



Door County Land Trust

Thanks-Giving: What You've Helped Save
You're invited! Virtual event Nov. 19 (pg. 14)

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Connecting You to Door County's Vital Lands & Waters

New bridge construction



Door County Land Trust

Door County Land Trust protects the wild places, scenic beauty, and ecological integrity that make the peninsula and islands so special. The Land Trust is a local, member-supported, non-profit organization. It is thanks to members and donors that over 10,000 acres are now protected. Land Trust nature preserves, located throughout Door County, are open for hiking and other low-impact, non-motorized recreational activities—all at no charge to the public.

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On the Cover

By Dave Heilman

From the photographer's perspective: The image from Oak Road Nature Preserve was taken during an evening walk after an early season light snow and freeze. Oak Road is only a few miles from our home, so I walk there quite often. I was drawn to how the evening light added a warm glow to an otherwise cold subject. I am always fascinated by how the water levels at that preserve change so drastically as the seasons change.

As a generational Door County landowner and resident for nearly all of my 73 years, I have watched in dismay as more and more of Door County's treasured places have been lost to commercial development. I fully support the role the Land Trust has taken to save these places, that once lost, are gone forever. It is very important to me to do my part to save the heart of Door County for future generations.

A Letter From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Years ago I stood in a vacant lot in Indianapolis with a group of teen volunteers, shovels in hand, sweat on our brows. The lot had once been a dumping ground—concrete rubble, broken glass, forgotten things. But that day, we gathered together and planted trees. Lots of them. Oaks, maples, redbuds. We planted not just for shade or beauty, but for belonging and connection. For healing. For the idea that we could help nature reclaim space and offer something better.

I watched those teens transform as they worked. Some had never planted anything before. Some had never been thanked for good effort. But as the trees went into the ground, something else took root: pride, connection, and a sense of purpose. That day changed me. It showed me how nature can give people—especially young people—what we all need so badly: to feel strong and a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Now, as I walk along the trails of Door County, I carry that memory with me. I think about the kids I worked with, and I wonder: **Will the next generation have the same chance to be inspired by nature? To be healed by it? To fight for it?**

The truth is, we are at a tipping point. Climate change, unchecked development, and habitat loss are threatening the very places that have always been special to us. The forests, wetlands, and shorelines of Door County are not guaranteed.

They are vulnerable—and they need us.

That's why I'm asking you to take action today. **Your support of Door County Land Trust is more than a donation—it's a declaration.** A declaration that you believe in protecting wild places. That you believe future generations deserve to know the peace of a quiet forest, the thrill of spotting a rare bird, the joy of planting something that will outlive them.

Big change doesn't come from one person. It comes from many people doing small, meaningful things—together. **Your gift, your membership, your voice—it matters.**

Thank you for being part of this movement. Thank you for being a guardian of Door County's future.

With gratitude and hope,



Emily Wood
Executive Director



P.S. If you want to make a real difference for the lands and waters of Door County, you can have **TWICE** the impact right now. **All donations are being doubled** thanks to a generous matching challenge gift of \$200,000 from the Warner family.



Wheelbarrows prepped for the workday in Indianapolis, where teens helped transform a vacant lot into a tree-filled green space.



Sunrise at Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve, where awe-inspiring lands and waters are protected for future generations.

CONSERVATION FAMILY STORIES

How our community **honors** the land

"I believe that conservation is not just about protecting but about belonging. When we belong to the land, we are more likely to protect it with love, not just law."

—Emily Wood, Executive Director

"Daniel, Jillian, Leo (9), Luna (7), Lake (5), and Leaf (our husky) soak in the beauty of autumn on a colorful forest hike. Golden leaves, crisp air, and happy hearts—the perfect day to wander together under the canopy of fall." —Jillian Laurent



"Why do we honor the land? We were taught to do so. Part of our 'being' or our soul is formed from sitting at the knee of your father and mother and listening, working beside your family, and folding these lessons into your very being. When you love something, you lift it up and make it better rather than make it less than what it was when it was given to you."

