

Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Fall 2021 ~~FALL 2017~~

A Perspective on the Past, Present and Future of BECWA

Barbara Borns and Steve Born

BECWA Board Members and Past Presidents

For more than three decades, BECWA has pursued its goals of a) protecting and advocating for the wise long-term management of the creek and its watershed; b) encouraging local stewardship among the many members and interests of the watershed community; and c) providing a public forum for discussion of issues and problems in the watershed. We have addressed problems and prospects of the wild trout fishery, water quality threats, concerning infrastructure and development threats, flooding and a changing hydrologic regime, habitat restoration, and recreational and economic activities in the watershed. We have placed a premium on sharing information about the watershed and educating citizens - young and old - about the ecology, wonders, and challenges in this special place. Signs along roadways "Entering the Black Earth Creek Watershed", in front yards and stream access points "Protect Black Earth Creek" are ongoing efforts to make us all aware of this special region and resource.

As part of our educational mission, BECWA has offered opportunities for the next generation to learn and appreciate the value of this watershed. During the annual Trout Days in Cross Plains BECWA has offered "BUGS BY THE CREEK" engaging young folks to understand the food webs supporting the creek; and

"PASSPORT TO THE BLACK EARTH CREEK WATERSHED" where kids visited teaching stations to earn a gift of a tree to be planted in the watershed. These and other efforts helped bring together a variety of public and private partners as stakeholders in the watershed: Wisconsin DNR, Dane County, towns and villages as well as local non-profits such as Trout Unlimited. All these activities have played an important role to advance our goal of advocating for the wise management of BEC.

BECWA's visibility and level of activity have ebbed and flowed over the years - largely dependent on needs, project opportunities, Board member energies, etc. Such fluctuation is normal for small watershed organizations, as we are currently experiencing a transition in leadership. But our enduring goal has been to survive and be viable when opportunities or challenges arise and BEC needs a watchdog and a constituency. We are dedicated to keeping this special watershed in the eye of the public - known to school kids, new residents, and old-timers alike - while working to enhance the future for fish, other critters, and the communities connected by the flowing waters that define our watershed.



Steve Born



Barbara Borns





**Black Earth Creek
Watershed
Association**

BECWA.ORG

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

BECWA 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 watershed.
- To foster and encourage citizen and locally-based stewardship among the many members of the Watershed community.
- To provide a forum for civilized discussion of issues and problems in the Watershed.

Board of Directors

Bobbi Peckarsky, *Vice-President & Acting President*

Steve Born, *Past President*

Barbara Borns, *Secretary & Past President*

David Lucey, *Treasurer*

Johnny Armstrong, *Website Manager*

Kate Beardmore - Mary Devitt - Christopher Long -

Andy Morton - Debra Weitzel

Deb Nemeth - *Newsletter Design*

Bobbi Peckarsky - *Newsletter Editor*

Membership

We hope you enjoy reading the BECWA newsletter. It is our pleasure to share news and information from the watershed.

If you are not already a member - please join today! To become a BECWA member go to <https://www.becwa.org/join-becwa> and fill out a form to mail with a check or donate online.

If you choose to send a check please mail to:

BECWA
PO Box 164
Cross Plains, WI 53528

If you are already a member, renew today by going to <https://www.becwa.org/join-becwa>

Lifetime Member - \$100

Business - \$50

Watershed Patron - \$35

Household - \$25

***Help us continue this important work!
We appreciate your support.***



**Welcome New BECWA
Board Member: Mary Devitt**

I have called the Black Earth Creek Watershed home since 1986 when my husband Terry and I first moved to the Town of Cross Plains from Madison. We raised our two sons here, and have a strong attachment to, and a special appreciation of this area. Much of my professional life was in interdisciplinary outreach and research and public service, at UW Madison and the Biodiversity Project. Fifteen years ago, I opened Crossroads Coffeehouse in Cross Plains, where I could continue an outreach mission: bringing people together over good coffee, and sharing my love of the natural assets of our area. Recently retired, I have joined the Board of BECWA in hope to focus energy on protecting the place we call home.

