



# Thinking Like a Watershed

The semi-annual Newsletter of the  
Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Volume 8, Issue 2

Autumn 2006

## ***BECWA's 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 assets of the Black Earth Creek Watershed.
- To foster and encourage citizen and locally-based stewardship among the many members of the watershed community.
- To provide a forum for civil and informed discussion of issues and problems in the watershed.

## ***BECWA Board Meetings***

BECWA Board Meetings are open to the public.

Check our website for the next scheduled meeting.

We hope you will join us.

## **Inside this issue:**

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## **FIVE GENERATIONS OF FARMING – A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE IN THE BLACK EARTH CREEK WATERSHED— PART 1**

*By Mindy Habecker, Dane County UW-Extension*

The Mickelson family now counts five generations farming within the Black Earth Creek watershed in the rolling hills of the Towns of Vermont and Cross Plains. Craig and Jane along with their daughter Sara currently farm 309 acres in the Union Valley Road area near Vermont Creek. The family keeps both busy and happy surrounded by plenty of work with 100 acres of corn, 60 acres of oats and 140 acres of hay to manage along with 110 cows to milk. Three generations currently live in the farmhouse,

with the youngest, Sara's daughter, being only two months old.

The farm first came into the Mickelson family in 1913 when John Melvin Mickelson and Myrtle Lee married and had the large white wood frame home built. They purchased the barn which had been built by Norwegian bachelors 5 years earlier. The Mickelsons had four children, Merrill Sanford being one of them. Merrill eventually married Elizabeth (Betty) Emma Schlub who settled on the farm in 1942. Betty now lives nearby, but shared with me how she remembers local

farmers still raising some wheat in the 1930's and how the drought of the 30's forces farmers to cut marsh hay and even feed tree leaves to their starving cattle. Many of the hills were pastured at that time until the 1960's. In the 1940's not only did they milk cows, but they also raised and sold about 200 pigs, and had 300 chickens as laying hens and another 40 chickens as broilers. Betty remembers using corn binders to make the corn shocks until the 1960s, how hay was brought in loose and not baled, and when the farm operation transitioned to bulk milk in 1952. She and her husband also raised 6 children on the farm. Craig Vernel Mickelson was one of them.

Craig picks up the story, remembering the purchasing of the first baler in 1957 and the first corn picker in the early 1960s, a single row picker, soon followed by a double row picker.

*(Continued on page 2)*



Jane and Craig Mickelson with daughters, Julie and Sara, and their families

## FIVE GENERATIONS OF FARMING

*(Continued from page 1)*

Prior to baled hay, there were only two cuttings made. By the late 1960's Craig went into partnership with his father. The Harvester silos were built and they transitioned into bunker feeding for the cows instead of just pasturing. The haylage required less dry down time of the cut hay, and bunker feeding allowed the cows more comfort and less expense of their energy in having to roam the hills for food. The 1960's in dairy farming focused on increasing cow comfort and productivity.

In the 1970's Craig married Jane Cross and they had two daughters. Julie lives and works in the area. Sara made a decision 11 years ago to discontinue beautician school and farm full time with her father after her

grandfather was injured and could no longer provide much assistance. In the 70-80s they expanded their farm operations, renting land from 10 other farms and operating 500 acres of cropland and had 2 fulltime employees. However interest rates climbed too as did labor costs. Finding laborers for the farm became more difficult as was keeping a profitable edge. So by about 1995 Craig began downsizing. This allowed for less wear and tear on the machinery, and more time to attend to better quality feed. They now have some University of Wisconsin-Extension and high school interns helping them part-time. Sara and Craig are usually farming from 6 am until 7 pm seven days a week. They have some people hired for custom work. The chickens and hogs are long gone, only a few pet goats and horses remain along with the dairy cows. The milk is being sold to Foremost Dairy out

of Richland Center where it is processed primarily into cheese. They raise the majority of the feed for the cows and still rent land from 5 other farms. In the past 10 years they have worked with the County Land Conservation Department to put in grass waterways and a barnyard runoff structure to help conserve the soil and protect our streams.

