning equipment at public boat launches.

Please join us in congratulating Janet.



CONSERVATION@HOME SIGN UP OPENS FOR 2021

The Geneva Lake Conservancy is pleased to invite property owners to participate in Conservation@Home for the second straight year, providing guidance and advice on how they can make their property more ecologically healthy and contribute to healing our planet.



Last year, 42 property owners participated in the program and more than 80 percent were certified as using environmentally friendly practices, receiving a special plaque to place in their yard.

“In a one-to-two hour visit, we can provide information on what native shrubs and trees you can plant to make your yard healthier for nearby lakes, wildlife and humans,” said Maddie Olivieri, the Conservancy’s Community Outreach Manager. “You will also learn how to remove invasive species like buckthorn, improve bird habitat and reduce phosphorus and chloride use that harm lakes,” she said.

The Conservancy has 4 trained volunteers – Kathleen Renowden, Joan Rost, Sonette Tippens, and Gerri Green – who meet with property owners to suggest native plants, identify and give tips to remove invasive species and recommend where to plant trees and shrubs to help absorb storm runoff. Those property owners who are not certified on the first visit can schedule another visit the following year to show that they have implemented the suggestions of the Conservation@Home specialists.

New this year is an effort to encourage property owners to help support the Dark Skies Initiative needed for nocturnal animals like owls by turning off night lighting or using it sparingly, Olivieri said.

There will also be a continued commitment to educating property owners on how they can reduce phosphorus runoff by limiting fertilizer use, planting native plants and stopping soil erosion. Chloride is also a growing problem for aquatic life and property owners are asked to reset their water softeners and use salt sparingly on walkways and driveways.

If you are interested in learning more about the Conservation@Home program, check with your local library to watch one of our upcoming virtual programs with Maddie Olivieri. If you would like to schedule a Conservation@Home visit, please sign up on our Website and we will call you to schedule an appointment beginning in May.

The Conservation@Home program is underwritten by Karl & Lucy Otzen and Otzen Family Foundation.

CONSERVANCY EXPANDS COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Our new Community Outreach Manager, Maddie Olivieri, joined us in early February. She graduated from the University of Vermont in 2019 with a degree in Environmental Policy & Development, and she minored in Spanish. Growing up, Maddie and her family spent every summer on a small lake in Walworth County where she fell in love with the wide-open spaces, fresh air, and pristine lakes.



She brings experience in community outreach and grassroots organizing to the team, and she is looking forward to working with volunteers and homeowners through our Conservation@Home program. She also can’t wait to help promote our summer programs at the Helen Rohner Children’s Fishing Park.

Maddie believes that anyone can be an environmentalist, and she is thrilled to be working with the Conservancy to help make environmentalism more accessible to the people of Walworth County.

The Conservancy gratefully acknowledges a \$30,000 grant received from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to expand community outreach.

OLDEST KNOWN OAK IN WALWORTH COUNTY IDENTIFIED

The Geneva Lake Conservancy's 2020 Oak Tree contest may have identified the oldest oak tree in Walworth County, according to Kiera Theys, the Conservancy's Land Protection Manager.

Last fall, the Conservancy received an entry from John Zinzow and Holly Neault of La Grange, long-distance runners and outdoor enthusiasts, who regularly passed a large white oak tree while running/hiking through Kettle Moraine State Park's Southern Unit. This white oak is the largest tree in an old growth oak savanna that is obscured by buckthorn and honey suckle.

Relying on an aging chart developed by Martin Bowles of the Morton Arboretum and Michael Jones of Christopher Burke Engineering, based on core samples from roughly 600 Chicago region forest specimens, John developed an estimate of the tree's age. With a circumference of 12 feet at waist height and a diameter of 45.84 inches, the tree is around 350 years old.

"It may be the oldest living oak tree in Walworth County," Theys said. "Based on their information, the oak tree began growing in 1670, which was when the first white men, who were missionaries and fur traders, came to Wisconsin."

Walworth County was then populated by the Potawatomi tribe who had villages near the present-day cities of Whitewater and a trail that passed near what is now the Kettle Moraine State Park's Southern Unit that led from the present-day city of Madison east to Milwaukee.

The first white man did not settle in Walworth County until 1836 and Walworth County was not formed until 1839 when the tree was already more than 160 years old. It is part of a larger oak savanna in the Kettle Moraine State Park. The park was created in 1937 and now comprises more than 22,000 acres.

