



Watershed News

The Farmland Protection Issue

Conserving Land in the Cedar Lakes Region

With the purchase of the Ostberg Property by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) in January, the closing of a farmland easement on the Norman J. Fehring Family farm in February and the closing of a farmland easement on the Mantoan Sauve Terre farm in March, the first three months of 2023 have been very busy at CLCF! With these transactions, which total 170 acres, CLCF has helped to protect 2,784 acres in the Cedar Lakes region – well on its way to achieving its Strategic Plan goal of protecting 3,000 acres by 2024.

Since 1974, CLCF's vision has been to sustain the abundant natural beauty, clean water, and biodiversity of the Cedar Lakes region for generations to come. Part of this vision is the protection of sustainable working farms, which have been part of the fabric of CLCF's mission area since the mid-1800s.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program

CLCF is grateful to be working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) to conserve farmland as part of NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP).

In 2020, CLCF partnered with MMSD and applied for and was awarded a \$1.5 million cost-share grant from NRCS as part of the RCP program. As a result of this grant, for each farmland conservation project that NRCS approves, CLCF can receive up to 50% in cost-share funds.

The RCP program is aimed at furthering the conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, agricultural land, and related natural resources on a regional or watershed scale. The program helps local farmers keep farmland in the family and in production through the purchase of a conservation easement by a qualified entity like CLCF.



Norman J. Fehring Farm with Little Cedar Lake to the North

As part of the RCP program, CLCF aims to permanently protect prime farmland in its mission area. With an agricultural easement, landowners retain ownership and the right to farm the land while preserving the natural resources on a site. Participating landowners work collaboratively with NRCS to develop a recommended conservation plan for the farm and to develop various land management practices to improve soil health and water retention.

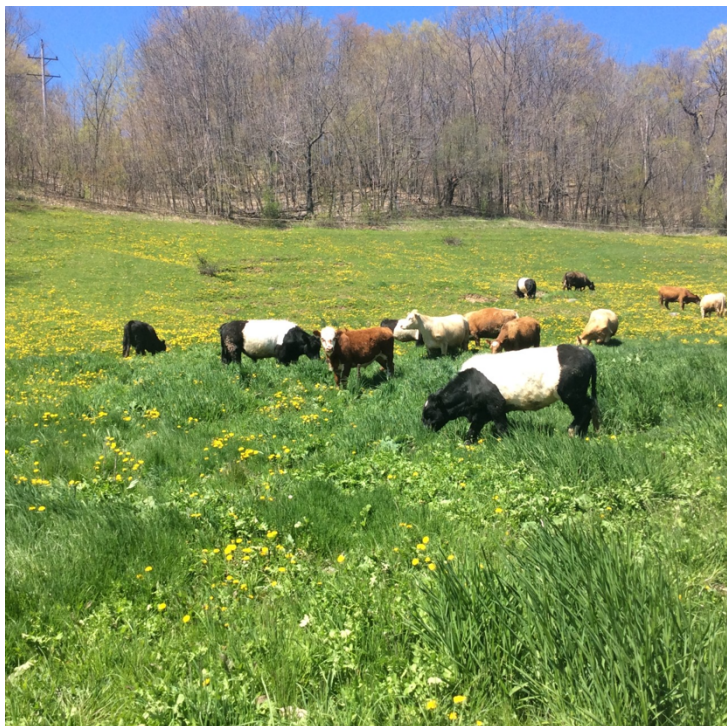
According to data from the American Farmland Trust, nearly 60% of farmers in Wisconsin are 55 or older and 82% of those who are 55 and older are currently involved in estate or succession planning. In CLCF's mission area, nearly 100% of the farmers are 55 or older. As a result, many of these farmers are weighing their options regarding the future of their land.

CLCF believes that sustainable working farms are an important part of the local community. If you are a farmer who has an interest in this program—or know a farmer who might be interested—please let us know. We would welcome a chance to meet and talk about NRCS's RCP program and to see if it might be a good fit.

