



Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Semi Annual Newsletter

Volume 10, Issue 1

Celebrating 20 Years 1987 - 2007

Spring 2008

"For the wise management of the land and water resources in the Black Earth Creek Watershed"

BECWA'S Goals

- To protect, conserve, support and advocate for the wise, long-term management of the physical, biological, environmental, cultural and historical resources that constitute the heritage and future of the Black Earth Watershed.
- To foster and encourage citizen and locally-based stewardship among the many members of the watershed community.
- To provide a forum for civil and informed discussion of issues and problems in the watershed.

Board of Directors

Barbara Borns, President
Greg Hyer, Vice-President
Jeffrey Postle, Secretary
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Richard Anderson
Hugh Anderson
Steve Born
Pamela Bosben
Harriet Irwin
Carl Jones, Jr.
Barbara Peckarsky
Wayne Rounds

BECWA Board Meetings

BECWA Board Meetings are open to the public. Check our website for the next scheduled meeting.

Watershed Coordinator:

Briana Burns
608-767-1475
brianaburns@yahoo.com

www.BECWA.org

Lake Marion Dam Controversy

By August 1, 2008 the Village of Mazomanie must notify the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) of its decision on how it plans to repair or remediate the current dam structure on the Black Earth Creek that supports Lake Marion. Right now three options are being discussed: repairing the current dam structure, replacing the dam with a new structure or removing the dam completely. There are pro's and con's of each option, not the least of which is determining the future of Lake Marion, now seen by many as a valuable resource to the area. Below is an historical perspective by Bob Dodsworth, President of the Mazomanie Historical Society, of how the lake was created initially.

BECWA is planning to feature "A PRIMER ON LAKE MARION" for our spring public event to be held on Monday, May 12 at Lake Marion. Professor Emily Stanley, UW-Madison Professor of Limnology and Marine Studies, will be the main speaker at 6:30 with others from WDNR, Dane County, Mazomanie Historical Society as well as Warren Myers from Town and Country Engineering present to answer questions.* (In case of inclement weather, we will move to the Mazomanie Community Center at 7 PM—9 Brodhead St.) We hope this "PRIMER" will help us all to understand better the history, hydrology and options for the future of this important resource.

*At 6 PM there will be an optional walk to the dam with an explanation of how it works by Warren Myers, Village Engineer and Konny Margovsky, DNR engineer.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Lake Marion: great recreational, scenic, historic importance for the Village of Mazomanie

Robert O. Dodsworth, President, Mazomanie Historical Society

When the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad designed, named, and platted the Village of Mazomanie in 1855, one objective the railroad had in locating a village at this specific place was to build a powerful mill as a focus for future commerce. They saw that Black Earth Creek and the topography at the foot of School Section Bluff in Section Sixteen could be made to provide a large impoundment of water.

Their plan called for the base course of the railroad track to be raised. A dam was constructed on the creek side of the tracks with a tunnel under the tracks which allowed a flow of water to fill the area on the opposite side of the tracks to the same height as the impoundment. This body of water created between the railroad right-of-way and School Section Bluff was named Lake Marion.

The lake occupied over forty acres. The largest portion of the lake was known as the upper mill pond and the area immediately to the east of the mill was known as the lower mill pond. There was sufficient water available to keep the mill's turbines running throughout the winter months. In May 1950, high water breached the earthen portion of the dam. The mill owners responded by totally electrifying its operation, ending the use of water driven turbines.

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Lake Marion Dam, continued from page 1

The Wisconsin Conservation Commission then obtained the water rights to the lake and divided it into three parts, abandoning the lower mill pond altogether. The configuration was for fish rearing purposes.

While under operation by the commission, the breached portion was restored and control points were located so that the level of each area could be regulated. The lake was also drained so that it could be deepened and, after some difficulties, it was successfully refilled. In August 1984 the property and water rights were turned over to the village.

Now under village jurisdiction, Lake Marion is available for a variety of recreational purposes. Residents are able to enjoy picnicking, skating, walking, bird watching, fishing, and model regatta meets.

MHS Students Design Gardens for Rosemary Garfoot Library

Students in Debra Weitzel and Mike Duren's environmental studies classes partnered with the Garfoot library in Cross Plains to convert lawn to native garden. Students learned the principles of native landscape design from Lisa Johnson, professor from the Master Gardener program at UW-Extension. They received a lesson in water features at The Bruce Company along with pricing information for the project's budget.