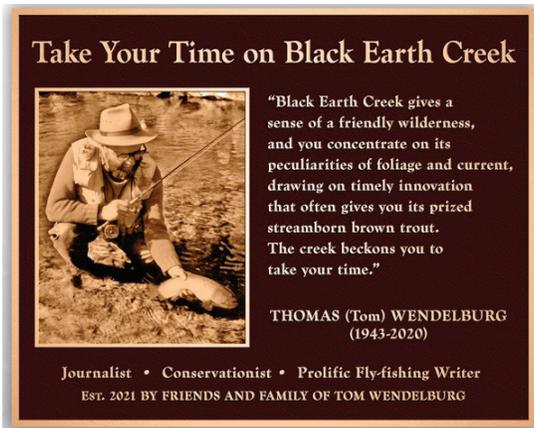
Black Earth Creek Watershed Green Infrastructure Planning Update

Mike Rupiper – Capital Area Regional Planning Commission

BECWA has been collaborating with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission, communities along Black Earth Creek, a consulting team, and a steering committee of other organizations active in the watershed to develop a green infrastructure plan. The goal of this project is to develop specific strategies that will provide a quantifiable level of flood protection to communities, water quality benefits to Black Earth Creek and its tributaries, and recreational, economic, and ecological benefits to the watershed as a whole. BECWA members are encouraged to provide input on this plan for the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Please visit the project website at: <https://becw-greenplan-silvernail.hub.arcgis.com/> to take the survey, view interactive watershed maps, and keep informed about upcoming events. For more information:

- Read a detailed article about this project in the Fall 2020 BECWA newsletter ([BECWA.org](https://becw.org))
- View an interpretive sign describing the Green Infrastructure Project at Zander Park in Cross Plains (or an image of that sign on [BECWA.org](https://becw.org))
- Visit the following link to BEC Green Infrastructure Flyer:

<https://becw-greenplan-silvernail.hub.arcgis.com/documents/printable-flyer-for-black-earth-creek-watershed-green-infrastructure-initiative/explore>



Fishing friends of Tom Wendelburg are memorializing this trout fishing addict and writer, a unique character who loved his home waters - Black Earth Creek - and who passed away in 2020, with the installation of a stream side plaque. The plaque reads:

"Black Earth Creek gives a sense of a friendly wilderness, and you concentrate on its peculiarities of foliage and current, drawing on timely innovation that often gives you its prized streamborn brown trout. The creek beckons you to take your time."

Thomas (Tom) Wendelburg

News Briefs

Dane County has awarded Groundswell Conservancy a grant to purchase 38 acres within the BEC Natural Resource Area containing a mix of farmland and wetland and 4,100 feet of BEC frontage. The property will be open to the public for hunting, fishing, hiking and cross-country skiing.

https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/08022021_Dane_County.pdf

WDNR purchased ~7.6 acre Streambank Fishing Easement upstream from South Valley Rd. Easement provides opportunities for public fishing, hiking, and cross country skiing, in addition to allowing the WDNR to conduct fisheries, wildlife and riparian habitat improvement activities.

Groundswell/Dane County purchased a 10-acre streambank and trail easement on Halfway Prairie Creek for streambank restoration and extension of the Wolf Run Trail that connects Mazomanie to Wisconsin Heights School. <https://groundswellwisconsin.org/page.asp?page=BECstreamprotection>

Steve Born was inducted into the prestigious Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame in late 2020. View the video of the presentation he gave at his induction ceremony, and photos of some of his more impressive catches at: wchf.org/stephen-born/

WDNR River Planning Grant Update

Engagement for Restoration in the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Andy Morton and Kate Beardmore- BECWA Board Members

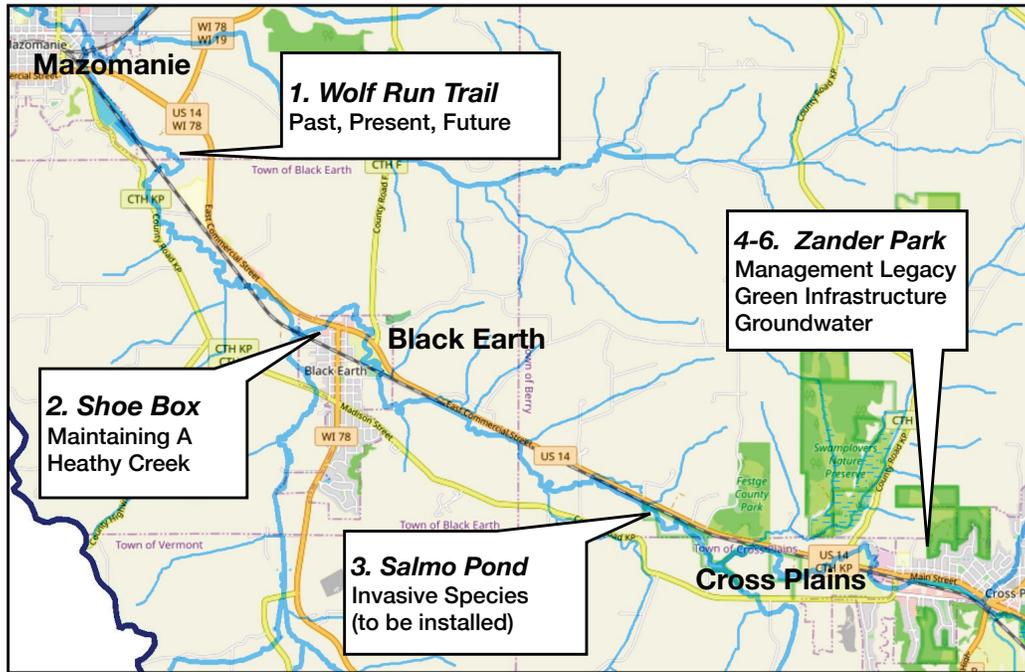
BECWA was awarded a River Planning Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) in 2020 to assess its organizational effectiveness, develop a strategic plan, improve our website, and conduct outreach activities. All of these efforts are intended to move BECWA forward as an organization and enhance capacity, appreciation and stewardship of the Black Earth Creek (BEC) watershed. Despite the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to accomplish most of the grant objectives.

