

Summer 2025

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

The Conservancy Completes 90-Acre Conservation Easement for ‘The Preserve’ Resort

The Conservancy announced that it has signed a conservation easement with Williams Bay Property Company LLC, an affiliate of Topography Hospitality LLC and new owners of the 137-acre George Williams College Campus, to protect 90 acres of open land that Topography will restore as a prairie-oak savanna nature preserve with several miles of public hiking trails.

The nature preserve will be a vast open area for the protection of wildlife and preservation of natural habitat. Landscape Architect Jens Jensen will transform the existing abandoned golf course and farm field into a tallgrass prairie with oak savannas, the features of this land that were present before European settlement of the Lake Geneva area in the 1800s.

“We want to thank Topography for the protection of 90 acres of open land this close to the lake, which is a generous gift to the community,” said Don Parker, Conservancy Chair. “The replanted land will filter stormwater before it reaches the lake, provide wildlife habitat, create scenic vistas and provide opportunities for children and adults to hike and learn about nature.”

The Preserve’s public hiking trails will be open from sunrise to sunset and connect with trails at the adjacent Yerkes Future Foundation property. Twenty to twenty-five acres of the prairie will be planted each year for four years and non-native trees will be removed to allow the oaks to regenerate into the savannas that once were the common landscape in Southeast Wisconsin. Oak savannas are now one of the rarest landscapes on earth and a highly endangered ecosystem in the Midwest.

The main lodge and cabins of the new resort will be built on 47 acres by the lakefront where most of the George Williams College campus was located.



Standing in front of one of the oak savannas protected by the Conservancy conservation easements are: Tom Nickols, Conservancy Vice Chair, Anthony Duggan of Topography, Jens Jensen, Prairie Restoration Director, and Roy Diblik, Garden Designer.

The Preserve resort, continued from page 1

Topography plans to build a new main lodge and guest cabins and will repurpose several of the existing college buildings for use by resort guests. Restoration plans of the former golf clubhouse, located in the protected prairie area are underway and will include public restrooms.

“Our team is thrilled and grateful to be the next stewards of this beautiful property,” said Liam Krehbiel, Topography CEO. “By working with the Geneva Lake Conservancy to permanently protect these 90 acres, we’re not only honoring the history of this landscape, but also investing in a future where conservation and hospitality go hand in hand.”

Topography and the Conservancy hope to involve Williams Bay School students in the restoration of the prairie and will encourage student participation in science studies on the protected prairie, which is located across Highway 67 from the school.

“The Williams Bay School students and faculty welcome the opportunity to learn more about prairie-oak savanna landscapes and involve students from our environmental science and other classes in projects on the prairie,” said Emily Soley-Johnson, School Principal.

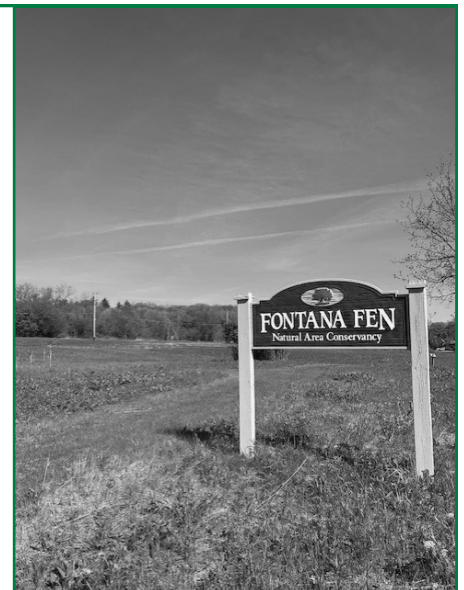
The Preserve will become part of the new cultural area for Williams Bay, which also includes the Yerkes Future Foundation campus and the Women’s Leadership Center.