**See Part II of this series in the Spring 2007 BECWA Newsletter for a countywide perspective on farming history.**



Craig's Mom, Betty

## HOW WILL NEW ATC TRANSMISSION LINE EXTENSION AFFECT BLACK EARTH CREEK??

*By Barbara Borns*

Imagine 120 foot towers supporting electric transmission lines in the West Middleton Substation. That's exactly what American Transmission Company (ATC) is proposing to install at the Willow Lane site in the headwaters of the Black Earth Creek.

The proposed expansion of the transmission lines will affect a number of areas in Dane County. Several routes for the 345-kilowatt line have been proposed, all of which will end up at the West Middleton Substation on Willow Lane just south of highway 14. The 120 foot towers

will be anchored into concrete support platforms. The recommendation for two final route options will be presented to the PSC, possibly yet this fall. Once approved, it will be too late for the public to get involved.

The expansion has been challenged from a number of perspectives: A) ATC's projections for future electric needs, B) adverse effects on landowners through which the lines will run and C) compromising natural resources, especially the Ice Age Trail in the Black Earth Creek Watershed. This past spring and summer a number of public meetings have been held, some convened by ATC and some convened by the Environment,

Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee of the Dane County Board allowing for public input.

So BECWA urges your action on this issue while there is still time to make your voice heard. There are several ways to voice your opinion. One way to do so is with your ballot. The election this coming November will include a question asking if another study should be done, this one **not** funded by ATC, to assess future electric needs in Dane County. After the election, there are likely to be other opportunities for public comments to be made. Keep your eyes and ears open in the next months for the opportunity and **get** involved.

## Highlights from the Spring 2006 BECWA Events

### Spring 2006 Events

April 22, 2006: Watershed Clean-Up

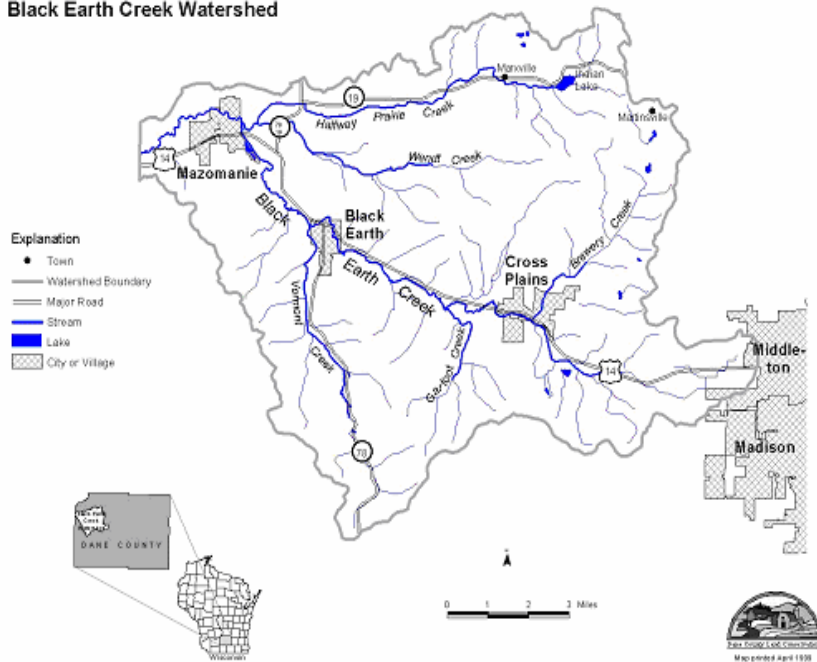
May 6, 2006: Trout Days in Cross Plains

May 10, 2006: Spring Public Meeting: "More Than Trout: The Role of the Black Earth Creek in the Watershed in the next Decade"

### Upcoming Event

October 21, 2006: "Reflecting on Water: The BEC as a Link Between Communities"

