

FRIENDS OF Pheasant Branch

Our Mission

To restore, preserve and promote the value of conservancy lands and other habitats in the Pheasant Branch watershed for today and tomorrow.

WE DID IT!

Highland Way Protection and Reforestation Project Funded!

On Dec. 7, 2005, after 3 years of effort, and with great community support, the Friends of Pheasant Branch exercised the option to purchase the 19.27 acre Highland Way land from the Middleton Cross Plains Area School District. The acreage, which will become part of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, provides significant environmental benefits and a wonderful community open space for everyone to enjoy. Conservation and reforestation of the land will protect the water quality of Lake Mendota and the Pheasant Branch Creek and Marsh.



Friends members celebrate: (L to R) Susan Gruber, Jim O'Brien, Emil Haney, & Sally Kefer

When FOPB heard the parcel was going to be sold in December of 2002, our board discussed the implications of high density urban development at this location. We concluded that water and air quality would deteriorate, and that

traffic on Century Avenue would increase. FOPB approached the school district to request that they consider maintaining the parcel as a green space by starting a school forest program. With its budget constrained and the need for new schools in the southwest part of the district intensifying, the School Board decided instead to sell this land.

Computer models revealed that high density residential development would send two million gallons of stormwater runoff each year into the Conservancy

... See *We Did It*, p. 4

How the Funds Were Raised . . .

Despite an outpouring of support, a gap of \$200,000 remained at the deadline

When the Friends decided to try purchasing the Highland Way property from the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, the effort was widely thought to be hopeless. \$3 million, the fair market price, seemed beyond the reach of a local environmental group. However, thanks to the dedication of many Friends members and private donors, along with the willingness of our city, county, and state governments and several foundations to commit substantial funds to the purchase, the goal was met just a day before the deadline.

The funding campaign involved an intensive effort by the Board of the Friends of Pheasant Branch, their advisors, and many community members. The Board met often to consider strategy and to ponder proposals from President Brian Butler and from Project leader and fellow member . . . See *How the funds were raised*, p. 5

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A Note from the Board President



Brian Butler

Dear Friends:

2005 was a watershed year (pardon the expression) for the Friends. It's our tenth anniversary, and not since our inception—as an ad hoc group protesting the construction of sewer mains through the Conservancy—have our activities engaged so many participants and received such public attention.

What most captured people's imaginations was the Highland Way Project. On December 7 we exercised our option to purchase 19.27 acres to add to the Conservancy, at a price of \$3 million. This was a long shot project for a small, all-volunteer organization like ours, and our success was problematic right up to the deadline for exercising the option. Our Board of Directors and our Advisors persisted through all the hard work and emotional ups and downs. Sally Keefer deserves special credit for conceiving and fiercely pursuing the project.

The purchase is scheduled to close on January 31, 2006. We are about \$175,000 short of the \$3 million; whatever gap remains at closing we will borrow on a two-year note. Please keep your checkbooks at the ready. We want to pay off the note as quickly as possible so that we can facilitate the preservation of other sensitive lands in the watershed. These will probably be less ambitious undertakings, and I hope less dramatic.

While the Highland Way Project got the spotlight, we carried on our educational and restoration activities at the usual high level. 2005 also saw the publication of Jan Coombs' excellent booklet, Geology, Cultural History, and Ecology of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy and Watershed.

I hope to see you at our annual meeting and dinner on January 19.

Sincerely,



Brian Butler, President

A Powerline to Nowhere?

During the fall migration two bird watchers came across a dead bird in the conservancy. The bird, a sora rail, was lying in the grass alongside the gravel lane from the north parking lot on Pheasant Branch Road. A power line runs along the lane, and the bird had evidently stuck the line in flight.

The line, which once provided electricity to the Frederick farm, is no longer needed, and the Dane County Parks Department has decided to have it removed. This decision is in line with MG&E policy, which endorses the removal of power lines no longer in use. Park officials estimate that the line will be gone in six months or sooner.

Birds have enough obstacles to deal with. The removal of the line will reduce that number by one.

