



Geneva Lake  
Conservancy

# Connections

Spring 2023

Protect and restore the lands and waterways of Walworth County and beyond

## CONSERVANCY PROTECTS SCENIC FARM IN TOWN OF LYONS

The Geneva Lake Conservancy this spring completed a 29-acre conservation easement on a scenic farm with high conservation value in the Town of Lyons.

The farm is a family farm owned by Elena Spiegelhoff and features more than 20 acres of prime agricultural land as well as a tributary to the White River that contains more than 100 species of native wildflowers and sedges along its banks. It also has a high meadow with many native plants that is adjacent to a wooded Isolated Natural Resource area.

Known as “Sunshine Acres,” the farm has a large equestrian barn and a smaller cobblestone barn as well as a milk house and smoke house. The early records show that it was purchased in 1897 by Charles Vorpagel who farmed 200 acres in the Town of Lyons. Elena’s parents purchased the farm in the early 1990s and kept horses in the large barn on the property.

“This is an extraordinary property because of both its scenic beauty and the beautiful native plants and buffer strips along the tributary to the White River,” said Kevin

Brunner,

GLC chair. “The conservation easement is a gift to the community and all the wildlife that are dependent on it for habitat.”

The conservation easement prevents any subdivision of the property into smaller lots as well as preserves its historic buildings and allows for only the existing house or a house of similar size on the property. The outbuildings can be repaired or replaced but only on the existing footprint.

Spiegelhoff knew that the conservation easement was the best land protection tool for her property as she had previously placed a conservation easement on another farm she owns in McHenry County, Illinois.



Kiera Theys, Land Protection Manager, and Elena Spiegelhoff



Land Protection Committee members toured the Spiegelhoff farm last fall. From left to right: John Cobb, Steve Diamond, Tom Nickols, Mary Constable, Kevin Brunner and Kristen Freytag.

Continued on page 2

## CONSERVANCY MOVES FORWARD ON GENEVA LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Geneva Lake Conservancy worked with its partners over the winter and spring to complete the studies and surveys needed to update Geneva Lake's Management Plan by 2024.

When completed, the 2024 management plan will provide recommendations to address growing phosphorus pollution, invasive species and boat traffic as well as propose solutions to other issues that threaten the health of the lake, such as wakeboarding.

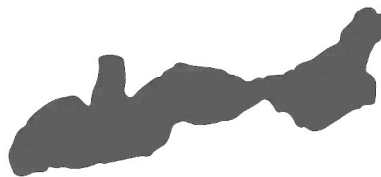
On January 26, the public was invited to voice their concerns for the lake at a Stakeholder's meeting at Lake Geneva's City Hall. An informal survey of some of the more than 100 residents at the meeting showed that the majority were concerned about the declining water quality of the lake.

The Conservancy also led a group of scientists from the Southeast Regional Plan Commission, Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, and University of Wisconsin-Whitewater on a tour of the Big Foot Creek watershed. They examined the land and completed water testing to help determine why Big Foot Creek is bringing high concentrations of phosphorus and other pollutants into Geneva Lake.

In May, approximately 1,300 lakefront property owners and another 1,000 randomly selected property owners in the watershed will receive a survey asking them to report on their observations of the lake and its recreational uses. The results will be tabulated to help scientists determine what actions are working to protect the lake and what new initiatives should be considered and incorporated into the plan.

In addition, the Conservancy and its partners will work with a drone operator to identify and count the boats on the lake during high use weekends in order to verify the growth in boat traffic as well as identify the kinds of boats and their uses on the lake. Periods of lesser boat use, such as during the weekdays, will also be surveyed by drone.

The Geneva Lake Management Plan Update is being funded by generous grants from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Otzen Family Foundation, Charles and Diana Colman and an anonymous donor.



Conservancy Protects Scenic Farm, continued from page 1

"I am so pleased that our family property in Walworth County is now protected from subdivision and further development through this conservation easement," said Spiegelhoff. "The beauty of this valley should not be compromised and this easement will ensure that our farm remains for future generations to enjoy."

