



# Oak Leaves

Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy — December 2022

*To protect and restore field, forest and natural habitat along the lower St. Croix River*

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## President's Message

by Deb Murphy

When I think of Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, past and present, I think of a mosaic - a beautiful piece of art made up of many small colorful pieces. The word mosaic also refers to the process of making it. Similarly, Standing Cedars is a beautiful place that became a reality, and continues to exist, because of the work and contributions of many different people.

The founders of Standing Cedars set up the framework, raised the money, wrote the grants, established the conservation easements, procured the legal documents, and created the Standing Cedars Community Land Trust.

The Wisconsin Stewardship Program contributed grant money to help purchase Engelwood, the first and largest parcel of 1,100 acres.

Donors, past and present, helped to purchase Standing Cedars' lands and help to restore and maintain them today. Some of you have donated money, some have donated land, and others have donated items. Thank you for your generosity.

We have wonderful volunteers who help out on work days, and do many other things for Standing Cedars. Volunteers cut trees and brush, pick seeds, mow, snow plow, set the xc ski tracks, work on land restoration and maintenance, maintain the bluebird houses, organize the hunting season, do clerical and technical work, create maps, help put the newsletter together, and more. Some volunteers have been helping out since the beginning of Standing Cedars, over 25 years ago. We are deeply appreciative of all you do, and have done, for Standing Cedars.

And finally, there are the board members - past and present. Your guidance has allowed Standing Cedars to follow its mission to preserve, protect & restore, field, forest and natural habitat along the lower St. Croix River for the benefit of the general public and the community. Thank you for your time and commitment.

And look at what we have built together! Like a mosaic, the pieces came together, and are still coming together, to create a spectacular place for the community, and the plants and animals that live there or pass through.

Thank you to everyone who has been a supporter of Standing Cedars and we hope that you will continue to support Standing Cedars in the future.



## River Road Farm Crawl

In May, Standing Cedars participated in the 2nd annual River Road Community Farm Crawl. We had an information table at the Engelwood parking lot. Along with the table, we also had a ten-foot, hand-built, elm tree shaped story booth - built by local artist and Standing Cedars board member, David Aichinger. The story booth had a phone and digital recording device in it for guests to record a story about nature. It was fun to talk to those who visited, sharing with them the beautiful hiking trails and the mission of Standing Cedars.



bumble bee nest was the most interesting to me, as a nest of this species has not been described in any scientific literature since 1966. The nest was located in a tussock of grass which was likely woven together by a small mammal in the previous year. It also seemed to be a relatively small colony, as there were never many bees seen around the nest. We planned to uncover the nest at the end of the season but found it had failed by late July. I suspect the wax cells and pollen stores were likely eaten by a small mammal and the nest was then abandoned by the bees afterwards. Both the half-black and black-and-gold bumble bee nests survived to the end of the season.



## Nesting Bumble Bees at Buffalo Skull

by Chan Dolan, University of Minnesota Graduate Student

Hello! My name is Chan Dolan and I am a Graduate Researcher in the Cariveau Native Bee Lab of the University of Minnesota Entomology Department. My research is focused on observing and documenting bumble bee nesting habitat in the Upper Midwest. In the summer of 2022, we surveyed for bumble bee nests in the forests and dry prairie of Buffalo Skull.

Similar to the honey bee, bumble bees are eusocial insects with a queen who founds a colony and produces workers who visit flowers to collect pollen and nectar. In the spring, queen bumble bees emerge from winter hibernation and search for a place to nest and establish her colony. This is usually in an abandoned rodent burrow underground or under grass tussocks made by a small mammal on the ground. However, bumble bee nests are extremely difficult to find, meaning we don't have a strong understanding of how different species nest or the habitats they nest in.

In 2022, we found three nests of three different species of bumble bees at Buffalo Skull:

- Black-and-gold bumble bee (*Bombus auricomus*)
- Half-black bumble bee (*Bombus vagans*)
- Northern amber bumble bee (*Bombus borealis*)

All three nests were found in the dry prairie, with the half-black and black-and-gold bumble bee nests being located in underground tunnels. The northern amber

Lastly, I observed a rare bumble bee at Buffalo Skull named the indiscriminate cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus insularis*; subgenus *Psithyrus*). While this bee is relatively common in the Western US, it is rarely documented in the Midwest. This species is a parasite of other bumble bees, meaning it invades the nest of another bumble bee to steal resources, lay eggs, and raise young. While this sounds destructive, the presence of parasites like this bumble bee are actually an indicator of a healthy bumble bee community. Parasites are reliant on their hosts to survive, so without a healthy bumble bee population this unique species would likely not survive.

