



# Oak Leaves

Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy — December 2023

*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

*What's in a Name? Everything.*  
*Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy*

**Standing Cedars** - The name comes from an uncommon, natural stand of northern white cedar trees along the St. Croix River at "Cedar Bend" that served as a landmark in the Indian Treaty of 1825 (...to the St. Croix River, which it strikes at a place called the standing cedar, ...). It was describing a boundary line separating Sioux and Chippewas land.

**Community** - There are many communities that are a part of Standing Cedars. There is the community of people - the volunteers, the board members, the donors, the hikers, the cross-country skiers, the hunters and the neighbors. Beaver Valley Boy Scout Camp, nestled within the Engelwood parcel, provides young people a chance to camp and explore nature.

Standing Cedars is also part of the Osceola and neighboring communities. What a treasure it is to have a local park that welcomes people to enjoy a beautiful natural setting. There is a term in Sweden, *Allemansrätten*, "The Right to Public Access", which gives everyone the freedom to roam and explore the beauty of the countryside as long as people do not disturb or destroy anything. Lindstrom, MN (about twelve miles to the northwest) has a park named *Allemansratt*. Standing Cedars is an example of *Allemansrätten*.

One of the most important communities at Standing Cedars is the biotic community of plants, animals, fungi, microscopic organisms and the soil. Aldo Leopold wrote in *Sand County Almanac*, "For the biotic community to survive, its internal processes must balance, else its member-species would disappear." Standing Cedars

is blessed to have a diverse, healthy and abundant biotic community to support all of the living organisms there. And being connected to the St. Croix River Valley creates a large, continuous corridor for the many animals which live in the area or pass through.

**Land Conservancy** - The mission of Standing Cedars is to protect, preserve and restore land in the lower St. Croix River Valley. The diverse natural communities of Standing Cedars are central to why this became a land conservation area. An outstanding feature of Standing Cedars is the size of undeveloped land bordering National Park Service land along the St. Croix River. The Engelwood tract is over 1100 acres and over 400 acres of high quality, oak forest and woodland are included in the WI-DNR Standing Cedars State Natural Area.

The Buffalo Skull and Tewksbury tracts have prairie/woodland remnants along the crest of the bluff. The rare plant, kittentails (*Besseyia bullii*) naturally occurs in these prairie/woodland remnants. Standing Cedars plays a critical role in protecting these rare habitats.

As an organization, Standing Cedars has been working hard to understand what the biotic communities need in order to stay healthy, diverse and resilient. For example, in order to expand remnant oak savanna and prairie areas we work to limit aggressive plants and encourage a diverse ground layer with prairie seeds that have been collected.

You are part of the community that makes Standing Cedars such a unique, beautiful and important land trust. Thank you for your support of Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, a place where people communities and natural communities all benefit.



## Land Management Recap

by Bob Wright

The Land Management Committee and its many volunteers have been busy in 2023, putting in more than 800 hours. Our continuing goals are to maintain the highest quality habitat on Standing Cedars natural areas, and to improve those areas that need a little more TLC. Our largest efforts this year include removal of invasive buckthorn at Tewksbury, brush removal and prairie seed collection at Engelwood, and planting woody shrubs beneficial to migrating birds at Brown. We also continue to maintain the trail network for your enjoyment of Standing Cedars. On the administrative side of things, we've implemented a more formal project tracking system and reviewed a series of potential projects. Next year's projects include several prescribed burns and experimenting with using goats or mechanical removal to address the continuing challenge of invasive buckthorn. If you're looking for a great excuse to get outside and contribute to the gem that is Standing Cedars, join us for our Saturday workdays! We meet every third Saturday of the month, from 9:00 am to Noon, at the Engelwood parking lot, 215 280th Street, Osceola, WI.

## Standing Cedars Ecology Award

This year Standing Cedars started something new. Each spring we will be awarding two, \$500 scholarships to Osceola High School seniors who demonstrate a commitment to ecology and a desire to study ecology and/or apply their education to promote ecology and conservation. This year's scholarship winners were Cecilia Gustafson and Drew Pingle. Congratulations Cecelia and Drew.

## Tropical Wings Grant Plantings

This spring we planted and caged 34 native, fruit bearing and bird loving shrubs and trees at Brown. The shrubs included Nannyberry and Red-Berried Elder. We purchased them using money from a Tropical Wings grant. Tropical Wings, is a Hudson, WI, based nonprofit that supports migratory bird education and habitat conservation. With a dry spring, and a forecast for a dry summer, we had to come up with a plan to water them. We found a local family, the Williamsons, who volunteered to water them. They used our UTV with a water tank, and drove to Brown multiple times per week, from mid-June to mid-August to keep them watered. It was a hot and dry summer, and they would not have survived without the waterings. We are happy to report that the shrubs and trees are doing well. Thank you to Tropical Wings for the grant. Thanks to the volunteers that helped to plant and cage them, and an extra thanks to Kasey Williamson for all of his help with the waterings.