Elena's farm and beautiful gardens will be the setting for the Conservancy's July 15 summer fundraiser, which will include a catered dinner, tour of the farm and a garden silent auction.





## ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE – PURCHASE A COMPLETE GARDEN

Pick up Friday, May 12 & Friday, May 19, 10 a.m.—2 p.m., in time for Mother's Day on May 14.

How does your garden grow? If you want a garden that will fill your senses with colors and smells year after year, consider planting native perennials. Not only will they come up each year, you will be providing the birds, butterflies and a host of other pollinators with foods they need to survive.

Each year the Geneva Lake Conservancy offers a collection of popular natives at a great price. As part of the Conservation@Home program, we want to help promote bird and pollinator-friendly yards by offering WILDFLOWER GARDEN KITS that include a selection of five native wildflowers to plant in your yard, and come in a decorative basket and serves as a great Mother's Day gift.

We are also offering Prairie and Rain gardens that have 64 plants and cover 75-125 square feet.

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 pollinators. You can create spaces for eco-friendly plants around your house or 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. **All of these native plants need full or partial sun. Each plant will be a healthy 2 - 3 inches tall and ready to plant. Instructions will be included.**



Plant kits from GLC's 2021 Native Plant Sale all lined up in their decorative baskets and ready for pick up before Mother's Day.

### NATIVE PLANT SALE ORDER FORM

**NOTE: Due to availability substitutions may occur**

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 1**—\$15 includes one of each: Wild Columbine, New England Aster, Pale Purple Coneflower, Wild Bergamot, Black-Eyed Susan.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 2**—\$15 includes one of each: Prairie Coreopsis, Wild Geranium, Smooth Penstemon, Golden Alexander, Purple Prairie Clover.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 3**—\$15 **for butterflies** includes one Common Milkweed, two Butterfly Weed, and two Swamp (Rose) Milkweed.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 4**—\$15 **deer resistant** includes one of each: Nodding Onion, Butterfly Weed, Spotted Joe Pye Weed, Wild Bergamot, Smooth Penstemon.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 5**—\$15 **deer resistant** includes one of each: Wild Columbine, Wild Geranium, Cardinal Flower, Tussock Sedge, Prairie Dropseed.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 6**—\$200 SUNNY RAIN GARDEN kit that covers 75-125 square feet and includes 64 plants.

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 7**—\$200 PARTIAL SHADE RAIN GARDEN kit—64 plants that that cover 75-125 square ft

**New this year....**

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 8**—\$200 SUNNY PRAIRIE GARDEN, dry soil kit—64 plants that cover 75-125 square ft

\_\_\_\_\_ **KIT 9**—\$200 PARTIAL SHADE PRAIRIE GARDEN, medium to moist soil kit—64 plants that that cover 75-125 square ft

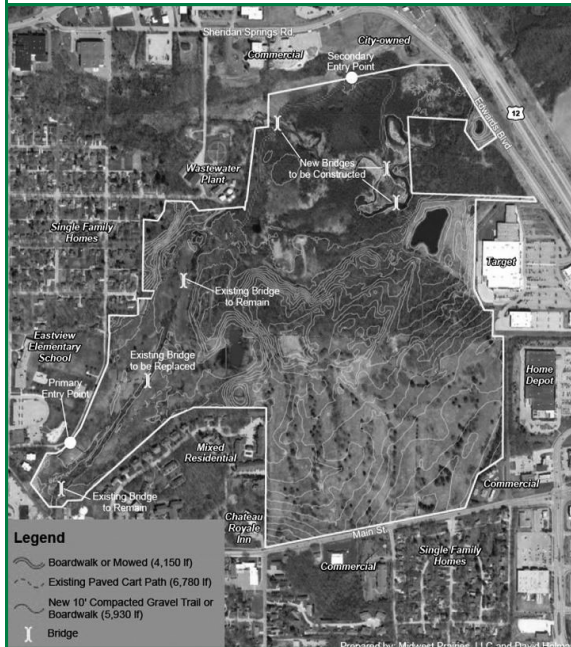
\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL COST** Pick up will be on Friday, May 12 & Friday, May 19—10 am—2pm, or by appointment. Return this form to GLC, 398 Mill Street, PO Box 588, Fontana WI 53125. You can also order online and find more information via the Conservancy website, [www.genevalakeconservancy.org](http://www.genevalakeconservancy.org).

