

# Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

*Celebrating 30 years*

FALL 2017

1987



2017

*Greg Hyer, BECWA Board President*

Happy 30th birthday to you, BECWA and many thanks to all of you who have supported stewardship of the Black Earth Creek Watershed for decades. Watershed stewardship has come a long way since the 1980s. Publicly accessible lands have increased; more landowners are placing permanent agricultural and conservation easements on their lands with the help of the Natural Heritage Land Trust. Storm water management, farming and development practices have improved and reduced their impacts on water quality and trout populations.



*Photo: Dennis Franke - Statz Juniper Farm*

We've come a long way with your support but our collective efforts need to continue. A new generation of folks has moved into the watershed and needs to be introduced to the great natural resources of the area and the past and future efforts necessary to maintain that greatness. The measures of water quality and healthy trout populations are not all positive and not everyone is committed to extraordinary development standards to protect this extraordinary resource.

Your continued financial support, concern and efforts to protect our watershed are as important now as they were thirty years ago. So let's take a moment to pause, reflect and celebrate the efforts of so many people who have championed protection of the Black Earth Creek Watershed for 30 years. Here's to 30 more years!



**Black Earth Creek  
Watershed  
Association**

**BECWA.ORG**

**Become a BECWA member or renew your membership**

Send your check with name, address and email to:  
David Lucey, 7952 County Highway K, Cross Plains, WI 53528

Lifetime Member - \$100 Business - \$50  
Watershed Patron - \$35 Household - \$25 Basic - \$15

*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**

- Greg Hyer, *President*  
 Bobbi Peckarsky, *Vice-President*  
 Barbara Borns, *Secretary*  
 David Lucey, *Treasurer*  
 Richard Anderson - Steve Born - Dan Buckland  
 Kathy Haig - Christopher Long - Debra Weitzel
- Deb Nemeth - *Newsletter Design*  
 Barbara Borns - *Newsletter Editor*  
 Deb Weitzel - *Proofreader*



*Briana Burns*

1935 - 2017

Briana Burns was a dedicated member of the Board of Directors of BECWA for many years. One task she did so well was proof reading our newsletters--always with a keen eye saving us many embarrassing mistakes. Understanding the history and purpose of drainage ditch regulations was a topic Briana studied carefully and proved important in our watershed. We miss her good nature, willingness to participate and help in our efforts to keep the Black Earth Creek a healthy and enjoyable natural resource. Our sympathy to her family and many friends. She is missed.



*Photo: Katie Weber*

*Celebrate BECWA at 30!*

Cross Roads Cafe  
Cross Plains  
Wednesday, November 8th  
5:30 to 7:30 PM

cash bar social

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# The Black Earth Creek, What a Great Place!

*Steve Born*

It seems like only yesterday that BECWA was celebrating its 20th birthday. We celebrated by publishing a history of the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Time flies, and now this small non-governmental organization made up of volunteers has added ten more years of life.

One of the factors that led to the creation of BECWA was the recognition that no single entity was “in charge” and responsible for the future health of the stream and its watershed. Landowners, businesses, farmers, local governments and state agencies, non-profit groups -- all make decisions affecting Black Earth Creek. The creation of BECWA was an effort to coordinate the actions of the many actors, to resolve conflicts that arose, to educate and share information about the watershed, and to be an advocate for a healthy watershed.

BECWA, guided by a board of directors, has pursued its mission in diverse ways. It has served as a clearinghouse on current events and issues in the watershed, and has held public meetings to share that information with citizens. One highlight of the past few years was an assessment of the health of the stream in the face of declining fish populations in lower reaches of the creek. This effort, coordinated with WDNR staff, engaged citizens in identifying problems and “taking the pulse” of a large portion of the waters in the watershed. The results of this work have been useful in guiding management and restoration activities of WDNR, county agencies, and non-profit organizations.

Another effort to raise the profile of the watershed and increase public awareness involved two signage projects. One restored the major signs along roadways indicating that you were now “Entering the BEC Watershed”. These are durable signs that remind folks daily of their watershed address and identity. The other signage project involved a large number of yard signs that property owners and businesses could display indicating their support for “Protecting/Preserving Black Earth Creek”.

