

Updates from the Minnesota Land Trust

On September 7th our volunteers, landowners, supporters, and friends gathered at our annual **TREASURED PLACES** event to celebrate the generosity of individuals who have given so much to Minnesota this past year. At the historic Marine on St. Croix Village Hall we honored the following people:

LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR



Since protecting her land in 2017, **JEANNE KINGSTON** has embarked on an ambitious plant restoration project to battle buckthorn and aid the return of native plants. From a restored prairie, to the tall woods at the edge of William O'Brien State Park, Jeanne's land is the extended home of black bears, a wide variety of birds, and brook trout in Old Mill Stream. In addition, it is home to rescued horses and animals that she cares for, as well as monarchs that she raises and releases. For years she has welcomed school groups to learn about nature, and recently even hosted a crew from TPT to shoot footage about the Land Trust. But if you ask her, Jeanne will humbly tell you she's not doing anything special — it's how she's always lived with the land, and how she hopes it will be managed in the future.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION



In 1991 when a group of concerned citizens formed the Washington County Land Trust, **STEVE DELAPP** was at the forefront of the effort. As the organization grew into the Minnesota Land Trust, so did Steve's engagement, serving on the Board of Directors until 2001. Since then, he has been a dedicated member of the Land Trust's Conservation Committee, making Steve one of the longest serving volunteers in Land Trust history. Steve has evaluated hundreds of projects and provided feedback on the Land Trust's strategic direction. For these reasons and more, the Minnesota Land Trust was honored to recognize Steve for all his contributions to conservation in Minnesota.



Seven Islands, St. Croix River

CRAIG BLACKLOCK

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

GLORIA

LINDBERG grew up close to the land, spending her childhood in the wilds of Minnesota's Northwoods. After retiring from her career in nursing and the medical device industry, she enrolled in a Master Naturalist course, which led her to the Land Trust's volunteer monitor program. Since 2015, she has monitored properties near and far for the Land Trust, always doing so with unmatched verve and enthusiasm. "It's a good excuse for getting out in the woods — I'm making a difference and enjoying it," says Gloria. When Stewardship Manager Andrew Moe joked at the volunteer training earlier this year about needing volunteers to monitor new Land Trust properties in Kittson County near the Canadian border — one person volunteered in earnest: Gloria.



PARTNER OF THE YEAR



From the time the Land Trust established its roots in **WASHINGTON COUNTY**, the east metro has been a top priority conservation area. Since the beginning, Washington County has been a dependable and responsive partner. They have provided leadership in shepherding conservation projects through to completion and have made great efforts to prioritize areas of importance for species habitat, water quality, and community engagement. The data and support they have provided has also enabled the Land Trust to better focus resources to ensure that jointly both organizations are maximizing their impact in the metro. This forward-thinking work protects the natural resources that ensure a high quality of life for all in the Twin Cities.

OFFICE NEWS: JEAN CURTIS-NEITZ

Jean recently **rejoined** our team as our new Finance Associate. Back in 2013 she systematized our many monitoring books (after all she has a Master's Degree in Library Science!) We are happy to have her back!



MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

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Restoration in Red Wing



HANSI JOHNSON

Farmland encircled by a walking path will be restored to a dry prairie.

This summer the Minnesota Land Trust kicked off the first project of our new private lands restoration initiative, working with Anne and Scott Jones of Red Wing to restore a dry prairie and eventually an oak savanna to their 164-acre property. Protected through the Land Trust just this year, their land had been used for row crops since 1914. When completed, the restoration project will provide extended habitat for pollinator species that are in greatest conservation need like the **Regal Fritillary** and **Dakota skipper**, while creating a new community asset for visitors and residents of Red Wing who can walk and bike the public trail surrounding the property. Adjacent to Frontenac State Park and just a stone's throw from Lake Pepin, this land is visible from Rattlesnake Bluff and falls within the Lake Pepin Important Bird Area which provides habitat to over 260 species of birds. This exceptional property offers the opportunity to experience nature nearby through the generosity of the Jones family.

