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## Dave Jacobson - Volunteer of the Year

Being half Norwegian, half Swedish and 100% farm boy, Dave Jacobson knows the value of hard work -- and keeping busy. On October 24th, he received an award for his old-fashioned virtues.

Jacobson, a retired educator who grew up on the family farm just north of Sauk Centre, is the *John Peck Volunteer of the Year*, an award given by the Minnesota Land Trust to honor one of its many dedicated volunteers. The award was created in 2005 to honor the extensive volunteer efforts of John Peck.

Jacobson is the fifth recipient of the award. Volunteers are essential to the mission of many organizations and certainly to the Minnesota Land Trust. With nearly 400 projects already completed, and 15 -20 new ones coming online annually, we really rely on a cadre of trained and dedicated volunteers to assist us in monitoring these protected lands.

Jacobson was selected by fellow volunteers and Land Trust staff for his many years of service as a conservation easement monitor. The Land Trust, which specializes in the use of conservation easements to protect natural and scenic land, counts on volunteers like Jacobson to visit each protected property annually in order to build goodwill with its owners and to ensure that the land continues to be used in a manner that preserves its conservation values. Jacobson became involved with the

Land Trust in 1995 when he worked with the organization to create a conservation easement that protects his 160-acre Century Farm forever. In addition to protecting his land with a conservation easement, Dave completed a ten-year restoration project on his farm. Today, the farm resembles the land that once greeted his Swedish grandparents, August and Albertina Jacobson, who homesteaded it in 1885.

Each year when he's not busy working his own land, he travels throughout the region, monitoring about a dozen of the nearly 400 protected properties under the Land Trust's care. The organization trains and dispatches about 100 volunteers annually to assist its staff.

"My volunteering for the Land Trust is really just a way for me to pay something back to the organization for all the help they offered me when I was looking for ways to keep my own land protected" says Jacobson.

For more information on becoming a volunteer for the Minnesota Land Trust, contact Anne Murphy at 651-647-9590.



Jacobson on his protected and restored Century Farm near Sauk Centre  
- Land Trust file photo

## North Shore Protection Initiative receives Touchstone Award

The Minnesota Land Trust was one of five organizations to receive a Touchstone Award from the Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation in September. The Land Trust's North Shore Protection Initiative was selected for its effective approach to land conservation along Lake Superior's North Shore.

The goal of the Initiative is to protect the natural and scenic heritage of Minnesota's North Shore while simultaneously respecting the social and economic needs of the communities within the region. The Land Trust is working with private landowners, local communities and other organizations to complete direct land protection projects and to implement an effective conservation vision for the region.

Executive Director Kris Larson says receiving the Touchstone Award is a strong affirmation of the value of this region's beauty. "The Minnesota Land Trust often works quietly behind the scenes doing what we can to maintain and enhance this region's beauty. We were thrilled to learn that we were being recognized for this work that we obviously consider vital to the North Shore."





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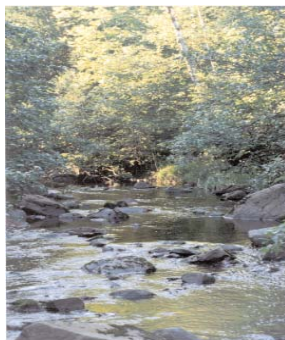
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## Keeping the Lester River healthy

Earlier this year, just before the snowmelt began its run into the Lester River, landowner Terrence Smith placed his signature on the conservation easement that now protects his 80+ acres of land and 3,650 feet of riverbank along this premier North Shore trout stream.

The Lester River runs along the edge of Duluth and is a popular destination for anglers who ply its cold waters in search of brookies, browns, rainbow and chinook.

Travelers heading up the North Shore cross the Lester as it empties into Lake Superior on the east end of



Duluth. The massive stone and concrete bridge that spans the mouth of the river is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Another historic structure, the old US Fisheries Station built in 1882, is situated right along the Lake Superior shore.

Upstream, the Lester becomes a haven for hikers and anglers; its' dense canopy of trees shade its waters, keeping the temperature ideal for fish. Most of the land surrounding the Lester is in private ownership, making protection a cooperative effort with local families.

### A long time in the comin'

Like other North Shore streams, the Lester is a magnet for small-acreage shoppers. Too much development on the thin soils of the North Shore have already harmed other streams.

The Land Trust began working on this project back in 2004, when its previous -- and out-of-state -- owner Bob Wilson decided to protect his stretch of the Lester. During the process, Wilson transferred the land to Terrence Smith, who had been the land's caretaker for over 30 years. Smith also favored its protection to preserve its classic boreal forest and clean waters.

"I've known this land for a long, long time, working with Bob to try and keep it whole," said Smith, a working artist known for his expertise in American folk music traditions, "There's still much to do on the land...the benefits of which I won't live long enough

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## Someone has to be first...

Avon Hills couple are first to act under new initiative

Bob and Bonnie Thomsen, long-time residents of St. Joseph, Minnesota, have protected their 34 acres by granting a conservation easement to the Minnesota Land Trust.