“We are so fortunate to have all of these unique organizations in the Village of Williams Bay that bring so many education, environmental, science and cultural opportunities to our residents and visitors,” said Tom Nickols, Conservancy Vice Chair and Chair of the Yerkes Future Foundation. “They improve our quality of life and ensure that we will be a vibrant and thriving community for many years to come.”

FONTANA FEN BOARDWALK PROPOSED

The Conservancy has been working closely with our Advocacy and Land Protection Committees over the past several months to determine if constructing a boardwalk through the Fontana Fen is environmentally sound. The Village of Fontana currently owns and manages the Fen, which was given to the Village by the Conservancy in 1986 with deed restrictions prohibiting any type of construction. The proposed boardwalk project, commissioned by the Village of Fontana and the Department of Transportation (DOT), aims to create a shared use (bike/pedestrian) path connecting Fontana to the path through the White Tail Ridge development in Walworth.

The current DOT proposal involves drilling helical pilings 6 to 18 feet deep into the peat material of the Calcareous Fen, one of the rarest landscape types, protected in many states. The Department of Natural Resources describes Calcareous Fens as rare, peat-accumulating wetlands dependent on upwelling groundwater rich in calcium and other minerals. This environment supports unique rare plants that thrive in low oxygen conditions, calcium carbonate deposits, low nutrient availability, and relatively cold organic soils (peat). Fens are highly susceptible to disturbance, and any activity, whether by humans or machines, can be disruptive.



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SIGN UP FOR KID'S CLUB AT HELEN ROHNER CHILDREN'S FISHING PARK

Summer is right around the corner which means Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park will be buzzing with summer fun! Sign up your kiddos online at GenevaLakeConservancy.org to join in on the activities and classes all summer long.

Fishing Lessons: Tuesdays @ Williams Bay Pier, 9 & 10 AM*

Story Times: Thursdays @ at Helen Rohner, 10 AM—no sign up required

Nature Classes: Fridays @ at Helen Rohner, 10 AM*

*Please email outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org to be put on the waiting list for Fishing Lessons and Nature Classes.



Pictured above is the 2024 Kid's Club end of summer event at Helen Rohner Park. The kids received a Kid's Club t-shirt and a native plant to take home.



Pictured above is Story Time, held under the walnut tree at Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park, led by Emily from the Williams Bay Barrett Memorial Library.

FAMILY DAY AT THE PARK— JULY 3

The Conservancy's annual Family Day at Helen Rohner Park is scheduled for July 3 at 10 AM! This fun family event includes a presentation with farm animals, treats, and goody bags for the kids. No sign up required. Please call the Conservancy at 262-275-5700 with questions. We can't wait to see you there!



SMALL NATURE PHOTO CONTEST

The Small Nature Photo Contest opens July 3rd! Submit up to five photos of 'Small Nature' taken in Helen Rohner Park by August 14 for a chance to win cash prizes. A public reception for all participants will be held at the end of summer on August 21.

Please see our website for more details. Entry deadline is August 14. Age groups: 4-8, 9-13, 14-21, 22+.



Fontana Fen, continued from page 2

Fens contribute to groundwater sustainability, improved water quality, and ecological diversity, making them invaluable to healthy lake initiatives like Keep it Blue. Formed thousands of years ago after glaciers receded, Calcareous Fens are rare and irreplaceable natural phenomena that require careful management and restoration to prevent irreversible loss. Quentin Carpenter's documentation of his 1989 UW Masters Thesis work on the Fen can assist in preventing any further loss and help focus restoration efforts as top priority. Despite consultations with engineering firms, the DOT, SEWRPC, Fontana Village, and other environmental experts, uncertainties remain regarding the impact of drilled pilings on the Fen.

Given these unknowns, the more environmentally favored and less invasive approach would be using a pan system, allowing the boardwalk to sit on 19" x 19" pans without drillings. The Conservancy's mission is to protect and restore Walworth County's lands and waterways for cleaner air, clean lakes, and appropriate development. We are proceeding with extreme caution to support the quality and health of this treasured Calcareous Fen. Sharing this information with our community helps protect what we all love.