—Carl Barnard, conservation easement donor

"Future generations will have no Earth to inherit if people do not get serious about taking care of it. To honor the land, we put our resources into supporting Door County Land Trust, taking care of the people who take care of the land." —Gary and Barbara Yeast, long-time supporters of DCLT

"To honor the land means to live each day with the understanding that we are a part of nature, and we must treat the land with the same love and care we would give ourselves, our children, our grandmother?"

—Lucia Hodkiewicz, staff

Oak Road Nature Preserve by Daye Heilman

"It has always been important to me to bring scenes from nature to people who may not otherwise get out to the land. I want to bring awareness of what we are losing so people are inclined to help protect the land."—Dave Heilman, volunteer photographer



"As a descendant of Ole Larsen, one of the first settlers of Ephraim, I feel a connection to and responsibility for this place. To honor the land is to steward it responsibly, to recognize that we are temporary caretakers of places that existed long before us and will continue long after."
—Ariel Pate, land donor

"If we fail to adequately respect and care for the vulnerable parts of Creation now, we threaten and undermine what we will need to continue thriving as an inextricable part of that same Creation in the future."
—Joe Mitchell, preserve steward for Bear Creek Nature Preserve, where he spotted these paw prints!



"The reason for protecting the property is because now I can go and sit in the woods and enjoy the wildlife and know the land will be the same as it is now in a hundred years."
—Ivan Bissen, Conservation Easement donor

"We are borrowing this planet from future generations. To honor the land means to treat the Earth and all its inhabitants with the greatest respect and gratitude. Never forgetting how interconnected everything is."
—Terrie Cooper, retired DCLT staff

Oak Road Nature Preserve by Dave Heilman



"There's something special about knowing our gift helps care for the places we love to walk, making us feel rooted in the land rather than just passing through."
—Rose Warner

Thanks to Rose Warner and her family, every donation made to Door County Land Trust will be doubled by a matching gift through December 31.

LAND PROTECTION



A donation of land on Washington Island

Text by **Rex Meikle** Photography by **Rex Meikle & Debbie Nelson**

Door County Land Trust is honored to announce the protection of a remarkable 20-acre property on Washington Island, donated by Christopher Nelson, who has made Washington Island a second home for nearly four decades. The land, a secluded beech and maple forest off East Side Road, is home to quiet trails, a rolling landscape, and a one-of-a-kind amphitheater-like limestone feature.

For Chris, who has visited Washington Island every year since 1987, the gift reflects a longtime love for this corner of Door County. He stated, “Most important in our minds was the desire to make a remarkable parcel of land available to the general public so that more people could come to see the untouched woodlands and the beautiful geological formations.”

Chris and his late wife first discovered Washington Island nearly forty years ago. What began as a simple getaway to a rented cabin turned into a lasting relationship. “The first cabin we stayed in was an old fishing shack that smelled exactly like one,” he recalled with a laugh. “We went to a local realtor to find other rental options, and by the end of that trip, we’d bought a place of our own.”

Since then, Chris has spent between one and five months each year on the island, now joined by his fiancée, Debbie. They are drawn by its quiet pace and sense of community. The rest of the year is spent in Maryland, where the couple teaches at St. John’s College across curriculums, guiding students through classic works of literature, philosophy, math, and science. Debbie, who has been there for over fifty years, is renowned for her profound love of French poetry.

To Chris, the island feels familiar. “The weather, the rocky shores, even the seasonality remind me of Maine.”

In the year 2000, when a 160-acre tract of undeveloped land came up for sale, divided into eight twenty-acre sections with no access roads, curiosity pulled him in. He and his late wife hiked through dense forest and uneven terrain to reach the farthest lot.

“It was a hands-and-knees hike at times,” Chris said. “We needed to see which lot we would be most interested in.”