## Welcome New Board Members

This year Oliver Dressel, Cade Lefeber, Tim Lindquist, Ron Vorndran and Bob Wright joined the board.

**Oliver Dressel** is a recent graduate of St. Norbert College with a degree in Environmental Science who has moved back into the area, working at Bending Branches. Oliver is on the Education & Outreach Committee and excited to get the younger generations more involved with the great land Standing Cedars has to offer.

**Cade Lefeber** has been a volunteer with Standing Cedars since he moved to Somerset in 2017. Cade enjoys all things pertaining to nature, wildlife, and the outdoors. As part of the land management committee, Cade looks forward to working on projects to help revive the native ecosystems for all to enjoy.

**Tim Lindquist** is a 19-year volunteer at Standing Cedars. He recently retired from being a banker at Royal Credit Union. He enjoys spending time at the various properties hiking, hunting and snow shoeing. Tim is looking forward to getting more involved in such a great place in our community.

**Ron Vorndran** is an engineer with Polaris and Indian Motorcycles, with the fortune to live nearby to Standing Cedars. He enjoys outside time whether trail hiking with the dog, or cross-country skiing. Ron is excited to be part of the board, continuing to learn and volunteer with the Standing Cedars community.

**Bob Wright** earned degrees in wildlife biology from UW-Stevens Point and Texas A&M University, and recently retired from the state of Minnesota as a wildlife GIS (computer mapping) specialist. He chairs the Land Management Committee and is looking forward to contributing to Standing Cedars and how it benefits all.

Leaving the board this year was Dave Anderson, Alex Bouthilet, Pat Collins, and Jeff Mallak. Thank you, Dave, Alex, Pat and Jeff 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 \$1,992 in donations, and won a \$100 Golden Ticket.



## Forest Cover Mapping Project

Assistant Geography Professor Xavier Haro-Carrión from Macalester College in St. Paul brought a group of geography students to Standing Cedars in September to learn how to use drones to collect data, which will be used to create forest maps and analyze forest cover changes over time. A few of the students will be working on a project using the mapping data they collected at Standing Cedars. We will share their project with you in next year's newsletter. Thank you to Common Harvest Farms for making the connection with Macalester College and hosting the class for lunch.

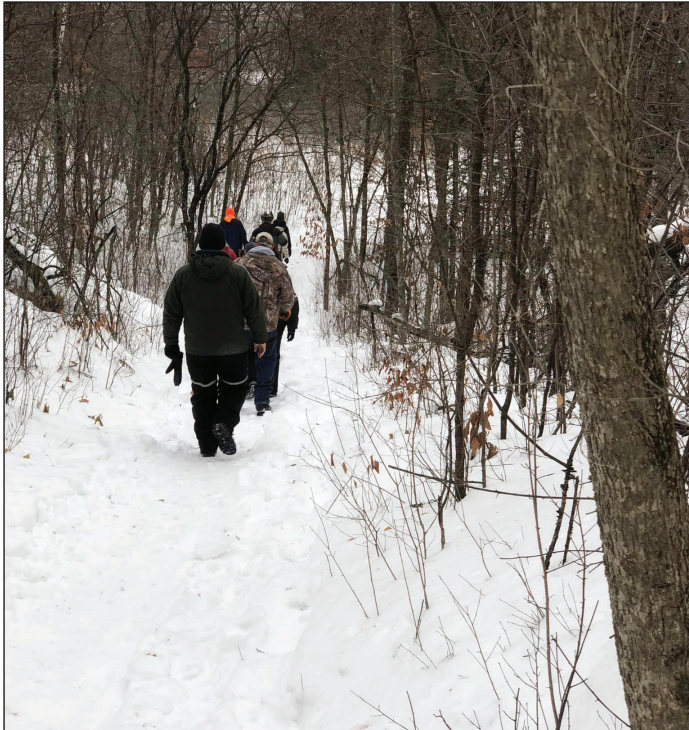
## Standing Cedars Mentioned on MPR

During an episode of the show Minnesota Now, on Minnesota Public Radio, Angie Hong, a nature educator, said that Standing Cedars is one of her favorite places to go exploring. We agree! Thanks for the shout-out Angie.



## 1st Day Hike

This year's First Day hike/snowshoe at Tewksbury was 50 degrees warmer than the First Day Hike in 2022! Twenty hikers wound their way around the trail at Tewksbury and learned about plants along the way from guide Alex Bouthilet. Thanks to Wild Rivers Conservancy for cohosting.