We plan to survey for bumble bee nests again in 2023! If you have any questions about my research or bumble bees in general, you can contact me at [dolan334@umn.edu](mailto:dolan334@umn.edu).



## Welcome New Board Members

This year Ed Dike and Dick Burrows joined the board.

**Dick Burrows** is a long-time volunteer and past board member. He organizes the hunting program at Standing Cedars and is on the Land Management Committee. He is a man of many hats, and we are glad to have him back on the board.

**Ed Dike** grew up in St Paul. Living in a military family provided for both traveling the world, and maintaining a connection to the St Croix River Valley; Camping with Boy Scouts at the Beaver Valley cabin, skiing at Engelwood, and more recently exploring the lands of Standing Cedars.

Since retiring he has been volunteering with both the scout camp, and Standing Cedars so that others may enjoy opportunities to experience these unique areas.

Leaving the board this year was Dan Guenther. Thank you, Dan for your dedication and for all of the work you did, and continue to do, on behalf of Standing Cedars.



## Give Big Day

A Big THANK YOU to all who donated to Standing Cedars during this year's St. Croix Valley Give Big Day in April. We raised \$1,937 in donations.

## Kiosk Repairs

Thank you to Dick, Don & Sean Burrows who did repair work at some of the kiosks this summer. History note – Sean built the kiosks at Buffalo Skull, Tewksbury & Brown for his Boy Scout Eagle Project.



## South Engelwood Parking Lot Upgrade

There will be a lot less mud in the south Engelwood parking lot next spring. With the help of some donations (Thank You), we were able to make repairs and add new gravel. And a sincere "Thank You" to neighbors and friends who helped pull cars out of the mud last spring! The new gravel was definitely needed.



# Land Management Recap

by Alex Bouthilet

2022 was another productive year for accomplishing our land management goals at Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy. Once again, we spent most of our volunteer workdays clearing invasive brush, such as Buckthorn, from our remnant oak savanna areas, mostly within the Buffalo Skull unit. These are very rare and special ecosystems that are becoming even rarer without management.

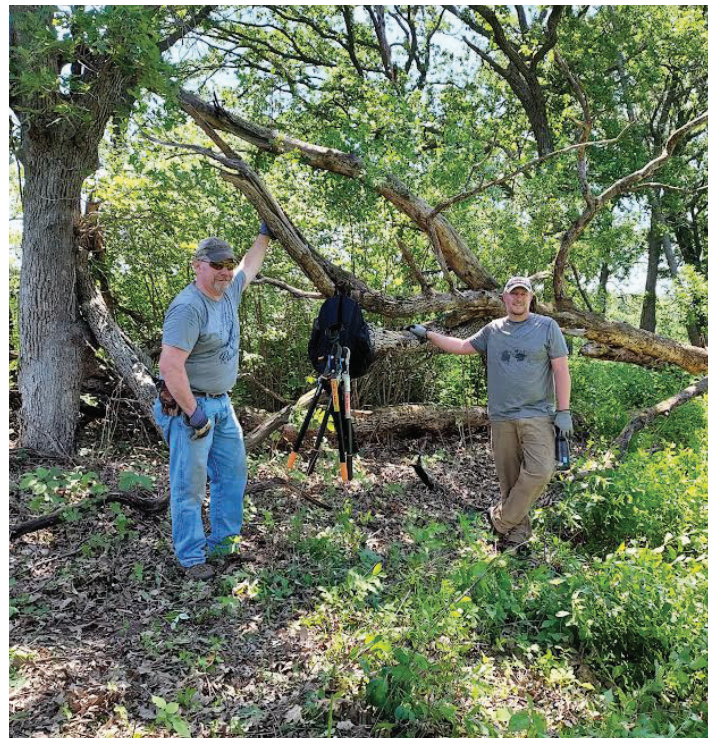


According to the Wisconsin DNR, “Intact examples of oak savanna vegetation are now so rare that less than 500 acres are thought to exist in a state similar to Euro-American settlement. This is less than .01% of the estimated 5.5 million acres of savanna historically found in Wisconsin.” We also collected an estimated 50 pounds of native seed mix for broadcasting into areas that we have recently cleared of brush. This seed mix is composed of at least 10 different prairie and savanna species. This is important because it will give us a better chance of suppressing the invasive species through competition from beneficial native plant species. We always would like to do more, but in the words of Aldo Leopold: “We shall never achieve harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations, the important thing is not to achieve but to strive.”