Theys noted that it was probably the park's protected land that helped ensure that the oak tree was not endangered by timber companies or others seeking to cut it down for lumber or development.

"When asked how they found the tree John commented, "Discovering ancient oaks begins by locating old growth forest areas. We looked for "oak families" with visual similarities in the canopy and major limb configuration, along with the same bark texture and, of course, size."

Because our oak savannas have been overrun with invasive brush – buckthorn and honeysuckle – winter is the best time for searching out old oaks, he said. "We encourage everyone to hike our different natural areas in Walworth County and the greater Kettle Moraine. All of us are fortunate to have access to land owned by the state, the county, Geneva Lake Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy and other community organizations."

John estimates that he spent 30-35 hours clearing non-native brush that almost completely blocked a view of the tree from the main trail.



John Zinzow, utilizing the oak aging chart used by the Morton Arboretum, estimates that this stately oak tree in the Kettle Moraine State Park is 350 year old.

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OLDEST OAK IN WALWORTH COUNTY (continued from page 4)

“We are very thankful to John and Holly for their work to improve the health of the tree. Right now, the tree appears very healthy in spite of its age,” Theys said.

White oak trees are the longest living Northern oak species with an average life span of 300 years. The oldest white oak tree ever identified in the United States was in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, in a church yard. It was estimated to be more than 600 years old and in failing health when the Washington Post published a story on it in 2016. It was cut down in 2017.

“We invite anyone else who thinks they have a tree of this size and age to contact us and enter it in our 2021 contest,” said Theys. “We are trying to identify the oldest trees in the County and do what we can to care for them.”

The Conservancy’s oak contest is part of its Oak Recovery Program, sponsored by the Griffith Family Foundation and Keefe Kares. The goal of the program is to begin replacing oak trees in Walworth County. A recent survey by the Morton Arboretum Chicago Wilderness Oak Recovery Program identified all the original oak forests, savannas and woodlands in Walworth County and determined that only 17 percent of them remained.

Each year, the Conservancy holds a fall sale of native oak trees, helping to ensure that more than 100 new oak trees are planted in Walworth County. In 2020, the Conservancy also worked with the Walworth County Public Works Department to plant an oak savanna at White River County Park with the help of more than 30 families.

Every mature oak tree supports more than 500 species and oak savannas have become one of the rarest landscapes in the world, Theys said. “This work is very important to the ecological health of our area and anyone can contribute by planting an oak tree on their property.”



John and Holly Zinlow, and Kiera Theys (right) hike Kettle Moraine State Park, an area treasured for its old oak trees.

THEYS NAMED LAND PROTECTION MANAGER

Kiera Theys, Land Protection Specialist has been promoted to Land Protection Manager, increasing her responsibilities in the Conservancy’s water and land protection projects.

Kiera served as the summer intern for Helen Rohner Children’s Fishing Park in 2018 and joined the Conservancy as its Land Protection Specialist in 2019 after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a degree in Environmental Science with a Geosciences track emphasis. In addition to annually monitoring the Conservancy’s 34 Conservation easements, she has managed the Healthy Lakes grant program as well as supervised stewardship projects on the Conservancy’s nature preserves and coordinated the oak savanna project at White River County Park.

Her new responsibilities will include managing all the stewardship projects on the Conservancy’s conservation and fee-owned properties and supervising a part-time Land Protection Specialist.

Please join us in congratulating Kiera.



CONNECTIONS spring photo by Jim Frost. Special thanks to Jim for his assistance with photographs.

ELIZABETH ALDRED JOINS CONSERVANCY BOARD

Elizabeth Aldred brings 20 years of experience in the public health sector to the Conservancy. Liz's professional experience began as a counselor and therapist, and progressed to her appointment as the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services, Waukesha County, this January. Liz will be responsible for the development, administration, and direction of a comprehensive range of programs and services addressing mental health, public health, child welfare, and other social services for Waukesha County. Liz "has spent her career demonstrating her commitment to the health and quality of life of the public," said Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow. The Conservancy welcomes Liz's experience as the benefits obtained from visiting our nature preserves during this stressful time are sought by the public.



Liz lives in East Troy and is a mother of two teenage daughters. She is an avid runner who enjoys being outside in our community and on our scenic trails.