## Wild Flower Walk

In August, Alex Bouthilet guided hikers on a wild flower hike at Engelwood. Even with the dry weather, there were still lots of flowers in bloom. We learned that some prairie flowers can thrive in dry conditions. Thanks to Wild Rivers Conservancy for hosting.



## River Road Farm Crawl

In May, Standing Cedars participated in the 3rd annual River Road Community Farm Crawl. We had an information table at the Engelwood parking lot. It was a beautiful day and over 500 people participated in the event, which included 11 locations. It was fun to talk to those who visited our table, sharing with them the beautiful hiking trails and the mission of Standing Cedars.

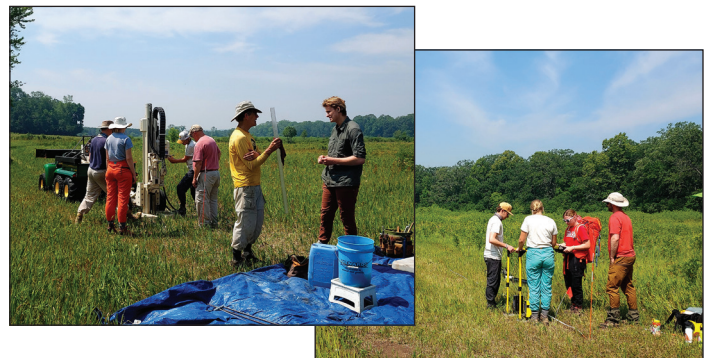
## Geologic Research at Buffalo Skull and Brown

Despite the general information you see at Interstate State Park or elsewhere, we really do not know a lot about the geologic origin of the St. Croix River Valley. This summer and fall, Hunter Delikowski, a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a group of students and professors were at Standing Cedars taking core samples to try to better understand this geologic history.

According to Hunter, the reason that Standing Cedar's land is crucial to his research is because the land resides on a suite of alluvial terraces (former floodplains of the river that are at a higher elevation than the modern river). The presence of these terraces tell us that the river once existed at elevations much higher than the current river elevation.

Through his research, Hunter hopes to better understand: 1) how and when the terraces may have formed, 2) the evolution of the St. Croix River in this part of the St. Croix River valley, and 3) link these terraces to the glacial/deglacial history of the region – particularly to large glacial lakes that are thought to have drained through the St. Croix River valley at and after the last glacial maximum, between about 17,000-13,000 years ago.

Hunter will spend this winter analyzing the rocks, core samples and geophysical data they collected. Watch for an article in next year's newsletter with his results and conclusions. Thanks to Philadelphia Community Farm for allowing research to be conducted on their land also.





## My Croix Woods Newsletter

In the 2023 winter issue of the My Croix Woods newsletter, Standing Cedars was one of the winter hiking trails that was highlighted (mycroixwoods.org). The article by Maria Young was titled Winter Hiking Throughout the Watershed. My Croix Woods is a partnership program created by Wild Rivers Conservancy to serve Minnesota and Wisconsin woodland owners in the St. Croix River watershed.

## Bluebird Houses

by Terry Ingram and Aaron Rysdam

Terry Ingram

Well, here we are, the Fall of 2023 already. The update on the bluebirds this year is that we have around 70 bluebird houses spread throughout Standing Cedars. In order to check them, it means we have the enjoyment of walking about 7 miles through our wonderful prairies.

I would like to share a story about 5 special bluebird houses on the property. I am an assistant baseball coach at Osceola High School so I get the pleasure of working and getting acquainted with a lot of kids. One particular student, a freshman baseball player, approached me this past spring and asked if I needed any help with the bluebird houses. I said, "absolutely!" So, we set a date, he came to my house, and together we built 5 bluebird houses. A few days later, we ventured out to the Buffalo Skull property and put up them up. We had wonderful conversations and always lots of laughs.



Well, you may think it was, "Wow, we built 5 bluebird houses and put them out!" No, it was a lot more than that. It was a new project, a way to relax, and a way to enjoy the outdoors for this young man. I didn't realize how much of an affect I had until he wrote back to me a little something to put in our newsletter. Before I pass this off to Aaron I would like to say, "The next time you come to Standing Cedars bring someone new so they too, can enjoy the beauty Mother Nature gives us."



Aaron Rysdam

In June 2023, as part of my Faith Project for Peace Lutheran Church in Dresser, WI, I spent time with Standing Cedars Board member, Terry Ingram. I was looking for a way to connect my faith with being outdoors. After talking with Terry, I decided that helping him build and distribute bluebird houses would be a great way to give back. Being outside really relaxes me and when Mr. Ingram said he was putting up bluebird houses, that seemed like a perfect fit. The houses are stained and put throughout the Buffalo Skull property. The hope is that the houses will make Standing Cedars an even more attractive place for the birds to live as they go up and down the river.







## **Thank You, Donors**

*Thank you for your continued financial support.*

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# Standing Cedars

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