





**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 10,425 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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**Cover Photo:** An aerial view of land in Southern Door that is anticipated to become the 16th nature preserve protected by DCLT. Story on page 6. Photo by Dan Eggert.



# A Letter From the Executive Director

Dear Reader,

You have the power to change the future.

That is a big statement, so I'll say it one more time to let it sink in: you have the power to change the future.

Today's news may have you feeling a different way, but I am here to remind you that each one of us holds the power to decide what happens next for ourselves and the things we care about.

Four decades ago, the Land Trust was just an idea in the hearts of a few people who saw Door County rapidly developing and said, "we can do something." This inspires me, and hearing from Virginia Yunker—one of the original founders of DCLT—on page 12 reminds me to never underestimate a small, committed group of people with a vision.

Today, there is still significant development pressure and less land available to save. DCLT is the only organization in the county striving to save as much land as possible before it is too late. When this task feels daunting, I think about the audacity of DCLT's original founders who chose optimism in the face of big obstacles—ones that we still face. Unchecked development, invasive species, and climate change still put pressure on our lands and waters even as funding for conservation is diminishing.

It is up to us to remain vigilant, hopeful, and determined to show up for the places we cherish.

Virginia's story reminds us that changing the world for the better often begins with a little audacity to remember our own power.

In this 40th Anniversary edition of Landings, as we celebrate four decades of conservation, you will read about the things keeping me optimistic: a new nature preserve on the horizon for Southern Door, remembering our roots with long-time supporters, revisiting recent land protection, a fresh look for DCLT's brand, and some new faces joining our team.

I am grateful to share this 40-year milestone with you. Together, we have saved land, provided access to nature, and created a conservation legacy. With a little audacity, I believe we have the power to grow this legacy for years to come.



Emily Wood  
Executive Director



PS: One of DCLT's audacious goals in our 40th year is to reach 400 new members! Help the legacy grow by inviting your friends, family, and neighbors to join our conservation community.



**the door county land trust**

**Photos:** 1. DCLT staff at a recent excursion to see newly protected land at Kellner Fen NA. 2. A happy plant giveaway attendee. 3. Ike, a reoccurring character from DCLT's past fundraising events, found in the archives. 4. Another archival photo featuring ladies on Washington Island during Folk Fest.

# Remembering Our Roots

The strength of this organization is rooted deeply in a community of people who love Door County. Thank you for sharing four decades of memories with us! Here are some highlights from the past 40 years...



The Door County Land Trustees recently elected officers for 1994. From left, Carl Scholz, treasurer; Virginia Yunker, president; Beverly Njaa, vice-president and Robert Yeomans, secretary.



"The conservation easement provides us with a lot of comfort in knowing that the wetlands, woodlands and critical habitats are preserved in perpetuity. It is a source of joy to know that the preservation of the lands is assured long into the future." —Dan Collins & Nancy Aten, conservation easement owners



A unique habitat

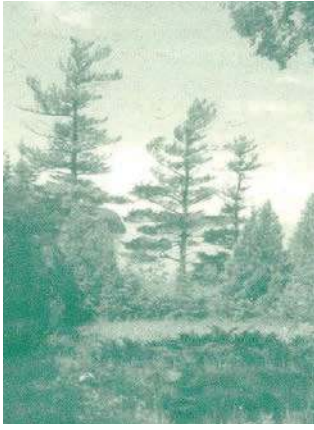


Preserving a bit of beauty, history



**The Grand View:** My childhood view high over the waters of Ellison Bay was now slated for 44 condo units. How could I ever drive past these without my heart breaking for what was lost? It's the fear of losing places like this that fueled my passion to be part of the solution. Longing to protect the childhood places and memories that shaped who I became as an adult, I couldn't bear to lose this view. Thanks to the 2008 real estate market crash, after only 8 units were built on the Grand View, the condo developer backed out of their contract and DCLT had a one time opportunity to purchase and protect it.

