

“Postcards From The Lake” - A delightful, colorful, hardcover book about the natural and human history of Geneva Lake is available at our offices in the historic Fontana Mill House, 398 Mill Street, behind the Citgo in Fontana. The cost is \$14.95 and a portion of the proceeds will go to the Conservancy. This is a book anyone, young or old, will enjoy!

Budget and Tax Initiatives Impact Land Conservation

The State of Wisconsin’s budget woes threaten to undermine the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, one of the underpinnings of land conservation activity in the state. The program, which provides matching grants to private not-for-profit organizations such as the Geneva Lake Conservancy for land purchases, is fully funded in the Governor’s proposed budget.

Wisconsin’s legislature, however, is sending signals to the state’s land trust community that it might place a moratorium on the program, or severely cut funding. The legislative vehicle that will decide the program’s fate is the budget bill. The legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance, which will draft that bill, has toured the state holding a series of public hearings. Following those hearings, drafting of the bill has begun. Both houses of the legislature (Assembly and Senate) must approve the bill (which may include convening a conference committee to first reconcile any differences between initial Assembly- and Senate-approved versions), which then goes to the Governor. The Governor may sign the bill, veto it, or exercise his power of line item veto to strip out objectionable provisions.

GLC executive director Chris Goebel is among a group of Wisconsin land trust leaders who have traveled to Madison to advocate for the Stewardship Fund.

At the federal level, new tax incentives for private land conservation are wrapped into a \$10 billion bill Senate bill proposed to benefit private charities and churches. The two conservation initiatives are: expansion of the income tax deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement; and reducing the capital gains treatment on the sale of lands or conservation easements for conservation purposes.

Current federal tax law allows a landowner donating a conservation easement to a not-for-profit organization such as the Geneva Lake Conservancy to deduct the value of that easement, up to 30% of adjusted gross income, for six years. While that has been of substantial benefit to landowners, the new proposal would go even further by permitting the deduction of 50% of adjusted gross income over a 16 year period. Cash-poor, land-rich easement donors, in particular, would be better able to realize the full economic benefit from the charitable donation.

The President’s budget proposed a 50% exclusion of the capital gains derived from the sale of lands for conservation purposes to government agencies or not-for-profits, providing greater incentive to landowners to make such conservation sales, and making it possible for state and local governments and conservation organizations to stretch their purchase dollars. The Senate Finance Committee reported the bill S.256 for a vote by the full Senate, but pared the exclusion to 25%. On April 9, the Senate voted 95-5 to approve the bill, with the conservation tax incentives included. For up-to-the-minute news on what is happening, check the Land Trust Alliance website at www.lta.org.

Another Look at the Dockominiums Issue . . .

When the Wisconsin Supreme Court invalidated the dockominiums at The Abbey Harbor Marina in July, 2002, ruling that the conversion and sale of boat slips under that particular arrangement violated the state’s public trust doctrine, it also left open the possibility that the “owners” could cure the fault by making certain changes. According to a Village of Fontana official, that process has begun.

The owners’ action is timely, since the Wisconsin DNR has notified the parties that it will begin to enforce the Supreme Court’s decision this summer, meaning, in effect, those slips that had been sold as dockominiums would be required to go back into the Marina’s rental pool and thus be available to the general public. If the owners are successful in restructuring the condominium declaration consistent with the Court’s opinion, there remains a question of how many of the Marina’s boat slips would be available for private ownership. In the original adjudication, an administrative law judge ruled that the conversion of all 407 slips to private dockominiums violated a reasonable use standard, and ordered 287 to remain available for public rental. Whether that ruling will still be applicable is to be determined.

Not to be lost in consideration of the entire dockominiums issue is the financial stake of the Village of Fontana. Each boat slip sold as part of the overall condominium becomes a real estate parcel subject to annual real property taxes, i.e., revenue to the Village. Rental of slips creates no such taxing opportunity.



Conservancy Corps

Spring is in the air! We will soon be calling those of you on our list of volunteers and would be happy to hear from more. Whether you can give a couple of hours or make a longer commitment we greatly appreciate any time you can provide. From cub scouts to seniors we can find something for everyone.