SCAN TO  
ORDER PLANTS!



## CONSERVANCY'S HILLMOOR TRAIL PLAN

Keeping its commitment the Conservancy made to the City of Lake Geneva several years ago, the Conservancy received approval from both the Hillmoor Ad Hoc Committee and the City Council this spring on its plan to create a trail system on the 60 acres of Hillmoor that are



primarily floodplain. It is also preparing a plan to restore the wetlands along the White River.

Conservancy staff will work with the city's Public Works Department to apply for a Knowles Nelson Stewardship grant to install the first phase of the trail, which could be opened in 2024. The plan includes more than 3 miles in trails that will cross the White River and also create a path through the oak savanna on the property.

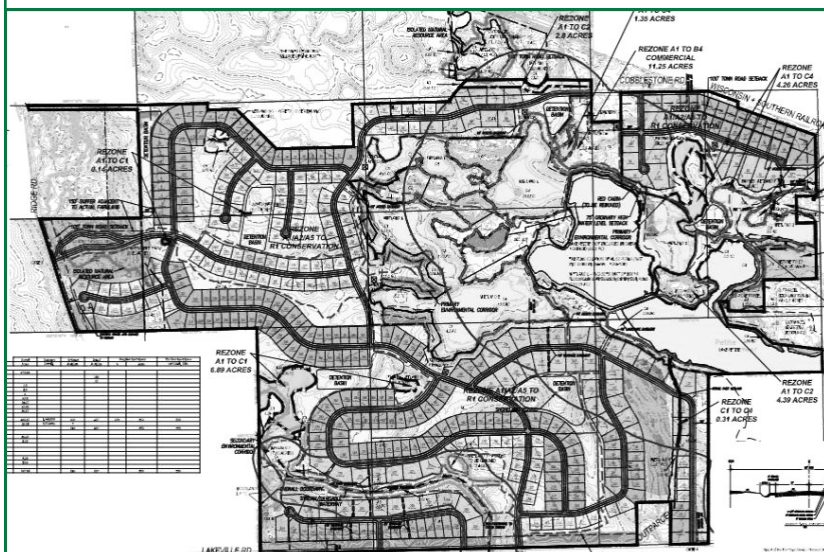


Oak and Oak Savanna/Woodlands are a major conservation feature of the Hillmoor trail plan. Buckthorn and invasive species removal is a priority.

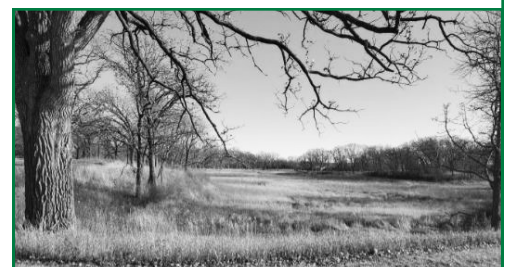
## CONSERVANCY ADVOCATES AGAINST BIG FOOT RANCH DENSITY

The Conservancy's Advocacy Committee testified against the proposed development by Shodeen Group of Big Foot Ranch in the Town of Walworth that includes more than 700 acres of land that Shodeen proposes to develop into 427 homes that will feature individual septic systems and wells.

"While Walworth County will decide whether the proposed plan meets the county's zoning requirements for a 'conservation development,' we think that it is too dense," said Mark Bromley, chair of the Advocacy Committee. "The number of homes needs to be reduced and each house needs to be connected to a municipal sewage treatment plant to protect the wetlands, lake and other natural features of the property."



The Conservancy board and staff will continue to testify at public hearings on the proposed rezoning throughout the spring and summer. The date and time of the public hearings will be posted on the Town of Walworth's website.