I am forever grateful that DCLT, in partnership with the Town of Liberty Grove embraced the challenge, and I poured my heart and soul into this project. I didn't think I could continue to live here if we couldn't make it happen. So many pieces painstakingly fell into place over the next 2 years. We received Door County's first Scenic Byway grant matched with a Knowles-Nelson State Stewardship grant and private donations and the dream was realized. Door County's most beloved view is protected forever and I feel such joy and gratitude everyday I drive by it.—Terrie Cooper, former DCLT Land Program Director



**The Clearing Conservation Easement:** I moved to Door County in 1999 to work at The Clearing, and soon learned about the Door County Land Trust's land conservation work. One day, in the early 2000s I asked a Clearing colleague, "Can you think of a reason why The Clearing shouldn't have a conservation easement?" He said he couldn't think of one. So I called Tim Stone, The Clearing's Board President at that time, asking the same question. He agreed that it was a good idea.

With Tim's and The Clearing's Board of Director's support, a conservation easement that protects 120 of The Clearing's 128 acres from development was signed in early 2006. Of all the projects, big and small, that happened at The Clearing during my 25 years there, the conservation easement is the one of which I am the most proud—the one to which I believe The Clearing's founder, Jens Jensen, who was an influential land conservationist, would give his stamp of approval.—*Michael Schneider, former Executive Director of The Clearing Folk School in Ellison Bay*



**Creating a Legacy of Land**

**Former site of cranberry and frog farms now ecological jewel**



"I am so glad that the Door County Land Trust became a strong environmentally important organization over the past 40 years. They have preserved many wildlife corridors and valuable natural places for our native creatures and the people who support them to visit. The Land Trust has a fine staff who know how to keep many parts of our beautiful county wild and healthy!"—*Charlotte Lukes, a supporter for the past 40 years*



**Preserve, protect, defend**

*Door County has seen success in protecting its unique land*

**By Deb Fitzgerald**

df@doorcountylt.org

Most visitors and residents alike have always known that Door County's draw is the natural beauty of this limestone peninsula jutting out into the vast waters of Lake Michigan.

Preserving the land for future generations has been the mission for decades of The Ridges Sanctuary in Baileys Harbor, The Nature Conservancy and the Door County Land Trust.

Each of these nonprofit organizations work to legally remove permanently from potential development the woodlands, waterscapes and rural charm that define Door County.

Between the three, roughly 9,274 acres are permanently protected on the Peninsula, either through land owner-



IT IS PERHAPS THE DEFINITIVE IMAGE of Door County that has proven successful in protecting its unique Ridges Sanctuary in Baileys Harbor, The Nature

**Setting Aside for a Green Future**



# The Next Chapter: A New Nature Preserve for Southern Door

*Written by Lucia Hodkiewicz*

**D**oor County Land Trust is pleased to share an exciting opportunity to protect 338 acres of land in Southern Door at the mouth of Kayes Creek. This project has been many years in the making and offers the chance to protect one of Green Bay’s most exceptional estuaries. Here, history and ecology overlap in fascinating accounts of this now-quiet agricultural landscape. You are invited to explore the rich history of this place—and contribute to preserving its ecological values for the future.

## The Past: An Ancient Creek

For approximately 10,000 years, a spring-fed creek has been winding its way through Southern Door and into Little Sturgeon Bay. It was formed when the glacial Green Bay Lobe retreated, leaving behind a network of underground springs that still seep and rise at the base of Brussels Hill, feeding the creek as it flows north through a series of bends, pools, and riffles.

Kayes Creek supports abundant life, being one of Green Bay’s most important fisheries. Here, walleye and northern pike spawn, trout swim, migrating birds rest and feed, and an unassuming green



**Above:** Common mergansers seen returning to Kayes Creek this spring, where they fish the open waters. Photo by Emily Wood.

dragonfly once thought to be extinct has been discovered thriving in the creek’s surrounding wetlands. Gardner Swamp Wildlife Area—a nearby 1,180-acre property protected by WDNR—is fed by this creek and is an important habitat for waterfowl.