Black Earth Creek Watershed



## PERMITS REQUIRED FOR WINTER SPREADING OF LIQUID MANURE

*By Pete Jopke, Dane County Land and Water Resources Department*

County regulations passed in December 2005 require that agricultural producers obtain a county permit before applying stored, pumpable liquid manure on frozen or snow-covered cropland. Liquid manure applied during the winter months can pose serious runoff threats to surface waters. Snow-covered or frozen croplands may not allow for manure to be properly incorporated into the soil, resulting in manure runoff during thaws. Dane County experienced two such events in 2005 resulting in a fish kill on the West Branch of the Sugar River and nutrient loading to Lake Mendota. The winter of 2006 was the first time producers were required to follow

winter spreading plans and no runoff incidents were noted to occur. Patrick Sutter, Dane County Conservationist, cited mild conditions which allowed landowners ample opportunities to incorporate liquid manure. "Landowners also followed their plans and didn't spread when conditions weren't favorable," Sutter stated.

Liquid manure winter spreading permits must be obtained from the Dane County Land Conservation Division, and require that producers file winter spreading plans and emergency response plans with the Division. Liquid manure application rate limitations are based on the slope of the land to which the manure is applied. Any land with slopes greater than 12% will be

prohibited from having liquid manure applied in winter. Additional requirements include installing one or more conservation practices such as grassed buffer strips, terraces, diversions and conservation tillage.

The ordinance requires that permits be obtained prior to November 1<sup>st</sup> prior to the winter during which the permit would be effective. All landowners intending to apply liquid manure to their fields in the coming months are encouraged to contact the Dane County Land Conservation Division at 224-3730 for assistance.

## LOCAL TROUT FISHER, DENNIS FRANKE DONATES LARGE BOOK COLLECTION TO GARFOOT LIBRARY IN CROSS PLAINS

*Adapted from an article by Kim Lamoreaux in the August 3, 2006 News Sickle Arrow*

If "Trout Fishing on the Black Earth Creek 101" were a college course, Dennis Franke would probably be the professor. Locally, he has long been known as a sage of the stream, which is still rated one of the nation's top fishing spots.

At the end of July, he and his wife Hanna contributed over 50 trout-fishing related books to the new Rosemary Garfoot Public Library in Cross Plains. Those books will soon be added to the library's collections, and become part of a growing environmental section.

"The trout fishing books are apropos for Cross Plains because of the famous Black Earth Creek. They show the kind of trout fishing we do on the Black Earth Creek. It has an extensive literature around it including the may flies, caddis flies and the whole biology of fly fishing and the types of fishing flies for casting that imitate those bugs. Hopefully, people will learn that trout fishing isn't just something you sort of do, you really make it part of your life."

Over the years, Franke has not only been a trout fishing enthusiast, but also an advocate for the conservation and protection of the creek. He is well studied on the impact of increasing development in the watershed area, and speaks

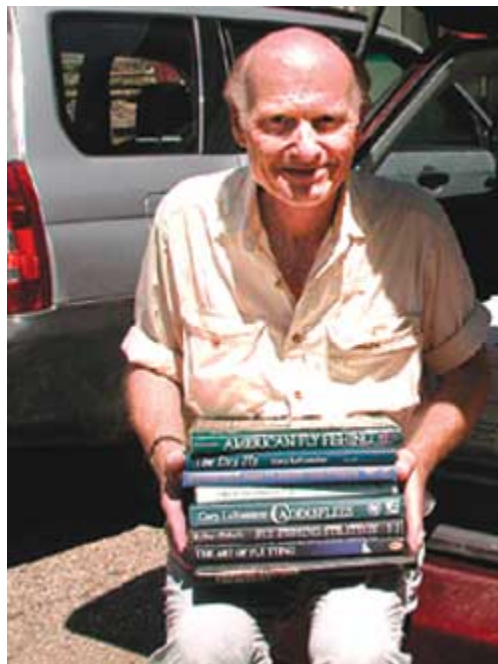
fluently on issues related to pollution, storm runoff, and subsequent impacts to the creek's ecological equilibrium. He said donating his books on the subject is part of sharing that vast trove of knowledge.

