



by Janet Evans McCuiston



# Oak Leaves

Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy — December 2024



**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

**Exciting News!** Standing Cedars purchased the 10 acre homestead property just north of the main Engelwood parking lot in May. This parcel is extremely significant because it is surrounded by Engelwood on three sides, and on the fourth side by other properties under permanent protection. It was a key parcel of land for Standing Cedars to protect.

We plan to restore the old farm fields back to prairie and we will have space to store our equipment. In the future we will have office and meeting space, and have a homebase for offering more opportunities for the public to connect with Standing Cedars.

Greg Seitz, of St Croix 360, wrote a very nice article about the property. To read the article visit the St. Croix 360 website and search "Standing Cedars". Thank you, Greg, for writing the article and sharing it with your readers.

On behalf of the Standing Cedars Board of Trustees, I would like to thank the

many people, organizations, foundations & businesses who have donated to the capital campaign.

In addition, we raised over \$2,000 during this year's St. Croix Valley give Big Day, and received \$180 in Bonus Dollars.

Thank you, donors!

I would also like to thank the Standing Cedars Board and others who put in many volunteer hours working on this project. Thank you for your hard work on this important land acquisition.

I am grateful to the many people who work to protect the St. Croix River Valley, and other beautiful and ecologically significant areas.

In protecting these areas, we are creating environments that plants, animals and people can thrive in and enjoy for generations to come.

***"I think of all of the places that are still wild and beautiful and that the fight to save them must intensify. And I think of the places that have been saved by community action. Those are the stories that people need to hear..."***

***Jane Goodall,  
The Book of Hope***



## A Family History of the Engelwood Parcel

by Catherine Preus

I was seven years old when my father, David Preus, inspired by a cabin on the St. Croix River belonging to his friend and business partner, Roderick Shearer, began buying up farmland along the river in the late 1950's with the idea of creating a membership association of vacation homes that would preserve the natural beauty of the area.

After acquiring land on the river bluffs, my father built an outhouse and three small plywood cabins: a cook cabin, and two sleeping cabins a short walk into the woods. Our family spent all our summers for the next three decades inhabiting this rustic set-up, enjoying the close contact with nature which this glorified camping on the land provided.

The river was our favorite place to be. On sunny days, we motored upriver in our aluminum rowboat for a picnic on a sandbar. On the way back, we would shut off the motor and float downstream through the slough, us kids trailing behind the boat in truck-sized inner tubes. My mother always brought along her Peterson Field Guides to the wildflowers and birds, and she would point out the watercress, forget-me-nots, marsh marigolds, or her favorite, the red cardinal flower.

The slough gradually exercised a kind of spell on us, and we would lapse into silence, suspended in time, floating in the dark waters, carried along by the river. Shafts of sunlight filtered through the translucent green canopy of trees. In our hushed domain of alternating light and shadow, the only sounds were the pure notes of bird calls, the buzzing of insects, or the scrape of an oar as my father pushed the boat away from a protruding log. Drifting noiselessly, passively watching the scenery go by, we temporarily lost our grip on the everyday world.

Now in my seventh decade, looking back to my childhood, it seems as if those long summer days went on forever -

as long as we had energy for them, and our energy was boundless.

Over the years, my father (The Cottonwood Land Company), acquired 1700 acres of land. In 1968, with the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, "the Feds" bought our stretch of riverfront. The 1972 Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway act imposed new restrictions on development in the form of scenic easements. My father's proposed development was somewhat in limbo, but still going forward. While my parents wanted to preserve the natural character of the land, they needed to make their investment pay as they were deeply in debt. Eventually, the planned development failed to attract the necessary buyers, and my parents were forced to sell the land. By this time, my parents were living full time in the red brick farmhouse, (now Foxtail CSA), on 280 th Street. Just north of them, Verna Kragnes and Rick Hall of Philadelphia Community Farm were at that time envisioning a greenway along the St. Croix that would incorporate small farms and land preservation. With the newly founded non-profit, Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, they initiated a campaign to raise the money to buy our family's land. It was a year of ups and downs. Against all odds, and with a sizable grant from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, this grassroots effort triumphed, and in October of 1995, the 1100-acre Engelwood parcel officially became part of SCCLC.