## KEEP OUR LAKE BLUE

Are you concerned about keeping the lakes near you clean and blue? The best way to ensure this is by educating yourself and others about how you can stop phosphorus and other pollutants from entering your lake. High phosphorus levels cause algae blooms and turn the lake an unsightly green color, and are harmful to human health.

In Walworth County, runoff from residential properties and farms are two of the biggest contributors to phosphorus pollution. Our new “Keep Our Lakes Blue” program educates homeowners on how they can stop phosphorous pollution by limiting the use of fertilizers, preventing soil and leaves from entering the lake and ensuring that animal waste, soaps and other chemicals don’t flow into lakes and tributaries.

The Conservancy is offering homeowners who sign a pledge to limit their use of phosphorus, a “Keep Our Lakes Blue” sign for their yard. The sign directs neighbors and motorists to our “Keep Our Lakes Blue” Web page where they can learn more about how they can help stop phosphorus pollution and prevent algae blooms. Members are invited to stop by our Mill House office and sign a pledge and pick up your free yard sign this summer.

## KETTLE MORaine BIRD FESTIVAL SCHEDULED FOR MAY 19

The third biennial Kettle Moraine Bird Festival will be held on Friday, May 19 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. beginning at Bromley Woods in LaGrange. Bird walks will be held hourly beginning at 8 a.m. and will be led by members of the Lakeland Audubon Society. At 11 a.m. Carol Zimmermann, Lake Geneva Avian Bird Committee member will speak on “Birds of the Kettle Moraine” at the LaGrange Methodist Church up the road followed by an 11:30 a.m. lunch catered by Celebrations. Tickets are \$30 and include both the presentation and lunch, bird walks only are \$5. For more information, please see our Website. We hope you can join us for this fun spring event signaling the return of the warblers and other special birds.



## SPRING 2023 KICKOFF FOR OUR CONSERVATION@HOME PROGRAM

This program is a great way to learn how to make your yard eco-friendlier! Discover how your home can contribute to increasing native bird and wildlife populations while helping to protect our lakes and water supply.



How it works: Once you schedule a site visit, two of our members will visit your property to discuss how you can improve the ecological health of your yard. Once suggestions have been implemented, your yard will be certified by the GLC, and you will receive a Conservation@Home sign to display in your yard. Sign up is on our website.



## HELEN ROHNER CHILDREN'S FISHING PARK SUMMER ACTIVITIES START JUNE 6TH

Join the Conservancy for another summer of fun outdoor activities at Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park in Williams Bay.

Beginning Tuesday June 6th, join us for Fishing Lessons with the Lake Geneva Fishing Club. Lessons are held at the Williams Bay Municipal Pier (9-10 am) and (10-11 am).



Continue your summer fun outside with our Story Times in collaboration with the Barrett Memorial Library. Join us at our "Thinking Spot" in the park under our shaded walnut tree. Story Times are scheduled for every Thursday (June 15th – August 17th) from 10-10:45 am.

Lastly, the GLC will be hosting again this year weekly Nature Classes at the park. Search the park with our Scavenger Hunt, discover tiny things in nature with our new magnifying stations, and explore our amphibian pond for frogs. A Summer Class schedule will be posted on our website starting May 15.

With over 500 participants in our Fishing Lessons and Nature Classes in 2022 we can't wait to see everyone for another year of activities at the park.

Registration is required for fishing lessons and nature classes. Look for information on our website.

All classes are free of charge and are open to the public.



## MELITA GRUNOW REMEMBERED

Melita Grunow, who passed away this past February, was an inspiration to all who care about preserving open space and protecting native species and wildlife habitat and the environment for future generations.

An avid horsewoman, Melita loved trail riding, and often rode through what is now the Town of Linn Nature Park. In 1998, learning that the Town of Linn was interested in purchasing the property, Melita offered to donate the funds for the purchase. The property, that at one time was to be developed into a golf course and subdivision, was protected forever in 2000. The Conservancy, working with the Town of Linn, placed an easement on the property prior to the Town of Linn purchase and the 160 acres remain unspoiled, and the natural features restored.



