

Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

Fall 2020
FALL 2017

BECWA Receives WDNR Grant for Organizational Assessment and Outreach

Andy Morton, BECWA Board Member

One of the constants of life is change—and our organization is no different. Recognizing the changing community and resource management needs of our watershed, BECWA will undergo an organizational assessment and develop a strategic plan and expand our outreach and engagement activities. Our goal is to provide opportunities for learning about the watershed to support its management, restoration and protection. These efforts will receive financial support from a \$10,000 WDNR River Planning Grant awarded to BECWA earlier this year. The complete grant document which includes details about the funded activities can be found on our website (<https://www.becwa.org>).

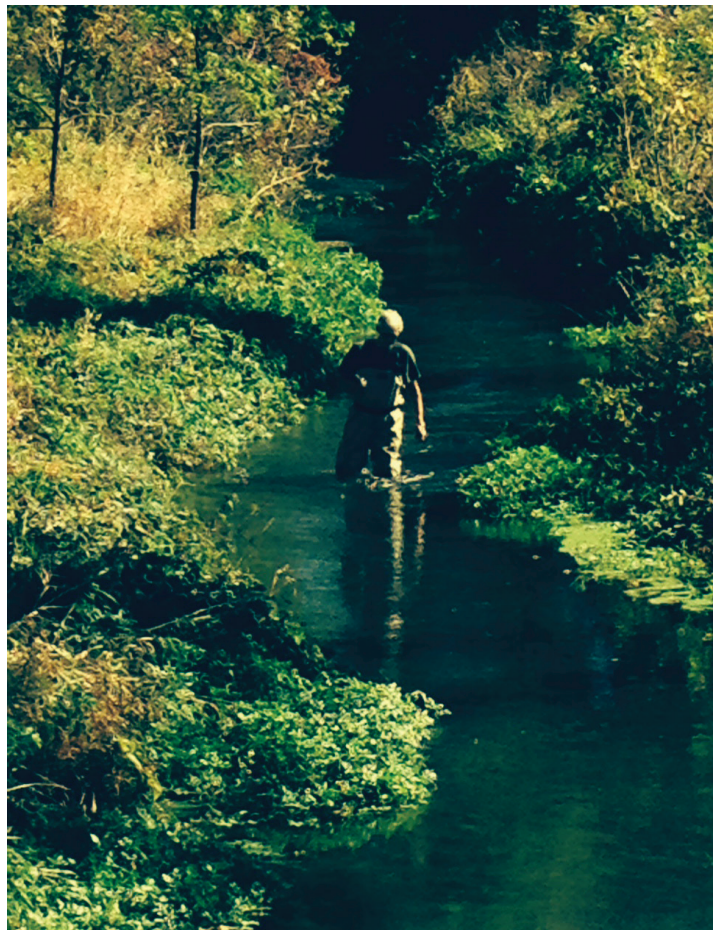
The organizational assessment and strategic plan development will be facilitated by UW-Extension and aims to help us best fulfill our overall mission “to protect and restore natural resources and ecosystems of Black Earth Creek and its watershed.” To prepare for our organizational assessment, the board will conduct a survey of current and former BECWA members, landowners, elected officials, organizations, and users. We invite you to take the online survey, which can be accessed via a link on our website. We greatly appreciate your help!

Also supported by the WDNR River Planning Grant, are several outreach and engagement activities including: publishing our newsletter; reworking our website and upgrading our social media presence; installing six interpretive signs along the creek—in the Village of Cross Plains, at Salmo Pond, in the Village of Black Earth and at the Wolf Run Trail; producing a video highlighting Black Earth Creek which will involve Wisconsin Heights High School, Middleton-Cross Plains High School, BECWA, and watershed partners; and conducting watershed forums, workshops, meetings, and events.

We look forward to your involvement and participation in these future BECWA-sponsored events and activities.

BECWA volunteer Steve Horn mapping the stream.