I am grateful beyond words that my family's land has been protected for the generations. How many people can come back to their childhood home and find it unspoiled? In the past 30 years, I have witnessed SCCLC's stewardship presence radiating outward, expanding beyond simple conservation to enriching the larger community, with activities such as volunteer workdays, scientific studies, group hikes, and a scholarship fund for Osceola High School students.

I encourage people to come and walk and ski this land at all times of the day and in all seasons so that they can come to know it and love it as I do. This is what I would wish for people who come to SCCLC - that they feel it is their own, that it is their home and that it belongs to them, and they belong to it.

You can read stories about Catherine's St. Croix River Memories at her blog: [stcroixrivervalleymemories.blogspot.com](http://stcroixrivervalleymemories.blogspot.com)





## Welcome New Board Member

This year Dan Guenthner joined the board. Dan has a long history with Standing Cedars and we welcome him back to the board.

Leaving the board this year was Kim Gearin. Thank you, Kim, for your dedication and for all of the work you did on behalf of Standing Cedars.

## Standing Cedars Ecology Award

Each spring we award 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 Mazie Gillespie & Mason Utke. Congratulations Mazie & Mason.

## 1st Day Hike

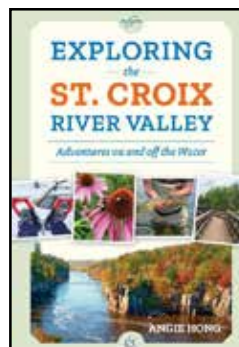
This year's First Day hike/snowshoe at Tewksbury included 44 happy hikers from Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hikers learned about the importance of native plants in the watershed from guide Alex Bouthilet. One hiker commented, "It was a great hike. I learned lots and spent time with wonderful people. A great way to start the year." Thanks to Wild Rivers Conservancy for cohosting.



## Standing Cedars Included in a New Book

Angie Hong, a conservation educator, considers Standing Cedars to be a gem in the St. Croix River Valley. She included Standing Cedars in her new book, Exploring the St. Croix River Valley: Adventures on and off the Water. Thanks, Angie, for including us in the book.

The book is available through the University of MN Press.



## Work Days & Land Management Recap

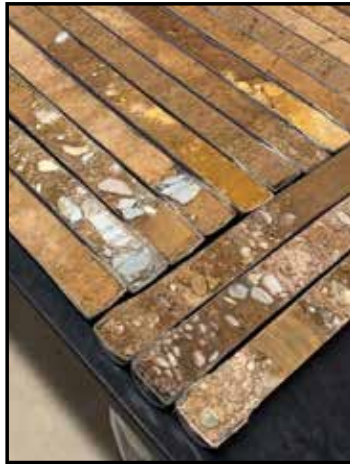
This year Standing Cedars volunteers logged over 1400 hours. A big thank you to all who shared their time, skills, and tools with us. Many of the volunteer work days were spent on improvements at the newly acquired Engelwood Homestead property. The garage exterior siding and trim installation was a major project that has been completed. We also did some oak release work at Tewksbury, some woody encroachment work in the field just north of the Homestead property and at the south end of Engelwood, along with some trail encroachment removal at Engelwood. Additionally, we have a new rental agreement for the farm fields at Tewksbury and we plan on restoring 5 acres a year to prairie. We continue to maintain and upkeep the trail network for your visiting enjoyment. If you are interested in joining us, volunteer work days are every third Saturday of the month, from 9:00 am to Noon, at the Engelwood parking lot, 215 280th Street, Osceola, WI. All are welcome!





## Learning More about the Geologic Origins of the St. Croix River Valley

The geologic history of the St. Croix River Valley is a complicated story. Recent research is hoping to answer some of the many questions geologists have pondered for over a century. In the summer and fall of 2023, Hunter Delikowski, a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, conducted research at Standing Cedars and several other locations in the area to learn more about the geologic origin of the St. Croix River Valley in the Osceola area and how the river responded to glacial retreat. Hunter is currently busy finishing up their thesis, with plans to graduate this December and to publish their results at a later date.



