



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Issue #16 Dec. 1, 2016

The Land Trust Movement Led by CWRLT

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

The Couderay Waters Regional Land Trust (CWRLT) is not one of those snappy acronyms that stick in your head and roll off your tongue when you're trying to tell people about it, but once you've learned what the organization is about and what they do it is unlikely you will ever forget, because, quite simply, they protect and preserve the land in perpetuity.

"How's that," you say?

It's done through land trusts, which legally protect and preserve the natural environment by using conservation easements which are legal agreements between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits use of the land in order to protect its conservation value. The owner—you—retains ownership, use and enjoyment of the land, as do your heirs—but they must abide by the terms of the easement.



Photo submitted.

History of CWRLT

CWRLT was begun in 2002 when a few people from the Couderay and Grindstone lakes area got together to talk about the concerns of the development on the shores of these lakes, according to Carol Heinrich, President of CWRLT.

"They desired to see less development and more preservation of lands that affect the watersheds of these regions," Carol explained, adding that they then established the non-profit 501 (c) (3) Land Trust which was able to create specific terms of agreement on the use of the lands placed within the trust, using binding documents to last in perpetuity.

Carol said those original founders were Roger Rickert, Jim Garvey, Ray Moeller, Bob Oesterreicher, Ted Schwenker, Harry Schroeder and Eric Nilsson.

CWRLT meets monthly and has two main committees: stewardship and resources. The Stewardship Committee is responsible for the easements and works with landowners to gather information and assist in decisions on land use. They also monitor the land from year to year to ensure compliance. The Resource Committee is responsible for membership and fundraising, requiring continuous updates and contacts with people and organizations for financial support.

How it operates

Carol said to begin the process the landowner requests information from CWRLT. A packet of materials is sent out that explains the options a landowner has in preserving their property. If they want to proceed they contact the land trust and fill out preliminary paperwork regarding the property and its features. Members of the land trust then walk the property with the landowner to develop a sense and a vision for what the preservation would look like.

After that the land trust compiles baseline data about the land in the form of survey maps, property tax descriptions, and historical and geographical features of the land that include type of forest and habitats that dominate the landscape. That information is used to write the legal document that describes the uses and restrictions of the land in perpetuity.

It is important to note, Carol pointed out, that the landowner may be eligible for tax benefits based on the possibility of land value changes that may occur due to the restrictions that are drawn up.

FAQs

Louise Heim is also on the CWRLT Board of Directors. She said CWRLT operates with legal counsel. For years that was Bob Oesterreicher; today it is Susan Miley who is their legal consultant for the land trust.

Louise said land uses and restrictions can vary greatly, depending on the land, the property's conservation qualities and the landowner's vision. She said protection agreements usually encourage keeping shoreline in a natural state, leaving wooded areas natural with a minimum of disturbance while allowing uses like cutting firewood or keeping a walking trail.

"I know of no movement...as convincing, as effective, and as compassionate as the land trust movement. It is like water, seeping into the most unexpected places."

Terry Tempest Williams, author & conservationist

CONSIDER A YEAR-END CONTRIBUTION TO THE LAC COURTE OREILLES FOUNDATION

Momentum is growing ... and the most important and permanent solutions for preserving Lac Courte Oreilles are now in sight: Legal protection from the state and phosphorus reductions from a number of the larger sources that discharge directly or through runoff to the lake. COLA has never been closer to implementation of these measures.

The substantial progress COLA has made would not be possible without your contributions to the Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation. The future of our lake depends entirely on a significant financial response from all lake property owners. [Please help by making your 2016 tax-deductible donation.](#)

PLEASE BE ALERT

A first-ever bloom of blue-green algae developed on Stuckey Bay, LCO, on or about Sunday, November 6, and lasted for five days. While blue-green algae can produce toxins, there was no detectable toxin level associated with this particular event. [\[More\]](#)

This incident and the August fish kill are wake-up calls. Lac Courte Oreilles needs our attention. Please be on the lookout for any changes you see on the lake or anything you consider unusual, and provide COLA with your information.

IN THE NEWS

[Fish Die-off Spurs Another Phosphorous Debate](#)
Sawyer County Record
Nov 17, 2016

RECENT PRESS RELEASES

[Recent Blue-Green Algae Alert on Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

[Massive Die-Off of Whitefish and Cisco in Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

[How One Lake Association is Encouraging the Cranberry Industry to Control Waste Discharges into Its Lake](#)

[Lake Association Offers \\$100,000 to Fix Pollution from Cranberry Operations on Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

[Lake Association and LCO Tribe Proceed with Legal Action to Protect Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

We'd like to spread the news of COLA's good people and good works throughout the upper Couderay River watershed. If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears Long Tales, [let us know.](#)

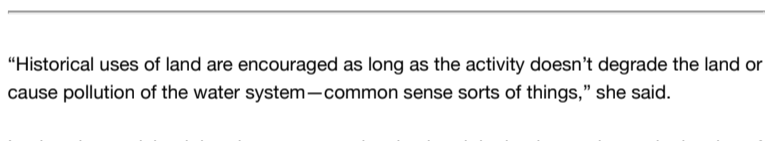
Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends.