THE CONSERVANCY'S ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING



Celebrate with the Conservancy at our annual public meeting on Saturday, June 21. We will celebrate our 2024-2025 successes, honor dedicated volunteers, hear from Mike Carlson, Director of Gathering Waters, and get a glimpse of what is ahead for the Conservancy.

The Annual Meeting will be held from 10 AM to noon at Celebration on Wells, 422 S. Wells Street, Lake Geneva, with refreshments.

We welcome public comments and look forward to connecting with you!

DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT AT THE GRECO FAMILY ESTATE

The Conservancy is excited to announce a special summer gathering on July 24 from 4:30—6:30 PM. Held at the beautiful Greco Family Estate on Geneva Lake, you can expect a relaxing evening filled with delicious food and great people supporting a good cause.

Enjoy appetizers and drinks by Celebration on Wells all set against the backdrop of the lake. This event is a chance to connect, unwind, and most importantly, support the mission of Geneva Lake Conservancy. We hope to see you there for an unforgettable evening with purpose.

Those who are part of the Stewardship Society, donors of \$1,000 or more, will receive an invitation to this event. Please email Outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org for donation details to be invited to this event.



AN EVENING AT THE ASCHLIMAN'S LAKEFRONT HOME



Pictured above is the home of Mark and Patty Aschliman in Williams Bay on Geneva Lake.

Join the Conservancy for a beautiful evening on the waterfront, delicious dinner by Celebration on Wells, silent auction, and classical quintet at the home of Mark and Patty Aschliman.

The Conservancy's speaker for the event is Tim Asplund, affiliated with the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Asplund manages the Water Quality Monitoring Section with the Wis. Department of Natural Resources and serves as co-chair of the Water Resources Working Group with the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts.

Prior to becoming a supervisor in 2012, Asplund served as a research scientist as well as a water resource specialist in the lakes and groundwater management programs, serving as technical liaison between DNR staff, researchers, and citizen groups on a variety of water resource management issues. These issues included water quality monitoring, biological indicators, shoreland habitat assessment, aquatic invasive species, water levels, and climate change. Asplund holds degrees in Water Resource Management and Limnology from UW-Madison.

THE CONSERVANCY WELCOMES SUMMER INTERN

FOR HELEN ROHNER CHILDREN'S FISHING PARK

Mary O'Connell will be entering her senior year at Saint Mary's College in the fall, where she is pursuing a triple major in Political Science, Philosophy, and Gender & Women's Studies, with a minor in Justice Studies. She is also on a 4+1 graduate track with the University of Notre Dame for a Master of Nonprofit Administration in 2027.

O'Connell is passionate about driving positive change through nonprofit leadership and advocacy, with a strong focus on community engagement and empowerment. At school, she has been involved with the campus Sustainable Farm since her freshman year, and has served as a student worker on the farm since her sophomore year. She grew up spending summers in Fontana and finds great joy in the beauty of Geneva Lake. When she's not at work, you will most likely find her near the water—either swimming, boating, paddleboarding, or lounging on a pier.

O'Connell will be at the Helen Rohner Children's Park in William's Bay leading the fishing lessons and nature classes. Stop by the barn this summer to say hello!



OAK TREE SALE STARTS AUGUST 2

The Conservancy's annual Oak Tree Sale begins on Saturday, August 2nd where a collection of native oaks and shrubs will be available. Visit our website at GenevaLakeConservancy.org to see details of the Oak Tree Sale.

Less than one percent of the Midwest's original oak savannas remain. Therefore it is crucial that we protect our healthy oaks as well as plant new ones for the sustained health of our landscape. Oak trees are known as 'ecosystem heroes' as they play an essential role in our ecosystem while providing food and shelter for wildlife, help clean air and water, stabilize soil, and sequester carbon.