We could use help with maintaining the historic Fontana Mill House. Built in 1857 and lovingly restored by Jean and Phil Harvey, the Mill House is a quaint place to spend a morning or afternoon. The public is always invited to stop in to see the interior or stroll through the gardens. We want to look our best, so we could use your help cleaning, painting, doing minor repairs and gardening. You’ll learn something about the history of the area and feel a sense of accomplishment helping to put a little polish on the old place.

If you are more inclined to spend some time in the woods learning about wildflowers, frogs and salamanders come help us spruce up the Hermansen Woods. This hilly forest contains sparkling streams and a small ephemeral pond. We need help picking up litter and building trails and a small bridge.

Please call us at 262-275-5700

Lake Geneva’s “Southside Neighborhood” and Geneva Ridge

Ever since it became evident that last summer’s proposed annexation of 700+ acres of Linn Township land to the City of Lake Geneva would fail, and with it plans for a 1,200 residential unit, seniors only golf course community, an alternative to study the area had been under consideration by some City officials and the Geneva Ridge developers. With the Geneva Ridge properties as the centerpiece, it was recommended that the City take a wide-ranging look at alternate development strategies for this so-called “southside neighborhood”, expanded to include 8,000 acres of Town of Linn land.

The Conservancy opposed the idea in concept not having seen the actual study proposal, dated September, 2002, which did not surface until just before City Council action in February, 2003, arguing the better course would be for the City to take a comprehensive look at all its gateway areas. In that way, the City could consider all options and possible directions for future development on its perimeter and not tie itself so closely to (and seemingly be so bound to support) the economic future of the Geneva Ridge properties.

When faced with the choice at its February 24 meeting to undertake either the comprehensive planning activity or the southside neighborhood proposal, the Lake Geneva City Council did neither. The motion to approve failed for lack of a second, and a motion to turn down the southside proposal was approved unanimously. Not to be lost in the entire debate over Geneva Ridge is that the property remains, in actuality, the Town of Linn’s “eastside neighborhood”. As the Town proceeds with its comprehensive plan rewrite, proposed use of the lands in the area will be carefully examined.

Ecological Restoration - The Conservancy encourages landowners to practice good stewardship of their streambanks, shorelands, woods and wetlands. We can recommend appropriate vegetation for such sites and for colorful rain gardens which will absorb excess water under drain spouts, at sump pump outlets and around natural springs. The Care of Trees, certified arborists, have offered a discount to Conservancy members wishing to do restoration work.

- Wish List —**
All weather, 4 season, 4’ x 6’ American flag
Power Point Projector
Gardening tools and wheelbarrow



Share the Vision

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership check.

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 \$250 Guardian
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Yes I would like to be a volunteer:
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I give permission to send occasional emails regarding land use issues.
 I would prefer to receive my newsletter via email when it becomes available.

www.genevalakeconservancy.org

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Phone: (262) 275-5700 Fax (262) 275-0579
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VOLUME 40 ISSUE 1 SPRING 2003 NEWSLETTER

Renae Prell-Mitchell, editor

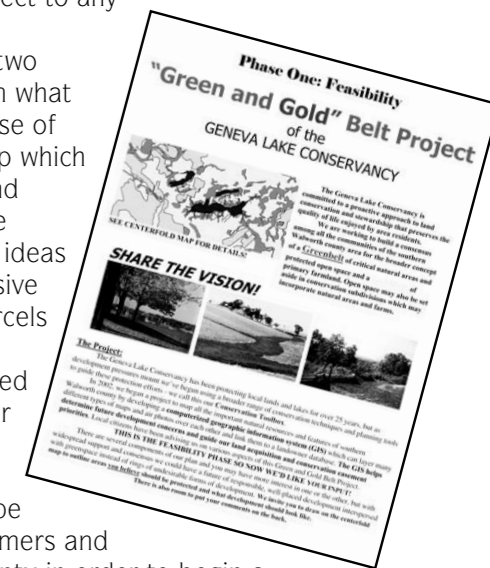
New “Greenbelt and Goldbelt” Feasibility Underway

What will southern Walworth County be like in the next 25 years? From the township of Lyons with its extensive complex of glacial hills and wetlands to the flat rich expanses of farmland in Sharon township and all around the popular lakes of Geneva, Delavan and Como, residential development continues to expand, often without regard for natural features or community character.