Melita watched a track meet held by Reek School at the Park and seeing the students running on the walking trails said "It made my heart sing to see so many young people enjoying this great activity." The Town of Linn Nature Park with its "wildflowers, prairie flowers, native birds and trees" is a "spectacular piece of land" said Melita.

In 2004 the Conservancy presented Melita with the Conservation Stewardship Award, noting that her generosity is a landmark in private contributions to local land conservation initiatives.



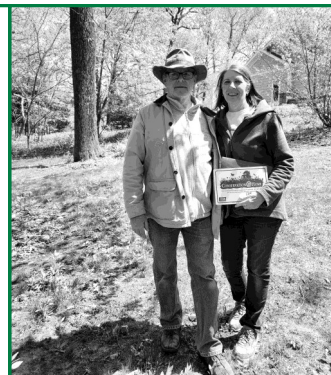
## JOIN THE CONSERVANCY IN WELCOMING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

### BRUCE JOHNSON—CONSERVANCY BOARD

Bruce's first contact with the GLC came when he and his wife Gail tendered their property for certification in the Conservation@Home program. The property impressed the evaluation team, being a noteworthy example of the utilization of a rich diversity of native plants in a landscape. Subsequently, Bruce and Gail agreed to host a Conservation@Home Open House during which Bruce shared his knowledge of conservation with the attendees.

Bruce earned his degree in horticulture from the College of DuPage and a Certificate in Horticulture from the Morton Arboretum, where he also taught natural history in the Youth Education Department. During various chapters in his life, he also owned a horticulture business and a dairy farm, traded in antiques, published a few books, and performed as a union actor at The Lyric Opera of Chicago. He currently operates an aviation-related enterprise.

Bruce's horticultural knowledge is extensive and his passion for conservation is deep.



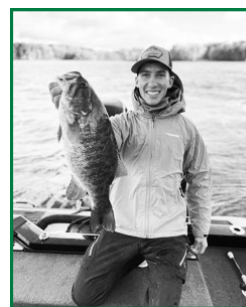
### TAI THOMPSON—Community Outreach & Fundraising Manager

Tai Thompson has an Environmental Science degree from UW-Whitewater. She has accomplished a year of undergraduate research on the *Bacopa* species, volunteered with the Rock River Coalition conducting water monitoring, participated in Citizens Climate Lobby, and was Chair of the Sustainable Janesville Committee. As a Janesville native, her summers included taking day trips to Lake Geneva where she fell in love with the area. Tai is excited to work as the new Community Outreach and Fundraising Manager where she will be heading the Conservation@Home program, assisting in event planning, and handling community outreach. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, running, reading, and cuddling her kitty, Roman.



### MICHAEL ZAWICKI—Land Protection Specialist

Michael Zawicki, a 2023 graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, majored in Environmental Science and Resource Management, with an emphasis in Environmental Writing. While President of the Whitewater Fishing Team, Michael and his teammates competed at the collegiate level all over the country. His passion for the outdoors led him to the Conservancy where he is eager to give back to the community, assist with community outreach, manage the Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park, help out with land protection projects and much more. Michael, a resident of Muskego WI, has many different connections with the Lake Geneva area and he looks forward to this summer.



### JAIDEN LAUER—Intern

Jaiden Lauer will be the summer intern at the Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park where she will work on the maintenance of the park, as well as the weekly fishing lessons, nature classes and story time hour. She is currently attending the University of Wisconsin La Crosse studying Biology with a concentration in Aquatic Sciences. An advocate for environmental sustainability, Jaiden enjoys helping to educate others on ways to be more conscious of their impact on the environment. Jaiden has a love for exploring and preserving the natural world and is excited to bring that passion to her hometown of Lake Geneva.





# Geneva Lake Conservancy

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Our mission is to protect and restore the lands and waterways of Walworth County and beyond.



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[www.GenevaLakeConservancy.org](http://www.GenevaLakeConservancy.org)

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