## A Place Long Inhabited

The forested land bordering the creek extends into Little Sturgeon Bay near the site of a historic Menominee settlement. At the time, the area was known as “Chickatoek.” Historical accounts indicate that roughly 500 people lived here, including Chief Nasewaupee, for whom the nearby town is named. The Menominee fished these waters and conducted trade here. Lake Sturgeon was abundant and held deep cultural importance, while also serving as a source of food and medicine. The Menominee, Potawatomi, and Ojibwe Nations maintain enduring relationships with this region and its waters.

## Early European Settlement

In 1835, immigrants Increase and Mary Ann Claflin built a home within the area inhabited for generations by these Nations. The Claflins established a trading post in the sheltered bay and raised horses on the abundant marsh grass.

Walloon-speaking Belgian immigrants escaping the European potato blight arrived in the area in the 1850s, where it is said their hope “rapidly gave way to bitterness” upon discovering the dense Wisconsin wilderness impeding their agricultural ambitions.

## An Industrious Harbor

Forest gave way to industry through sheer determination. Businessman Freeland B. Gardner (namesake of the town of Gardner) opened a steam-powered sawmill, shipyard, lime kilns, and the county’s first grist mill (saving the Belgians a walk to Algoma) on the site of the original Claflin settlement here in 1856.



**Above:** The mouth of Kayes Creek at Little Sturgeon Bay is surrounded by agricultural fields that will be converted to native prairie and hiking trails as part of the Land Trust's process to restore 338 acres into a new nature preserve. Photo by Dan Eggert.

The wilderness surrounding the creek became, for a time, the busiest place on the peninsula. Up to 400 men were employed by Gardner during the early 1870s. For years, vessels were leaving Little Sturgeon Bay once a day during the season to bring loads of lumber and lime to rebuild Chicago after the fire of 1871. The area was so populous that they formed the county's first baseball club, the Empire Base Ball Club, which battled Sturgeon Bay's Peninsula Base Ball Club in their first game on July 3rd, 1869—losing 63 to 92.

### **The Present: A Pastoral Landscape**

19th century industrial changes eventually caused the closure of Gardner's empire. After a stint as an ice-harvesting harbor, Little Sturgeon Bay and its surrounding lands became the quiet agricultural countryside that it remains today.

The winding creek that flows out to the bay is now surrounded by patches of farmland, swamp, and forest. For some years, Kermit and Cleo Franda operated a dairy farm right next to the creek. The Land Trust recently connected with the Franda family, hoping to preserve the pastoral beauty and ecological values of their land.

## The Future: A New Nature Preserve

Today, there is an opportunity to protect this land. Fruitful discussions between Door County Land Trust and the Franda family have presented the possibility of saving their land for conservation and protecting the creek. The Land Trust is now raising money to make this project a reality.