Since last April, we of the Geneva Lake Conservancy have been building a computerized geographic information system (GIS) which layers a variety of maps, aerial photographs and other spatial data over each other. Then, questions can be asked of the GIS to help determine land protection and management strategies and networks. Our system contains inventories and maps of the areas showing forests, wetlands, critical natural areas, and the best soils for farming. It can also show original vegetation and the ways the land has developed historically. Projecting future growth areas was also part of the study which used a weighted model to help determine areas of concern.

From this analysis we have begun to identify priority areas for different types of protection using traditional tools such as zoning, and newer tools such as conservation easements, neighborhood agreements and conservation subdivision design. Our proposed Greenbelt of natural areas, bike trails and private lands in conservation can be seen on the centerfold map in a four color booklet with inserts which is now available from the Conservancy. We are offering a Power Point presentation explaining various aspects of the project to any interested groups or individuals.

The Conservancy has identified two different types of farmland districts in what we call the Goldbelt - so called because of the yellow and gold colors on the map which denote the importance of the corn and other grains grown in this region. The Conservancy is examining alternative ideas for their protection such as an “exclusive agricultural zoning” of 50-80 acre parcels for flatter areas with the richest soils. For areas which are already fragmented due to scattered rural development or varied topography, a combination of cluster development and a purchase of development rights program may be appropriate. We seek the input of farmers and other landowners throughout the county in order to begin a dialogue in advance of the next countywide comprehensive planning effort that will start in a few years.



“Promoting responsible stewardship of the region’s land and water resources.”

INVASIVES: BUCKTHORN-HONEYSUCKLE-GARLIC MUSTARD

Just as people can no longer ignore the presence of zebra mussels in the lake and on the piers, many who enjoy living or walking in wooded areas may have observed the decline of beautiful native wildflowers and noticed fewer varieties of woodland birds mainly because of three common invasive species: European or glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* and *R. frangula*), Bush honeysuckle - Tartarian, *Morrows* and *Bella* (*Lonicera tartarica*, *L. morrowii*, *L. x bella*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*).

Buckthorn has a shiny, lenticular (little silver streaks or dots) bark which can easily be confused with that of a young black cherry tree which is a desirable native species. The form of buckthorn is that of a smaller understory tree that can sometimes have several trunks (orange when cut) and looks gnarled - similar to a crabapple tree. Sure ways to distinguish buckthorn from other trees are: 1) a small spike (thorn) growing up in between two offset buds at the ends of the twigs, 2) they are usually the first trees to have leaves in the spring (which means they shade out spring wildflowers) and 3) the orangish tinge to their wood and roots - which can sometimes be very pronounced. European starlings spread the seeds because they are able to digest the alkaloid toxins in the berries which act as a cathartic (laxative) for most humans and other animals. Because



Buckthorn leaves, twigs and berries

the buckthorn will resprout once it is cut, it is better to pull the young ones out by the roots or cut them and use a systemic herbicide to kill the stump.

Geneva Lake Conservancy
P.O. Box 588, Fontana, WI 53125
Phone: (262) 275-5700 • **Fax:** (262) 275-0579
E Mail: GLC@genevalakeconservancy.com
Web: www.genevalakeconservancy.com

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Bush honeysuckle has been planted for years as an ornamental shrub but most respectable nurseries no longer sell this problem species because it has been overtaking native species in woods, openlands and fencerows. Honeysuckle shrubs are one of the first plants to leaf out in spring, shading anything below. While the flowers are pretty and fragrant they are small and not very showy. Likewise the small, somewhat translucent, orange to reddish berries do not add much to the fall landscape because they are quickly eaten by robins and other birds that then spread those seeds everywhere. The food value of these berries is less than those of native serviceberries, chokeberries, mulberries and other plants the birds would normally feed upon. The shrubs grow very large - up to 8 feet tall and wide and will stump sprout if merely cut. A woody or systemic herbicide or constant cutting or digging out of the stumps is recommended. Once honeysuckle is removed from an area you will have to be vigilant in pulling up small ones that start again from old seeds in the soil or new seeds brought in by the birds.