"You can read about how valuable streams like Black Earth Creek really are," he said. "It's like going out and developing an art and understanding of nature, how the trout feed on the bugs and how the bugs live on the vegetation

Black Earth Creek, like storm water from the Village of Cross Plains, we need to work on that in the future so we can preserve our trout stream."

Assistant library director Sue Freedman has been working with Franke in determining what books he might donate. "We received a grant from MGE and that money was to be used to start an environmental collection," said Freedman. "With Dennis giving us his wonderful books, it's really growing. We'd like to be a clearing house for people who want to use these resources. We've noticed a lot of the books on green building, renewable energy and environmental issues are going out all the time, and are being circulated around the whole South Central Library System. With Dennis's books, that will help our whole system." She has also been working with Black Earth Creek Watershed Association (BECWA) president Barbara Borns in building a significant environmental collection in the library.

In conclusion Franke stated: "As one gets older, one realizes one doesn't need all these things in one's life," he said. "Over the years you sort of make those books a part of you, and you'd like to pass them off to someone else."



Dennis Franke donated more than 220 books to the new Rosemary Garfoot Public Library last week. Photo by Kim Lamoreaux

and how vegetation grows from all the lime stone that comes up through the streams and makes the streams very fertile. Other sources of water coming into the

## GRAHAM – MARTIN FOUNDATION PROVIDES MORE PLANTS FOR BLACK EARTH CREEK WATERSHED

*By Barbara Borns*

This spring the Graham-Martin Foundation approved a grant proposal for a prairie and raingarden at the new Rosemary Garfoot Library opened this summer in the Village of Cross Plains. The grant provided \$1400 worth of appropriate plants for the two areas around the Library and this was matched with another \$1400 provided by the Village of Cross Plains. Early in July the plants were distributed (see photo). Carl Jones, Jr, BECWA board member assisted Bobbi Fehr, Master gardener and volunteer at the Rosemary Garfoot library with transporting the plants to their new location at the library.

The grant submitted by the Friends of the Garfoot Library was prepared by Barbara Borns, a member of the Friends as well as BECWA President. Last year BECWA also helped sponsor a

grant proposal to the Graham - Martin foundation which resulted in a rain garden being planted at the Wisconsin Heights High and Middle Schools.

The prairie plants were immediately put into place and several were blooming late this summer including a lovely blue gentian. There has been a delay in planting the raingarden plants until some engineering problems are resolved. But the plants are being watered and cared for so as soon as possible they will be put in place.

We are again grateful to the

Graham-Martin Foundation for making this grant available and helping to improve the water quality in the Black Earth Creek Watershed.



Carl Jones, Jr, BECWA board member and Bobbi Fehr, Master Gardener, picking up plants for Garfoot library.

## BECWA.ORG - THE NEW WEBSITE FOR BECWA

*By Barbara Borns*

This spring and summer a student from Waunakee High School, Mitchell Meffert, helped BECWA launch a new independent website. We have had (and continue) to have BECWA listed on the Madison Communities website. But there is now a link to our new BECWA.org site that will include the most up to date information about our organization.

Check out the new site and you will find several new features: Evan Murdock, PhD student at UW-Madison's Nelson Institute, did a very thorough search of websites offering information about land use planning, watershed management, hydrology and related issues. He then prepared a listing of these articles found under the heading "Guidelines." BECWA prepared this document in response to several local officials who expressed a need for such a

resource. We hope you will look it over, use it as you can and pass along the word to others who may find it helpful.

Mark Wegener helped us prepare a new map for the site to which other layers will be added. Thanks to Mitchell and Mark for their assistance with this project. Let us know what you think we should add.