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Nature Nearby

MID-YEAR REVIEW | FALL 2019





JOSEPHINE MARCOTTY

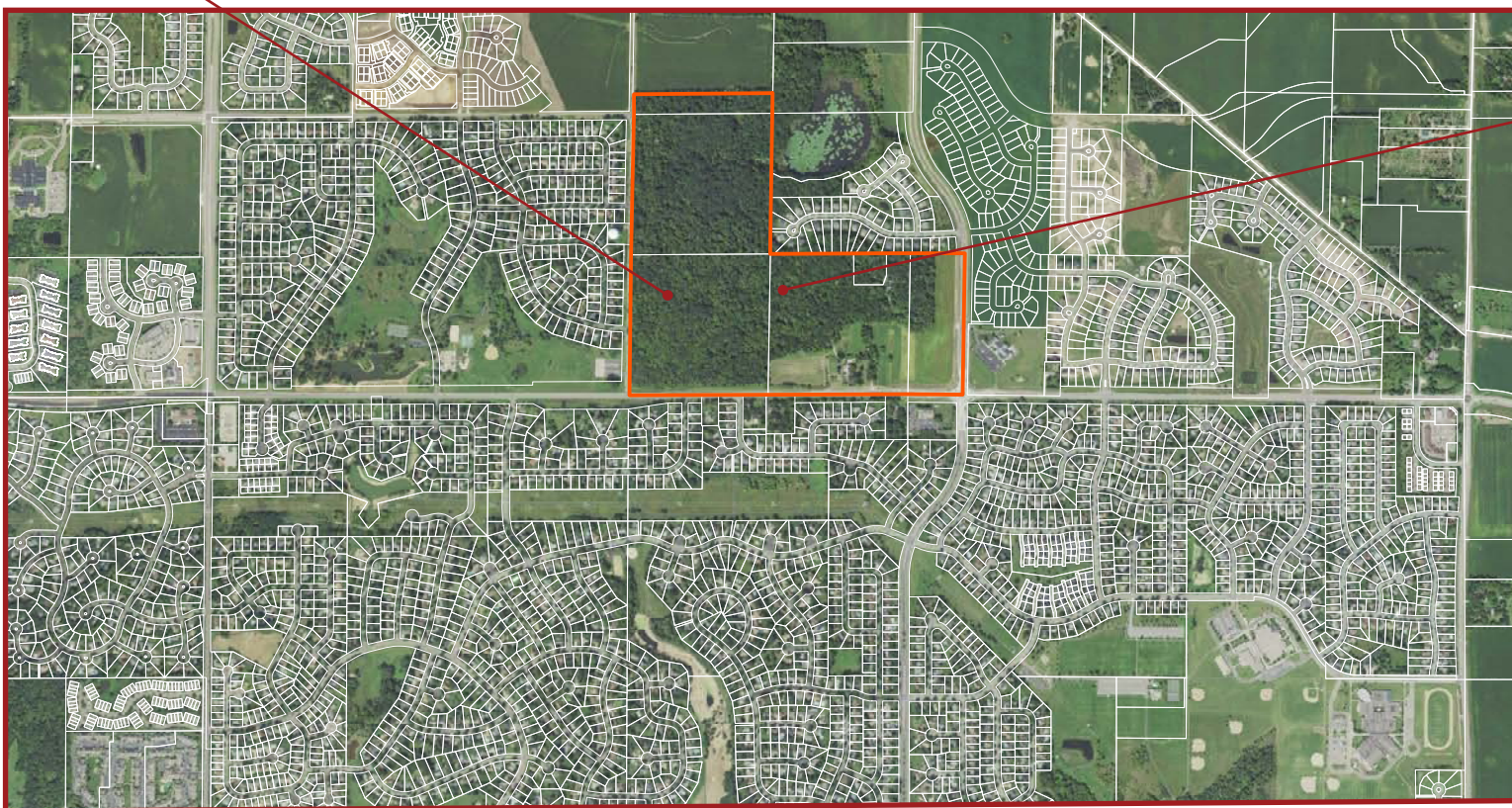
COURTESY OF DODGE NATURE CENTER



Today Shepard Farm rises like a green island above a sea of suburban development. Farm animals are back, and this summer the voices of children again rang out among the trees and vegetable garden.