Fourteen teams of students designed the gardens with prairie plants, paths, and water features. Students wrote grant requests to cover construction costs and native lawn management plans for the Village of Cross Plains. Beth Ann Hamilton and Jane Cummings Carlson from the library landscape committee viewed the presentations and helped Weitzel and Duren choose the five best plans.

These plans were on display February 20 at an open house for Cross Plains residents to view. One design was chosen to be implemented in the spring. The Bruce Company staff will work with students in the construction of the water feature. Middleton High School Ecology Club and the library are each donating \$500 to the project.



Richard Anderson

Welcome New BECWA Board Members

Hello Everyone,

I'm Harriet Irwin, new member of the board of BECWA. First let me say that I love water, in all forms - lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, snow, rain. Being a Wisconsin resident is the best because we have water.

Lake Mendota was my year-round "playground" growing up and although I now live in the Driftless Area I spend lots of time at my spring, Ryan Creek and the Wisconsin River. Being outside every day is very important to me.

All of my adult life was spent teaching, the last 20 years or so for UW-Baraboo, teaching biology, botany and ecology courses. I have been a naturalist for the UW Arboretum, Madison schools, Trees for Tomorrow in the summer, and Elderhostel through Northland College. Presently I am an assistant dog trainer with Dogs Best Friend Training, but we really are teaching people, not their dogs.

Perhaps my strengths for the board might include working with school groups, teacher workshops, seniors, providing information and understanding of this precious resource we have. Also I could try to do an inventory of the plants and animals that utilize the creek environment.

Sorry, I don't fish.

Harriet

Hugh Anderson Joins BECWA Board

Hugh Anderson is our most recent new board member. He is a resident of the Town of Berry who has lived in the Black Earth Creek watershed for over 20 years. He and his wife own 84 acres that drain into a wetland adjacent to Brewery Creek.

Hugh is an attorney and a graduate of UW Madison's Water Resources Management program. He says he has followed BECWA's activities over the years and has been favorably impressed with its goals and accomplishments. He remarks that his business has taken him to every state of the U.S and that there is no doubt in his mind that Western Dane County is a national treasure. He sees BECWA as working to maintain and enhance Western Dane's water resources and would like to help with that work.

Natural Heritage Land Trust in the Black Earth Creek Valley

Kate Wipperman, Natural Heritage Land Trust

Since 2001 the Natural Heritage Land Trust has helped protect 624 acres in the Black Earth Creek valley and hopes to work with interested landowners to conserve many more. The Land Trust's land protection success stories include:

- working with Ken and Charleen Zander, Dane County, the DNR, and the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to protect 215 acres of their high quality farmland with a private conservation easement;
- working with Linus and Donna Schoepp, Dane County, the DNR, and the Wetlands Reserve Program to purchase 62 acres along Garfoot Creek for a wildlife area, which has been turned over to the DNR and is open to the public for hunting, fishing, and hiking;
- working with Lee Swanson, Wayne Esser, and Mike and Mary Mirkes to purchase 53 acres of bluff land with a DNR grant, and turning it over to the Village of Cross Plains for a conservancy park, which is open to the public for hiking, bird watching, and enjoying scenic views of the valley; and
- working with Neil Swanson, Karen Bolles, and Ken Swanson, Dane County, and the DNR to purchase a 294-acre natural resource area along Black Earth Creek and turning it over to Dane County for a natural resource area open to the public for hiking, bird watching, fishing, and cross-country skiing.

In addition, the Land Trust has been striving to meet landowners in the Black Earth Creek valley (between Middleton and Mazomanie) to let them know about conservation easements as another option for planning the future of their land. The Black Earth State Bank has graciously allowed Kate Wipperman to use space in its basement for several open house sessions for any landowners who have questions about the Land Trust, what we do, or conservation easements. Twelve landowners have

taken advantage of this one-on-one time. The Land Trust is also happy to meet with landowners at other times; fourteen landowners have met with the Land Trust at other times.

In the future, the Land Trust hopes to continue to work with landowners, businesses, and communities in the Black Earth Creek valley to protect more of what makes the valley a unique place—its high quality farmland, the trout stream, the scenic vistas, and easy access to recreation. The Land Trust will also help to provide volunteers who partner with Trout Unlimited and the DNR to manage vegetation along the creek this spring.

Some of the benefits of the Land Trust's land protection work in the Black Earth Creek valley:

- Helping provide public lands for fishing, hiking, etc,
- Protecting irreplaceable productive farmlands and helping farmers get compensated for protecting lands,
- Helping build strong, healthy communities that maintain their unique identities,
- Helping maintain water quantity and quality through land protection, and
- Protecting the scenic, rural character of the valley.