Greg Seitz, St. Croix 360, has written an interesting article explaining some of Hunter's findings. You can find the article at the St. Croix 360 website, search "Standing Cedars". Hunter and their advisor, Dr. Phil Larson, were recently featured on the Larry Meiller show of WPR, July 29, 2024 episode.



## Other Happenings

### Osceola Fire Dept Training

In June the Osceola Fire Department had a training session at Standing Cedars to learn about the trail system and land layout. They want to be prepared in case there is ever an emergency or fire on the property.

### Best Kept Natural Secrets

Standing Cedars was included in a brochure from Gathering Waters (Wisconsin's alliance for land trusts) titled "Wisconsin's Best Kept Natural Secrets". We agree, and appreciate the acknowledgment.

### River Road Farm Crawl

It was another great turnout for the 4th annual River Road Community Farm Crawl in May. Standing Cedars had an information table at the Engelwood parking lot. It was fun to talk to those who visited our table, sharing with them the beautiful hiking trails and the mission of Standing Cedars. This year, a representative from the Beaver Valley Scout Camp, nestled within Engelwood, joined us to talk to visitors about the camp.



**Nature Notes** A USGS report noted that a Rusty-patched bumble bee was spotted at Buffalo Skull during a survey in August 2023. The Rusty-patched bumble bee is listed as a Federally Endangered and State Special Concern species.







## Capital Campaign Update

With your generous support we raised more than \$200K dollars toward the purchase of the Engelwood Homestead. We were able to quickly pay off a bridge loan using your donations and by borrowing from our land acquisition fund. It is our hope to repay these endowment funds within the coming year. Watch for a mailing this spring with more information and an acknowledgment of Capital Campaign gifts received in 2024. Thanks again for your generous support of our recent Capital Campaign.



## Thank You Donors

Standing Cedars relies on your annual donation to help maintain our trails, land and parking lots. Donations are also used to protect and restore prairies, forests and bluff lands along the St. Croix River. And we are continuing to raise money to help pay for our new land acquisition. Thank you to all of our donors, we sincerely appreciate your support.

To donate, you can mail a check or to donate online at: [www.mightycause.com/organization/Standing-Cedars-Community-Land-Conservancy](http://www.mightycause.com/organization/Standing-Cedars-Community-Land-Conservancy).

# THANK YOU, DONORS

*Thank you for your continued financial support.*

## **2023 Gifts Received** (Cash, Grants & Gifts in Kind)

### **\$1,000 and up**

Alice M. O'Brien Foundation  
Dan Guenther & Margaret Pennings  
Gail Hanson  
Catherine Nelson

### **\$500-\$999**

Benevity  
Patrick & Madeleine Fleming  
Katherine Grant  
Joyce Hinz  
Richard & Carolyn Johnson  
Nancy Larson  
Cade Lefebvre  
Sheila Nolan  
Polaris Match  
Steve & Donna Schletty

### **\$250-\$499**

Anonymous  
Dave & Amy Anderson  
Dick & Debbie Burrows  
Stephen & Christine Clemens  
Martin Hamm  
John & Diane Herman  
Terry & Deb Ingram  
Town of Farmington Resident  
Barry Tulkki

### **\$100-\$249**

Rebecca Barbcovi  
Elliot Berkley  
Dave Crawford  
Drew & Robin Eckstrom  
Randy & Kathy Ferrin  
Paul & Kathleen Fredrickson  
Peter & Mary Gove  
Mark & Jean Hoffman  
Thomas Horan  
Kelvin Kobernick  
Deborah Kravik  
Betsy Kremser  
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Richard & Linda Law  
Sally & Richard Leider  
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Jeff Mallak