Friends of Pheasant Branch Officers

President

Brian Butler

Vice President

Emil Haney

Secretary

John Mitchell

Treasurer

Hagen Hedfield

Board Members

*Tim Aggen, Tom Bernthal, Tanya Bjork,
Andrea Gargas, Janet Kane, Trudy Laffer,
Lou Maher, Jim O'Brien, Gail Shea, Dan
Stapay*

Newsletter Layout & Design

Jeffrey Potter

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*WI DNR, USFWS, Mike McDowell,
Andy Adams*

Send Newsletter Ideas to:

office@pheasantbranch.org

Don't Forget Our Website!

www.pheasantbranch.org

Help Wanted!

The Friends of Pheasant Branch are seeking an experienced bookkeeper to develop and maintain an accounting system for the organization.

Professional experience and familiarity with Quickbooks or other accounting software and non-profits a plus.

**For information - call
Treasurer Hagen Hedfield**

831-2265

City of Middleton Updates Conservancy Lands Plan

Last year, the City of Middleton's Conservancy Lands Committee (CLC) contracted Schreiber Anderson Associates to draft an updated Conservancy Lands Plan to include an inventory of existing conservancy areas and management efforts, strategies for implementing recommended trail standards, management techniques, staffing, and other policies over the next five years. In June, the CLC held a public hearing on a draft copy of the Plan and solicited written comments to be considered in drafting the final document. At least three FOPB Board members submitted comments on the Plan. At its November meeting, the CLC recommended adoption of the final revised Plan and sent it to the Common Council for approval.

The City's first Park and Open Space Plan, devised by its Park, Recreation and Forestry Commission and adopted in 1966, identified the need to protect the Pheasant Branch Conservancy

(PBC). In 1972, the Common Council approved an updated version of the Park and Open Space Plan, which established guidelines for managing the newly created Pheasant Branch Nature Preserve (precursor to the PBC) and recommended increasing its size. To oversee the protection of its streams, lakefront, ponds and marshes, the City also created the Water Resources Management Commission, which oversaw the Pheasant Branch Marsh Environmental Study and Acquisition Plan in 1973 (updated in 1982). This Plan outlined a strategy for expanding and maintaining the PBC with local, state and federal funding. The CLC was created in 1998 to oversee the planning and management of the City's conservancy lands.

An important feature of the current Plan is the inclusion of goals and objectives to guide the CLC and Public



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Lands Manager in maintaining and improving the City's conservancy lands. While these are very ambitious for current levels of funding and staffing, they embrace principles widely shared by members of the FOPB, other citizen support groups and the general public. Indeed, the Plan acknowledges the critical role of volunteer groups and external funding in carrying out conservancy projects. Of course those of us who have battled invasive species in the PBC and stumped for funds to preserve the Highland Way parcel have our weak moments when we ask: "Will we ever catch up, not to mention get ahead?"



Middleton's Fire Department to Help the Friends with Spring Burn

Prescribed burns are a necessary part of oak savanna and prairie restoration. Our efforts to restore the oak savanna on Dane County's hill at the north end of Pheasant Branch Conservancy have been slowed considerably by our inability to burn the site often enough.

Weather conditions have often been unfavorable on the days when burns were scheduled and staff, equipment, and funding limitations restrict the county park department's ability to

conduct as many burns as required. Our Friends volunteer group has conducted several burns in the savanna as well, but not enough to do the job.

This past fall we contacted the Middleton Fire Department, whose volunteers conduct prescribed prairie fires in the City of Middleton and the townships of Middleton, Springfield, and Westport. After reviewing the county site, they agreed to do an annual savanna burn and scheduled one in November. As luck would have it, the weather didn't cooperate and a snow storm soon afterwards closed the "burn season" for the year. The Fire Department has promised to burn for us in the spring and we look forward to their help with great anticipation.

Highland Way



This important sense of community, added to the success of this project that

Support from Elected Officials Crucial . . .

Almost \$2 million of the total purchase price for Highland Way came from three governments—the State, Dane County, and the City of Middleton.

The state share of \$774,000 came from the Stewardship Fund administered by the DNR. Elected officials were not specifically involved in the Highland Way purchase award; however, the Friends of Pheasant Branch, along with earlier recipients of these funds, must applaud the wisdom of the Governor and Legislature for establishing the fund several years ago.

