

Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Occasional Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2012



Bobbi Peckarsky samples the Creek and shares the results with a family.



Todd Opsal matches artificial flies with the bugs found in the Creek samples.



Mike Miller shares with eager youngsters what they're seeing in the Creek samples.

Bugs and Trout at Cross Plains Trout Days

Young and old got the opportunity to see what bugs live in Black Earth Creek, which bugs trout eat, which bugs live in healthy streams and which bugs thrive in streams at risk. They also got to “match the hatch” with artificial flies used to catch trout. The Creek side seminar was a featured event at Trout Days and was sponsored by BECWA. Bobbi Peckarsky, BECWA Board Member and UW Professor of Stream Ecology, Mike Miller, DNR Stream Ecologist and Todd Opsal, Owner of On the Creek Fly Shop shared their time and technical knowledge with the group.



Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

***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*
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President's Column

Please read this issue of our newsletter if you want to know what twenty-five plus years of education and advocacy by BECWA, Dane County, Wisconsin DNR and others have done and why you should continue to support our efforts. Elected officials of the Villages that bookend the Creek are taking the lead on major projects that will protect and enhance the water quality of Black Earth Creek and support resource based recreation and economic development opportunities. The Ice Age Trail Alliance and Natural Heritage Land Trust are new and significant players in advancing protection of the Watershed's critical natural resources.

We've run out of room in this issue to highlight businesses like Crossroads Coffee Shop, On the Creek Fly Shop, Black Earth Meats and Mazomanie Old Feed Mill that draw visitors to the area, create jobs for local residents and use the area's natural resources to promote and support their businesses. We also didn't have room to highlight Dane County's role in acquiring land in the Watershed's headwaters for a new County Park and a key parcel for the National Ice Age Scientific Reserve. We appreciate and support all of their efforts to make the Black Earth Creek Watershed a healthy and vital area resource and we appreciate your past and continuing support.

Greg Hyer



Watershed Park Improvements

Festge Park and Salmo Pond

David Lucey, BECWA Treasurer

Festge Park will be 50 years old in 2014 and to prepare for that milestone there is an on-going effort to restore the park to its pre-settlement state. Invasives such as buckthorn are being cut and burned, invasive weeds are being sprayed, and new prairie plants and trees are being planted. Town of Berry resident Gary Nelson and volunteers from the Town along with assorted groups such as the Sierra Club, REI, and students from the University of Chicago High School are doing the work. A blue bird trail has been established and other improvements are planned. The view from the lookout has been improved. Members are encouraged to stop out and see all that has changed.



Shelley Dubis

Salmo Pond was created in the early part of the 20th century as gravel and stone were excavated from the valley floor. Today this spring-fed pond is a popular area for fishermen. However, access to the pond is extremely limited due to dense growth of invasives such as honeysuckle and buckthorn. Volunteers are clearing the shoreline in order to open up the shore and improve fishing opportunities. Town of Berry

volunteers, the Sierra Club, REI, and others are doing the work. Brush and trees will be burned and new pond plants and shore plantings will help to restore the area to a more useful and appealing condition. The pond has become much more visible from Sherbel Road and Hwy 14.

