

Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Fall 2016

An Environment for Healthy Living

Jane Busch

The leaves are turning, fall is here and the LIFE (Lifestyle Initiative for Fitness Empowerment) Foundation is celebrating the success of the first year of the LIFE Community Gardens. The Gardens, located at the west end of Zander Park in Cross Plains, sit adjacent to the beautiful Black Earth Creek that meanders through the Park. Last spring, community members were able to join the LIFE Community Gardens Co-op and receive a garden plot at no cost thanks to a grant provided by the UW School of Medicine and Public Health Wisconsin Partnership Program.

But why would a health-based non-profit organization create a Community Garden?

Community gardens are common ground for growing plants that feed, heal and give aesthetic pleasure. They are civic spaces where people work and recreate to nourish themselves, their families and friends; the gardeners' shared labor also builds a stronger sense of belonging to their physical environment and connection to other gardeners. Community gardens are the collective effort of people with the patience and determination to make things grow. Community gardens often set aside space for community get-togethers, serving as the modern-day equivalent of the ancient plazas in urban areas where people would gather to meet and spend time together. Community garden spaces also allow for interaction with nature and the productive use of land. Because community gardens are beautiful and visually unique they offer a calming respite from life's hectic pace.

The LIFE Foundation's mission for the Community Gardens was to foster healthy communities for individuals, youth, families and seniors in the community of Cross Plains through gardening. We view gardens as ecological, social and cultural places to connect with others, be active, keep learning and give to the wider community.

The Gardens, by being located in a park along the Black Earth Creek, marry the beauty of both land and water. Benches are placed between the gardens and the creek to allow quiet contemplation of an environment demonstrating the ecology of the region. One can see bugs, birds and small animals co-existing with humans, although I believe this past summer the mosquitoes outnumbered us all.



Health can be measured by the physical activity of tending a garden, by the walks through the park, by the fishing in the creek. But health can also be measured by the heart and the soul. The peace that one feels watching the creek flow over rocks, picking a tomato off a vine or appreciating the flowers bordering a garden feeds something even deeper. This is an ideal environment for healthy living. We must appreciate it and preserve it.



**Black Earth Creek
Watershed
Association**

BECWA.ORG

For the wise management of the land and water resources in the Black Earth Creek Watershed.

BECWA Goals

- To protect, conserve, support and advocate for the wise, long term management of the physical, biological, environmental, cultural and historical resources that constitute the heritage and future of the watershed.
- To foster and encourage citizen and locally-based stewardship among the many members of the Watershed community.
- To provide a forum for civilized discussion of issues and problems in the Watershed.

Board of Directors

Greg Hyer, *President*
 Bobbi Peckarsky, *Vice-President*
 Barbara Borns, *Secretary*
 David Lucey, *Treasurer*
 Richard Anderson - Steve Born - Dan Buckland
 Briana Burns - Kathy Haig - Christopher Long -
 Debra Weitzel

Deb Nemeth - *Newsletter Design*
 Barbara Borns - *Newsletter Editor*
 Briana Burns - *Proofreader*

Become a BECWA member or renew your membership

Send your check with name, address and email to:
 David Lucey, 7952 County Highway K, Cross Plains, WI 53528
 Lifetime Member - \$100 Business - \$50
 Watershed Patron - \$35 Household - \$25 Basic - \$15

BECWA QUIZ

Submitted by Bobbi Peckarsky

Over the past couple months there has been a record amount of rain in the Black Earth Creek watershed, often occurring during severe storms. Which of the following statements best describes how those extreme rain events affect the re-meandered section of Black Earth Creek in the Village of Cross Plains?

- The restored (re-meandered) section of Black Earth Creek in Cross Plains is much more vulnerable to storm-related damage than it was when it was channelized (straight).
- Big storms have destroyed most of the improvements that were completed in Black Earth Creek during the summer of 2013 to increase trout habitat.
- The re-meandered section of Black Earth Creek reconnected the stream to its floodplain, thereby dissipating much of the power of the storm water.
- The storm water retention structures installed in 2013 were not adequate to buffer Black Earth Creek from such extreme rain events.
- The stream restoration cannot prevent sedimentation caused by runoff during massive storms.