Have an oak on your property? Enter our Oaktober contest! There are 3 categories: Most Beautiful Oak, Oldest Oak, and Oak with the Best Story. Email outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org for more information.



Pictured above is Peggy Borg, winner of the 2024 Most Beautiful Oak in the Oak Tree contest.

ATTEND THE CONSERVATION@HOME OPEN HOUSE



Are you interested in learning more about our Conservation@Home program? Attend the Conservation@Home Open House on Thursday, July 10 from 4-6 PM. The cost is \$30 and registration is required.

The C@H event takes place on the gorgeous and historic Penwern Estate on Delavan Lake. Since 1994, Sue and John Major have been restoring the home to Frank Lloyd Wright's original vision. Tour the colorful gardens at this estate while you enjoy refreshments, catered by Celebration on Wells.

To date, the Conservancy has visited 265 homes in Walworth County and beyond. Conservation@Home visits are for any land, whether you have a small or large yard, are a gardener or just getting started.

Deanne Pierson first contacted the Conservancy in late fall of 2023 to have a Conservation@Home site visit in her recently purchased, beautiful Country Club Estates woodland property. She kept in touch with the Conservancy during 2024 and invited us back in March of 2025 for a second visit. At that time Deanne's yard was certified as a Conservation@Home property, as she had begun to make some of the recommended updates to her yard: she began to remove invasive species and add more native plants. She is also protecting some naturally occurring remnant natives that are growing in her woods.

To sign up for the Conservation@Home Open House or have a Conservation@Home visit at your home, go online to www.GenevaLakeConservancy.org.



Deanne Pierson, certified C@H member

GENEVA LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN TO BE POSTED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The Geneva Lake Conservancy and the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) will be posting a draft of the new 2025 Geneva Lake Management Plan this summer on the Conservancy, SEWRPC and Wisconsin DNR Websites.

The plan reviews the current health of Geneva Lake and provides recommendations to preserve and restore its health. Public concerns addressed in the plan include water quality and algae blooms, declining fisheries, managing invasive species, increasing boat traffic, and better managing wake surfing. The probable impact of climate change on the lake is also addressed in the report.



Pictured above is Geneva Lake, photo credit: Pam Lindley

The final plan will include more than 80 recommendations and will assign various Water Alliance partners to complete the recommendation in the next few years. Some of the recommendations will include lowering phosphorous levels, preserving sensitive and undeveloped lands in the watershed, protecting groundwater, establishing recommended wake surfing areas in deeper waters and reducing sediment and pollutants entering the lake from many of the lake's 50 tributaries.

The report will also include a discussion of various lake management structures to address the growing funding and personnel needed to implement many of the plan's recommendations. Currently the Geneva Lake Conservancy is leading the Water Alliance For Preserving Geneva Lake, which meets several times a year. Water Alliance member organizations include the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, Geneva Lake Association, Wisconsin Department of Nature Resources, Walworth County Conservation Office, UW-Whitewater and others, including the municipalities around the lake.

An email blast from the Conservancy to its members, alerting them that a draft of the proposed 2025 Geneva Lake Management Plan has been posted on its Website, will be sent out later this summer. It will include instructions for public comment.

In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please contact Karen Yancey, Conservancy Executive Director, at kyancey@genevalakeconservancy.org.

THAT'S A WRAP ON 2025 BIRD FEST AND BROMLEY PRESERVE



The Conservancy held its fourth biennial Bird Festival on May 16 and 17 at Bromley Woods in Whitewater. Over 140 students and adults enjoyed spotting birds on their hike through the woods. A dedication ceremony also took place at Bird Festival, where the Conservancy officially opened its last Bromley Woods parcel. Members of the Bromley family (left) posed for a picture to remember this special event. The Conservancy thanks the Bromleys for working with us to help protect and preserve their land in perpetuity.



Geneva Lake Conservancy

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Walworth County and beyond.



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