## CROSS PLAINS PLAN COMMISSION AND BOARD SOON TO SHAPE WATERSHED CORRIDOR

*The Following letter was sent to: Mr. Dave Zweifel, Editor Capital Times, Ms. Ellen Foley, Editor Wisconsin State Journal, Mr. Marc Eisen, Editor, Isthmus, Mr. John Donaldson, Managing Editor News Sickle Arrow, Mr. Matt Geiger, News Editor Middleton Times Tribune and Editor, Mt. Horeb Mail. Copies were provided to the Village of Cross Plains Plan Committee and Board*

To the Editors:

In all of Dane County there are only two bodies of water that are designated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as "Outstanding Resource Waters". One of these is a section of the Black Earth Creek that runs through the Village of Cross Plains. In 2005 the Cross Plains residents voted to create a Water Quality Corridor that would protect the land surrounding the Creek from development. At this time the Cross Plains Long Term Strategic Plan Committee, the Plan Commission and the Village Board are discussing details and the implementation of the Water Quality Corridor. Stewards of the Creek are fearful that new Board members will alter and possibly weaken the plan to protect the creek with a buffer of undeveloped land.

The vital ground water springs that sustain this rare cold water resource begin in Cross Plains. They provide the life blood that allows naturally reproducing Brown and Brook Trout to inhabit the stream for 15 miles to the dam at Lake Marion in Mazomanie. The Black Earth Creek winds through the broad, flat, soil rich valley on its 27 mile journey to

join the Wisconsin River. This valley, in many cases, is still being farmed by descendants of the original families that broke the prairie sod with their walking plows in the mid-eighteen hundreds. The valley is classified prime agricultural land, containing the fertile Plano Silt Loam soil that was deposited as the glacier receded thousands of years ago.

Since this is such a valuable resource, several million dollars of public and private money has been spent on various projects to restore and protect the creek and its tributaries and the surrounding farmland. Nonprofit organizations have worked cooperatively with state and county governments on stream bank restoration and many farmers in the valley have invested large sums of their own money for manure containment facilities that prevent contaminated run-off from reaching the creek.

In 2003 the Dane County Board voted to include the Black Earth Creek valley as a part of the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. This action recognizes the area as a unique natural resource and makes funding available to purchase development rights from landowners that might be affected by the Corridor. In 2005, shortly after the referendum was passed, the Village President appointed a Water Quality Corridor Task Force Study Committee of scientists and community members. They have developed recommendations for the Corridor that were passed on to the Cross Plains Village Board for adoption. We urge the Village of Cross Plains Plan Commission and the

Village Board not to weaken the intent or "water down" the Water Quality Corridor Task Force Study Committee's recommendations. The passage of the Water Quality Corridor referendum gave the Cross Plains community the rare opportunity to protect this unique water resource and set the bar state-wide for protecting Outstanding Resource Waters such as the Black Earth Creek.

A decision to conserve land and protect the creek will stand the test of time. The stream will be here long after we are gone but as stewards of the land and water in our area, the quality of the water in the Black Earth Creek depends on our efforts and actions at this time.

Louise Klopp, President  
Black Earth Creek Conservation  
Organization (BECCO)

Barbara Borns, President  
Black Earth Creek Watershed  
Association (BECWA)

Jack Way, President  
Trout Unlimited  
Southern Wisconsin Chapter

Ed Brost, President  
Dane County Conservation  
League



Black Earth Creek

## GARFOOT LIBRARY AND BECWA OFFER SUMMER FISHING CLINIC

*By Barbara Borns*

On July 5, 2006 Catherine Baer, children's librarian at the Rosemary Garfoot Library offered one in a series of programs for youth in the area. She asked BECWA to assist with arranging a session on fishing and stewardship of the Black Earth Creek. With able assistance from Pete Jopke, Dane County Land and Water Resources Department and Pastor Peter Jonas, Trout Unlimited member about a dozen youth from the area congregated along the Creek on a beautiful summer afternoon. They received some

valuable lessons in fishing and in keeping the stream healthy.

Pete Jopke emphasized the importance of water quality to a healthy fishery and Pastor Peter Jonas added to that valuable lessons on stewardship of the resource. The students were enthusiastic and engaged. Several tried their hands at casting. In addition to enjoying the fishing lesson, they were good observers of the insects and other life along the Creek.

We hope young people will learn, not only to enjoy the Black Earth Creek for it's beauty and life, but will see the wisdom of keeping it

healthy. It's never too early to begin being good earth and water stewards!



