

Door County Land Trust: Southern Door ecological gem to become 15th Land Trust Preserve

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Sturgeon Bay, WI- An exceptionally scenic and ecologically significant 75 acres in the Town of Clay Banks has recently been added to Door County Land Trust's roster of protected properties. The former dairy farm features a half-mile of Bear Creek that flows into Lake Michigan that supports coldwater fish. Within its eye-catching landscape of open fields, wetlands, native forest, bluffs, and 50-foot stream banks, are habitats for migratory birds, grassland and wetland breeding birds, and native pollinators.

"It's an exciting and unique property to protect," says Land Program Director Jesse Koyen. "The perennial stream of Bear Creek is of great water quality and extends these benefits into Lake Michigan. With the changing landscape and climate, waterways such as these are vital to an area's water quality overall. Protecting the land around Bear Creek, which acts as a cleaning filter for surface water, ensures that the watershed—which is a DNR Fisheries priority watershed—remains healthy."

Early staff visits to the creek revealed plentiful populations of macroinvertebrates like stone flies, caddis flies, and crane flies. These insects are ideal nourishment for fish, like the rainbow trout, that spawn there. Also included in the species list under protection are neotropical warblers, yellow birch and mountain maple, and six-foot-tall ostrich ferns. Of note is a sighting on the property of a pair of grassland songbirds that are a species of Special Concern in the State of Wisconsin.

For now, Koyen says the general stewardship plan for the property is to restore some former agriculture fields to grasslands and further expand the interior forest

by planting trees. An increase in grassland habitat supports pollinators and grassland birds, which are in decline. The expansion of the forest will provide additional cover and nesting opportunities for migratory and breeding birds.

According to Executive Director Emily Wood, the Bear Creek Nature Preserve aligns with the Land Trust's mission to protect lands throughout Door County. "We were aware of a need to secure land that serves people, wildlife, and water quality in Southern Door," she said. "As a new nature preserve, the site offers immense possibility for recreational access as well as wildlife and habitat protection."

Bear Creek Nature Preserve will offer visitors opportunities for activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, and fishing, and especially birdwatching, photography, and wildlife observation. In 2024, the Land Trust will begin planning for trails, boardwalks, overlooks and bridges, including a feasibility study of including ADA accessible amenities wherever possible.

The Land Trust depends upon funds from the community to purchase, restore, and make infrastructure improvements to significant properties like Bear Creek. The organization's fundraising efforts for this project are still in the initial stages. Until the end of 2023, first time gifts to the Door County Land Trust Land Acquisition Fund will be matched to double donations. To learn more about giving to the Land Acquisition Fund, please visit: www.doorcountylandtrust.org/landchallenge .

About the Door County Land Trust

Protecting Door County's Exceptional Lands and Waters...*Forever*. Door County Land Trust protects the wild places, scenic beauty, and ecological integrity that make the peninsula and islands so special. Fourteen featured nature preserves are open for hiking, and other low-impact, non-motorized recreational activities—all at no charge to the public. Trail maps and more information may be found at www.doorcountylandtrust.org.