Educators Making a Difference in the BEC Watershed

Pete Jopke

Spring creek clean-ups, water quality monitoring, land use planning exercises, native planting and assisting resource managers with stream studies are just a few of the activities in which Middleton High School Environmental Science students in Deb Weitzel and Mike Duren's classes have participated. Deb and Mike "team" teach 2 Environmental Studies courses that introduce students to topics such as history, ethics, politics, biology and watershed management. As Mike tells his students, "You can hug all the trees you want, but you still need photosynthesis for the trees to grow." In many instances, the Black Earth Creek Watershed serves as the classroom where the students engage in real life examples. 2008 will be a busy year for the students as they are currently writing grants and developing various designs for construction of native prairie gardens at the Rosemary Garfoot Library in Cross Plains. Cross Plains community members will select the best plan with the construction to begin later this spring.

Deb has been teaching for 31 years and Mike for 16. Each has a slightly different educational background, with Deb having her undergraduate degree in science and two masters' degrees in education and natural resources, while Mike's emphasis was on sociology. Their different educational backgrounds and their personal interests in the outdoors have helped them develop the environmental curriculum into a very popular elective.

Mike cites his early years working and living in Yellowstone Park and countless hours in pursuit of trout in Black Earth Creek as cornerstones for piquing his interest in environmental education. Deb, whose father was in the Air Force, traveled frequently in her youth. However, it wasn't

until she was hired to teach Environmental Science that she realized this was her passion, and it has continued to grow from there.

As for the students, their educational experience goes far beyond the classroom and the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Deb has led field trips to Costa Rica to study the rainforests and to the mountains of Colorado. Annual trips to the Trout Lake Research Center in Northern Wisconsin also afford Advanced Placement Environmental students an opportunity to study limnology and literally get their feet wet. Through the years, their students have logged over 10,000 hours of volunteer work on conservation related initiatives.

For many of the students, the environmental classes are their first exposure to natural resource management and the complex issues associated with it. Over 15 years of the BEC Watershed being used as a teaching tool, there have been noticeable changes to the creek. Mike and Deb have seen land use, traffic patterns, fish kills, flooding, and many other factors affect the integrity of the stream. One thing they agree on is that the overall appreciation for Black Earth Creek is stronger than ever. Support from local governments and recognition that the "creek cannot be ignored," are two reasons why. Deb and Mike also agree that the commitment of BECWA has had a major influence in providing a forum for disseminating information to watershed residents and creating an awareness of this important resource.

Both teachers have been recognized for their outstanding efforts by numerous organizations including BECWA, the Rock River Coalition, the University of Wisconsin Extension, Wisconsin DNR, Trout

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Headed to Sea World for the 2007 Environmental Excellence Award

(L to R) Front Row: Megan McCrumb, Natalie Reece, Deb Weitzel, Katie Wipfli, Liz Just (representing Middleton High School)

(L to R) Back Row: Guerdon Coombs, Mike Duren, Tom Bernthal, Janet Kane (Guerdon, Tom and Janet represent the Friends of Pheasant Branch Creek)

Educators- continued from page 4

Unlimited and the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. In 2007, Deb and Mike's Environmental Studies program received the 2007 Sea World Environmental Excellence Award with the Friends of Pheasant Branch Creek. Also, this past November, Deb was chosen from 45 environmental educators to receive the first Richard C. Bartlett Education Award in Virginia Beach, VA. Richard Bartlett, for whom the award is named, stated, "Positive solutions to achieve a sustainable planet begin in the classroom with teachers like Debra Weitzel, who are true leaders in education."

Giving kids an appreciation of and fostering a commitment to the conservation of natural resources seems obvious to Deb and Mike. But they both know that it's difficult to achieve without also forming a knowledge base and appreciation of how the natural ecosystem works. Teachers like Deb and Mike give of themselves out of a desire to see positive outcomes in both students and natural resources alike. As far as they're concerned, it's a win-win situation all the way around.