DATA COURTESY OF STATE OF MINNESOTA, WASHINGTON COUNTY



By Josephine Marcotty

The first find of the day — right next to the parking lot — was a tiny green caterpillar. After that they came thick and fast: a toad, another toad, deer prints in the mud, a snake skin, and most thrilling of all, a tiny garter snake.

It was the last day of day camp at Shepard Farm, and that meant an animal hunt for the 20 first and second graders who had also learned about edible plants and how to light a fire without a match. And even though hopes were dashed when camp leader Mick Garrett said there were no grizzly bears to be found, the kids embraced the safari with the zeal of courageous explorers. After all, these 140 acres of old woods and fields in southeast Washington County, now owned and managed by the Dodge Nature Center, are one of the best places in the Twin Cities metro area to see wild creatures.

And it's been that way for 25 years — ever since the Minnesota Land Trust worked with the original owners to place Shepard Farm under a conservation easement. Back then that kind of land protection was a

rarity. But over the past 28 years, the Land Trust has worked with more than 150 private landowners to protect — forever — nearly 17,000 acres of the Twin Cities metro area's most treasured places. Metro-area projects now account for over a quarter of

the total acres the Land Trust has protected statewide. And those rare, green refuges in urban areas are increasingly important for water quality, wildlife, and recreation for Minnesotans who love the outdoors. But, even more importantly for the

people who live in the metro area, they offer “nature nearby” that can enrich their daily lives.

Washington County is one of the metro counties taking a lead in land protection, an effort that officials said could not be done without the staff at



JOSEPHINE MARCOTTY

the Land Trust.

“They are so skilled at this work,” said Washington County Senior Planner June Mathiowetz. “They know what to look for and what to do. That expertise is invaluable for the county and getting these conservation easement transactions completed is one of the most efficient ways to protect land.”

Washington County commissioners have set an ambitious and clear plan for land protection throughout the county with the full-hearted support of the people who live there. Seeing the future rate of development articulated

in the county's Comprehensive Plan, in 2006 county residents voted for a referendum authorizing the county to use \$20 million in public bonds to pay for land protection.

The referendum inspired a long-range project to identify the highest priority areas for protection — 10,000 acres of lakes, streams and forests, plus the bluffs along the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers.

Using historic land surveys from 1847, county land planners know what it used to look like before European settlement and agriculture first altered the landscape. And with the help of modern biological surveys by the Department of Natural Resources, they've ranked parcels with the highest

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species diversity, the most aesthetic value for the community and greatest benefit for water quality.

Today, they are flooded with calls from private landowners in Washington County who want to know how they can preserve their land for the next generation, and how to restore it to the best condition. Many of them will join the 70 Washington County landowners who together have already placed nearly 4,000 acres into conservation easements with the Land Trust.

This year the county, along with the Land Trust, is launching a new outreach effort to educate landowners about options — including conservation easements and funding for habitat restoration. Together, they will explain how the county and the Land Trust

can combine different local, state and federal grants, and bring in a wide variety of expertise from other partners to accelerate land protection for future generations.

In hindsight, the decision to protect Shepard Farm looks prescient. In 1920 Roger and Katherine Shepard, of St. Paul, bought 140 acres of what was then rural Cottage Grove property to use as a summer estate. Years later, their daughter Constance Shepard-Otis entered it into a conservation easement with the Land Trust in order to keep her parents' vision for the land alive. She gifted it to



JOSEPHINE MARCOTTY

the Wilder Foundation and they then gave it to the Dodge Nature Center. That created a second environmental education site for the nonprofit, which operates programs for adults and children on 320 acres 15 miles away.

“It stands for what we believe in,” said executive director Jason Sanders. “We can use this to create new stewards of the world, and to expand our environmental education approach to a new community.”

Today Shepard Farm rises like a green island above a sea of suburban development. Farm animals are back,

and this summer the voices of children again rang out among the trees and vegetable gardens as Dodge launched their first summer day camps.

And soon the public will be able to enjoy it as much as the kids. Once the parking lot is complete and permanent bathroom facilities are installed, Dodge Nature Center expects to open it up to anyone who wants a peaceful walk in nature.

“It's an extremely quiet place,” said Sanders. “You will notice birds that you don't see in the middle of the city.”

Not to mention toads and deer and snakes.