Most of the projects BECWA has undertaken involve education and public awareness in one way or another - and the signage projects and public forums have that goal. And we have published a semi-annual newsletter with similar objectives as well as maintaining a website: BECWA.org. Participation in local events are part of the public information strategy, including such fun things as Dr. Bobbi Peckarsky’s “Bugs by the Creek”, which is aimed at kids (the future watershed leaders) and has taken place at Cross Plains’ Trout Days.

BECWA has also tried to accomplish its goals by supporting the efforts of others in the watershed. We’ve applauded the work of local citizens to improve the area around Salmo Pond and Festge Park. We’ve supported watershed related projects in the local school system, where teachers have done some amazing science projects with their students. And our efforts cheer on landowner, DNR, and county efforts to improve riparian areas along the creek and improve public access. And we’ve played supportive roles, in various ways, in such major undertakings as the Wolf Run stream restoration and trail initiatives in the Mazomanie area, and Zander Park in Cross Plains.

At 30, we’re a mature organization -- still small and led by citizens -- dedicated to working in this wonderful watershed to enhance the future not only for fish, birds, and the stream, but for community and citizen health in every way.



*Steve Born opening the newly restored channel on lower Black Earth Creek near Mazomanie.*

## Short History of

Sara Sh

Fred Wolf sits on the patio at the back of his farmhouse cradling a steaming coffee cup in his hands. It's early morning and he's looking out at the Black Earth Creek that runs just south of his barn and empty cow yard. Thinking about the old creek. For about a mile downstream to the Village of Mazomanie, and upstream another mile to the Wisconsin Heights Schools, it twists and babbles along freely, the banks covered with grasses and wild flowers. Wolf Run Conservancy and Trail.

The coffee cup sits on his lap, his hands at rest, his eyes and heart and mind in that far-away mystical place musing on why he loves this creek and this land so much. Grandpa bought the place in 1921. Dad took it over in the 60's. He and his deceased wife, Pam, raised their family here since the 70's. Grandpa drained the wetlands to plant crops; Dad straightened out the creek after the terrible flood in 1954 that almost took out the feed mill dam. They kept up with the latest fertilizers, pesticides, and modern farming methods from the University of Wisconsin and agriculture companies. They were stewards of the land and successful farmers. But times change and farmers get tired. People were moving into the valley. Suburbia was on the rise, farming on the decline. The fields continued to be tilled but, with the cows sold, the pastureland along the creek became overgrown with invasive willows, elms, blackberry, multiflora rose and honeysuckle bushes, and fallen trees. The feed mill was long ago closed. Another awful flood came in 2001. It was time to move on.

Fred thought about the long talks he had with his elderly mom, Grandma Eva, starting in the 90's. They shared a love for children and a belief in Aldo Leopold's land ethic - cherish, protect and use the land for your generation and future generations of children. Together they started to formulate ways to preserve the land and creek and pass on this love. In 2006 Eva gifted 7 acres of land at the corner of Cramer and Hudson Streets, including the confluence of the Black Earth and Spring Valley creeks to the village of Mazomanie for parkland. Her primary goal was to create a place where kids could fish. In 2011 Fred donated 45 acres along the creek for a public conservation easement, protecting it in perpetuity. At the same time Fred and his Mom were talking, other individuals and

groups who shared this passion for the creek corridor began swinging into action. For example, The Black Earth Creek Watershed Association, led by Steve Born, was formed in 1987.

In an exceptional display of collaboration, public and private groups such as snowmobilers, and municipalities along the creek came together, organized and in 2008 began planning a trail from Middleton to Mazomanie. Slowly at first, but gathering speed and support over the years, interest in the creek corridor took hold with the general public. In 2010, the Wolf family and local conservation enthusiast Scott Stokes created the Wolf Run Association, a non-profit, to coordinate the effort. Then Dane County, Wisconsin DNR, trout enthusiasts, The Natural Heritage Land Trust, scientists at the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, the Village of Mazomanie and Wisconsin Heights Schools all signed on.



When, the dam was removed in 2012 the stretch of the creek above it was returned to its former meandering channel. Other sections of the creek narrowed, banks stabilized and the creek scoured itself of years of accumulated silt and a gravel bottom returned.