The Dane County Board, by a vote of 17-15, allocated a last minute increase of \$91,000 over and above the \$774,000 recommended by the Conservation Fund Grant Advisory Committee. Supervisor Mark Opitz represented his district well in persuading a majority of his colleagues to accept this appeal from the Friends. Fiscal conser-

vatives such as Ruth Ann Schoer, Dennis O’Laughlin, and Eileen Bruske-witz joined more liberal members such as Dave DeFelice in backing the increased allocation.

County Executive Kathleen Falk played an important role in urging votes from several supervisors who hesitated to exceed the standard set by the Stewardship grant.

The Middleton City Council had to wrestle with the Friends’ request too. Mayor Doug Zwank saw the funding as a bridge to good relations between the City and the Friends. While the entire council endorsed the annual budgets in which the Highland Way appropriation was included, Finance Committee members Jim Wexler, Andy Lewis, and Mark Horn provided specific arguments for the city’s action, as did Howard Teal as chair of the Conser-

vancy Lands Committee. Wexler also distributed a memo to his council colleagues arguing for an additional \$100,000 grant shortly before the announcement of the last minute grant from the Madison Community Foundation made this allocation moot.

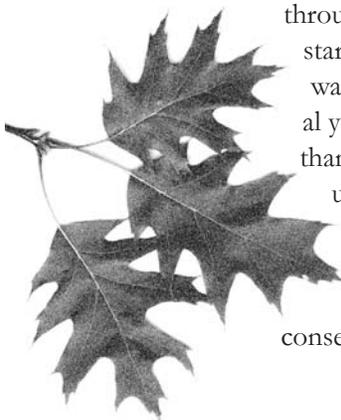
The Friends of Pheasant Branch appreciate the support of the DNR, the County Board, and the Middleton City Council. In a period of tight budgets, the votes cast in favor of our proposal take on heightened significance. We also appreciate the fine reporting and editorial support from our local paper, the Middleton Times-Tribune.

We did it . . .

continued from p. 1 . . .

and Lake Mendota. Further modeling showed that planting the acreage in trees would improve air quality and counter the trend toward more frequent ozone alert days in Dane County.

Local citizens have gained access to the Conservancy through this parcel for years. Hundreds started using the limestone trail near the water tower when it was installed several years ago. Many walked no farther than the 19.27 acres and others continued on into the new conservancy trails. The Friends started planning for the purchase of the acreage and permanent protection as conservancy land.



Now that the City master plan for the trails is complete and a 4 mile loop exists in the conservancy, more people from Dane County and elsewhere visit this property. The Highland Way land gives nearby residents a much needed place to walk, exercise, paint, take nature photographs, visit and share news of community events. This important sense of community, added to the environmental protection, has made the success of this project that much more significant for the Friends, our funding partners and the many citizens and businesses who have contributed to this project. We look forward to working with the community on a reforestation effort over the next couple of years.

We look forward with the community to reforestation over the next couple of years.
Visit us on www.pheasantbranch.org to stay on top of the Highland Way and other FOPI projects.

Project Success!



Photo by: Andy Adams

to environmental protection, has made the at much more significant.

How the funds were raised continued from p. 1 . . .

Sally Kefer. Several advisors kept close tabs on the deliberations and secured substantial donations from supporters.

Substantial grants first came from the John C. Bock Foundation, Dane County, and the City of Middleton. In July of 2004, a community fundraiser resulted in many private donations, as well as a \$30,000 contribution from MG&E. Eventually the campaign moved into a higher gear with several second year grant applications to government sources. The Bock Foundation's award came to \$200,000, and a State Stewardship grant from the DNR provided \$774,000. Both Dane County and the City of Middleton reached even further into their coffers to move the campaign ahead.

Presented with a proposal to increase its initial grant to match that of the DNR, the County Board responded by exceeding that goal and granting the Friends a total allocation of \$865,000. Approached this year a second time, the Middleton City Council unanimously agreed to add \$150,000 to an identical sum allocated the previous year. With this \$300,000 in-hand, the Friends were able to withdraw a final appeal to the City for an additional \$100,000. This happened when the Madison Community Foundation came through with a \$100,000 grant several hours before the Council meeting.