What they discovered hidden back on one of the farthest parcels was “an amphitheater-like limestone enclosure with 10-15 foot high boulders topped with ferns, mosses, trees, and shrubs that created a natural sanctuary, beautiful to look down upon, and wonderful to access from below by a trail alongside the looming rock walls.” The scene is unlike any other place on the island. Enchanted, they purchased the property, envisioning building a home overlooking the limestone spectacle, a place where their five children and eventually twenty-two grandchildren could visit. Over time, Chris realized that distance and busy lives would make those reunions rare.

Instead, he began to see a different future for the land. He had decided that donating the land to Door County Land Trust would be the best way to continue enjoying and sharing the property



with others. Chris finished clearing and defining a couple of paths through the totally wooded property, making the rock-walled sanctuary accessible before donating.

When he brought friends to visit, they were awestruck. “Everyone who saw it reacted the same way,” he said. “They couldn’t believe something like that existed there.”

Last year, he introduced the property to staff from Door County Land Trust. With Debbie, he decided to donate the land to ensure it would remain protected forever.

“We intend to continue to spend a good bit of our time at our home on the island and to volunteer our services to help maintain the trails on the donated land. We do love working on and walking in the woodlands,” Chris said.

When they aren’t on the island, Chris and Debbie continue teaching in Annapolis, where they are preparing for retirement after their decades-long careers in education.

Chris shared how Washington Island was once his escape and place of rest, but now more than ever, he enjoys getting involved with the community. He serves on the Board of Directors for Gathering Ground, a Washington Island nonprofit devoted to sustainable farming and food education. The organization grows produce, hosts summer workshops, and provides fresh food to local food banks throughout the county.

Chris has long been a huge supporter of the fine arts scene on the Peninsula, which he stated, “is as rich as I’ve seen anywhere.” He is a regular collector of art from Edgewood Orchard Gallery, Fine Line Designs, Cappaert Contemporary Gallery, Off the Wheel Pottery, Lily Bay Pottery, and Juddville Pottery, among others.

The Nelson property has mature forest, limestone outcrops, and rolling landscape which provides habitat for mammals and migratory birds, while providing stunning geological visuals of the Niagara Escarpment.

The Nelson property will remain undeveloped, protected, and maintained by Door County Land Trust. It is a must-see for Washington Island locals, seasonals, or visitors. Make sure to visit in winter, Chris’s favorite time to enjoy the property. 🍂

Protect what you love!

Your donation will...

- ✦ Keep trails free and open to everyone. Always.
- ✦ Support research and citizen science programs.
- ✦ Provide restoration and care of sensitive lands.
- ✦ Make guided hikes free and open to everyone.

Best of all...

Your donation will protect the beauty, ecological integrity, and rural character of Door County lands and waters for all.

Give today and your
donation will be matched
dollar for dollar!

Rose Warner, and her children Seth and Lindsay, offer a matching challenge in memory of David, husband and father. The Warners' \$200,000 matching challenge gift honors David's love of Door County while encouraging others to support the protection and expansion of the wild places he cherished.

Your donation



Twice the impact

When you give by December 31st, your donation will be **DOUBLED** thanks to the Warners' matching challenge gift! Make an online donation today! Scan the QR code or visit doorcountylandtrust.org/warnerchallenge



BEAR CREEK BRIDGE

The biggest challenge while coordinating infrastructure improvements at Bear Creek Nature Preserve is “finding that sweet spot of a good visitor experience while minimizing any negative impacts to the natural resources,” says Conservation Director Jesse Koyen. He says turning a property into a preserve is “not a simple or straightforward process,” but a long and winding one—much like the new trail that will soon be open at Bear Creek Nature Preserve. A stewardship workday to complete trails and construct a boardwalk to access the new bridge will take place in November.



Photo by Dave Heilman showing the bridge construction over Bear Creek

EARNING BLISTERS FOR THE BIRDS

“Each year, millions of birds migrate along the Mississippi Flyway, and Washington Island provides an essential stopover along their route. The shrub planting we completed at the Domer-Neff Preserve will strengthen this important habitat for years to come.”