Organizational Assessment and Strategic Plan. BECWA completed an organizational effectiveness survey during winter 2020, which served as a springboard for developing our strategic plan. We owe major thanks to Greg Hyer, former BECWA Board president, and Mindy Habecker, now retired from UW-Extension, for all of the work they did on this project. Sixty five people completed the survey which included elected officials, nonprofit groups, government staff, landowners/residents, and creek users. Highest priority issues for BECWA identified by respondents were water quality, invasive species, healthy trout populations, education, good stewardship practices, farming and local development practices, and addressing flooding concerns. The BECWA board also updated our mission statement and strategic goals. Visit becwa.org to learn more about our strategic plan and organizational assessment.

Interpretive Sign Project. A series of interpretive signs were designed by Gary Cox with support from WDNR and UW Extension. The six signs cover a range of topics including elements of a healthy stream ecosystem and the value of a nationally known wild brown trout stream next to a large population center. The interpretive signs are weatherproof, made of a high quality, durable plastic, and are attached to a steel backplate. Made to last for years to come. The purpose of the signs is to highlight and communicate to residents, users, and visitors the outstanding qualities of Black Earth Creek and its tributaries. Despite over 50 years of community partners working together to take care of the creek, this wonderful stream still needs our protection. The signs can be found at Wolf Run Trail in Mazomanie, The Shoe Box on Black Earth, Salmo Pond and Zander Park in Cross Plains. Images of all signs (two are displayed in this newsletter) and a map indicating their locations (next page) can be viewed on BECWA.org. BECWA sponsored a Sign Roll Out and Partnership Celebration behind the Shoebox on Saturday, June 26th, which was a great success. Despite the threat of rain, we had a good turnout including several locally elected officials from townships and villages. As we had hoped, people from groups represented were actively engaged in networking and made connections with local leadership. Special thanks to: Trout Unlimited, Gateway to the Driftless, Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission (Green Infrastructure Project), The River Alliance of Wisconsin, UW Extension, WDNR, Wolf Run, Dane County Parks, Sand County Foundation, the Village of Cross Plains, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, The Shoe Box, Wolf Run Association, Cox & Co, the Ice Age Trail Alliance, Groundswell Conservancy, and the Wisconsin River Alliance for supporting BECWA's efforts!

Video Project. In Spring 2022 we plan to work with Middleton/Cross Plains and Wisconsin Heights High Schools to produce a short video on natural resource, ecological, and recreational values and management needs of BEC.

6 Sign Locations—BECWA Interpretive Sign Project



A long history of caring for Black Earth Creek



Millpond circa 1900.



Creating the new stream channel 2013.



For over 65 years WDNR has managed the trout fishery.



Black Earth Creek is a Class 1 Trout Fishery.

Changes over time

Black Earth Creek, as it winds back and forth, may look natural now, but it has seen great change over the last 150 years. Once the site of a mill, built in the mid 1800's, the stream at this site was flooded with a millpond, and then channelized over 50 years ago. In 2013 the Village of Cross Plains and WDNR created a new winding stream channel to provide improved stream habitat and a more natural setting for the park.

Now this area has healthy habitat with a robust trout population and is heavily used by spawning trout every fall. The channel restoration project took several years of planning

and engineering, funding from a variety of public and private sources, and extensive public input. Given the work and dollars invested to improve this stream section, its continued care and protection into the future is important.

Stream management legacy—past and future

Since the 1950's several million dollars have been invested over the years to restore and protect the stream with pollution control projects, habitat improvement, and land acquisition.