Photo Credit: Bobbi Peckarsky





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

Greg Hyer, *President*

Bobbi Peckarsky, *Vice-President*

Barbara Borns, *Secretary*

David Lucey, *Treasurer*

Richard Anderson - Johnny Armstrong

Kate Beardmore - Steve Born - Kathy Haig

Christopher Long Andy Morton - Debra Weitzel

Deb Nemeth - *Newsletter Design*

Bobbi Peckarsky - *Newsletter Editor*

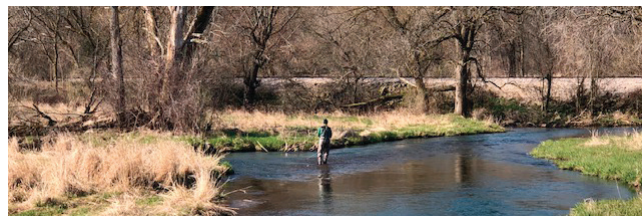
A Note from the President

Greg Hyer, BECWA President

2020 is not meeting anyone's expectations. The COVID pandemic has taken a tremendous personal toll on residents of the Black Earth Creek Watershed; and has made it very difficult for local businesses, many of which have provided carryout and outdoor seating options. All of us need to make an extra effort to support them and keep them safe. A 2020 bright spot is an increase in outdoor recreation -- shops are low on kayaks, canoes and bicycles. Folks are out and about and using resources in the Black Earth Creek Watershed that hundreds of volunteers, non-profits and all levels of government have protected, enhanced and promoted. Thank you to all those who care about the quality of life in the Watershed and help make it such a special place.

Fishers have reported good fishing on Black Earth Creek and are amazed at the quality of the fishery right in Cross Plains. It has also become quite the spot for kids playing in the creek as reported by my grandson. More and more kayakers are putting in at the Shoe Box landing and floating west. Folks of all ages are walking the trails at Mazomanie, Cross Plains, Festge Park and Ice Age Trail sections as a welcome and popular respite from the pandemic. All this outdoor activity is creating new fans to advocate and care for resources along Black Earth Creek, which has the potential for turning the 2020 lemon into lemonade. The Watershed is all of ours and for all of us, especially during these challenging times.

*Photo credit:
Bobbi Pecarsky
Fisher enjoying a
picturesque section of
BEC near the Wolf
Run Trail, May 2020*



Tom Wendelburg 1943- 2020

Memorial to a Legendary Trout Bum: Tom Wendelburg

By Jeff Mayers

Legendary "trout bum" and ardent Black Earth Creek advocate Tom Wendelburg died earlier this year at his Middleton home at the age of 77. The Milwaukee-born Wendelburg was a teacher, coach, Idaho newspaper reporter, fishing guide, expert fly tier, conservationist, freelance writer and photographer, and one of the finest writer-anglers of his generation. He waded treasured waters with fly angling legends such as Joe Brooks, Dan Bailey, and Doug Swisher and satisfied an elite group of outdoor magazine editors with a steady stream of articles, which culminated in his 2001 book, "Catching Big Fish on Light Fly Tackle." One of his conservation pieces on Black Earth Creek helped educate policymakers and the public on the need to protect its blue-ribbon waters. Tom's full obituary:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/jsonline/obituary.aspx?n=thomas-gene-wendelburg-tom&pid=196541102>

Solar Power Promoted in the Watershed

David Lucey, BECWA Board Member, and Warren Gaskill, Black Earth

Four Town of Vermont residents (Warren Gaskill, Peter Antonie, Barbara Borns and David Stanfield) were concerned about climate change, the ATC power transmission line, and the recent historic flooding of the Black Earth Creek valley. Believing there is a connection among the three, they discussed what an individual could do to address those issues. Consequently, they launched a Climate Action Workshop, co-sponsored by BECWA, consisting of three meetings in Feb., March, and April 2020 focusing on actions one could take in their home, business and community to help reduce their impact on the environment.

The third workshop focused on adding community solar systems to local energy supplies in coordination with member-owned Legacy Solar Cooperative of Madison. A special group buy was created with two installers: All Sky Energy and Eagle Point Solar. The “Western Dane County Group Buy” offers discounts on solar installations for residential, farm and small businesses owners located in the area from Verona to Blue Mounds and Cross Plains to Mazomanie. Through July 2020, 56 people have signed up for an assessment, with 39 forwarded to the solar installers for a cost estimate. The special offer runs into fall 2020.