The good news is that once buckthorn and honeysuckle are removed from even a small patch of woods, wildflower seed left in the soil over the years may return or can be reseeded and will generally do well as long as the invasive competitors for sunlight are kept down.

Garlic mustard is a relative newcomer to the Geneva Lake area migrating from the east coast where European settlers initially cultivated it as a salad herb. It is a woodland plant that takes over shady, established forests but also grows in sunny yards and roadsides. A tall herbaceous white flowering plant which forms monotonous stands, garlic mustard can completely cover a forest floor within a few years and out compete all native vegetation.



Garlic Mustard

(cont. on page 3)

Conservancy Elects New President

After serving four exceptional years as president of the Board of Directors of the Geneva Lake Conservancy, David Weinberg has stepped down to pursue his artistic interests and continue other philanthropic activities. He will remain active as a member of our Board of Directors. Weinberg has been instrumental in energizing the board and building the capacity of the organization by hiring new staff, launching our website and supporting the creation of the video, "Preserving our Legacy". He also presided over our move to the Fontana Mill House and many important initiatives to protect the lands and waters of the Geneva lake area including: advocating for the redesign of the former Northwest Military Academy subdivision from a 204 unit condominium development to an upscale 40 home subdivision with more open space; successful opposition to a WI Dells-type waterpark development at The Abbey, which is now proposing a more community-compatible redevelopment; and the Conservancy's work to encourage the City of Lake Geneva and Town of Linn to make environmentally sensitive decisions regarding the 700+ acres proposed for development as "Geneva Ridge". During Dave's tenure the Conservancy also obtained conservation easements on over 247 acres of land and initiated the Greenbelt and Goldbelt project.

On March 1, Grace Eckland was elected President of the Board. Eckland has been a leader in business and tourism in the lakes area since her relocation here in 1978 with her family. A former IBM Chicago executive and past director of the Wisconsin Lottery, she is currently owner and president of G3Destination Management and Eckland and Associates, and serves as a consultant for the Lake Geneva Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Grace has assumed the reins of leadership with great eagerness and looks forward to building upon the level of maturity and recognition gained over the last several years due to greater Board involvement and additional professional staff.



David Weinberg



Grace Eckland

(INVASIVES cont.)

Each plant produces long string bean-like pods filled with hundreds of tiny seeds which are easily picked up in the mud on shoes and transported to new places which may have previously been free of this scourge. It is a good idea to wash shoes or use different ones when hiking trails in the Kettle Moraine or other places where garlic mustard may not have invaded yet. Starlings and other birds may also spread the seeds, usually consumed because there are so few native berries and seeds left to eat since garlic mustard has taken over the woods.

People can eat raw or cooked garlic mustard as an herb like spinach when it is young and perhaps that would be the best way to get rid of it - just make sure you pull the roots up with the leaves and discard them in the garbage or burn pile or bury them deep under the compost pile because they are incredibly resilient and may escape! When planning to cut garlic mustard the best time is just as flowering begins since this will stop seed production and, if cut as close to the ground as possible, weaken the plants so they die. Instead of herbicides, flame torches may be used to scorch small patches For larger infestations, fall burning may be effective, but may need to be continued for three to five years.

Village of Fontana-on-Geneva-Lake Protects Historic and Environmentally Significant Lands Surrounding Conservancy Headquarters

Glacial springs, flowing from hillsides throughout the Village of Fontana are extremely important to the quantity and quality of waters in Geneva Lake. Historically some of these springs powered the original sawmill and flour mills of the pioneer settlers and even in modern times, local springs were tapped as sources of drinking water sold to visitors. Still today, Potawatomi and Van Slyke creeks are of high enough quality to be classified by the DNR as Class I trout streams. When visiting the Conservancy's historic Fontana Mill House headquarters, we invite you to view an engraving from an 1873 atlas showing the original mills. the Mill House and the early landscape of ponds and streams.

As part of its redevelopment plan for Main and Mill Streets, the Village of Fontana recently purchased 14 acres. The Community Development Authority will administer approximately 10 of those acres which are stream corridor and forested wetlands located south and west of the Conservancy's office. This area serves as an important environmental corridor and the Conservancy applauds the Village for its preservation efforts. The Conservancy is now working with Village Park Committee members to lay out a walking path through the property.



Garlic Mustard seedheads

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