Answer on page 7



Wolf Run Trail Drone Flight!

Late this summer Mazomanie resident, Jason Sromovsky shared a video taken from his drone that flew over the Wolf Run Trail. Use the link below to enjoy this view.

"Thank you again Jason from all of us!"

Scott Stokes & The Wolf Run Trail Association

Check out this video on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/riBl3yeGoF8>

Events in the Watershed

BECWA will be sponsoring a public watershed wide event to present and discuss results from our June Habitat Assessment Day. Please join us!

Cross Plains Library
Thursday, December 1st
7-9 PM

Written in Creek-Lines

Pamela Bosben reflects on her childhood near the creek

John Muir knew how to capture in words, the inspired, soul wrenching feelings wrought by communing with nature. He encapsulated that essence when he questioned, "Who publishes the sheet-music of the winds or the music of water written in river-lines?" For a young child who slapped toes in the "water written in [creek]-lines," spent summer days lolling with a book beneath the willows on the stream bank and, as a young mother, shared the tune of the meandering waterway with her young sons, Muir's words gave voice to the feelings I carried every time I wandered along the Black Earth Creek.

Life on the creek was a trip. Early memories swirl around walks across the foot bridge to Doc's Island, Grandma fishing with a cane pole more than double her height, and Dad tossing in a line after a hard day's work. We Cross Plains kids were lucky to have that creek as a playground. Wading, lazy-river tubing, skipping stones, pulling leeches off of sunburned skin, all part of languid summer days. The creek was also a place to gaze, reflect, and meditate upon nature or find solace over broken hearts and dashed dreams.

When I was in high school in the 70s, the area was hit with a March ice storm that has been unparalleled in Wisconsin weather history. Power was out and Mom was fretting over the goods in the refrigerator. Plunking those perishables into a cooler to save them never entered our minds. We gathered up the milk and lunchmeat containers, stowed them in net bags, and hauled them down to our trusted creek where we hung the bags from willow branches so they were submerged in the frigid water. Late twentieth-century pioneering never felt so right.

While most of the fifty-plus years I've known the creek were adventurous and idyllic, there were experiences that brought hardship, frustration and sadness. When the torrential rains came, the sprightly waters bulged over the banks and flooded yards and basements. Blaspheming Mother Nature and the creek, I remember standing in two feet of rank water rising against the sides of my washer and dryer. When I heard about run-off polluting those pristine waters, I grew frustrated with the adjacency of a busy highway besmirching our gentle creek. When chemical overspill from nearby fields caused significant fish kills, I was among the numbers who despaired over this agricultural side-effect. But genuine sadness came the day progress dictated re-meandering the creek. Ill-prepared was I to see this transformation completely alter the familiar waterway that affected my life for over half a century. Though still beautiful, it is no longer the village creek I remember.

I have always known the Black Earth Creek. I have seen her waters barely covering the silt bed, and I have witnessed her morph into a raging river. I rejoiced in seeing the habitat she provided for trout, leeches, ducks and water bugs, and I mourned as the ancient willows were hewn and her familiar banks were altered in the name of progress. This eloquent creek has altered through the ages, much like those of us who lingered at her shores. She will remain a constant in the lives of those lucky enough to live in her watershed, and she will continue to write her story in creek-lines for generations to come.



Festge Park Update

Dave Lucey, BECWA Board Member

Restoration work continues at Festge County Park, overlooking the Black Earth Creek Valley. This summer, a logging firm from up north, cut down the 300 red pines that stood near Hwy 14, as well as 150 nearby aging poplar trees. The process involved a mechanical device that grabbed the 60 foot trees at the base, sheared it near the ground with a chainsaw, rotated it 90 degrees, then proceeded to remove all the branches, cutting it into eight foot lengths, and stacking it in a pile. The total time needed was around 45 seconds per tree. The logs filled several semis, and were hauled to paper mills in central Wisconsin for conversion of pulp for papermaking.