The Thomsens are the first landowners to protect their property through efforts of the *Avon Hills Initiative*, a community-based organization committed to preserving the rural and natural character of roughly 50 square miles of land in Avon, Saint Joseph, Collegetown, and Saint Wendel Townships. The Land Trust is partnering with the Avon Hills Initiative and will hold and monitor conservation easements.



Bob and Bonnie Thomsen outside their restored log home  
 Photo courtesy Dave Schwarz, St. Cloud Times

The Thomsens have lived on their land in this central Minnesota community for 36 years and were concerned about the increasing loss of ecological integrity and rural character.

Bonnie notes: "The land has many geographic and aesthetic features that are critical to the continuation and establishment of wildlife and plant habitat. It was critical, in our minds, that the land remain so beyond our lifetimes."

Indeed, the Avon Hills area is a unique area. While not pristine, its rolling topography contains several key natural habitats including upland deciduous forest, non-forested wetland, and grassland. Numerous

species of greatest conservation need (SGCNs) rely on the distinct habitats located within Avon Hills.

Tom Kroll, director of St. John's Arboretum and a member of the Avon Hills Initiative is excited about the prospects for additional land protection. "Several more landowners have expressed interest in following the Thomsen's lead and two have already started the process of protecting their land."

Funding for this project was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).



Minnesota native Bob Dylan lyrically reminds us: “The times they are a changin’”. And no where is this more true than at the Minnesota Land Trust, where we’ve experienced change in many of its forms over the past year. As we wrap up 2009, it seems appropriate to communicate to you, our faithful members, how the Minnesota Land Trust has managed in this year of new circumstances and endeavors.

For us, the biggest change was experienced in our leadership. After 9½ years of leading the Minnesota Land Trust through a period of significant growth and increased professionalism, our president and executive director Jane Prohaska announced her retirement. No one has worked harder or with more passion for the cause of land protection than Jane, and her legacy with the Minnesota Land Trust will be felt far into the future.

Following in Jane’s shadow is no small task, and so it is with a great sense of humility that I have accepted the challenge to lead the Minnesota Land Trust as its new executive director. While I’ve been with the Land Trust for most of the past 11 years (in addition to working in conservation in Pennsylvania and Colorado) I am particularly excited to be a part of this new chapter of the Land Trust’s story.

But the changes don’t end there. In July, the Land Trust welcomed Anne Murphy as the newest member of our team. Anne is the organization’s first Conservation Stewardship Director, a position of increasing importance and visibility. Anne is responsible for managing the Land Trust’s growing portfolio of conservation easements, directing the conservation easement monitoring program and coordinating the organization’s response to potential violations. Prior to joining the Land Trust, Anne gained valuable experience in

stewardship and conservation planning at Western Reserve Land Conservancy (formerly Chagrin River Land Conservancy) in Ohio and Little Traverse Conservancy in Michigan.

Another significant change occurred when Minnesotans approved the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment during the 2008 fall elections. This constitutional change creates a significant new source of much-needed conservation funding over the next 25 years. Our proposal to protect Bluffland prairie in southeastern Minnesota resonated with the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (L-SOHC) and was one of 19 proposals selected to receive funding during the 2009 legislative session.

In addition to changes in leadership, staff and funding, the organization has also taken the opportunity to plan for the future - a future that will require new ways of getting things done. This process has been energizing and while we’re still wrapping up details, I can share with you that our mission of land protection will not only remain at the core, it will be augmented by fresh approaches that will speed up the pace and quality of land protection throughout the state.

So, with this first issue of News and Views printed under my watch, I want to close by saying thank you to all of you who make our work possible and to ask for your continued support as we move boldly into the future. We simply couldn’t do this work without the landowners, members and volunteers who have give so generously to the mission of protecting Minnesota’s incredible natural assets.

I look forward to working with you all,

Kris Larson

## Leaving a Conservation Legacy

Henry Crosby was a planner. As one of the first landowners we had the privilege of working with, Henry did more than place a conservation easement on his land, he planned to leave a lasting legacy to conservation by naming the Minnesota Land Trust in his will.

And like Henry Crosby, long-time member Eleanor Fenton did the same, providing the Land Trust with a significant gift that allows us to move our mission forward in new ways.

Bequest gifts, like Henry’s or Eleanor’s, can be transformational for an organization like the Minnesota Land Trust, and obviously we encourage them. We also receive numerous inquiries about the process, which is surprisingly simple. Here’s where to start:

**Create a will, now.** While we all know we should, too many of us never get around to it. If you already have a will, you simply need to create a codicil.

**Contact an attorney.** Even though the process of creating a will is straightforward, use an attorney -- they’re the experts and will make sure you achieve your charitable objectives.

**Consider informing the Land Trust of your plans.** It’s encouraging and it helps ensure that any specific plans you’re considering are clearly understood and not impractical.

There’s no special language and a near endless variety of ways to structure a bequest gift. It just takes a little planning.