Text by **Carrie Ehrfurth** Photography by **Don Krumpus**

It took our Stewardship Team—plus 17 volunteers and three borrowed office staff—six days to complete a large restoration project on Washington Island, planting native shrubs for the benefit of migratory birds.

I was lucky enough to join the Stewardship Team and volunteers for two workdays on the island. First, 230 holes needed to be dug. So many roots and rocks—my pickaxe definitely earned its keep that day! It was hard work but satisfying to be outside working alongside such dedicated folks. I spent another day planting shrubs. I thought planting would be easier than digging—wrong! Planting shrubs so they have the best chance to survive had more steps than I realized.

As an office worker, I spend most of my days at a computer. It was a joy for me to spend those days in the sunshine on the land. Having said that, I was absolutely wiped out at the end of those two days. The experience gave me an even greater respect for the stewardship team. They work so hard without complaint, and with pure dedication to improving habitat. It's inspiring—and honestly amazing—to work with people like that.

So much thoughtful planning goes into these restoration projects, especially when they take place on Washington Island. It's far more than simply planting shrubs. It involves coordinating with the nursery, staff, and volunteers; preparing equipment; and then transporting everything—shrubs, tools, hoses, buckets, vehicles, crew, and more—across to the island.

Watching Thomas skillfully maneuver trailers onto the Washington Island Ferry and seeing Tina zip around the preserve in the Mule (utility vehicle) to deliver supplies to each planting area so we could work more efficiently—it was all genuinely impressive.

I'm incredibly proud of our Stew Team and dedicated volunteers for completing this restoration project with such care and attention to detail.

Each year, millions of birds migrate along the Mississippi Flyway, and Washington Island provides an essential stopover along their route. The shrub planting we completed at the Domer-Neff Preserve will strengthen this important habitat for years to come, providing vital energy to migratory birds. I am grateful to have been part of this meaningful work—it was well worth the blisters and backache. 🌿

Watch our video documenting the volunteer workday planting shrubs on Washington Island on our YouTube channel, [youtube.com/@DoorCountyLandTrust](https://www.youtube.com/@DoorCountyLandTrust).

1. A magnolia warbler, which relies on shrubs for food and cover during migration, including on Washington Island! 2. The author, Carrie, happy to be digging in the dirt at Domer-Neff Bird Sanctuary and Nature Preserve.
3. Tina, Jesse, Brian, Bonnie, Makaylee, Jim, Margaret, Rick, Paige, Carrie, Evy, Charles, Dan, Amy, and Maddie at the first workday.



VOLUNTEERS ON THE LAND



Spring

Krista piles brush from invasive honeysuckle into wildlife shelters at Lautenbach Woods Nature Preserve

Sue looks happy to complete a workday blazing new trails at Bear Creek Nature Preserve on a humid day!



Bluebird chicks were observed at Oak Road Nature Preserve during nest box monitoring!

Summer

Bruce (left) & Doug (right) look like they're enjoying pulling invasive purple loosestrife at Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve



Al & Teri conduct pollinator observations to understand the plant-pollinator network at the dunes of Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve



Deb looks for bumble bees amongst the flowers at Legacy Nature Preserve at Clay Banks as part of WI-DNR's Bumble Bee Brigade



Michael, Doug, Guy, Judy, Sue, Rick, Krista, Gary, Barb H and Barb R finish a shrub-planting workday at Domer-Neff Bird Sanctuary & Nature Preserve



Fall

WORKER BEE

Volunteer Spotlight: Kris Smith



1. Kris piles sticks for wildlife at Lautenbach Woods Nature Preserve, by Lucia Hodkiewicz. 2. At an aquatic discovery program at Heins Creek Nature Preserve, Kris explains how indexing macroinvertebrates helps determine water quality, by Paige Witek. 3. Kris swings a mallet above her head, working hard to remove a post from an old obstacle course in the grounds at Camp Cuesta, by Lucia Hodkiewicz.