View from Festge Park south toward Black Earth Creek



Mario Quintana

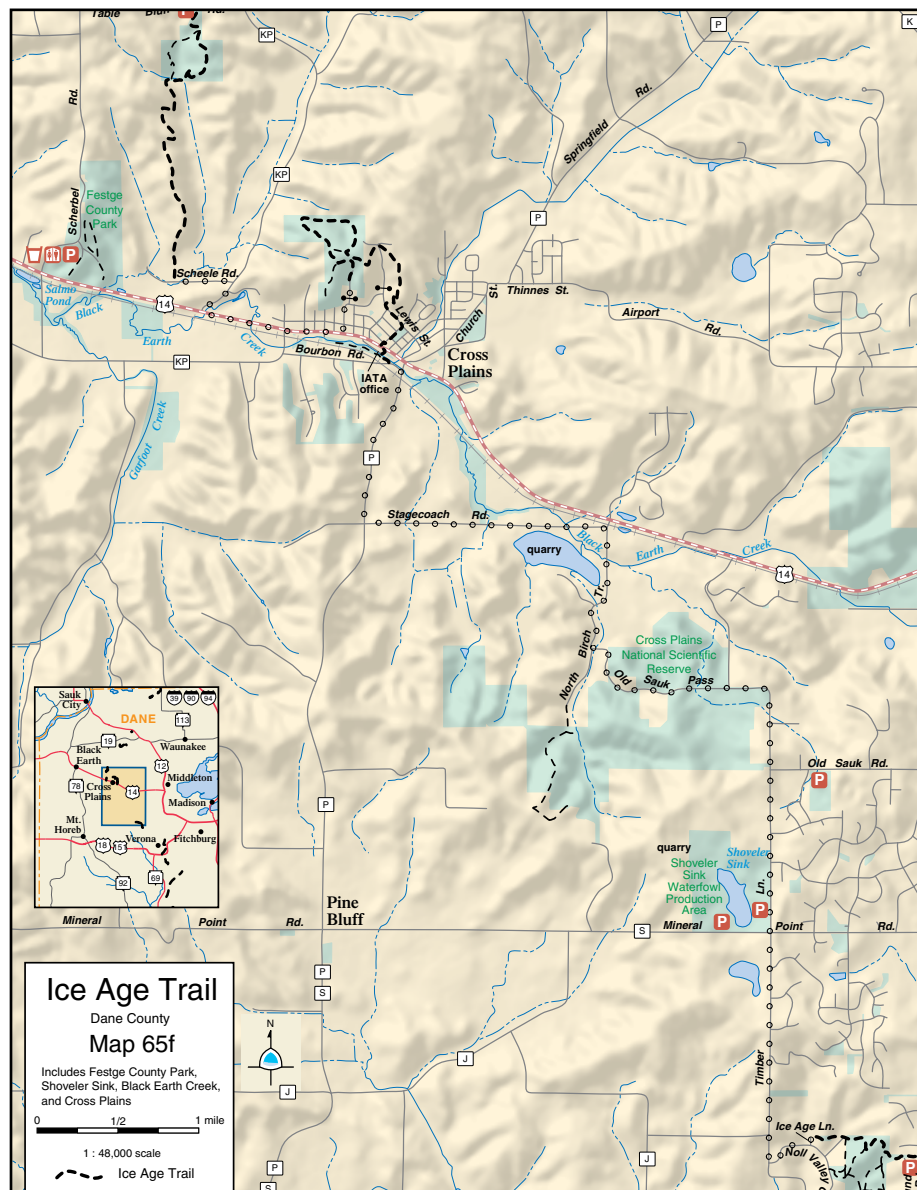
Ice Age Trail in Black Earth Creek Watershed Update

Kevin Thusius

Director of Land Conservation - Ice Age Trail Alliance

In 2011, the Ice Age Trail Alliance opened a new segment of the Ice Age Trail in the Village of Cross Plains. Previously the Trail extended from Bourbon Road to a gravel access road off the Lewis Street cul-du-sac. A new portion was mostly constructed in 2009 and opened for public use last year. The 2.5 mile segment has some really nice off-road portions going through lands owned or with easements by the Ice Age Trail Alliance and the Village of Cross Plains. We have been partnering with the National Park Service, USFWS, Village, Operation Fresh Start and others to restore an old agricultural field to about 24 acres of prairie and an overgrown forest to about 8 acres of oak savanna. A hiker this summer will see piles of to-be-burned slash. There are ongoing efforts to control invasives and prepare for future woodland burns in the area.

To get started on your off-road hike in Cross Plains, walk or drive to the dead end road of Hickory Hill Street or Lewis Street/American Legion intersection and follow the distinctive yellow blazes.



Permanent Land Protection in Black Earth Creek Watershed

Caleb Pourchet

Conservation Specialist- Natural Heritage Land Trust

There are many tools to protect the natural resource and scenic values of a watershed. Permanent land protection through the purchase of conservation easements is one. A conservation easement is a voluntary, permanent land-use agreement made between a landowner and a private conservation organization (often called a land trust) or a government agency. The purpose of an easement is to place permanent restrictions on the use of land to protect its natural and scenic resources. The land stays privately owned, but the public reaps the various benefits of its protection.

Natural Heritage Land Trust (NHLT) is the Black Earth Creek watershed's local land trust. Since 1983, NHLT has been permanently protecting lands in and around Dane County; almost 7,700 acres so far. The Black Earth Creek watershed, and specifically ridgetop to ridgetop in the valley of Black Earth Creek, is a priority for our conservation efforts. With the help of our partners and willing landowners, we have protected over 700 acres in the valley, including the Sunnyside Unit of the Black Earth Creek Wildlife Area, Hickory Hill Conservancy Park, and portions of the Black Earth Creek Fishery Area along Garfoot Creek.

Caleb Pourchet, NHLT's Conservation Specialist, leads the land protection effort in the valley. "I love this place," says Pourchet. "It is more than pretty scenery. It's a viable agricultural community that is under constant development pressure. It's a world-class water resource that needs more protection. It's a refuge for natural communities that were once widespread, but now only exist in small pockets. It's a place that we need to preserve and enhance for future generations."