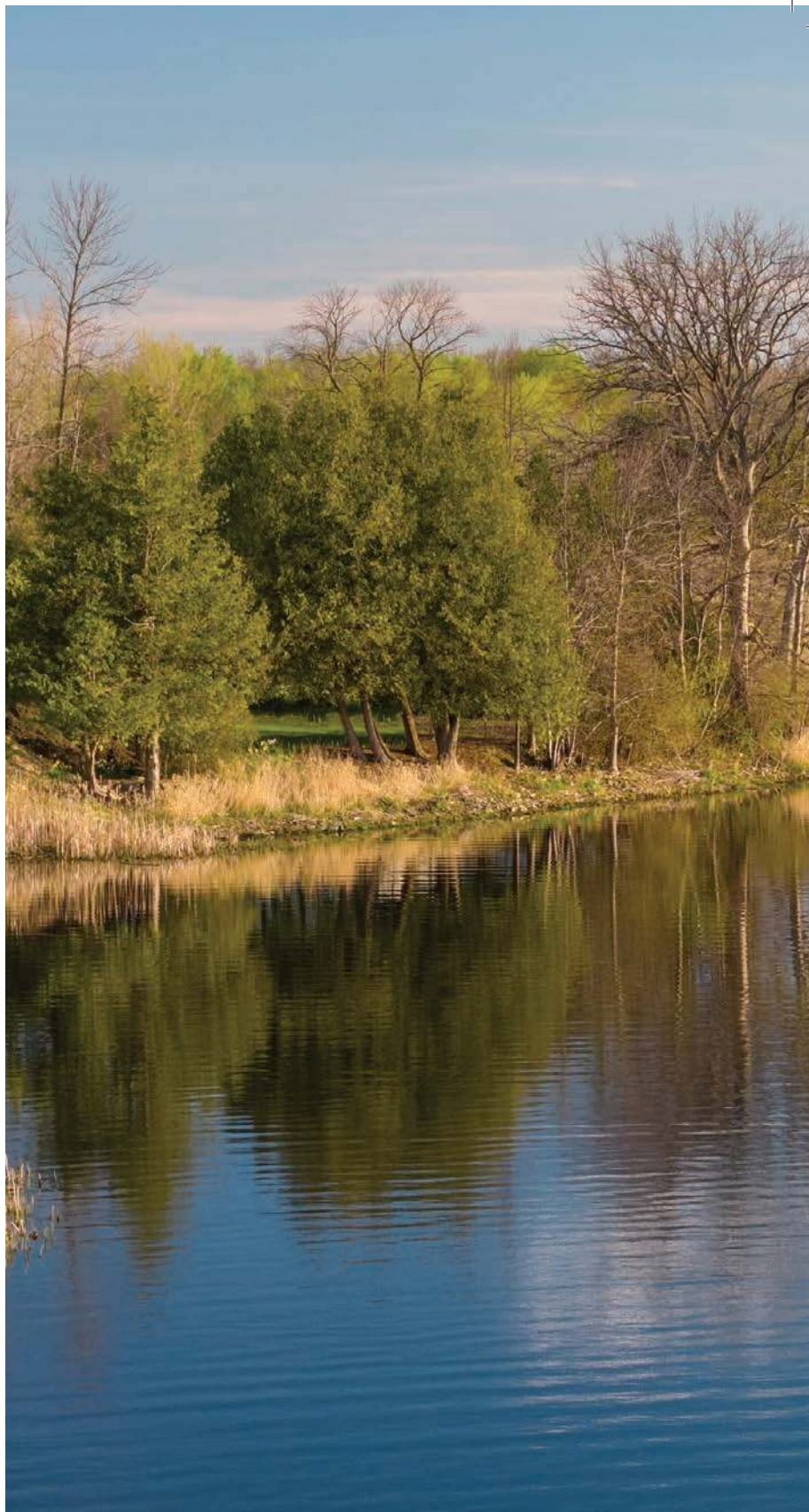
You can help write the next chapter of this storied place. By donating today, you are protecting the newest nature preserve, Little Sturgeon Bay Estuary Nature Preserve. Here, 338 acres of high-quality stream habitat, wetlands, and scenic open spaces can be saved for ecological benefit and public recreation.

## Give to the Vision


Valued habitat for trout, walleye, and bass, as well as breeding and nesting grounds for migratory and grassland birds can be saved. With your support, tilled areas can be restored back to healthy wetlands, helping protect water quality. Native prairies and nature trails can be installed to create a diverse and beautiful landscape.

Give today to make a difference in Door County. Your support will help restore agricultural fields to native habitats, protect fish populations, safeguard clean water, create new recreation opportunities, prevent future development, and preserve the stories of this exceptional place. Help protect a thriving future for this historic landscape with a donation today. 🌿

# MATCHING CHALLENGE DONATION



A \$25,000 Matching Challenge gift is provided by Thriving Earth Fund and the Wong family, honoring the memory and wisdom of Y.C. and Ruth L. Wong, and in recognition of the value of Southern Door County's natural heritage, native species and lively waters for this and future generations.



**"The intersection of the Kayes Creek watershed with the Little Sturgeon Bay Estuary supports one of the most important fish spawning areas in all the bay of Green Bay and represents a generational opportunity for the Franda family and the Door County Land Trust to protect this gem—forever!"**

*—Mark Holey, DCLT board member, retired WDNR staff and fishery biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service*

Photo by Dan Eggert

**Today is the best time to give generously, thanks to a Matching Challenge gift that will double every donation up to \$25,000. Help create a new Nature Preserve!**

Support from donors like you will make the new Little Sturgeon Estuary Nature Preserve possible. Your gift today is the most valuable source of funding for this and future conservation efforts.