Questions? Contact Walter Abramson at the Minnesota Land Trust: 651-647-9590 or [wabramson@mmland.org](mailto:wabramson@mmland.org)

## Land Trust receives grant to protect bluffland goat prairie

Named for their steep slopes requiring goat-like nimbleness to traverse, goat prairies are a rare habitat in southeastern Minnesota.

In May, 2009, the newly formed Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council recommended a \$500,000 grant for the Minnesota Land Trust to acquire conservation easements on these and other important bluffland prairies. Preservation of these landforms is critical to the rare wildlife habitats along with prevention of detrimental impacts to cold-water trout streams in the valleys below.

Sometimes termed hill prairies or dry prairies, this landform is found mainly along the valley of the Upper Mississippi River. Goat prairies are important to protect because of their unique characteristics. The underlying limestone creates alkaline soils that allow a variety of rare native plants to thrive. The south-facing slopes rid themselves of snowmelt and create a warmer habitat conducive to reptiles such as skinks, blue racers and timber rattlesnakes.



Typical goat prairie on King's and Queen's Bluffs, near Winona. Photo permission granted under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License.

## Another piece of the puzzle completed

Judy Steltzner's Valley Creek project inspires others to "finish the deal"

Afton resident Judy Steltzner doesn't want any accolades for protecting her 13-acre property. She simply knew it was the right thing to do.

Judy and her late husband Larry lived in Washington County for over 30 years. They shared the concern of many of the local residents who wished to retain the rural qualities of this region and feared the encroachment of urban development taking place throughout the St. Croix River valley.

"We knew we wanted to retain the existing look of our property but we didn't know how to accomplish it" reports Judy. The Steltznors' property abutted that owned by Belwin Conservancy and they admired the Conservancy's land management and public educational programs. After discussing her objectives with the county planning commission, she was referred to the Minnesota Land Trust for assistance.

Land Trust staff recognized that the Steltzner property lay within the high-priority Valley Creek watershed. Valley Creek is an exceptional trout stream and tributary of the St. Croix River. This 13-acre addition was one of a handful of remaining properties without any type of long-term protection.

The Land Trust, along with the Belwin Conservancy, the Valley Branch Watershed District and Washington County were already making major progress towards the protection and restoration of Valley Creek. With Judy's action to convey a conservation easement, one more piece of the puzzle is now in place. In addition to the easement, Judy is working on a land management plan with the Belwin Conservancy.

In August, a celebration was held at the Belwin Conservancy's nature center. Judy's neighbors came to say thanks and to hear about the work that remains. Some of them are already following her lead.



Sarah Strommen, Judy Steltzner and Jack Daley at event celebrating Valley Creek protection efforts in August.

The Land Trust was pleased to have secured project funding from The Conservation Fund in partnership with the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Additional funding was made available by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

Currently, the organizational partners working along Valley Creek have expanded to include Trout Unlimited. Together, they are seeking additional funds to finish the remaining land protection projects and continue shoreline and upland restoration efforts.

## Lester River -- continued from page one

to see. At the very least, I wanted to protect this spot on earth to establish some sort of a beachhead that others could build on."

*"At the very least, I wanted to protect this spot on earth to establish some sort of a beachhead that others could build on."*

Completing the project took longer than expected. Old property records and title defects conspired to set the project back. But Smith and Land Trust staff persevered and the conservation easement was completed.

### Priority trout stream

Named in honor of a local pioneer, the Lester River was known as Busabika zibi by the Ojibwa, meaning "rocky canyon river". It's also a Minnesota DNR-designated trout stream. The Lester is attractive to trout like brook, brown, rainbow and Chinook because it provides the essential elements of good trout habitat including cool water temperature and a coarse stream bed. Coarse stream beds provide good places for spawning and good places for insects which the trout depend upon.

Unfortunately, the Lester has also landed on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's list of impaired waters; its high turbidity (cloudiness from suspended particles) is affecting its aquatic life.

The Lester, like other North Shore streams, is particularly vulnerable to turbidity. Snow melt and heavy spring rains rush down its "rocky canyons", depositing significant run-off increases stream velocity, burying spawning areas and reducing stream insect populations on which the trout feed. Nutrients, such as phosphorus increase algae growth, and heavy metals like mercury are ingested by fish, the bugs they eat and the birds and mammals that eat them. Keeping the lands in the watershed from becoming excessively developed is foundational to protecting the river itself.

### What's next for the Lester?

This is the second land protection project on the Lester River completed by the Land Trust. But given the rivers proximity to the City of Duluth, the need for a broader protection effort exists. Currently, that need is being met in part through the Weber Stream Restoration Initiative.

The Weber Stream Restoration Initiative, led by the Natural Resources Research Institute with help from Minnesota Sea Grant at the University of Minnesota Duluth, is a unique collaboration of projects and agencies, including the Minnesota Land Trust, flowing from the overall goal of using the best science available to keep clean and restore damaged stream systems in the Lake Superior watershed. The Lester River/Amity Creek system is the Initiative's pilot project.



The Lester River approximately 1 mile above Superior St., showing the steep clay banks that can pose a challenge with sediment.  
- photo Weber Stream Restoration Initiative