The Norman J. Fehring Family Farm

The Norman J. Fehring Family farm has been in the Fehring Family since the mid-1800s. Ron Fehring, Norman's son, lives on the farm and raises cattle for grass-fed beef. He has just over 90 acres in hay and row crops.

If you have ever driven past the farm, you most likely have seen Ron's cattle grazing in the pasture or on the hill where Pleasant Valley Road starts to wind (steeply) up towards Hillside Road. Many also know the area as Bull Frog Alley.



Cattle on the Hill at the Norman J. Fehring Family Farm

CLCF first began discussing the protection of the Fehring farm with Ron back in mid-2020, and on February 22, 2023, CLCF closed on a 133-acre agricultural land easement, which will protect the Fehring farm in perpetuity.

The farm contains high-quality soil and diverse ecological communities. In addition, a highlight of the farm is Cedar Creek, which runs directly through the western portion of the property. Cedar Creek begins at the Big Cedar Lake Dam and flows southeast through the wetlands and into Little Cedar Lake.

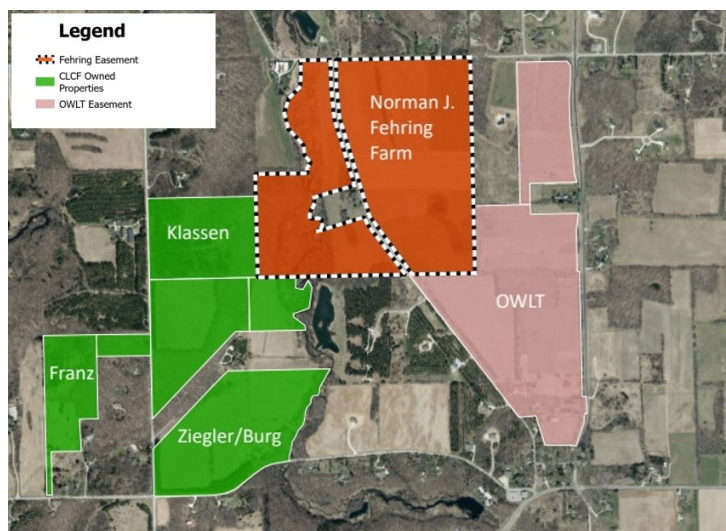
The Creek continues at the southern tip of Little Cedar Lake where it goes over the Little Cedar Lake dam – and

flows right down through the Fehring farm – before continuing on its journey to the Milwaukee River and ultimately Lake Michigan.



View of the Norman J. Fehring Farm Looking South

The protection of the Fehring farm creates an area of 376 acres of conserved land, including the Fehring farm, the Ziegler / Burg farm, the Klassen Property, the Franz parcels, and Curtes family land protected by the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust.



Conserved Land South of Pleasant Valley Road

The Fehring farm agricultural land easement is the first easement transaction to close as part of CLCF's and MMSD's partnership with NRCS to protect farmland in the Milwaukee River Watershed.

CLCF is incredibly grateful to Ron Fehring and his sisters, Karen Breuer and Susan Newsom, for protecting this truly magnificent property.

A Few Words from Ron Fehring of the Norman J. Fehring Family Farm

I have spent my whole life here on the farm. My great-great-grandfather, Carl Fehring, came from Germany to America in the mid-1800s and settled in the Town of Polk, where he bought land and started farming.

My sisters and I represent the fifth generation of Fehring who have owned this land, and my greatest fear was that this incredible farm – with its wildlife, woods, creek and fields – would be developed. My father always wanted this land to remain as it is, and now I know that I have made this wish come true. Someday, I will have to answer to my father, and I know in my heart that I have done the right thing.

CLCF and the RCPP program allows the Fehring family to continue to own this land and to farm it, while also letting us take some money off the table. Like many farmers, I haven't had a day off in many years, and I am looking forward to enjoying life – and the farm, too.