# 40 Years, 40 Milestones



**6/7/1986:** Door County Land Trustees incorporates and soon protects its first easement: 113 acres at Ruth Neuman's farm.

**1996:** DCLT makes its first purchase thanks in part to a grant from the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund, protecting 57 acres and establishing Kangaroo Lake Nature Preserve. The same year, Bay Shore Blufflands Nature Preserve is established.

**1997:** Door County Land Trustees changes its name to the Door County Land Trust.



**1999: 1000 Acres Protected!**

**2002: 2,000 acres protected!**

**2004:** 3,000 acres protected, thanks in part to a record 415-acre conservation easement agreement with Ivan and JoAnn Bissen in Southern Door.

## State grant sought to preserve 183 acres on Door peninsula

Land is part of Niagara escarpment

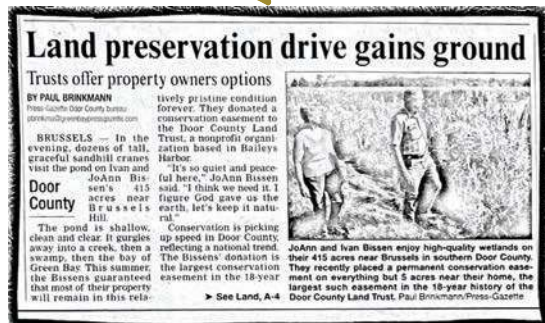
BY SCOTT HELDERBAND  
Press-Gazette/Madison Press

MADISON — State money earmarked for protecting the environment may help buy an area of scenic, undeveloped land in Door County. The Department of Natural Resources is seeking a \$200,000 grant for the Door County Land Trust to offset the cost of buying 183 acres north of Sturgeon Bay and east of the shores of Green Bay.

The money would come from the state Stewardship Program, which enables the



**2000:** 180 acres are added to Bay Shore Blufflands Nature Preserve, increasing the total acres owned to 450.



**2006: 4,000 acres protected!**

**2008:** With the successful acquisition of the 421-acre Three Springs property, the Land Trust completes the largest conservation purchase in Door County in over 41 years. The Land Trust also purchases 90 acres and 3,000 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline in the Town of Clay Banks.



## 'Save canal property' petitions submitted

**2009:** Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve is protected with a 332-acre purchase, saving the area from potentially becoming a power plant.

**2010:** The entire northern half of Washington Island's only inland lake is preserved, creating Little Lake Nature Preserve.



**2012:** Grand View Scenic Overlook in Ellison Bay is protected, preserving the iconic view forever! DCLT celebrates 6,000 acres protected.



**2013:** Heins Creek Nature Preserve opens to the public.

**2015:** The Land Trust surpasses 7,000 acres protected with the addition of 40 acres at the headwaters of Three Springs Creek which flows through the Three Springs Nature Preserve and completes protection of an additional 250 acres at the Chambers Island Nature Preserve.

**2016:** DCLT is awarded the seal of accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance—a recognition of adherence to the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

**2019:** Over 500 supporters help protect Pebble Beach.



**2020:** During a year of uncertainty, many people escape to nature by hiking DCLT's nature preserves.

**2022:** Land on Chambers Island previously used for a retreat center becomes part of the Chambers Island Nature Preserve, protecting an important strip of land between Lake Mackaysee and Green Bay.

**2023:** Kellner Fen Natural Area protection grows with a purchase of 63 acres, made possible by a significant donation from Xan and John Fischer of Sturgeon Bay.



**2023:** Bear Creek Nature Preserve is protected, becoming the 16th nature preserve.

**2023:** The Land Trust receives a donation of 10 acres in the Coffey Swamp State Natural Area on Washington Island.

**2023:** Oak Bluff Natural Area near Brussels is protected, saving one of the largest remaining undeveloped bay shore parcels in the area, including 150-foot-tall bluffs.