Pete Jopke, far right, with Pastor Peter Jonas and students

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*By Barbara Borns*

### JOIN US OCTOBER 21, 2006 FOR A HISTORICAL VIEW

“REFLECTING ON WATER;  
THE BLACK EARTH CREEK AS  
A L I N K B E T W E E N  
COMMUNITIES”

It was Pearl Buck who said “*One faces the future with one's past.*” This fall BECWA is planning a public event on October 21, 2006 at which time we will remember the past of Black Earth Creek by visiting several important sites in the history of the watershed. We invite you to join us:

**9:15 AM** Depart on bus from the Rosemary Garfoot library on Julius Street Cross Plains, Introduction: Mindy Habecker, Dane County/UW-Extension

**9:30** Pope Farm Park: Mel Pope will share history of area and park

**10:30** Head west past Wilke Gorge, Cross Plains, Black Earth, Lake Marion, Mazomanie Historical Society: Bob Dodsworth tour and discussion

**11:30** Lunch at the Old Feed Mill: Discussion with Dan and Nancy Viste

**1:00** Return to Garfoot library, panel: Virgil Matz, Bob Dodsworth, Bob Saeman.

**2:00** Audience members' reflections, displays from local historical societies

**2:30** Conclusion of program

Space is limited on the bus so make your reservation soon by contacting Jeffrey Postle: Email:

[Munozdm@chorus.net](mailto:Munozdm@chorus.net), phone: 798 1620 or mail:2522 S. Elmwood Circle E, Cross Plains, Wisconsin 53528

As we look at the current landscape in the Watershed there are some very important processes unfolding that will affect its future. Development pressures are present in Middleton, Cross Plains, Black Earth and Mazomanie. There is a proposed expansion of electric utility lines that will affect the eastern edge of Black Earth Creek. There is a proposed expansion of highway 14 that will affect the entire watershed. Perhaps a look back will help us to plot a healthy path for a sustainable future for the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Join us for the day on October 21 and then let's face the future by preserving the health of this outstanding resource.

**BLACK EARTH CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

c/o UW-Madison, Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies  
550 N. Park Street, 70 Science Hall  
Madison, WI 53706-1491



**Black Earth Creek Watershed Association**

Established 1987

**Board of Directors:**

Barbara Borns, President  
Porter Martin, Vice-President  
Jeffrey Postle, Secretary  
David Lucey, Treasurer  
Richard Anderson      Steve Born      Greg Hyer  
Carl Jones Jr.      John Mulligan  
Barbara Peckarsky      Wayne Rounds

Watershed Coordinator: Briana Burns  
Phone: 608-767-1475  
Email: BECWA\_coordinator@yahoo.com  
Websites: www.BECWA.org  
www.madison.com/communities/becwa/

**BECWA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME**

Much of what BECWA accomplishes each year is dependent on your membership in the organization. Your dues money makes possible the education and advocacy efforts that is BECWA's mission. Membership in BECWA runs from January to December, which means your membership expires soon. Please consider renewing your membership by filling out and sending in the membership enrollment form found in this newsletter. Thank you for your continuing support.

Dave Lucey, Treasurer



**Join BECWA Today!**

By joining BECWA today you become part of a dedicated community of people who recognize this gem we have in our midst.

Your membership will support BECWA's:

- Educational Forums
- Annual Earth Day Creek Clean-Up
- *Thinking Like a Watershed*, our twice annual newsletter

Please lend your support to protecting this outstanding creek which runs through the heart of our community!

*Note: If you are already a member, check your address label on this newsletter for your membership*

**Membership:**

- Watershed Patron      \$25.00
- Household      \$15.00
- Basic      \$10.00

**Yes! I'm interested in volunteering my time to BECWA.**

\*All donations are tax deductible.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Fill out this form and mail it with your check to:**

BECWA—Treasurer  
David Lucey  
7952 County Hwy K  
Cross Plains WI 53528

Watershed Coordinator: Briana Burns  
Phone: 608-767-1475

Email: BECWA\_coordinator@yahoo.com

Websites: www.BECWA.org

www.madison.com/communities/becwa/