Left in the wake of this logging operation was a tangled mass of branches, stumps, and invasive shrubs such as buckthorn. It would have taken park volunteers hundreds of hours to clear this area. Fortunately, park neighbor and friend of the Watershed, Lee Swanson, appeared with his tractor and grappling attachment and proceeded to stack the debris into huge piles for burning this fall. Additional help came from a group of 40 college students from Metro State University in St Paul, who visited the site in August. Almost all of these students were recent immigrants to this country, having fled war-torn parts of the world in the last 10 years. They were on a tour of the Midwest to perform volunteer work as part of a pay-it-forward campaign. While at the park, they picked up loose material and cleared away dirt from the tree stumps, despite the warm, humid conditions, and the fact that several of them dressed in burkas. A group leader estimated at least seven different languages were being spoken, although all could understand and speak English.

In the next few months, the brush piles will be burned and the stumps will be cut close to the ground, which will allow spraying and mowing equipment to work the site. Plans are to plant another large prairie along Highway 14, the third since park restoration work has begun. This should improve the soil retention in the area, benefit the pollinators, and add to the beauty of the Black Earth Creek Valley.



New ATC Power Line in the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Greg Hyer, BECWA Board President



American Transmission Company (ATC) sent a couple of informational mailings to Black Earth Creek Valley residents earlier this summer on their plans to increase capacity to bring additional power to the west side of Middleton from Iowa.

These mailings have sparked a lot of discussion in the watershed about which of the two proposed routes are likely; the aesthetics of large capacity towers and lines; the environmental impact of constructing this project and, whether we need more capacity or we should concentrate on alternative energy options including micro-grids.

The project, called Cardinal Hickory Creek Transmission line project, is now looking at 2 options: one south through the Town of Cross Plains (highway 14, Stagecoach Road to county highway P) south to Mount Horeb along existing power line right of way and one due west from Middleton running just south of the Village of Cross Plains (across country) to Iowa County and then south to Barneveld. The good news is that they've eliminated options that would have followed the entire length of the Black Earth Creek or bisected Sugar River corridor.

ATC plans to select a route in as early as 2018 and obtain Public Service Commission (PSC – the state regulatory commission that controls utility pricing and construction)

support to build it by 2020. Construction would be completed by 2023.

BECWA Board members have had discussions with both ATC representatives and environmental groups. Interestingly, at least one environmental group believes that construction of this line will help Wisconsin reduce our dependence on power generated from coal and increase the amount of power from wind used in Wisconsin. There is also a belief among groups that it is more likely the route, if built, will follow existing right of way. State law requires use of existing right of way unless there are extenuating circumstances. This suggests the route south through Town of Cross Plains to Mount Horeb is the likely recommended route.

Here's what you can do:

1. Follow ATC's route planning and application development on cardinal-hickorycreek.com.
2. Work with ATC to modify the route as it may affect your property if there is a reasonable alternative that would be better for you and your neighbors.
3. Make sure both ATC and the Public Service Commission clearly consider and document whether alternative energy sources would be a better investment.

A note about Internet Connection in the Watershed

Many of us who live in the BEC Watershed have very slow internet connections causing not only inconvenience but real day to day problems for residents.

Students are receiving class assignments that require hours instead of minutes to download.
Real estate values are being compromised by slow internet service
Home businesses are suffering as well.

The Wisconsin Public Service Commission is now accepting surveys to respond to this problem. Here is the link: <http://psc.wi.gov/broadbandsurvey.htm>

TAKE ACTION! We urge you to complete the survey in hopes it might facilitate better service.

Challenging Watershed Project for Eagle Scout

John Stenklyft, Eagle Scout

My project was to help the Black Earth Creek Watershed (BECWA) by replacing their 4 old signs with 10 new signs on different roads. The signs were placed on the edges of the watershed, which has a total area of 102 square miles. It required finding out who the people were that owned the land where we wanted to put up the signs and then asking them for permission.

Each worksite was different. We ran into all kinds of challenges like some of the sign locations were on hills, so we had to dig really deep on the uphill hole just to be even with the hole on the lower side. Other obstacles were rocks in the ground. It slowed down the digging by a lot when we dug by hand. Some sites we knew ahead of time to bring a gas powered hole digger. Above ground and below ground we ran into weeds. When they were above ground, we used rakes to clear the construction site. For the underground roots, we used loppers to cut and remove them from the hole. In two sites, we had to relocate one of the holes because of non-natural objects in the ground that were discovered during the digging process.