Black Earth Creek is a Class 1 Trout Fishery* and is Outstanding Resource Water (highest water quality level)—one of a handful of streams in this region that have this designation. Threats to the stream, such as the New Zealand mudsnail and nonpoint source pollution, remain. If the water quality and outstanding trout fishery are to be maintained into the future, it will need continued stewardship and protection.

*Class 1: natural reproduction and survival of wild trout in sufficient numbers to use the available habitat and sustain the fishery without stocking.



Trout nests (redds) can be seen in the Village Park in late fall.

Brown trout spawn here in the fall and help populate the entire stream. As females lay their eggs, males fertilize the eggs as they settle into the cleaned gravel nests, called redds.



Scan this code to learn more or go to the BECWA website. www.becwa.org



Sign created by Black Earth Creek Watershed Association and Dane County LW Extension



Image of an informational sign designed by Gary Cox describing the management legacy of BEC. This sign is located at Zander Park in the Village of Cross Plains.

Conservation K-9s Join the Fight Against New Zealand Mud Snails

Ellen Voss, Invasive Species Program Director, River Alliance of Wisconsin

New Zealand Mud Snails were first detected in Wisconsin nearly a decade ago in Black Earth Creek. As fisherfolks and paddlers took to Wisconsin rivers and streams in record numbers during the pandemic, it is likely this worrisome invasive species has had ample opportunities to spread further. Its small size (picture a grain of rice) makes it difficult to spot quickly, and current detection methods are expensive and time-consuming.

In 2020, River Alliance of Wisconsin partnered with Conservation Dogs Collective, Inc. and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to see if a dog's nose could potentially replace the human eye and speed up the detection process. Conservation K-9s Ernie and Betty White began sniff training for this species in summer 2020; and work will continue into fall 2021 to fine-tune the methods and determine the detection limits to a dog's nose. The preliminary results are extremely promising, and the hope is this method will someday provide a rapid presence/absence snapshot that will ultimately keep this snail from spreading further.

To learn more about New Zealand Mud Snails, visit:

<https://www.nzmscollaborative.org/index.php/nzms-basics/biology>

Watch "Sniffing for Snails: A Collaborative Approach for the Early Detection of New Zealand Mud Snail", the CanoeCopia presentation by River Alliance of Wisconsin and Conservation Dogs Collective, Inc.:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esbc39FeYdM&t=316s> to learn more about the 2020 pilot project.



Dog sniffing for snails.

Photo credit: Conservation Dogs Collective, Inc.

Stop the spread of the New Zealand mudsnail

New Zealand mudsnails are tiny. *The snails reproduce fast since they don't need a mate.* *The snails can crowd out native aquatic species.* *Mayfly nymphs are important food for trout.*

The tiny New Zealand mudsnail has been found in Black Earth Creek. Please be a responsible angler or paddler and help keep it out of other sites on Black Earth Creek and other water bodies. This small organism and other invasive species may greatly disrupt our aquatic ecosystems.

Best ways to avoid spreading invasive species

INSPECT equipment and **REMOVE** attached plants and animals (required) with a brush if needed. **DRAIN** all water from equipment (required)

THEN:

SOAK in 2% Virkon solution (2.7 ounces per gallon) for 20 minutes and **RINSE** clean away from surface waters

OR

USE DEDICATED rubber soled waders/wading boots for infected waters. Avoid felt—it can harbor small invasives and resists decontamination

OR

FREEZE for 8 hours

OR

WASH with 212°F water (steam clean)

OR

SOAK in 140°F water for at least 5 minutes

New Zealand mudsnail

Cone-shaped shell *7-8 whorls* *Opening on right with shell facing up* *Operculum (not shown)*

New Zealand mudsnails can survive out of the water for weeks on equipment.

Many species of mayfly (see above) crawl along, grazing on food (i.e. algae) on the underwater rocks. The New Zealand mudsnails may compete for food and space occupied by aquatic insects and native snails. If trout eat New Zealand mudsnails, the snails can pass through their guts unharmed and provide little food value. Reducing native food items fish rely on may negatively impact the fishery.

You can help

For more information go to: dnr.wisconsin.gov

Scan this code to learn more or go to the BECWA website: www.becwa.org

Sign created by Black Earth Creek Watershed Association and Dane County DNR Extension

Image of an informational sign designed by Gary Cox describing how to stop the spread of the invasive New Zealand Mud Snails. This sign is located beside Salmo Pond.