# of Wolf Run Trail

*ackleton*

Fred finishes his coffee, sets the cup aside, and gets up. A lone kayaker glides down the creek. A couple of students are riding their bikes to school – safely. Who would have thought that just a few years ago? It's time to get on the mower and trim the grass along the trail. The future for the creek, the land, and the kids looks good.



## Thirty Years of Restoration

*Dave Lucey*



One of the most noticeable developments in the Black Earth Creek Watershed has been the changes made in the landscape by those who are working to restore the environment to the way it looked before the settlement by Europeans in the 1800's. Swamplovers began the movement in 1987 by converting the hundreds of acres they owned into ponds, prairies and savanna (shown at left). This was followed by efforts made at Festge Park, Salmo Pond, Indian Lake and Walking Iron; Dane County parks in the watershed, to remove invasive plants and

trees and to plant native grasses and flowers. There also have been efforts by many private landowners to convert their acreages to the pre-settlement flora and fauna. In addition to being a pleasure to look at, the results will also improve water quality and promote the survival of grassland birds and the native pollinators who have been on the decline for the last few decades.

# Education Opportunities in the

*Bobbi Peckarsky, Deb Weitzel, Peter Jopke,*

The foremost goal of BECWA, established 30 years ago, is to foster “the wise management of the land and water resources in the Black Earth Creek Watershed.” One of the most effective ways to achieve that goal is to educate people of all ages about the proper functioning of those resources and the



*Photo: Dennis Franke - South Valley Road*

important role that citizens can play as local stewards of our special watershed. In recognition of the value of an educated citizenry, BECWA members have implemented many educational opportunities for students of all ages.

## **EDUCATION**

Faculty and staff from UW-Madison, UW-Extension, Wisconsin DNR, Dane County, and local schools from Middleton/Cross Plains to Wisconsin Heights have all engaged students and citizens in experiential learning demonstrating the magic of Black Earth Creek as an outdoor classroom. In this article we describe a few of the highlights.

## **EXAMPLES**

Steve Born, organizer and first president of BECWA led a UW-Madison Water Resources Management graduate student workshop to develop management recommendations to protect BEC. The goals were: To evaluate existing data on the watershed, identify potential problem areas, formulate management strategies and propose recommendations for the future maintenance and preservation of the creek.

Teacher Debra Weitzel, Middleton/Cross Plains High School, involved students in the annual cleanup of Black Earth Creek. Students implemented chemical and biological testing of BEC plus observing the annual trout census conducted by Scot Stewart (DNR). Subsequently,

after the discovery of New Zealand Mud Snails (NZM) in 2011 in BEC, MHS field biology students have continued sampling the macroinvertebrates in sections of the BEC with and without the invasive snails. Their results document increasing abundance of the snails. Students are also taught the importance and

technique of decontaminating equipment after being in contact with this prolific invasive species, which are critical components of proper stewardship of BEC.

Bobbi Peckarsky has provided many U.W-Madison undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to do original research related to best management of the BEC. For example, studies testing the effects of re-meandering of BEC in Cross Plains and establishment of Wolf Run Trail in Mazomanie demonstrated how remarkably fast the aquatic life recovers from re-meandering of stream channels. One ongoing annual educational event



sponsored by BECWA and under the guidance of Bobbi Peckarsky is “Bugs on the Creek”, held during Trout Days in the Village of Cross Plains. On this day, citizens of all ages, backgrounds and levels of experience are provided with the “tools” used by ecologists to bio-monitor the health of streams. Experts chat individually with the

participants and share stories about the magic of the underwater life in Black Earth Creek, in attempt to instill a widespread fascination and appreciation for the value of this special resource that we have committed to preserve and protect.

# The Black Earth Creek Watershed

*Kathy Haig, with editing by Barbara Borns*

There are three teachers in the Wisconsin Heights Middle and High School who use the Black Earth Creek on a regular basis for scientific experiments in a variety of classes in grades 6-12. They have students analyze the chemical composition of the water, measuring oxygen concentration and determining the quality of fish habitat. They also examine the microscopic flora and fauna of the creek. These kinds of activities have been going on for decades at Wisconsin Heights. In addition, students from Kathy Haig's humanities classes have participated in research studies with Bobbi Peckarsky or contributed to creek clean-up days with BECWA.

