

**Wisconsin Waterfront Revitalization Conference  
April 13, 2005**

***“Control Your Destiny - Obtaining Access and Acquiring Properties”***  
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**Introduction**

what is a land trust? a private, non-profit organization established to protect and restore natural resources for public benefit

public benefit can be: recreation, water quality control, open space/scenic views, working lands, wildlife habitat

land trusts work with willing landowners to acquire property rights – via conservation easements, fee title acquisition, management agreements; all transactions can take the form of donation, bargain sale, purchase, or bequest

land trusts are non-governmental – governed by elected Board of Directors

**Benefits land trusts provide**

bring private funds to match government funding for acquisition and/or restoration and improvements

also eligible for grant funds which local governments cannot access

expertise in land transaction negotiations, legal details

can serve as consultants or contract staff to a municipal project

often able to move faster than local government can to acquire property rights when they become available

have connections to and knowledge of the local community – can serve as sounding board or provide opportunity for public involvement

**Good non-profit projects**

land trusts typically interested in open space preservation – liability issues with brownfields may be too costly

projects must provide public benefit – cannot be solely to the benefit of a private individual or entity

project must meet with land trust's internal project selection criteria and mission: typically, the mission to protect environmental, recreational, agricultural resources

### **Example: Bayfield Regional Conservancy**

#### Brownstone Trail

formed to permanently protect a lakeshore walking trail on abandoned RR grade; trail is almost entirely on private land, access had been through informal agreements

the land trust role:

- negotiates with landowners for access easements,
- raises funds for trail improvements,
- provides volunteer labor for improvements

trail starts on city property, goes through town of Bayfield  
city would like to extend trail north within city limits along waterfront

trail provides an economic boost: "Great winter lake view property just above the Brownstone Trail with a path down to the lake. Listen to the creeks from your bedroom window and enjoy the peace and quiet within walking distance from Bayfield." – typical MLS listing description

### **Example: Mississippi Valley Conservancy**

#### LaCrosse Blufflands

City's Comprehensive Planning process identified public interest in protecting blufflands for scenic and recreational values

partnership:

- land trust – serves as "broker" for the program, working with landowners to purchase lands and easements; applies for State Stewardship Funding to match city's investment; monitors easements annually (retains easements on lands donated to city)

city – commits \$250 - \$275,000/year toward acquisition of properties and easements (committed to funding through 2007), and transaction associated costs; lands protected are placed into City Parks system for trail development and ecological management

Program success: 263 acres protected (223 owned, 18 acres eased)

## How to work with land trusts

most municipalities have existing relationships with their local land trust

### City of Mequon & OWLT:

OWLT bought and transferred a woodland to the city as its first project

City and OWLT collaborated on the vision and design of the Mequon Nature Preserve

### City of LaCrosse & MVC:

Conservancy worked with City on La Crosse River Conservancy project in 1998.

Then began planning how they could work together to save landscape and provide recreational opportunities. Formulated Blufflands Program with formal agreement in December 2001.

### Town of Bayfield and BRC:

Land Use plan identified need to preserve agricultural lands – local economy depends on active farming (ag produce & tourism)

Town and Conservancy collaborated on grant to USDA for funds to acquire devel. rights; Town levied taxes, Conservancy raised private dollars to match grant

Call your local land trust to determine their potential interest in a waterfront project – they will evaluate the project according to their criteria as they would any landowner contacting them with a conservation interest

Gathering Waters can provide technical assistance and resources as well



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