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join.](#)

[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES](#)

Best wishes for the Holidays!

[View this email in your browser](#)



One of the easements, this woods and water represents the essence of the northwoods, protected forever by Couderay Waters Regional Land Trust. Photo by Kelly Nechuta.

"Historical uses of land are encouraged as long as the activity doesn't degrade the land or cause pollution of the water system—common sense sorts of things," she said.

Louise also explained that there are costs involved and the landowner bears the burden of such costs as attorney time, easement stewardship fee (used for legal defense of the easement if needed), and potentially a re-evaluation of the land's assessed value with an easement in place. "The land trust tries its best to minimize any financial burden to the landowner," Louise said.

Carol also explained that most of the donations CWRLT receives come from members, usually in amounts that range from \$25 to \$100, although there are members who give more.

CWRLT is concerned that they grow their legal defense fund so that they have at least \$10,000 per easement in their stewardship fund to support any challenge that might occur. To date they only have \$20,000 in that fund and would like to see \$50,000.

She also said they are looking to seek support from the business community since their work as a land trust supports Hayward's economic base.

"The reason people come here to live, or vacation, is because of the natural beauty of the woods and water. Within that our forested trails provide the hiking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling and ATV activity so many seek. Our clean, clear waters are also the attraction for boating, fishing and swimming. Without the forests and clear-water lakes, what would attract those people," she asked.

Current Easements

To date CWRLT has five easements: two are on the Chippewa Flowage, both of which have a significant amount of shoreline in a natural state; and two are on Lac Courte Oreilles where the landowners' main goal was to protect the stewardship their families had worked hard to maintain—namely to keep land and water quality at a high level.

And the fifth one is with the Sherman & Ruth Weiss Public Library where CWRLT has a non-traditional land trust agreement with the Weiss Library Board, the City of Hayward and Sawyer County which perpetually prohibits any residential, agricultural, commercial or industrial use of the nature park.



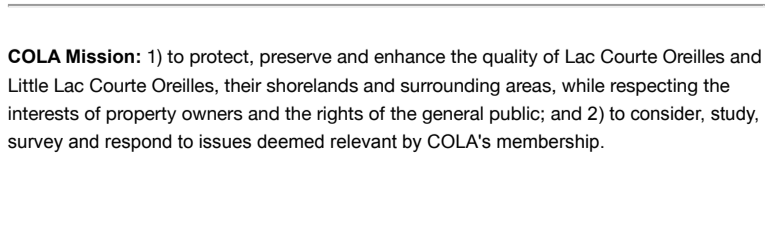
One of the easements CWRLT holds, the Library Nature Trail is easily accessible at the Sherman & Ruth Weiss Community Library. Photo by Kelly Nechuta.

Jim Burgess

Jim Burgess is one of the landowners on Lac Courte Oreilles who has established a land trust with CWRLT. He said he made that decision "nearly 10 years ago, long after it becomes clear it was foot spectacular, a home together for an extended family." He said "it covers a 600-front foot piece of land (shoreline) on Lac Courte Oreilles in deep woods—an acre or so—with spectacular views pointing to the south."

He said his land trust agreement, forever and formally supervised by CWRLT, prevents subdivision, additional buildings, or substantial enlargement of existing structure, and alteration of the land.

This multi-generational land will remain in the family, building on its many traditions and remaining the family meeting place of generations, Jim said.



Watershed Paddle Tour. Photo by Kelly Nechuta.

Additional Testimony

Tom Heinrich has been a part of CWRLT since 2005; he is now in his third term as board member. He has witnessed CWRLT's involvement in many accomplishments over this period of time: the library easement and nature walk; helping to sponsor GIS mapping projects of Moose Lake and Grindstone Lake; Shue's Pond shoreline project; film festivals at The Park Center about water/nature; co-sponsoring historic paddle routes with the Natural Resources of Wisconsin and more.

He points to the experience and talent of the people on the board—plant biologists, fish biologists, forestry experts, people who have spent their lives working and fishing the Chippewa Flowage, and people who have helped to create the Lower Wisconsin River waterway.

CWRLT Vice-President Dennis Clagett, who lives on the Chippewa Flowage, said, "My love of nature's beauty began when my family moved from Chicago to Hayward to purchase a resort on the Chippewa Flowage. I was 10 years old. Like time travel, suddenly I was in a wonderland. The effect was immediate and the awe I felt then is with me still. Stewardship of these lands and waters is immensely important to me and has led me to the CWRLT."

Kelly Nechuta is a part-time coordinator with CWRLT. Pointing to the Hayward area's rich natural resources, she said the mission of land trusts across the state and nation is protecting conservation values through conservation easements.

"I'd like to see the area maintain the leading reason folks are ultimately attracted to the region—clean water, amazing forests and that Northwoods feel, where you can leave the big city behind and enjoy nature."

Visit couderaywaters.org for more information. To become a board member/volunteer or to make a donation, email cwrlandtrust@gmail.com

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.

COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, and while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

The eNewsletter Editor can be reached at:

COLA
P.O. Box 702
Hayward, WI 54843

courte.oreilles.lakes.association@gmail.com