## RESEARCH

UW student monitoring of restored sections of Black Earth Creek led to discoveries that have been used by local managers at the Wisconsin DNR and UW Extension. For example, UW graduate students in an Insect Ecology class applied stream invertebrate data they collected to test the effectiveness of volunteer indices used all over the State



of Wisconsin by comparing them to metrics used by professionals to bio-monitor streams. In addition, a UW Statistics undergraduate student has been

analyzing data from BEC to make recommendations for improving volunteer indices for most effective citizen monitoring, not only in our watershed, but also throughout the state.

Dane County Land and Water Resources Department collaborated with USGS and the DNR in 2004 on a multi-year EPA funded study testing the environmental impacts of a residential subdivision on Brewery Creek, a tributary of Black Earth Creek. Conclusions confirm that correctly planning, implementing and maintaining Best Management Practices to control erosion and storm water runoff protect the stream from the impacts of development. Dane County enlisted the help of Middleton

High School (MHS) Ecology students enabling them to monitor Brewery Creek for an additional year. Students calculated the same macroinvertebrate indices that are used by Wisconsin Action Volunteers (WAV), presented the results in a written report and gave oral presentations to BECWA members. Their data were consistent with the professional study, which helped lend credibility to citizen monitoring.

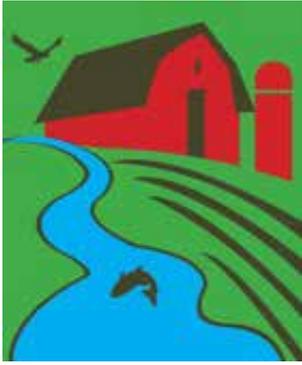
Finally, UW graduate and undergraduate students have teamed up with Wisconsin Heights HS students to track the spread of the invasive New Zealand Mud Snail after it was first discovered in Black Earth Creek in 2011.



In addition to research and educational opportunities, over the 30 years of its existence, from the end of the Priority Watershed program in the late 1990s, we estimate that BECWA members have collectively trained, educated, and given presentations to over to 1,000 people. Examples include State FFA Educator Conference, USFWS National Fisheries Tour, NHLT tours, County Board tours, Master Naturalists training sponsored by the Friends of Pheasant Branch, WAV trainings, school field trips, New Zealand Mudsnailed outreach and presentations, and Farmer Tours. A truly remarkable contribution from a volunteer organization.



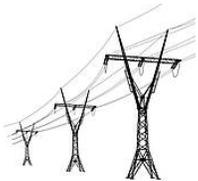
*Photo: Dennis Franke - Watershed Prairie Restoration*



## Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

c/o Greg Hyer  
4296 County P  
Cross Plains, Wi 53528



## BECWA Opposes ATC Cardinal-Hickory Creek Power Line



The Black Earth Creek Watershed Association's mission is to protect, conserve, support and advocate for the wise, long term management of the physical, environmental, cultural and historic resources that constitute the heritage and future of the watershed. Our opposition is based on the following:

- Black Earth Creek is recognized as an important environmental asset by the State of Wisconsin, which selected it as a "Priority Watershed" in the 1990's, investing over a million dollars in stream improvements.
- Black Earth Creek is an important recreational asset to the area—bringing visitors to fish, bird watch, walk, hike, bike along the creek. These visitors enhance the economic vitality of the community.
- One of the reasons visitors come to this watershed is because of the aesthetics—the beauty of the place—the connection to open spaces, clean waters, freedom from excessive noise and visual pollution. The proposed transmission line would blight the scenic and environmental values of our watershed.
- Educators from elementary, middle and high school and university classrooms use Black Earth Creek as an excellent local source for experiential learning and an example of a low-impact watershed with strong, citizen-based land stewardship.
- Individual homeowners in the watershed are concerned about effects of intrusion on their properties, loss of privacy and diminished land values.

**Because energy demand has been flat or declining for the last ten years, and because the proposed routes of the ATC Cardinal-Hickory Creek transmission line would run through and negatively impact the Black Earth Creek Watershed, BECWA is firmly opposed to the construction of this destructive transmission line.**