

Door County Land Trust: Restoring Habitat and Building Partnerships

Summary: Door County Land Trust has protected more than 4,000 acres since 1986 and has a strong commitment to using land management to protect these lands' ecological functions. One of the land trust's greatest contributions to the Door County peninsula is the land stewardship partnerships it has formed.

Regional Setting: Door County, lying northeast of Green Bay, Wisconsin, is a limestone peninsula that extends into Lake Michigan. The peninsula supports an unusual diversity of habitats and a number of endemic and rare species. Offshore islands, rocky cliffs, sandy beaches, marshy bays and conifer forests interspersed with productive farmlands provide habitat for a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

Land Trust Mission: To permanently protect lands that contribute significantly to the scenic beauty, open space and ecological integrity of Door County.

Service Area: Door County in northeastern Wisconsin.

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Biodiversity Values

Door County, which lies on a 75-mile-long peninsula surrounded by the waters of Green Bay to the west and Lake Michigan to the east, is a critical natural resource for Wisconsin. The limestone that forms the backbone of the peninsula and its associated offshore islands is part of the Niagara Escarpment. It supports many unusual species and habitats, including calcareous wetlands, coastal ridge and swale forests, and beaches, dunes and boreal forest that are unique to the Great Lakes shoreline. Islands off the peninsula provide critical habitat for rare species and colony-nesting birds. A recently



Photo above: Bay Shore Blufflands Preserve.

Inset: *Arethusa bulbosa* (dragon's mouth).



completed inventory of Door County found more than 180 at-risk species and natural communities.

Conservation Strategy

Door County Land Trust reviewed its land stewardship program in 2001 and identified a number of needs, including:

- Managing and/or monitoring an ever-increasing portfolio of conservation lands (fee and conservation easement);
- Building the land trust's dedicated core of volunteers to assist with growing land management responsibilities;
- Addressing the alarming spread of invasive species that threaten the ecological integrity of critical natural areas, displace native vegetation and destroy wildlife habitat on land trust properties and private lands; and
- Raising the public's awareness of the region's unique natural systems and the importance of protecting those areas.

Two new organizations resulted from the review, including the informal Door Stewardship Alliance, a partnership project with the Door County office of The Nature Conservancy, and the formally organized Door County Invasive Species Team, which is comprised of agencies, nonprofit partners, businesses and landowners. Five years later, both entities are flourishing and working towards a goal of land stewardship excellence across the Door County peninsula.

Partnerships and Funding

Door Stewardship Alliance

In 2001, faced with an increasing land stewardship workload on its 4,000 acres of protected land and after years of cooperative land conservation efforts, Door County Land Trust joined forces with the local office of The Nature Conservancy to tackle land stewardship projects. By pooling volunteers and equipment, the organizations sought to leverage resources in order to accomplish land management responsibilities on permanently protected properties. The land trust surveyed its volunteer work force to ensure their willingness to merge land stewardship efforts with The Nature Conservancy. Following an enthusiastic response, the informally organized Door Stewardship Alliance began joint efforts and now holds weekly work parties from April through October. Ample volunteer support has allowed the land trust to add a new land stewardship goal: to restore biological diversity on protected lands. Since its inception, the Door Stewardship Alliance averages 25 work parties per season. In 2005, more than 600 volunteer hours were contributed to the land trust and The Nature Conservancy properties.

Recent grants from Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation and private funders allowed the Door Stewardship Alliance to eradicate invasive species on two of the land trust's most ecologically important preserves. The alliance purchased much-needed equipment (brush cutter, propane torches and hand tools) to reduce common and invasive glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus spp.*), common reed grass (*Phragmites australis*) and invasive honeysuckles (*Lonicera spp.*). It also provided training to the volunteer team for the effort. Funding also supported a number of invasive plant educational workshops for private landowners and municipal officials. The project is being replicated in communities across Door County.

Door County Invasive Species Team

Door County Land Trust was a founding member of the Door County Invasive Species Team, a voluntary, formal alliance of businesses, nonprofit groups, agencies, educational institutions and private landowners. The team is committed to preventing, minimizing and eradicating non-native plant species, education and sustaining diverse ecosystems within Door County.

Invasive Species Team activities include recruiting town coordinators to identify, map and monitor invasive species populations, developing strategies to eradicate invasive species, and organizing work parties and demonstration events. The team currently works primarily on protected lands but the long-term goal is to join with private landowners on identification, control and removal of invasive species. The team hopes to emulate the management efforts and successes of the Door Stewardship Alliance, but with private landowners.

Forming Good Partnerships

Door County Land Trust received the 2004 "Land Trust of the Year Award" from Gathering Waters Conservancy, a coalition of more than 50 Wisconsin land trusts. The award was in part because of the land trust's successful efforts to raise the public's awareness of Door County's unique natural systems, and for building effective land stewardship partnerships.

Door County Land Trust's recommendations for successful partnerships include:

1. **Relationships matter.** Be clear, both internally and with new partners, about why you are forming a partnership and what you want to accomplish.
2. **Consider documenting partnerships.** Some partnerships benefit from memoranda of agreement.
3. **Pool resources to share the load.** Partners should determine what resources they can contribute, then combine forces to reach shared goals. Joint funding proposals and sharing staff and volunteers moves projects forward.
4. **Be dependable.** Respond to email inquiries, return phone calls, attend scheduled meetings and keep your promises. Successful partnerships are built through honest, responsive and equitable interaction.

For More Information

- **The Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Chapter:** www.nature.org/wisconsin
- **Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation:** www.wisconservation.org
- **Door County Invasive Species Team:** <http://map.co.door.wi.us/swcd/Invasive/about.htm>
- **Gathering Waters Conservancy:** www.gatheringwaters.org



Photo: Door Stewardship Alliance volunteers remove invasive bush honeysuckle at Bay Shore Blufflands Preserve. Honeysuckle is killing a stand of native cherry trees.