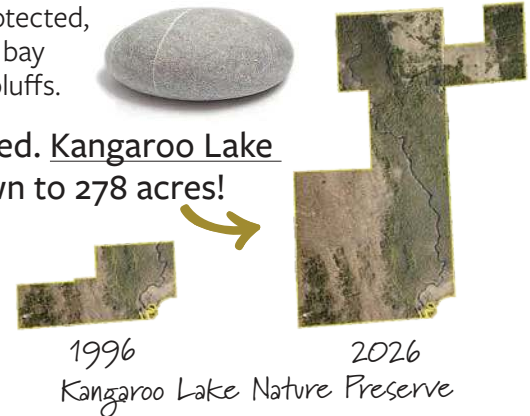


**2024:** Mike Schmitz protects 589' of shoreline in Ellison Bay with a conservation easement.

**2024:** Camp Cuesta is protected. Kangaroo Lake Nature Preserve has now grown to 278 acres!

**2025:** Three Springs Nature Preserve expands to 565 acres with a 40-acre purchase.

**2024:** Two conservation easements donated by the Barnard family protect a 5-generation family farmland and a working forest in Sevastopol.



**2025:** A small but mighty 4-acre parcel is purchased to connect preserved land in the Kellner Fen Natural Area.

**2025:** 10,000 acres protected! Jim Gearen's conservation easement in Ellison Bay helped reach this milestone, protecting 100' tall bluffs along Green Bay's shore.

**2025:** Carolyn Hitzeman donates a 20-acre conservation easement in Ellison Bay, protecting a forest and lovingly-maintained meadow.



**2025:** Rebecca Barnard protects 18 acres of forested Niagara Escarpment in Sevastopol with a conservation easement.

**2025:** Ariel Pate donates 40 acres near Oak Road Nature Preserve, protecting a wild landscape of forests and wetlands.

**2025:** Nelson Woodland Natural Area is established on Washington Island with a land donation, preserving unique rock features from an ancient shoreline.

**2025:** A purchase of 20 acres on Washington Island protects land in the Big and Little Marsh State Natural Area of Washington Island.

**2025:** Carl J. "Buzz" and Stephany Madsen protect 38 acres in Sister Bay with a conservation easement, ensuring the longevity of a forest planted by Buzz's father.



**2026:** 149 acres are protected to conserve a significant ridge-and-swale landscape in Kellner Fen Natural Area.



**2025:** Domer-Neff Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary expands with the purchase of 9.5 acres, maintaining a little more of "what the island used to be."

**2026:** 82 acres are purchased, expanding a protection area established by Ariel Pate's land donation and creating Headwaters of Whitefish Bay Natural Area.

**2025:** Completion of a new bridge, boardwalk, and trail expansion at Bear Creek Nature Preserve.

**2026:** New logo and branding updates are completed in celebration of 40 years of conservation!



**2026:** 13 acres are protected with a conservation easement in the Town of Liberty Grove, benefitting the health of the headwaters of Three Springs.

## Looking Back

Remembering four decades of conservation with one of DCLT's original founders, Virginia Yunker



**Land trusts urged  
for Door County**  
New group seeks way to curb development

**Above:** The very first property protected by DCLT was Ruth Neuman's farm in Jacksonport. 115 acres were protected forever with the organization's first conservation easement. **Inset:** DCLT announcement in the newspaper from July 29th, 1986.

**"W**e're going to Washington DC!" Virginia Yunker recalls her husband, Bill, saying in 1986. There, they attended the first meeting of land trusts from across the country.

As members of Door County's Environmental Council, they were concerned by a development boom that threatened the peninsula's rare and fragile ecosystem. At this rally, they learned about the concept of land trusts as a means for ecological protection, and established Door County Land Trust (then called Door County Land Trustees) on June 7th, 1986. Forty years later, Virginia speaks fondly of this decision which shaped the future of the peninsula—and her life.

During the summer of '86, a handful of concerned citizens joined the Door County Land Trustees, including Roy Lukes, Jim Ingwerson, Carl Shultz, and attorney Bill O'Connor. They gathered around kitchen tables and spent many weekend hours organizing a path towards protecting Door County. In November of that year, the Land Trustees protected Ruth Neuman's 115-acre farm with the organization's first conservation easement.