I know that a lot of farmers are in the same boat as me and see the writing on the wall with regard to the future of their farms. CLCF and the RCPP program provided our family with another option besides selling to a developer. This means a lot to me. I have a real sense of satisfaction knowing that the view from the bridge on Pleasant Valley Road as you look south down the valley will always remain the same. That's worth its weight in gold.



Mantoan 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and now 6!

CLCF is excited to announce the closing on March 9, 2023 of a 24.2-acre agricultural land easement on the Mantoan family's Sauve Terre farm. This is the sixth conservation easement that Joe and Laura Mantoan have entered into with CLCF since 2004, and CLCF is incredibly grateful to Joe and Laura for their 18 years of conservation efforts to protect land west of Gilbert Lake in the Town of West Bend.

The Mantoan family generously donated their first conservation easement, Mantoan1, in 2004 and two more, Mantoan2 and 3, in 2016 totaling 31.9 acres. Mantoan 1 contains pastureland as part of the Mantoan family's Sauve Terre Farm, while Mantoan2 and 3 both contain wetlands and are located on the western shore of Gilbert Lake.

In 2019 and 2020, CLCF closed on two more conservation easements with the Mantoan family, Mantoan4 and Mantoan5, which was formerly part of the Lichon farm. These two transactions conserved another 64.1 acres of farmland. During the Mantoan4 conservation project, CLCF had the opportunity to work with NRCS through their Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)—the predecessor to the current RCPP program. In fact, Joe Mantoan first

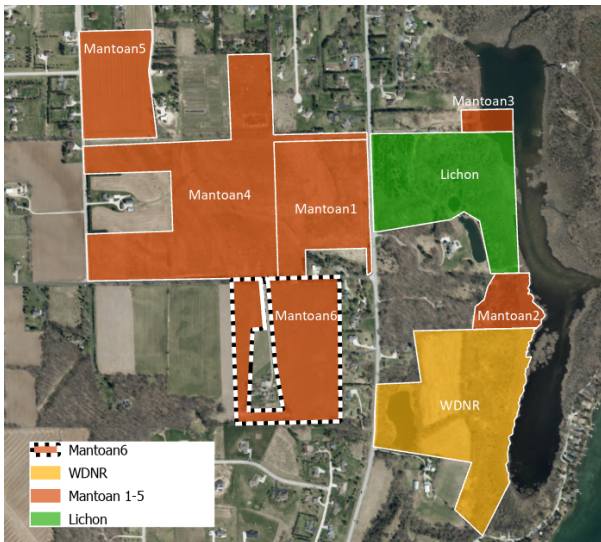
introduced CLCF to the NRCS program, which marked the start of CLCF's collaboration with both NRCS and MMSD. This introduction ultimately led to CLCF's participation in the current RCPP program through which CLCF protected the Norman J. Fehring Family farm.



Mantoan6 Looking Southeast towards Big Cedar Lake

Sauve Terre farm is located in an ecologically sensitive area. To the west, the farm borders Nabob Road, which lies along the subcontinental divide. To the east, the farm slopes towards Gilbert Lake and the waters of Big Cedar Lake, and so the Mantoan family's conservation efforts are truly appreciated.

With the closing of Mantoan6, the Mantoans have conserved a total of 119 acres of land. Adding in adjacent land protected by the WDNR and CLCF, this number totals 184 acres in the sensitive Gilbert Lake region.



Map of Conserved Land West of Gilbert Lake

Thank you to Joe, Laura and family for conserving this land and being a positive advocate for farming in the Cedar Lakes region and beyond!