All in all, the sign project was beneficial to society, because the signs raise awareness about the Black Earth Creek Watershed which will help keep the watershed clean. It helped me too on a personal level, because this project helped me become an Eagle Scout. Thank you to BECWA, Barbara Borns and Dave Lucey for giving me this opportunity.

John Stenklyft with his mom and dad, John and Beth, at the Eagle Scout Awards in the State Capitol on August 27, 2016.



John and the crew at work in the watershed.

Erosion Control Efforts to Save Black Earth Creek

Dave Lucey, BECWA Board Member

Much of the beauty of the Black Earth Creek Valley is due to the steep slopes lining the northern and southern boundaries of the watershed's valley floor through which the Black Earth Creek flows. However, after a heavy rainfall, these steep slopes can send water down into the valley at a force and speed that can cause massive amounts of soil and nutrients to pour into the creek and affect the ability of the stream to nurture the trout and people who rely on the Creek. In the last several years, we have had a number of "hundred year floods" that have seen, among other things, portions of Hwy KP go under water for several hours. Climate change is suspected to be a factor in these increased rain events.



During the 1950's and 60's, heavy rains caused Brewery Creek to send torrents of water into the village of Cross Plains. To solve this problem, a series of water retention dams were built along the Hwy P corridor north of Cross Plains, at crucial locations, holding back the heavy discharge of rain runoff, and feeding it into the watershed over a longer period of time. This project, with the cooperative efforts of local farmers and the government, succeeded in controlling the runoff to a point where flooding and water damage down Brewery Creek has become a thing of the past.

Swamplovers Nature Preserve, a local environmental group, which own 460 acres along Hwy KP northwest of Cross Plains, is facing a similar problem with erosion. Recent heavy rains from surrounding ridgetops have sent devastating amounts of water down the slopes and into the valley below (see photo), with large trees and boulders included in the flow, impacting prairie restoration efforts on the valley floor. This discharge of water is also carrying sediment and nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, to a small tributary stream that feeds into the Black Earth Creek near Festge Park, and ultimately, to the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers

and to the Gulf of Mexico, contributing to a dead zone of seven thousand square miles.

Swamplovers land managers have built a number of structures, such as grass waterways and holding ponds to help channel this flow. But, to adequately control the flow, it needs to be held back at its source. Local landowners, Ray Austin and Charles Barman, have agreed to consider allowing Swamplovers to build water retention basins on their land to control the release of water to the valley below. Once constructed, these structures should hold back the water and release it at a volume and speed that will not impact the soil and water downstream. Funding for such a project will come partially from government entities, but much of the money has to be put up by Swamplovers, or those who support such efforts. For more information on the Swamplovers Preserve, and the work they do, visit their website at www.swamploversfoundation.org and read the February 2016 newsletter. The long term viability of Black Earth Creek will, to some extent, be affected by the success of this and similar efforts to deal with extreme rain runoff events.

Quiz answer: C



Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

c/o Greg Hyer
4296 County P
Cross Plains, Wi 53528

Detective Work at Leaky Lake Marion Continues

The Village of Mazomanie has approved additional testing and analysis at Lake Marion this fall by Montgomery Associates of the leakage problem and the lowest cost approach to fixing it and restoring the lake.

Preliminary tests this summer indicated the excessive seepage may be related to substantial gaps in the 50-year-old clay liner as well as the elevation of the groundwater table in the sand and gravel aquifer surrounding the lake.

The new phase of diagnostic work by the Cottage Grove-based water resources engineering firm will include:

- Digging additional test pits in the lake bed to confirm previous electromagnetic scanning of the liner;
- Installation of groundwater monitoring wells and data loggers;
- Test pumping to determine any relationship between surface water and groundwater elevations that may control leakage rates, and
- Analysis of lake liner options.

The test pumping program and liner evaluation is expected to begin in the coming weeks and be completed by the end of November.

Restoration of the 16-acre former Village millpond built in 1855 began in 2014 with construction of a new high-capacity well to replace Black Earth Creek as the water supply for the family recreational lake and fishery. The Village has funded the project with grant assistance from Dane County Parks and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Visit the Lake Marion Project page on Facebook for project updates.

--**Christopher Long**, Project Manager.