Learn more about the Group Buy at: <https://legacysolarcoop.org/western-dane-county-solar-group-buy-2020/>

In addition, you can read about lessons learned by area residents who have installed solar projects at:

<https://www.vermonttownship.com/community/energy>



Solar panels at Dream Farm
Table Bluff Road, Town of Berry

Photo Credit: Dave Lucey

Meet Kate Beardmore: our newest BECWA Board Member

Originally from Green Bay, I moved to Southern Wisconsin in 2017 after receiving my Master in Public Health from St. George's University. I currently work a Student Advisor for the Master of Public Health Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, focusing primarily on the admissions process, and advising graduate and professional students. It was through my public health education that I became interested in environmental preservation, and the influence an individual can have as well as the influence of organizations and policy. As a lover of the outdoors, I enjoy hiking, camping, canoeing, fishing, and birding. In late 2019 I moved into the watershed (right on the creek!) and couldn't be happier to be a steward of the area. I hope to apply my experience in surveying, volunteer recruitment and coordination to help the BECWA.



Gateway to The Driftless Works with Dane, Sauk Partners to Make Regional Trail a Reality

Chris Long, BECWA Board Member, Executive Director GTTD

With Northwest Dane communities facing a challenging future, Gateway to The Driftless (GTTD) is working with area governments and other stakeholders on multiple efforts in support of economic recovery and smart growth around our area's natural resources. Launched in 2018 to promote the area's abundant outdoor recreation and to partner in related infrastructure projects, GTTD, a nonprofit corporation, continues to work actively toward development of the year-round multi-purpose recreational trail taking shape from Middleton to Reedsburg via Mazomanie and Devil's Lake State Park.

Following the December 2019 feasibility study of a new \$8 million Wisconsin River recreation bridge at Sauk City that would connect the Dane and Sauk parts of the trail, GTTD has currently teamed with Dane County Parks, the Great Sauk State Trail Commission, and UW-Extension (UWEX) in both counties on an economic impact study of the 60-mile bike/ped/snowmobile trail envisioned as both a major enhancement to the area's quality of life and a world-class eco-tourism attraction that can help spur downtown revitalization.

Working on the impact study for UWEX are Jenny Erickson, Mindy Habecker, Matt Kures, Dave Marcouiller, and Bill Ryan. Their scope of work includes estimates of potential use based on demographics and historical data, drive-time market analysis, expenditure patterns of non-motorized and snowmobiling trail users, and development of a marketing scheme. Interviews with potentially affected local business owners and other stakeholders have also been conducted. Delivery of the impact study report is expected by the end of 2020.

In addition to its importance for outdoor recreation, there is also growing interest in the Dane-Sauk regional trail's potential role as a transportation utility that could help local employers attract workers, plus support remote offices and shared workplaces. GTTD is helping organize a virtual roundtable meeting between local government representatives and regional planning and economic development organizations to discuss the economic outlook for rural communities and the benefits of regional cooperation in pursuit of smart growth. To better coordinate local and regional economic development activities, GTTD recently expanded its board of directors to include permanent seats for the three partner villages. A list of current directors can be found on the GTTD website. The Black Earth Community Representative seat is currently open.

For more information about Gateway to The Driftless and if you are interested in becoming a board member, visit <https://gatewaytothedriftless.com/heritage/>





Proposed Wisconsin River recreation bridge at Sauk City



Tribute to Steve Born

Barbara Borns - BECWA Board Member

BECWA is proud to announce that our founder, STEVE BORN, was one of three new members named to the **Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame**. Founded in 1985, the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame's mission is; *"To advance conservation ideals by inducting individuals who have contributed significantly to conservation in Wisconsin and the Nation."* Steve is in good company as he shares this honor with other notables including: Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Gaylord Nelson, and Nina Leopold Bradley.

In the late 1980's a hazardous waste landfill was leaking toxics into the headwaters of the Black Earth Creek. Steve Born coordinated an effort to address the impacts of that contamination, which led to the creation of the Black Earth Creek Watershed Association (BECWA). Now in its 32nd year of being an advocate for Black Earth Creek, BECWA is only one of many conservation activities that Steve has lead in his long and productive career.