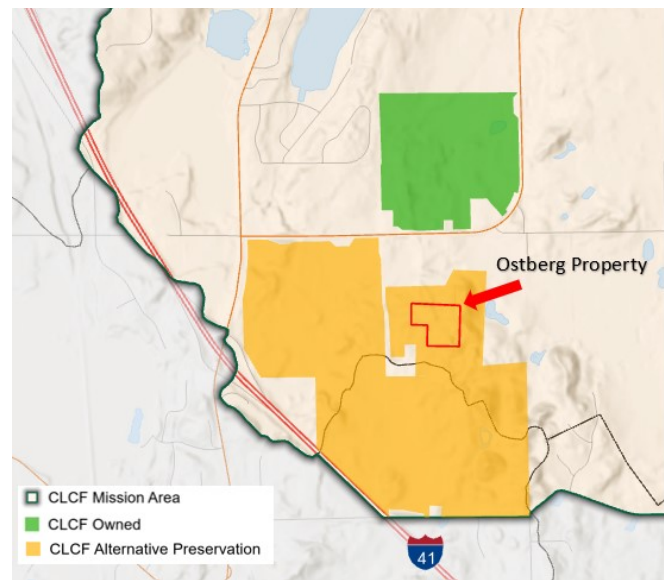
Ostberg Property: Closing the Gap at Polk Kames

On January 27, 2023, the WDNR closed on the purchase of the 13-acre Ostberg Property. The Ostberg Property is a beautiful, wooded parcel and a wonderful example of Kettle Moraine topography. The Property is in the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission’s (SEWRPC’s) Primary Environmental Corridor and contains woods, wetlands and a pond. In 1974, Edwin and Louise Pabst gifted the Ostberg Parcel to the Ostberg family with a provision that if the

land were ever sold, the neighboring landowner would have a Right to Purchase the Property. In March 2006, CLCF purchased the Pabst Property surrounding the Ostberg Property from the Louise Lemp Pabst Trust. Subsequently, CLCF transferred the Pabst Property to the WDNR as part of the creation of Polk Kames.

At that time, the Right to Purchase also transferred to the WDNR, and, all these years later, the opportunity to exercise this Right to Purchase became a reality.

CLCF is thrilled to have this wonderful property protected and is grateful to the WDNR for their responsiveness and ability to bring this transaction to a close! Polk Kames, now a 448-acre preserve, is open to the public and has roughly 3 miles of the Cedar Lakes Segment of the Ice Age Trail meandering through it.



Polk Kames (in yellow) with the Ostberg Property

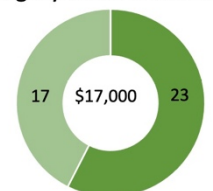
CLCF’s Legacy Circle Bequest Challenge

You have an amazing opportunity to expand the work of protecting, caring for and restoring the Cedar Lakes region for generations to come. Two generous couples have created a grant of \$40,000, of which \$1,000 will be added to CLCF’s operating funds **for every new Legacy Circle member**. This means that your future commitment to save land can help **right now!**

To date, 23 of CLCF’s donors have taken up this challenge to join CLCF’s Legacy Circle--leaving 17, or \$17,000, remaining as part of the Bequest Challenge grant. We hope that you’ll consider joining this special group. For more information or to participate in the Legacy Circle Bequest Challenge, please contact Linda Mutschler at 414-614-5084 or Kathy Klein at 414-614-4698.



Goal of 40 Legacy Circle Members



Why Protect Farmland?

Since European settlement, farming has been a staple across the Midwest and particularly in Wisconsin. This has certainly been true in Washington County and the Cedar Creek Watershed which stretches from the top of Big Cedar Lake all the way to Cedarburg.

As you can see in the image below, back in 1937 farmland used to stretch as far as the eye could see in the Cedar Lakes Watershed



**1937 Aerial Image of the Cedar Lakes Region
From the WI Historic Aerial Imaging Finder.**

However, over the years, as population has grown and families have moved into the area, more and more farmland has been converted for development. In fact, according to the American Farmland Trust, every day 2,000 acres of agricultural land in the United States is paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize farming. Once land is developed and paved over, the opportunity for conservation of that land is basically gone forever.