In the spring, board member Alex Bouthilet conducted a basic training class to become a qualified crew member for prescribed fires. Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct any burns due to a variety of factors. We are still planning on working towards our goal of building a team of experienced prescribed fire partitioners, so that we will have the opportunity to use this very important tool for our land management goals of restoring our prairies and oak savannas. We will plan on conducting another training in 2023. If you are interested and you haven't yet taken the class, email us at [standingcedarscl@gmail.com](mailto:standingcedarscl@gmail.com).

In total, we had 104 volunteers contribute 1007 hours towards our organization this past year. We will continue our workday schedule of every third Saturday from 9:00-noon for 2023. We always meet at the Engelwood parking lot: 215 280th St. Osceola, WI 54020. Thank you to everyone who volunteers to help make Standing Cedars a success.





# The Story of a Conservation Easement

by Ron Johnson

I had been thinking for many years about protecting a portion of the farm where I've spent my entire life. I figured it was something I'd get around to doing someday. Then suddenly it was 2020, I turned 70 and we were in the middle of a global pandemic, and I felt that if I didn't get the ball rolling on this idea, it might never be realized. It seemed like a daunting task, and I wasn't sure where to start.

I had many conversations with Standing Cedars board member Dan Guenther about my goals. We contacted Rick Remington of Landmark Conservancy to see if he would be willing to put together a conservation easement for me. Dan, Rick and I met via Zoom over many months to hammer out the details, figuring out things like permitted and restricted land uses, landowner and easement holder responsibilities, and public access. Standing Cedars agreed to become the easement holder. The final 40-page easement was signed and recorded in January of 2022.

The thirty-eight acres of land protected by this easement was originally part of a 200-acre dairy farm purchased by my parents, Fred C. and Donna F. Johnson, in the early 1940s. They operated the farm until their retirement in the early 1980s. It was around that time that they gave me the "back forty," which is mostly wooded ravines on its western side and a small area of level field on its eastern side. A two-acre lot was carved out of the forty for my brother, Neil, and his family, where they built a home and lived for 37 years. I built a home elsewhere on the property, where I continue to live.

I don't know much about the history of the land prior to the 1940s. Most of it was too steep for farming and was used as pasture and for timber and firewood harvesting. An old pioneer road ran from the river landing at the end of 50th Avenue to the farmland above. You can still see traces of the road in the woods. Old maps show that the road continued to the east across the fields and lined up with what we know today as 40th Avenue.

It was my parents' hope that I would maintain the land to the best of my abilities and keep it intact. Twenty-two acres of the woodland have been in the Managed Forest Law program since 1985 and a couple of thinning timber harvests have been completed. Cleanup of downed and

storm-damaged trees is an ongoing project, as is removal of invasives such as buckthorn. The seven acres of farm field was converted from row crops to a prairie planting in 2010. Local genotype seed of approximately fifty species was planted. Controlled burning, mowing and hand weeding are all used to maintain the planting, but mostly it takes care of itself. It provides critical habitat for songbirds and pollinators.

My main goals in donating this conservation easement were to preserve natural habitat for plants and wildlife, to protect land that serves as a carbon sink, and to provide non-motorized recreational opportunities (hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, birdwatching, etc.) for generations to come. No further residential development will be allowed. This land is unique because it is adjacent to the St Croix National Scenic Riverway and other protected lands along the river corridor (Standing Cedars' Gaylord Nelson Tract, Farmington Bottoms State Natural Area, and private lands with conservation easements). I am an avid hiker, and my dream is that someday a public trail will be developed through my property that will provide passage between Standing Cedars tracts to the north and south, if additional trail easements and segments can be secured. This conservation easement allows for that possibility.

It makes me very happy to know that this land will never be developed, but will remain wild for the animals, birds, insects, and plants that live here.









## Thank You, Donors

*Thank you for your continued financial support.*

### Donors of Cash, Grants and Gifts In Kind for 2021:

#### \$1,000 and up

Alice M. O'Brien Foundation & Charlie & Cynthia Wilcox  
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# Standing Cedars

COMMUNITY  
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P.O. Box 249  
Osceola, WI 54020

Standingcedarsclc  
@gmail.com

[www.standingcedars.org](http://www.standingcedars.org)



standingcedarsconservancy

P.O. Box 249  
Osceola, WI 54020

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