We continue to make progress. In 2011, NHLT partnered with Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Madison Community Foundation, Wisconsin DNR, and Dane County Parks to protect over a mile of Vermont Creek with permanent conservation easements. The easements secure the public's investment in the excellent streambank restoration work that has been completed there over the years and ensure that the public can fish and enjoy the creek forever.

Natural Heritage Land Trust also made great progress in protecting the iconic viewshed from the Festge County Park overlook by placing a conservation easement on an 80-acre hillside directly across the valley. The conservation easement will ensure that no new buildings interrupt the picturesque landscape. The landowners are the children of Otto and Evelyn Festge who donated the initial acreage that would become Festge County Park and worked with the DNR on numerous conservation projects on the family farm. Through this new conservation easement, the Festge family legacy of conservation continues. Sue Hinline, one of Otto and Evelyn's daughters, reflects, "The family has always loved to spend time on the land to enjoy nature—walk in the woods, enjoy the flowers, pick berries, observe wildlife, listen to the birds, plant hundreds of trees. We want to carry that forward to future generations."

At the grand overlook of the Black Earth Creek valley in Festge Park, many volunteers have been actively clearing invasive vegetation from the oak woodland and prairie. The transformation has been nothing less than astonishing. The approach to the overlook, which was once a thick tunnel of buckthorn, is now an open vista of majestic oaks and returning native ground cover. The viewshed from the overlook is now even more special and worth continued protection.

2012 will be another successful year for permanent land protection in the Black Earth Creek watershed. We are working on securing over a mile of Black Earth Creek near Mazomanie for public use and the permanent preservation of a large family farm in the Town of Black Earth. Our future success, however, depends on the support of our 700 members.



If you are interested in supporting our work by joining Natural Heritage Land Trust, please call (608) 258-9797 or visit our website at www.nhlt.org.

Village of Mazomanie Update

Scott Stokes, a community leader in the Wolf Run Association indicates that, “The dam removal/stream re-meandering and some of Trout Unlimited stream improvements are scheduled to begin this spring with a completion date of June. We got Village Board approval to start a railroad crossing petition at Crescent St. for the rec-trail and creek access trailhead. We have acquired most of the permits to start the rec-trail project from the downtown to the High School this spring but need to go through the lengthy, 4 month RR crossing petition process and get State approval first. “

The following are excerpts from the Final Report on the DNR River Planning Grant. (President’s Note: BECWA Board Member Steve Born has been supporting and advising Mazomanie’s efforts. BECWA convened a public meeting at the beginning of this project to support efforts to comprehensively plan for Mazomanie’s water resources.)

Lake Marion and Black Earth Creek Dam Removal: The UW-Madison students from the Water Resource Management Workshop in the Gaylord Nelson Environmental Institute under the guidance of Dr. Ken Potter, worked over the past two years to do research as part of their curriculum on Lake Marion and the Black Earth Creek Corridor. The studies included the habitat



in and around the lake as well as the temperatures of the water, the amount of seepage from the lake, how much water is coming from the Black Earth Creek into Lake Marion, etc. The results of their research were published in a book, “The Restoration and Recreational Enhancement

of Lake Marion and the Black Earth Creek Corridor”.

Members of the U.S. Geological Survey also helped install four groundwater-monitoring wells at Lake Marion. The wells were approximately 1-inch in diameter and a maximum of 30 feet in depth. Soil cores were collected and analyzed for texture, moisture and color during the well construction. After the installation of the wells, the water table was depth was measured and groundwater samples were taken.

Also included in the book are concept plans for Lake Marion for

after the removal of the dam on Black Earth Creek. Removal of the dam is planned to begin in Spring, 2012. The Village of Mazomanie would like to keep Lake Marion, but since it is currently fed by the Black Earth Creek, an alternative water source needs to be explored. The students worked with Jewell Associates, an engineering firm hired by the Village of Mazomanie, to try to locate sites for a groundwater fed well.

Creation of a Trail to Enhance the Black Earth Creek: In 2010, the Frank Wolf, Sr. family donated a piece of land, known as the Eva Wolf Conservancy, or “Grandma’s Park”, to the Village of Mazomanie. This land is located adjacent to the location where the Black Earth, Spring Valley and Halfway Prairie Creeks come together. This is one of the only pieces of land in the state that has never been tilled. It has always been used for feed. It was Eva Wolf’s wish before she passed away that this piece of land be donated to the Village of Mazomanie and used for recreational purposes.