The American Farmland Trust further estimates that over the next 15 years, one-third of America's farmland and rangeland will likely change hands, as current landowners age and sell. When farmland is sold, there is a high risk that the land will be converted to a non-agricultural use.

According to Washington County, land use in the Cedar Creek Watershed is approximately 55% agriculture, 16% urban, 16% wetlands/water, and 13% grassland and

forests. As we mentioned earlier, while nearly 60% of farmers are 55 and older in Wisconsin, this number is closer to 100% in CLCF's mission area. CLCF feels that maintaining sustainable farms is important for several reasons.

First, agriculture is important for the local economy. It provides jobs and livelihoods. Furthermore, there is a strong history of farming in the area with many farms having been in the same family for over a hundred years.

Second, farmland (and particularly farmland with healthy soils) is important for water infiltration, sequestration and groundwater recharge. Wisconsin has become wetter over the years with average precipitation increasing over 17% or about 5-inches per year since 1950. This means that the protection of healthy soils has become even more important. In the Cedar Lakes Watershed, we rely on groundwater for drinking water, so this groundwater recharge is critically important.

Third, it's important to have a balance between urban development and agriculture. There is no question that we need to be able to accommodate growth, but we also need to have sustainable working farms and farmers to grow food, not only for the local community but also for regional and global markets.

Lastly, farms and their iconic barns and silos have been part of the landscape and rural character of this region for generations. CLCF feels that sustainable working farms are part of the fabric of the community. By working with farmers to conserve and protect their farmland with agricultural easements, CLCF can help to ensure that this farmland stays in production for generations to come.



Farmland and Barns in the Town of West Bend

Welcome to CLCF's New Board and Staff Members!



John Bonnell joined CLCF's Board in 2023 and is serving as the Board's Treasurer. Since 2017, John has been the Director of Business Development at Campbell Newman Asset Management, Inc. Prior to that, he spent 10 years in Institutional Sales at Artisan Partners. He has been in the investment business for over 20 years. John also serves on the Board of Trustees at the University School of Milwaukee. He and his family enjoy spending time on Big Cedar Lake.



Kevin Steiner joined CLCF's Board in 2023. Kevin has worked at West Bend Mutual Insurance Company since 1994 and has been President from 2008 to 2022 and CEO since 2009. He has been in the insurance industry for 31 years. He also serves on the boards of the Boys and Girls Club of Washington County and the Kettle Moraine YMCA, among other organizations.



Sophie Gosetti joined CLCF's staff as Land Conservation Coordinator in November 2022. Sophie graduated from UW-Madison with a BS in Conservation Biology and Spanish. After graduation, Sophie worked with Waukesha County Parks and Land Use and Glacial Lakes Conservancy, where she learned about natural land management and various conservation tools, such as conservation easements. In her spare time, Sophie is often hiking, reading, or putting together jigsaw puzzles. CLCF is excited to have Sophie on our team!

CLCF's 2023 Nature Series Supported by West Bend Mutual Insurance Company

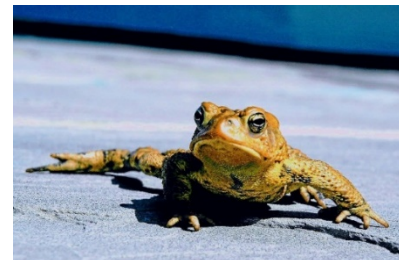
CLCF is excited to announce its 2023 Nature Series supported by West Bend Mutual Insurance Company. As part of this Series, CLCF will be hosting four events: two educational talks, a Prairie Walk and Talk, and the screening of the documentary film *Kiss the Ground* at The Bend. CLCF is grateful for West Bend Mutual Insurance Company's support of our educational and outreach efforts. Thank you West Bend Mutual!