Dan & Deb Murphy  
Christopher & Nicole Nelson  
Thomas & Kathryn Paskvan  
Chris & Mary Paul  
David & Lisa Peters  
Marian Quinn  
Steve Ressler & Deb Ryan  
Ryan & Lily Rodgers  
Kevin & Maureen Rogers  
Neil Soltis  
John Stoklosa  
Stonehouse Pictures  
Thrivent  
United Way of St. Croix Valley  
Ron & Kristina Vorndran

### **Up to \$99**

Robert Altman  
Amazon Smile  
Tim Anderson  
Michael & Marcia Baudino  
Robert Bullard  
Joan Carlson  
Mary Cotch  
Marcia Dressel  
Lowell Enerson  
Jeffrey & Jeanne Ewald  
Janet Hayman  
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Marsha Hovey  
Cheryl Hustad  
Timothy Jungers  
Susan & Mitchell Kittel  
Kenneth & Doris Krautbauer  
Norma & Roger Kretzschmar  
Jarell Kuney  
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Emilee Martell  
Amy Middleton  
Hanna Mierow  
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Terese & Thomas Mitchell  
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Vicki Seibel Betzold  
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Michael & Catherine Stevens  
George Vania  
Jason Vitalis  
Andrew Wollenberg

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Emily Berkley

**In Memory of Andrew Clare**  
Lorrie & Marc Franz

**In Memory of Jim Johnson & Julie Norwall**  
Ed Dike III

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Karen Fossum  
Dan Guenther & Margaret Pennings  
Eric Merriman  
Stephen & De Etta Miller  
Susan & Wayne Shelton

**In Honor of Gabriel Mitchell**  
Donald Mitchell & Barbara Staub

**In Honor of Tim O'Hare**  
Carl Dyrbye

**In Memory of Dr. Mike Schmidt**  
Ryan & Lily Rodgers

**In Memory of Jerry Springer**  
Steven & Sarah Kromrey

**In Memory of Roger Feldt**  
S Willis

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# Standing Cedars

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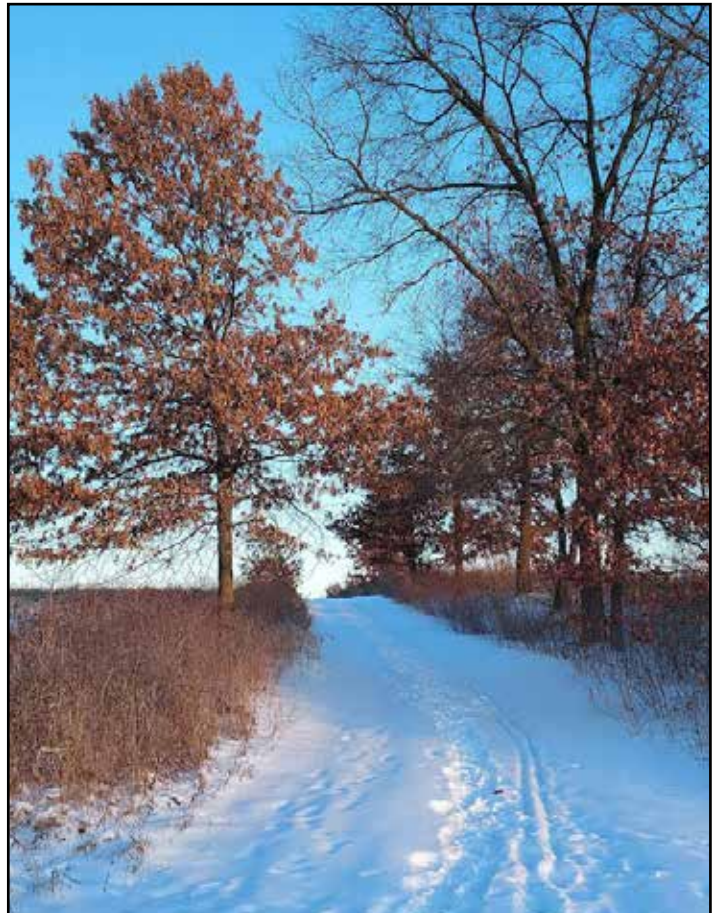
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*Photo by John Reed*