Through the generosity of Fred Wolf, 60 + acre parcel of land adjacent to the Black Earth Creek on the south side of Highway 14 was also donated to locate a multi-use recreation trail. The land that was donated by Fred Wolf was surveyed, along with a small portion of land owned by Steve Schmitt, by Thom Grenlie, Surveyor. The final plan is to have the land donated by the Wolf family, the “Eva Wolf Conservancy”, connected to the land donated by her son, Fred, and become part of a trail that would connect the Village of Mazomanie and the Wisconsin Heights High School/Middle School. This trail hopefully would also become part of the “Safe Routes to School” program to get children safely from the Village of Mazomanie to school. Further plans are to have the trail extend to the Village of Black Earth along the Black Earth Creek.

The multi-use trail would extend along the Black Earth Creek corridor, through the land owned by the DNR to accommodate horses, snowmobiles, walking, running, bicycles, and also be ADA accessible. This trail would help to promote the Black Earth Creek corridor as a recreational area.

The construction of this multi-use trail along the Black Earth Creek will accommodate pedestrians as well as snowmobiles and horses. The trail will be handicapped accessible according to the current ADA specifications. The trail is planned for construction in part with PARC grant funds in the spring/summer of 2012.

Village of Cross Plains Update

Matt Schuenke, Village Administrator

The Village of Cross Plains is in the midst of planning for the reconstruction of Highway 14 with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Even though the project is about two years from actually breaking ground, there is a tremendous planning and design effort currently underway by the Village, DOT, and DOT consultants. While this project will provide a tremendous improvement to local infrastructure, there will also be a direct benefit to Black Earth Creek and its watershed through the possibility of several capital improvements. One such improvement that was discussed in the Village of Cross Plains in 2011 was the reconstruction of Lagoon Street in 2013. This project included a new road from Wilson Street to Jovina Street, remeandering the creek, trail improvements, new accessibility, storm water enhancements and other amenities meant to improve the area. This project as it was previously planned for in the Cross Plains Downtown Core Redevelopment Project was not pursued by the Village Board following a fall referendum in which voters were mostly not in support of the project. However, even in light of the local discussion on what to do with Lagoon Street going on, there was a growing need in the Highway 14 planning effort to better determine how the existing Lagoon Street would interact with the new highway if it were not to be improved.

Following several meetings with the DOT on the relationship between Lagoon Street and the highway, it was demonstrated that a reconstructed Lagoon Street from Wilson to Jovina would provide for greater operational efficiency of vehicles using the highway and safer turning movements. This could only be made possible if the current driveway permitted access points were closed at the hardware store, pharmacy, and coffee shop. To offset the hardship that would be created by closing these driveways, the State presented a proposal to the Village in early 2012 where they would 1) pay for the new road construction cost from Wilson to Mill, 2) pay for the land acquisition cost for the land the new road would sit on from Wilson to Mill, and 3) provide full access at both Wilson and Jovina. It was further negotiated that instead of the complete closing of Crossroads Coffee Shop driveway, a right out would be allowed to be able to use the parking in a similar configuration. The Village would then be responsible for the remainder of the project and would have to complete the project in 2013 in advance of the highway's construction in 2014. A final decision is still required by the Village Board about whether or not to accept this proposal and that could happen in the near future. The Village is currently waiting on an agreement from the DOT to bring back to the Village Board for review and action to make the final determination.



Black Earth Creek is not lost in all of these planning efforts. There has been a significant effort by the Village, DNR, and DOT to pay special attention to one of our most treasured local resources. Significant planning will go into storm water infrastructure that is meant to treat run off prior to its entrance into the creek. This will be a vast improvement to the overall quality of life in the creek as there currently is very little in place to treat the overland runoff into the creek from the highway and other local roads. Most importantly, the Village continues to pursue grant funding to advance the creek remeandering project towards completion. The DNR recently committed its staff and other resources to assist the Village in moving the creek from its existing footprint to a more natural layout. An application has been submitted and is awaiting a response from Dane County on a Partners for Recreation and Conservancy Grant to further assist the remeandering and accessibility (President's note: BECWA supported the Village's application for the grant. The Village believed BECWA's support was important for the application). The Village Board has also submitted plans to the DNR and FEMA to gain approval for the project to allow flexibility to move the project forward in the future as desired.

A lot of planning has gone into these projects to date trying to keep Village residents, regional partners, and general users' best interests at heart. A significant endeavor is still ahead as we move forward positively towards 2014 trying to limit the disturbances caused by these projects and maximize their potential.



Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

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

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Sign me up as a new member.

Please renew my membership.

Membership levels:

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Watershed Patron - \$35 Household - \$25

Basic membership - \$15

I would like to volunteer!

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