Deer Hunting in Wisconsin Quiz

1. What is currently the largest age cohort of hunters in Wisconsin?
 - a) 20-25
 - b) 30-35
 - c) 45-50
 2. What was the top violation hunters were charged with in recent years?
 - a) Feeding wild animals
 - b) Transporting a loaded gun
 - c) Illegal use of bait?
- (BECW is found largely in the SW Deer Management Unit)*
3. What was the average deer density/square mile in 2006 ?
 - a) 55 deer per square mile
 - b) 80 deer per square mile
 - c) 105 deer per square mile
 4. What was the 2006 Buck Harvest per square mile in this same area?
 - a) 4.5 deer
 - b) 6.2 deer
 - c) 9.8 deer

(Answers found on back page)



UW-Madison Student Examines Development Issues in Town of Cross Plains

Maggie Donaldson, UW-Madison Freshman

In Fall of 2007, Maggie Donaldson contacted BECWA to help her identify a project within the Black Earth Creek Watershed that she could study for a class at UW-Madison. Maggie was raised in the Town of Vermont and has a keen interest in environmental issues. She decided to focus on a proposed development in the Town of Cross Plains. The following is a summary of her conclusions based on interviews conducted with key persons in the Town.

After hearing the opinions of many people involved with and affected by land use decisions, it is obvious that there are still diverse viewpoints pertaining to land development and environmental protection, as in 1996 when Howard Bellman's report was completed. However, it seems there is a strong majority of people opposed to developing considerable amounts of land in the Town of Cross Plains. Rationale varies from watershed protection to resisting the loss of rural character, and many hold the opinion that the Town of Cross Plains is something special, and that the natural environment and farming traditions are worth preserving.

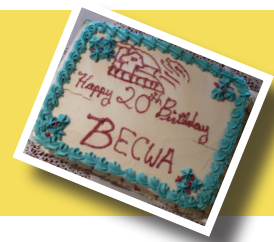
In terms of coming to a consensus on these issues of development and conservation, the town obviously still has a long way to go. Nevertheless, there is a substantial contingent of people willing to work towards coming to a conclusion that is in the best interests of the town. It is crucial that the public be involved with both the comprehensive planning process as well as any amendments to the current land use plan so the decision reflects the accurate opinion of the town as a whole. It is the responsibility of the Town Board and the Planning Commission to involve the public, and also the responsibility of the public to involve themselves in decisions that will directly affect them.

Now that there is a deadline to develop the comprehensive plan by 2010, there seems to be more motivation within the community to push towards reaching land use and environmental conservation agreements than there was when Howard Bellman did his report in 1996. The Town of Cross Plains does have the potential to compromise on issues of development and the environment, but it will take time and effort. Before it can come to a consensus, the town must make a decision on where its true values lie.



Celebrating 20 Years!

1987 - 2007



Barbara Borns
BECWA President



Denny Caneff
River Alliance



Steve Born
BECWA Founder



Matt Frank
DNR Secretary



Patty & Mike
McDougal



BECWA Awardees



Front Row:

Mindy Habecker, Scott Harpold, Louise Klopp, Carla Wright, Kate Wipperman, Barbara Borns, Pam Bosben, Nate Timm, and Pete Jopke.

Back Row:

Pat Sutter, Kurt Welke, Steve Born, Beth Hamilton, and Gene Schoohs

Awardees not pictured: Mike Duren and Debra Weitzel, Mike Schultz and Gerry Goth

A Note From BECWA President Barbara Borns

Good thing our 20th anniversary on October 3 was such a happy event! It provided me with a collection of warm memories to help assuage this long, cold, snowy winter. Thanks to all who attended and all who helped make it such a success. Special thanks to Steve Horn for photos of the evening many of which you will find in this newsletter.

Being an optimist at heart, I believe spring will finally arrive and when it does there will be a variety of activities to welcome the new season. As we move into April, our annual Stream Clean Up will occur on April 19. We will be teaming up with Trout Unlimited as well as local schools and volunteers to fan out across the length of the watershed to remove detritus accumulated over the winter. On May 3 we will join the Cross Plains Lion's Club in the Trout Days celebration at the green space on Main Street in Cross Plains with our BECWA display. On May 10, BECWA will be a co-sponsor of Family Fishing Day at Lake Marion.

Just two days later on Monday May 12 BECWA will sponsor a "PRIMER ON LAKE MARION." This event will feature historic and hydrologic aspects of the lake and will feature Dr. Emily Stanley, UW-Madison Professor of Limnology and Marine Studies. She will discuss the pros and cons of millponds and the dams that create them. See story on front page and join us at 6:30 PM at Lake Marion. There will be an optional walk to the dam at 6:00 PM. In case of bad weather meet at 7PM at the Mazomanie Community Center.

Randy Hunt from the USGS reports that his BEC watershed-modeling project is nearing completion. Delays were caused by their decision to use a new model instead of melding together two older ones. Randy estimates that the final product will be ready this summer.

Two BECWA board members, Porter Martin and John Mulligan have resigned due to other obligations. We thank them for their service. Harriet Irwin and Hugh Anderson have joined the board. Welcome to them both. Greg Hyer has agreed to accept the position of Vice President from Porter Martin.