Kris was cutting catnip in her garden when I called. Her day's plans to collect little bluestem seeds "got skunked" due to rain, but she appreciated the rain, nonetheless. Years ago, she had planted the little bluestem on her property near Hibbard's Creek in Jacksonport as part of an effort to convert a fallow field to prairie. Today, it has spread to nearly three acres, and the seeds can be used to plant new prairies.

Kris' ethos as a land steward runs deep. She extends her passion beyond her own property, attending many Door County Land Trust stewardship workdays. She maintains trails, manages invasives, plants native species, and more. "Grunt work is my specialty," Kris tells me. She is a self-proclaimed worker bee, saying, "Give me tools and tell me what to do."

Since attending her first workday in 2023, Kris has added preserve stewardship, boundary marking, Water Action Volunteer (WAV) creek monitoring, and leading hikes to her list of volunteer activities. She also became a certified Master Naturalist through the UW-Madison Extension, which requires 40 hours of volunteer work and eight hours of continued learning per year.

The Driftless Area, where Kris grew up, influenced her enjoyment of nature. Her childhood was spent outdoors "during a time when parents let their kids out in the morning with no supervision, and as long as you showed

up at dusk, it was cool." She remembers playing "army" in the cave near Ms. Dregne's horse barn and exploring the jungle-like forest.

While leading hikes at Lautenbach Woods Nature Preserve, where Kris is a Preserve Steward, she enjoys taking people "through time." She explains the geologic history of the area; how the top of the hill is the oldest point in time. As you descend, you go forward in time through glacial events which carved deeper and deeper into the land.

Kris' enthusiasm extends beyond land. As a kayaker, she often explores the shore and appreciates how preservation has an impact on water. One of her favorite areas is Bues Point, where The Nature Conservancy, the Ridges Sanctuary, and the Land Trust collectively protect thousands of acres on Lake Michigan. There are no houses along the shore, offering total solitude and a primitive vibe, "like you're away from everything" says Kris.

Kris has a deep appreciation for the fact that "Door County is a combination of circumstances that in Earth's history is never going to happen again. Like the Driftless...like the 50' dune at Bear Creek Nature Preserve." She says, "It is here, and that's it."

Door County Land Trust thanks Kris and the hundreds of other volunteers who dedicate their time to learning, teaching, researching, and sharing their passion and knowledge. Thank you! 🌿

Learn about ways you can get involved at doorcountylandtrust.org/volunteer-page

What: Thanks-Giving—What You've Helped Save
When: Wednesday, November 19 from 5:30–7:30 PM
Where: Virtual (Zoom)

At this virtual event, we'll celebrate a year of conservation success—made possible by your support of the Door County Land Trust. Hear from Executive Director Emily Wood about newly protected properties and upcoming projects, and from Community Conservation Coordinator Paige Witek about citizen science and volunteer efforts bringing our community together.



Scan to sign up!

Or sign up online:

doorcountylandtrust.org/thanks

KID'S ACTIVITY! NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT



RED
OAK
LEAF



WHAT ONES CAN YOU FIND?

How YOU make it possible to protect Door County's lands and waters




What you can do

Your gift will be used to keep Door County natural and wild, to care for threatened species that live and grow here, to protect water quality, and to build hiking trails for the public, as well as other conservation and stewardship efforts—with **twice the impact**, thanks to the Warner family.

What we do together

Since 1986, with the help of generous donors, DCLT has permanently protected and cared for over 10,000 acres of shoreline, forests, wetlands, ecologically significant wildlife habitats, and some of the most beautiful scenery in Wisconsin.

Join a community that believes...

-  Door County is like nowhere else on earth and that it is our obligation to defend and steward Door County's lands and waters...forever.
-  Healthy lands and waters improve the quality of our lives and that of future generations.
-  Well-cared for land, water, and connected native landscapes are essential to support the diversity of Door County's ecosystems.

Give today. Keep Door County wild! A gift of \$35 or more makes you a member. Mail in the included envelope, donate online, or call DCLT at **920.746.1359** to make a donation & join.



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Door County Land Trust

Protecting Door County's Exceptional Lands and Waters...Forever

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Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve by Lucia Hodkiewicz