Smaller donations both from businesses and individuals were important both in their own right and as indications to governments and foundations of strong local support for the

project. A complete list of donations from businesses, civic groups, and individuals will appear soon on our website, www.pheasantbranch.org.

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pntbranch.org
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How the funds were raised . . .

Despite donations such as the \$3,500 from Middleton High School's Ecology Club dinner, a gap of \$200,000 remained at the deadline. With expert advice from Chris Hughes, the attorney who contributed above and beyond the call of duty to this project, the Board secured the agreement of ten people, some of them from its own ranks, to guarantee a bridge loan in that amount. This represents a considerable liability for the guarantors, many of whom have already made substantial donations to the purchase fund. In order to eliminate this debt, the Friends are continuing the fundraising effort. With additional contributions from businesses and individuals, the debt has been reduced to about \$175,000.

The President, Project Leader, and Board express their profound thanks to everyone who made this effort a successful one. They also appeal to the community to make further contributions towards eliminating the debt incurred to complete the purchase.

Highland Way Protection Program Sources of Funds

Government Organizations

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	\$ 774,000
Dane County	\$ 865,000
City of Middleton	\$ 300,000
Total – Government Organizations	\$ 1,939,000

Private Foundations

Madison Community Foundation	\$ 100,000
John C. Bock Foundation	\$ 200,000
ANONYMOUS Foundation	\$ 250,000
The Evjue Foundation	\$ 20,000
Total – Private Foundations	\$ 570,000

Private Businesses and Individuals

Contribution for Earnest Payment to MC-PASD	\$ 1,000
Contributions Required to Complement \$200,000 Loan	\$ 290,000
Total – Private Businesses and Individuals	\$ 291,000

Loans

The Conservation Fund	\$ 200,000
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Total Resources Raised	\$ 3,000,000
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Kids for the Earth Welcome Developments in the Conservancy!

Autumn Visits:

Fall 2005 was a successful season for classrooms in the conservancy. Thanks to this year's River Planning Grant, fourteen classes enjoyed field trips and unique outdoor lessons all the way up to early November. Some classes helped the cause by collecting prairie seeds that will "spread" to new sites for native prairies elsewhere!

Support for Educational Programs:

Classroom/Naturalist Matching Program

There are still funds available to match naturalists with classrooms in the district. Remember, the value of environmental topics and themes is not limited to the warm seasons! If you are a teacher, consider having a naturalist come into your school over the winter. This is a wonderful way to keep the awareness of our precious conservancy resource fresh all year. Teachers and naturalists interested in getting involved with this matching program should contact Colleen Robinson Klug at 231-6035 or colleen_fopb@charter.net soon to reserve their space!

2006 Professional Development Series

The upcoming Kids for the Earth Professional Development Series is gearing up to be the best yet! Community professionals will join us to share information and inspiration on many aspects of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy. Also, expect field trips and hands-on lesson training with the ever-expanding Kids for the Earth Educator's Guide and brand new Lesson Kits (see below)! Professional development and graduate credits are available. Sessions are from 4 to 7 pm on



Board member Emil Haney talks about the big spring to Kromery Middle School 7th graders on their autumn field trip to the Conservancy

March 9, 16, 23 and April 6. All area educators are welcome, with preference given to staff in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. Reserve your space now through Colleen Robinson Klug (contact information above) or Nancy Wyngaard at 829-9028 or nancyw@mcpasd.k12.wi.us.

Kids for the Earth Lesson Kits

NEW THIS YEAR are the Kids for the Earth Educator's Guide LESSON KITS! In easy to handle plastic storage bins, these kits come complete with a supplies check off sheet and all of the materials necessary for a successful lesson. Make wildlife, water, geology and more come to life with ease in your classroom. The lesson kits are available now and FREE of charge to all district teachers! Reserve a kit for a week and have it delivered to you by calling Amy Callies at Park Elementary, 829-9250, or amyc@mcpasd.k12.wi.us.

*The 2006 Professional Development Series will introduce and incorporate these kits so teachers can get familiar with them, ask questions and share ideas for working with them.

Why do Great Horned Owls breed in the dead of winter?