Educational outreach programs target students of all ages

Bobbi Peckarsky and Deb Weitzel – BECWA Board members

One of the missions of BECWA is to educate students of all ages to foster appreciation for this exceptional watershed. BECWA Board members hosted two educational outreach events targeting very different audiences, both addressing a serious threat to Black Earth Creek (BEC): the spread of the invasive New Zealand Mud Snails (NZMS). NZMS invaded BEC ~10 years ago at South Valley Road and have spread to many sites, mostly in the Village of Cross Plains. These snails are highly effective invaders because they are very tiny, can survive for weeks out of water on boots or boats, can reproduce without a mate, and cannot be digested by trout. They crowd out native stream invertebrates and thereby reduce the natural food source for trout.

On a rainy afternoon May 15, Bobbi Peckarsky, Kate Beardmore, Barbara Borns and Mary Devitt teamed up with an enthusiastic group of 8 – 10 year old girls from Brownie Troop 7133 to better understand the prevalence these invasive snails and their effects on native invertebrates. The girls counted the invasive snails at two sites on BEC in Zander Park and used an index of stream habitat quality to compare invertebrates between sites with high and low numbers of snails. A change in native invertebrates indicated degradation of BEC where invasive snails were abundant. A local news broadcast about this event can be viewed at: [News release of event courtesy of NBC News 15 Madison.](#)



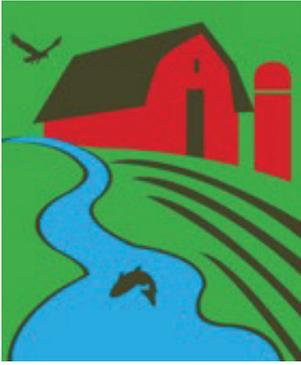
On August 13, Deb Weitzel, Tom Bernthal, Janet Kane and Colleen Robinson hosted a Wisconsin Master Naturalist Course (WIMN) on BEC near Salmo Pond to learn about BEC and its watershed. Students were introduced to BEC, its prized trout fishery and the invasive NZMS. Students sorted and identified the critters that support the fishery using the same stream habitat quality index as did the Brownies. Because there were no NZMS individuals at this site, Weitzel and Kane collected NZMS from the South Valley Road site so students could compare NZMS to native snails. After a full day of watershed and habitat restoration discussions and activities, including Dave Lucey describing the geology of the driftless area from the overlook at Festge Park, the students practiced mindfulness techniques in the Festge forest. The very positive health benefits of clearing one's mind to allow natural sights and sounds to enter renewed our spirit.



Photo Credit above: Deb Weitzel

Photo Credit left: LaShell Lentz (Brownie Troup Leader)

One critical piece of instruction of both programs was how to decontaminate equipment to prevent the transfer of invaders to other waterways. It is a credit to the WIMN students and the young girls and their troop leaders to have motivated them to learn about river conservation. These two different groups will now be able to educate others about the value of this exceptional stream and in the process, protect and preserve it.



Black Earth Creek
Watershed
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PO Box 164
Cross Plains, WI 53528

Proposed CHC Transmission Line - Turmoil at the PSC

Chuck Tenneson- Driftless Area Land Conservancy – Climate & Energy Coordinator

In June 2021 the Cardinal-Hickory Creek (CHC) transmission line project developers (ATC, ITC and Dairyland Power Cooperative) acknowledged that [former Commissioner Mike Huebsch engaged in private, ex parte communications with individuals associated with the CHC project](#) over several years while the permit application was before the Public Service Commission (PSC). Such communications are strictly prohibited. As an unprecedented request, the developers asked the PSC to rescind the CHC permit and quickly hold a new vote on the project in an effort to sweep the “tainted commissioner” issue under the carpet and proceed with the original construction schedule. Not so fast, say opponents. More than 150 comments to the PSC followed with all but two expressing opposition to the “serious irregularities at the PSC that appear to extend far beyond the proposed CHC transmission line.” Most requested the PSC to leave the issue to the courts or to start a completely new review, which would permit updated evidentiary submissions to be added to the record. These issues are evolving rapidly in State and Federal court. Dane County Circuit Court Judge Jacob B. Frost ruled that discovery and depositions for a Sept. 29 – 30 Evidentiary Hearing concerning these irregularities would go forward, regardless of any action by the PSC. The Wisconsin Court of Appeals has imposed an indefinite hold on the deposition of Mr. Huebsch’s records. Three federal court lawsuits continue: two concerning the project’s route through the [Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge](#) and one concerns former Commissioner Huebsch’s improper communications with the CHC developers.

Editor’s Note: BECWA continues to oppose the development of the CHC Transmission Line.