CLCF's 2023 Nature Series – *Sunset Serenade: Wisconsin Frogs*

Saturday, April 22, 2023, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm.
Location: Town Hall at the Town of West Bend
6355 County HWY Z, West Bend, WI 53095

This Earth Day, CLCF welcomes back Janet Raddatz, Wisconsin Master Naturalist, for her presentation, *Sunset Serenade: Wisconsin Frogs* as part of CLCF's 2023 Nature Series supported by West Bend Mutual Insurance Company. Each Spring, Wisconsin's frogs and toads announce their presence with a musical chorus. Come learn about these amphibians and the songs they sing. Janet Raddatz will share her knowledge of these special creatures. We hope to see you there or via zoom! Please Register by April 19, 2023 at:

<https://conservecedarlakes.org/event/clcfs-nature-series-frogs-sunset-serenade/>



CLCF Nature Series supported by:



CLCF's 2023 Nature Series – *Kiss the Ground* Documentary Screening

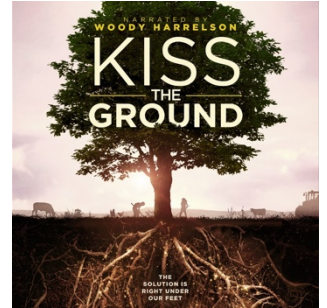
Thursday, May 18, 2023, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Location: The Bend

125 N. Main Street, West Bend, WI 53095

CLCF's Nature Series is hosting a talk and screening of the documentary, *Kiss the Ground*. *Kiss the Ground* reveals that, by regenerating the world's soils, we can help to stabilize Earth's climate, restore lost ecosystems, and create abundant food supplies. The film artfully illustrates how, by drawing down atmospheric carbon, soil is a missing piece of the climate puzzle. Please register by May 15, 2023 at:

<https://conservecedarlakes.org/event/kiss-the-ground-screening/>



CLCF Nature Series supported by:



SAVE THE DATE – Annual Kayak Tour

Saturday, June 10, 2023, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Location: Little Cedar Lake

CLCF will be hosting its Annual Kayak Tour at Little Cedar Lake on Saturday, June 10, 2023. Bring your own kayak or use one of ours. If you aren't interested in kayaking, we would love it if you joined us for coffee and doughnuts. Stay tuned for updates and registration!



SAVE THE DATE – West Bend Mutual Insurance Company Prairie Walk

Monday, June 26, 2023, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Location: West Bend Mutual Insurance Company

CLCF's Nature Series supported by West Bend Mutual Insurance Company will be offering CLCF members a special treat – a history and walk at West Bend's wonderful prairie. The prairie is not open to the public, and so this is a unique opportunity to see the colors of another organization's ode to conservation. There is a limited number of registrations for this event. Stay tuned for updates and registration!



CLCF's Nature Series is supported by:



SAVE THE DATE – Race for Open Space 5K and 10K Trail Run and Walk

Sunday, October 15, 2023

Location: Fox Hill Nature Preserve

Get outdoors and help CLCF in its 2nd Annual Race for Open Space 5K and 10K trail run and walk at the Fox Hill Nature Preserve. Your participation will help support CLCF's mission to protect the natural environment of the Cedar Lakes region. There are still sponsorship opportunities available. If you would like to be a sponsor, please call Mackenzie Franz at (262) 353-4866. Stay tuned for updates and registration!



CLCF's Race for Open Space is sponsored by:





Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation
P.O. Box 347
West Bend, WI. 53095

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Race to Protect OPEN SPACE

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Support CLCF by Purchasing Your Spring Logo Wear!

CLCF's online store will be opening April 21, 2023 with your favorite items and a special Save the Earth / There's no Planet B t-shirt. Orders are sent directly to your home.

Here is your CLCF shopping link:

<https://clcf.spring2023webstore.itemorder.com/>



SCAN ME



Watershed News is published by the Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation, Inc., a 501(c)(3) whose mission is to conserve the natural environment of the Cedar Lakes region.

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www.conservecedarlakes.org

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