HOME for the HOLIDAYS ... A SPECIAL HOLLY BALL @HOME

This Holly Ball we shared the mission and efforts of the Conservancy as we have never before. On December 5, Conservancy supporters gathered in their homes, and joined Bob Klockars at the home of Sarah and John Cobb. The program began with Kate Holland, Conservancy board member, introducing a mixology demonstration by Jacey Powers, followed by remarks by Kevin Brunner, Conservancy Chair, and Karen Yancey, Executive Director. Mark Bromley spoke for the Bromley Family, recipients of the Conservation Stewardship award for their stewardship of Bromley Woods and generosity, love of nature and community-minded spirit. Carl Korfmacher received the Honorary Land Steward award for his commitment to restoring and protecting the ecological health of the lands and wetlands of Walworth County. A live auction, was followed by "Preserving What You Love", a video celebrating the Conservancy's mission and work. Then our advocates were asked to raise their paddle for funds to support land acquisitions efforts of the Conservancy as well as general operations.



Bob Klockars, left, with John Cobb.

Holly Ball could not have succeeded without the support of our sponsors, the giving spirit of our constituents and our auction donors. We are grateful!

Thank you to our Holly Ball Sponsors!

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Many thank to the Holly Ball Committee!

Cari Alberts, Marilyn Ames, Kate Berley, Grace Eckland, Ursula Grud, Karen Hirn, Kelly Hirn, Kim Hirn, Kate Holland, Kirsten Larsen, Mary Leaf, Cindy Milojevic, Janet Nickols, Sharon O'Brien, JaNelle Powers, Suzette Rowe & Kathy Yih **Special thanks to our volunteers ...** Pam Theys & Kevin Williams

ALLIANCE PLANS 25 PROJECTS TO IMPROVE LAKE HEALTH

The Water Alliance for Preserving Geneva Lake, an alliance of more than 10 organizations, will have 25 projects around Geneva Lake in 2021 that are focused on reducing phosphorus loading to the lake and/or preventing and removing invasive species.

The Conservancy brought these groups together in 2019. They include the Conservancy, Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, Geneva Lake Association, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Walworth County Conservation Office, Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, and municipal representatives from Williams Bay, Fontana, Town of Linn and Lake Geneva.

The projects include major storm water engineering plans to reduce sediment loading to Geneva Lake from the 50 tributaries that feed Geneva Lake. Grants also have been obtained to staff boat launches to educate boaters on invasive species and to install rain gardens and buffer strips on private lakefront property to filter polluted runoff.

“We want to be proactive rather than reactive in protecting the ecological health of Geneva Lake,” said GLC Vice Chair Tom Nickols, who along with former GLC Chairman Charles Colman co-chairs the Alliance. “We have seen how algae blooms and invasive species devastate inland lakes and make it almost impossible to swim in or boat on them and we don’t want to see that happen to Geneva Lake.”

For more information on the Alliance and its 2021 projects, go to the GLC Website at www.genevalakeconservancy.org.

ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE - PURCHASE A COMPLETE GARDEN!

Pickup in time for Mother’s Day on May 9.

This year we are again are joining the Conservation@Home movement to help promote and create wildlife-friendly yards and offering WILDFLOWER GARDEN KITS that includes a selection of five native wildflowers to plant in your yard and a RAIN GARDEN that will slow and filter runoff.

You don’t need a dedicated wildflower garden or large area to be successful in attracting and feeding a variety of songbirds, butterflies, bees and other beneficial wildlife. You can create spaces for environmentally-friendly plants around your house or in among your favorite annuals. These plants are seasonal, and many are tall, so they can fill in early spring bare spots, or add height and color to the back of your annual garden. Unlike your annuals, they will bloom again year after year and help contribute to the ecological health of our region. **All of these native plants need full or partial sun. Each plant will be 2 - 3 inches tall and ready to plant. Instructions will be included.**

YES - PLEASE ORDER the following kits:

- _____ **KIT 1** - \$15—includes one each of Columbine, Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan), Monarda (bee balm), Pale Purple Coneflower and New England Aster
- _____ **KIT 2** - \$15—includes Wild Geranium, Penstemon (Foxglove Beardtongue) Purple Prairie Clover, Golden Alexander and Prairie Coreopsis.
- _____ **KIT 3** - \$15—for **butterflies** includes 1 common & 2 Swamp (rose) Milkweed, and 2 Butterfly weed
- _____ **KIT 4** - \$175—**RAIN GARDEN** kit that cover 75—125 square feet and includes 64 plants

_____ **TOTAL COST** Pick up will be on May 7 & May 8, or by appointment. Return this form to GLC, 398 Mill Street, Box 588, Fontana, WI 53125. More information and online ordering available via the Conservancy website, www.genevalakeconservancy.org.

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waterways, natural areas and working lands.



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