Please remember to renew your BECWA membership if you have not already done so. We do depend on your financial support to provide the activities and services you enjoy in the watershed.

News From Dane County Parks

Upcoming Work in the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Laura Guyer, Dane County Parks, Land and Water Resources Department

Dane County and the US Fish & Wildlife Service are partnering to restore and enhance wetlands on the Sunnyside Farm purchase. Dane County will be reviewing these plans with the Town of Middleton this spring. Ditches draining areas near Black Earth Creek on the south side of Hwy 14 will be filled, resulting in the creation of 3 small ponds and a higher water table in surrounding soil. The hydrologic change will support wetland plant communities rather than the disturbance vegetation that currently occupies the site. Ponded water as well as the wetland plant communities will provide habitat for a more diverse wildlife community. Insects, amphibians and birds will be primary beneficiaries of the restoration project.

Fields currently planted in alfalfa east of the wetland area will not be disturbed by the project. However, we are working with the cropper to delay mowing the alfalfa, allowing nesting birds opportunity to complete hatching and early chick-rearing.

Friends of Black Earth Creek can volunteer in several ways. Volunteers can help seed the area, remove invasive species, and inventory and monitor the development of plant and wildlife communities. Volunteers can contact Doris Rusch at 224-3762 or rusch@co.dane.wi.us.



Black Earth Creek Update

Kurt I. Welke, Dane County Fisheries Manager - DNR

At the 20th anniversary celebration of BECWA, Louise Klopp read an early account of the landscape that visitors to the Black Earth-Cross Plains area saw in the 1840's. She described a verdant grassed plain punctuated with intermittently spaced oak savannahs.

In 2007, Wisconsin DNR Operations crews worked systematically between Cross Plains and Black Earth at returning the stream corridor to a grassy condition on 5 parcels under fee ownership or easement agreement. The work was done in order to re-establish public access to the stream and re-set the ecological clock away from its current woody state. Each property had aged and undergone succession. Heavy growths of box elder, cedar, buckthorn, honeysuckle, maple and other undesirable ground cover needed to be removed, burned or chipped, or chemically treated. The area also needed to be re-seeded to encourage a new cover type.

Starting with excavators, the largest stream side trees were downed and removed. Crews then typically use a FECON machine – a rotary, grinding drum, mounted on a bobcat skid steer to fell and destroy the woody understory growth. Problem vegetation was treated with herbicide and the newly cleared areas reseeded with grasses. Firebreaks were established along the perimeter of each parcel. Additionally, rock protection was placed in areas showing bank erosion and channel widening. In all, over 13,000 feet of stream bank were worked on, including 2+ miles of boundary perimeters and a 3 acre stand of maple saplings. The long-term objective is to revert each parcel to

a predominantly grassed character that can be maintained by routine spring burning.

DNR crews enjoyed excellent support from the SW Wisconsin Trout Unlimited (TU) chapter on three Saturday work days near Salmo Pond. Additionally, partners from the Natural Heritage Land Trust and Friends of the Cross Plains Conservancy lent helping hands.

Work will continue in 2008 with burning of brush piles, touch-up herbicide application and seeding/mowing to encourage the grassy plain of years past.



Richard Anderson



Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

c/o Barbara Borns
9580 Union Valley Road
Black Earth, WI 53515

www.BECWA.org

✓ **Mark your Calendar** ✓

April 19 Annual Stream Clean Up Day
May 3 Trout Days
May 10 Family Fishing Day
May 12 Primer on Lake Marion

See Director's Note on page 6 for details.

Answers to the Deer Hunting Quiz:

1. C 45-50
2. C Illegal baiting
3. A 55 deer per square mile
4. B 6.2 deer per square mile

Join BECWA Today!

Become part of a dedicated community of people who recognize this gem. Please lend your support to protecting this outstanding creek which runs through the heart of our community!

Your membership will support BECWA's:

- Educational Forums
- Annual Earth Day Creek Clean-Up
- *Thinking Like a Watershed*, our twice annual newsletter

Membership Levels:

Watershed Patron \$35 _____ YES! I will volunteer my time. _____

Household \$25 _____

Basic \$15 _____

* All donations are tax-deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Fill out this form and mail it with your check to:

BECWA - Treasurer David Lucey
7952 County Hwy K
Cross Plains, WI 53528

Questions? Call Watershed Coordinator Briana Burns

608-767-1475 or email at brianaburns@yahoo.com

Visit our websites : www.BECWA.org

www.madison.com/communities/becwa