We are thrilled to announce that Treasured Places, our annual appreciation event for landowners, volunteers, and conservation partners will be returning live and in person this year at Camp Olson YMCA! Join us on Saturday, September 18 in Longville for a day of celebration at an iconic Minnesota summer camp recently protected by a conservation easement.

We’ll make more detailed announcements regarding the day’s events as the date draws closer – sign up for our email newsletter for the latest updates at www.mnland.org. We hope to see you there!

Join us at Treasured Places this fall!
DEFENDING THE PRAIRIE; HONORING FAMILY

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er the course of a single weekend one year, Becky and Graden West planted 5,000 trees at their property in Kandiyohi County. “We were dreamers with a shovel,” explains Becky, “and we were a lot younger then!”

But that explanation doesn’t tell the whole story when it comes to the West’s fierce commitment to restoring and preserving their 30 acres of land between Spicer and New London. Not only have the Wests worked hard, planted trees, and devoted serious bucks toward the property’s restoration, they donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust and, as explained later in this article, defended their conserved property and its precious memories.

As Becky recently told the District Court in her victim impact statement, “We hope someday this greenspace will make our grandchildren proud of us.”

The Wests’ story with their land began in 1980 when they purchased an old field of corn stubble and marsh along the banks of the Middle Fork of the Crow River. At the time, Graden was working at the New London federal fish hatchery. He was soon transferred to another post when the New London hatchery closed. For the next 8 years, the Wests returned to their riverside property whenever they could to plant trees and nurture it back to health. Graden taught his kids, the scouts, and 4-H’ers the finer points of archery, fishing, and fly-fishing. Becky is a Master Gardener. Together, over the course of 40 years, they purchased additional land, planted thousands of trees, and restored the habitat. In 2011, they donated a conservation easement to the Minnesota Land Trust to protect the land forever. When the Wests were preparing to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in 2011, they briefly considered taking a cruise. In the end, they decided to use the cruise money to hire a private company to restore the prairie at their protected property with the support of the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed. One of their grandchildren, Nate, took a special interest in the prairie and tirelessly worked with Becky to carefully spread seeds without dumping them and learning the Latin names for the prairie plants.

It takes many years of hard work and commitment to transform an old corn field back to native prairie. Some prairie forbs, including coreopsis, need years to sink deep tap roots to become established. By 2018, the coreopsis that had been planted in 2011 were finally blooming and the prairie was so well established that the Wests and their neighbors were enjoying glorious rounds of blooming prairie flowers. That year, however, was also marked with tragedy when Nate, then only 11, died from the injuries he sustained in a traffic accident.

In the spring of 2019, the Wests dedicated the restored prairie to Nate and erected a sign to honor Nate’s love of nature, Monarch butterflies and other pollinators, and the prairie he helped nurture with his Grandma. The restored prairie is now known as the PollINATE Memorial Prairie, but sometimes simply as Nate’s Prairie. Only two months after dedicating the prairie to Nate’s memory, Becky and a friend spotted a woman out in Nate’s Prairie who appeared to be picking flowers. Becky soon discovered that the woman was actually pulling blooming coreopsis from the ground, roots and all. By the time Becky had arrived on the scene, more than 20 plants had been yanked from the ground. Becky’s friend snapped photographs while Becky talked to the stranger who was holding clumps of withering bright yellow coreopsis, dropping clods of dirt, and offering no good explanation. Becky soon started making calls, including to the Land Trust but also to the DNR and the Kandiyohi County Sheriff’s Department. Her calls were taken seriously. The DNR assigned a Conservation Officer to investigate. The County charged the woman with criminal damage to property.

The criminal matter was only recently concluded in 2021, nearly 2 years after dedicating the prairie to Nate. Becky admits that she was frustrated with the pace of the court process and the attitude of some regarding a seemingly trivial matter. The woman’s defense attorney once called the destroyed flowers a bunch of “ditch weeds.” Even so, the court ordered the trespasser to replace the plants, place her on probation, and ordered the woman to have no contact with the Wests.

With the court case behind her, Becky has invited her Master Gardener volunteers and friends to visit Nate’s Prairie on April 25, the anniversary of Nate’s death. “I love watching the prairie bloom,” says Becky. “Lance leafed coreopsis - which was the plant removed - blooms early. June into September, and monarda turns the field various shades of pink.”

2020 Landowners of the Year: Florence and Carter Hedeen

At their protected property on Skor Lake in Hubbard County, Florence and Carter Hedeen have put their land stewardship ethos into action, planting thousands of trees and engaging in sustainable forestry practices to promote diverse wildlife habitat. Their property was among the earliest easements to be held by the Land Trust when the Hedeen donated the conservation easement in 1998. Since then, they have also been active volunteers, helping create and maintain dozens of miles of the North Country Trail and monitoring conservation easements for the Land Trust.

It was our honor to present Florence and Carter with the Landowner of the Year award at our virtual Treasured Places event last fall. On behalf of everyone at the Land Trust, thank you to Carter and Florence and to all our landowners who have protected their land in perpetuity!
STEWARDSHIP & CONSERVATION
BY THE NUMBERS

1,400+ Volunteer hours in 2020

638 Sites Monitored in 2020

54 COUNTIES with a Conservation Easement

68,716 Total Acres Protected

2,100,923 Total Feet of Shoreline Protected

90 VOLUNTEER MONITORS 37% of Sites Monitored by Volunteers / 55% by Staff / 8% by Contractors