Steve is an emeritus professor in the UW-Madison department of Urban & Regional Planning and was an active member of the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, as well as an alum of Water Resources Management Program. In the 1970's he was Director of the State of Wisconsin Planning Office as well as Director of the State Energy Office. He, along with Jeff Mayers, co-authored "Wisconsin Trout Streams: The Anglers Guide." Since his retirement, Steve is often found checking out the trout populations along Black Earth Creek as well as other US and international waters. BECWA congratulates Steve on this well-deserved honor.



Steve Born doing what he loves most!

Green Infrastructure Planning in the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Mike Rupiper – Capital Area Regional Planning Commission

The historic rainfall in August 2018 provided an important focus of conversation at BECWA's fall 2019 meeting, which highlighted the need for a more coordinated, regional approach for greater flood resilience in the watershed. As a result of that meeting, BECWA is working with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission, communities in the watershed, and other stakeholders on green infrastructure planning for the watershed. The goal of this project is to develop a plan that identifies potential green infrastructure projects in the watershed which, when implemented, will result in greater flood resilience, and improved water quality, as well as social and economic benefits. Small individual actions can have a large cumulative impact on the watershed – both negatively and positively. Communities in the Black Earth Creek watershed are working together to become a model for green infrastructure implementation throughout the region. A very fitting approach, given the watershed's identity as a place that enjoys abundant outdoor recreation opportunities and seeks to preserve and enhance its natural resources.

Green infrastructure is a broad range of practices that mimic natural processes for managing stormwater and reducing flow to surface waters. These practices provide a source reduction approach by typically using vegetation and soils to capture, absorb, infiltrate, evaporate, or store rain and melting snow. Strategies range from preservation and restoration of large-scale natural landscape features such as woodlands, floodplains, and wetlands to smaller-scale rain gardens, porous pavements, green roofs, infiltration planters, trees, and rainwater collection.

Green infrastructure has many environmental, social, and economic benefits. Infiltration of stormwater reduces its temperature and contributes to groundwater recharge, which is particularly important for sustaining cold water trout streams like Black Earth Creek. Green infrastructure practices that incorporate vegetation improve air quality by absorbing pollutants in addition to providing flood protection and cleaner water. By preserving and restoring natural landscape features such as forests, floodplains, and wetlands, communities can improve water quality while providing wildlife habitat and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Greener environments are also linked to better health.



Rain Barrels & Cisterns

save rain for later



Rain Gardens

beauty & rain collection



Natural Landscaping

create a healthy habitat



Stormwater Trees

hold more water



Residential Soil Amendments

create deeper roots



Green Roofs

protect your roof



Porous Pavement

rain soaks into the ground



Bioswales

catch dirty road runoff



Wetlands

support wildlife



Greenseams®

manage flooding upstream



Dane County Acquisition in the Headwaters of the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Sarah Rigelman, Dane County Land & Water Resources Department

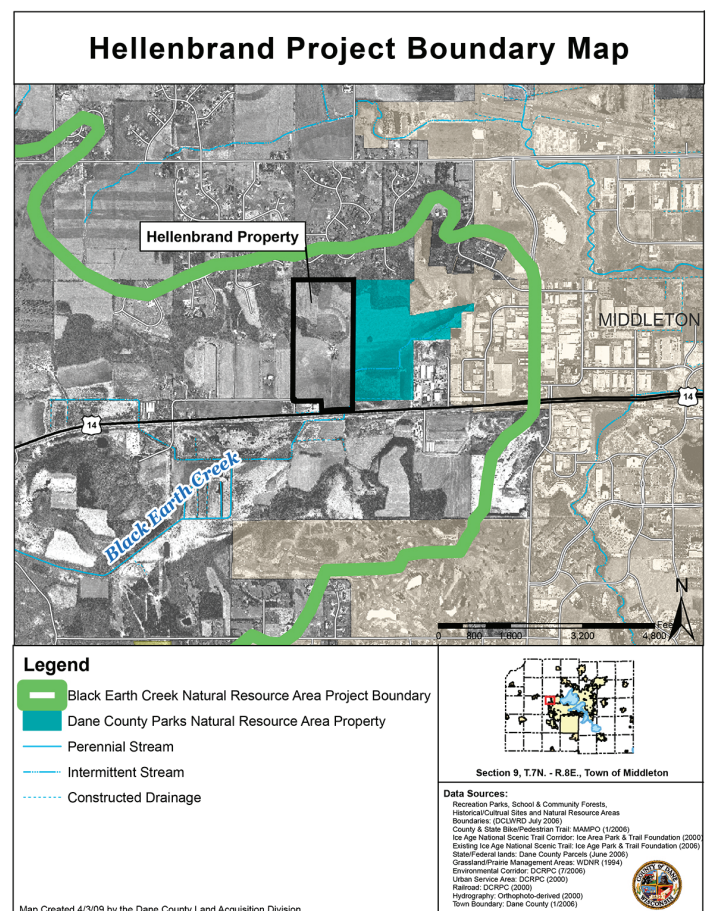
In March 2020, Dane County purchased approximately 81 acres located within Dane County's Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area from Judith Hellenbrand and the Hellenbrand Family Trust for \$4 million. The property is a mix of cropland, wood and grass-covered hillsides and farmstead. Judith Hellenbrand will continue to reside in the house on the property for the next two years.



Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and the Hellenbrand family at the property acquisition site.

The tract adjoins the 94-acre Dane County property (formerly Hinrich) that together, totaling 175 acres, house the headwaters of Black Earth Creek, and operate as a unit for a potential restoration of the historic shared wetland known as “Old Mud Lake.” Before the advent of the railroad and Highway 14, Old Mud Lake was an undivided wetland of ~140 acres and enjoyed a reputation as a premier waterfowl area. In addition, the wetland acted as a filter for sediment entering the system from the steep hillsides to the north, thus protecting the water quality in the Black Earth Creek. Around the turn of the century, the railroad bed was laid east to west to the middle of the wetland. Not long after that, Highway 14 was constructed paralleling the railroad. The southern half of the wetland was then ditched and drained, serving as a canal for the headwaters of Black Earth Creek. A pump was installed on the Hellenbrand property to move the water from the north side of the highway to the south side of the railroad track. This pump no longer functions; thus the area is returning to its natural wetland condition, which has been a major county conservation goal for decades.

Future restoration plans for the site are being developed in cooperation with several partners including the Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited. A major component of the restoration will include the conversion of the crop fields to grassland and wetland habitats. Planning is underway to determine the recreational uses for the property and adjoining County lands. For this year, both tracts will be included in Dane County's permitted archery program. Stay tuned as plans develop for this important and historic wetland site.





Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

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

**To become a BECWA member or
renew your membership**

Send your check to:

David Lucey

7952 County Highway K

Cross Plains, WI 53528

Lifetime Member - \$100 Business - \$50

Watershed Patron - \$35

Household - \$25 Basic - \$15

The Battle Over Unnecessary Transmission Behemoth – Far from Over

Chuck Tennesen, Community Organizer, Driftless Area Land Conservancy

Last September the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) approved the construction of the highly controversial **Cardinal-Hickory Creek (CHC)** high-voltage transmission line. This line would traverse the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, then traverse approximately one-hundred miles of scenic southwest Wisconsin. Critics contend that not only is this project not needed because electricity use throughout the region continues to flatten or decline, but also the PSC's own analysis demonstrates that the project is likely to be a decades long money-losing proposition for Wisconsin and regional rate-payers. And unfortunately, as with any large infrastructure project, both the fragile ecological balance and the scenic viewshed are unavoidably compromised.

But this battle is far from over. Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) and Wisconsin Wildlife Federation along with Dane and Iowa Counties and other municipalities are challenging the PSC's decision in court. In a joint lawsuit in Dane County Circuit Court, the plaintiffs contend that the PSC failed in many ways to follow the rule of law throughout the formal review process. At the federal level in the U.S. District Court - Western District of Wisconsin, plaintiffs charge that two of the three Public Service Commissioners should have lawfully recused themselves because of ties to and communications with the developers and other proponents of the line. Finally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to allow a route through the National Wildlife Refuge violates the letter and spirit of the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997. As a member of the Fish & Wildlife Service Oversight Committee, Illinois Senator Tammy Duckworth has soundly criticized the lack of rigor exhibited during the permitting process and has requested she be provided with the justifications for these oversights. This ongoing battle to protect our unique Driftless Area is supported by many conservation organizations including BECWA. For further information about the legal battle to stop this transmission line see:

<https://www.driftlessconservancy.org/trans-line-opposition>