Virginia, who is nearly 90 years old today, has witnessed the growth of the grassroots organization with amazement. "It's like giving birth to a baby," said Virginia. "I had no idea what it would become. I never dreamt it would go so far—from Washington Island all the way down to Southern Door." Virginia recalled the organization's 30th Annual Gathering

when she looked out at the hundreds of attendees and became emotional, crying as she remembered the days when they could hardly get ten people to show up for a meeting.

Virginia describes her connection to Door County as a sort of religious experience, feeling deeply grateful to have lived in a place surrounded by nature. “This is heaven,” she said. That spiritual connection motivated her to be persistent through those early years when people were leery to get involved.

As community understanding grew, so did DCLT’s community of support. Local supporters and businesses like the Blacksmith Inn in Bailey’s Harbor were instrumental to the organization’s early development.

In 1995, the first two nature preserves—Kangaroo Lake Nature Preserve and Bay Shore Blufflands Nature Preserve—were established, thanks to a grant from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. In 1996, the first executive director, Tom Davis, was hired on a salary of \$5,000 donated by a member who recognized the efforts of Virginia and other volunteers working hard to steer the ship.

DCLT’s early leaders volunteered their time—time that would have otherwise been spent sailing, in Virginia’s case—to build a strong foundation for the organization.

DCLT is now the leading land conservation organization in Door County, accredited by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, and has earned a reputation as one of the Midwest’s premier conservation organizations. Looking back, Virginia said, “I am glad we did what we did then. Now we have great memories and friendships that have lasted forty years.”

What would she say to young people wanting to get involved in environmental protection work today?

Virginia’s response is, “Do any small thing you can do. Follow what inspires you, and it will inspire others. Don’t try to look at the whole problem at once; just look at a small piece. Do what you can do while you can do it, because there is going to be a day when you no longer can.” Forty years and more than 10,000 protected acres later, DCLT’s conservation legacy is a testament to this wisdom. 🌿

*Written by Lucia Hodkiewicz*



**Above:** Early photograph of a work crew at Bay Shore Blufflands Nature Preserve.

**“Do what you can do  
while you can do it,  
because there is going  
to be a day when you  
no longer can.”**

*—Virginia Yunker*



**Above:** Virginia speaking at DCLT’s 2016 Annual Gathering, celebrating 30 years of conservation.

# Announcements

## Welcome to the team!



Our team is growing! This spring, the Land Trust welcomed five new staff members. Jenny, Brendan, Wynnton, Megan, and Kira bring positive attitudes and great capabilities to the mission. Take a moment to learn a fun fact about each new team member, and help make them feel welcome if you see them at events or in the field!



I can name & identify all countries in the world

Field Crew Lead  
Brendan



I like to paint, do ceramics, & make collages

Seasonal Restoration Assistant  
Megan



Database Manager  
Jenny

My favorite native Wisconsin plant is a cottonwood tree



Seasonal Restoration Assistant  
Wynnton

If I were a Wisconsin landscape I'd be Boreal Forest



Seasonal Stewardship Assistant  
Kira

I grew up in Southern Door



## You're Invited to the Annual Gathering!

Friday, August 21<sup>st</sup> from 2-5pm  
Held at Frank E. Murphy Park Pasture



Good wine, good food, & good people.

We will be celebrating 40 years of conservation & fundraising for the new Little Sturgeon Estuary Nature Preserve! All are welcome.

RSVP



# 40 Incredible Years Protecting Door County. You make it possible. Thank You!



## Your membership...

- Keeps trails free & open to everyone. Always.
- Provides restoration and care of sensitive lands.
- Supports citizen science and research programs.
- Makes guided hikes free and open to everyone.

## Thank you to our business sponsors!

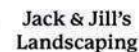
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Zero Sum Door County



# DOOR COUNTY LAND TRUST

PO Box 65, Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235  
www.DoorCountyLandTrust.org  
(920) 746-1359

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- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship



## Join the quiet side.

Explore Door County's quietest trails  
and be part of something bigger.

Become a member today.



Stiefel Conservation Easement at Mud Lake