Breeding seasons are always geared so that rearing chicks coincides with the peak availability of food. This is not always when prey is most numerous but when it is able to be caught in increased numbers. Late winter and early spring are times when mice and other small mammals are particularly vulnerable to owls. Great horned owls are the earliest nesters, but they don't build their own nests. They use the abandoned nests of hawks, eagles, herons, and squirrels; tree dens and cavities may also be used.

By late January or February, the female is sitting on two or three eggs, motionless as the winter winds and snows blow her feathers. She usually remains on the nest, keeping the

eggs warm, waiting for her mate to bring her food. Incubation lasts about a month, so that chicks emerge one at a time several days apart as early as late February through March. After the young hatch, the adults must spend several months or more bringing food to the young at the nest and teaching them to fly and catch prey. This timing allows the young to hatch and mature just in time for the emergence of easy prey — baby rabbits and other young mammals. This also gives the relatively slow growing young more time to learn how to hunt more efficiently before the following winter. Great horned owls are opportunistic feeders and tend to eat an amazing variety of prey including rabbits, foxes, porcupines, skunks, other owls, hawks, crows, feral cats, mice and rats.

Don't Miss Our Winter Field Trips!

Friday, February 3, 1:30 - 3:00 pm: Wisconsin's Wetlands: Biodiversity and Threats **Field Trip at Pheasant Branch Conservancy**

Conservation and protection of wetland biodiversity and functional values will require collaboration among researchers, professionals, and conservationists. This Wisconsin Wetlands Association conference will convene members of the wetland community from around the Great Lakes region and contribute to a growing collaboration for protecting and conserving our state's wetland heritage. Friends of Pheasant Branch will be co-hosting one of the conference field trips.

Conference participants will visit the Conservancy where field trip leaders Randy Hunt, Tom Bernthal and Pat Trochlell will discuss the diversity of wetland communities on site and threats to the ongoing health of these communities from adjacent land use activities. This trip is scheduled for Friday, February 3. A bus carrying conference participants will leave Monona Terrace at 1:30 p.m., arriving about 2:00 at the Dane County parking lot on Pheasant Branch Road (1-1/4 miles north of Century Ave.). *For more detailed information call WWA at 250-9971 or visit: www.wiscwetlands.org/2006forum.htm.*

Saturday, March 11, 1:00 - 3:00 pm: End of Winter in the Woods **Field Trip at Pheasant Branch Conservancy**

Tired of sitting inside all winter? Join Pat Trochlell and Tom Bernthal on Saturday, March 11 to see what's happening in the Conservancy the second last weekend in winter. This is a time of transition, with winter beginning to give way to spring. The weather is always capable of surprises at this time of year, but we'll be prepared for following tracks in the snow or mud and looking for signs of spring around the corner.

For birds we have returning Sandhill Cranes and Red-winged Blackbirds joining those winter stalwarts—chickadees, juncos, woodpeckers, and owls. We might spot a White-throated Sparrow or Brown Creeper, a Winter Wren or Eastern Meadowlark. If tracking conditions are good, we can follow the tracks of mice, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons; maybe even muskrats and mink near the water.

We will follow the new trail from the Century Ave. entrance at Branch St. to the new bridge at the opening of the marsh. We will meet at the Branch Street Retreat parking lot. Be sure to park as close to the street as possible, not near the building. And dress appropriately for the weather! *If you have questions, please contact Tom Bernthal at 266-3033.*



Photo by: Mike McDowell

Garlic Mustard Eradication Work Planned - Volunteers needed for work parties April through May

Volunteers will be needed once again this spring to help eradicate garlic mustard from the conservancy. An invasive plant that crowds out woodland wildflowers, garlic mustard spreads easily by water, boots, and bike tires. Not surprisingly, it can be seen spreading in Pheasant Branch along the creek banks, trails, storm water drains, and floodplains.

Recent efforts at eradication have made a huge difference. A combination of late fall chemical treatment and hand pulling has substantially improved some of the most infested areas.

Other areas, especially in the creek corridor, need a great deal of work. We have the opportunity to get control of a menace that destroys woodland habitats by stealing sunlight from its neighbors and poisoning the spoil.

Garlic mustard work parties will begin on Saturday, April 15, 2006 and continue each Saturday morning from 9:00 a.m. to noon through the end of May. Contact Mark Horn (836-0054) or Emil Haney (827-5419) for additional information.