

SUBJECT: LAND DONATION - STATEWIDE NATURAL AREAS – CRAWFORD COUNTY

FOR: JANUARY 2009 BOARD MEETING

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Richard Steffes

SUMMARY: The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin has offered to donate 959.93 acres of land to the Department. The area is known as the Hogback Prairie and the land will be added to the Statewide Natural Area program.

The tract is located in the Village of Steuben, and in the Towns of Eastman, Haney, and Marinette in Crawford County. It is within the project boundary of the Hogback Prairie State Natural Area. Geologically, this area is somewhat unique because of its narrow, limestone-capped ridge. In addition, it provides habitat for many protected flora and fauna species. Water resources include more than two miles of intermittent stream, which flow into the Kickapoo River.

Hogback Prairie was designated a State Natural Area in 2002 and is situated on an impressive geological formation (a narrow, steep-sided, limestone-capped ridge that rises 300 feet above the Citron Valley) a former oxbow of the nearby Kickapoo River. The Natural Area project currently includes 356 acres, which have been formally dedicated as a conservation easement to the Department. An additional 60 acres will be dedicated as an easement per the terms of an earlier Stewardship Acquisition Grant. The Hogback's western and eastern slopes support dry prairie vegetation from the ridge's crest down to its bases. There is also a small segment of north-facing prairie. The multiple aspects of the prairie have resulted in an unusual mix of plants, blending typical dry prairie species such as side oats grama, little blue-stem, purple prairie-clover and hoary vervain with species such as needle grass and mountain mint that are more characteristic of moister prairies. The variety of slope aspect has also contributed to the existence of an excellent population of the state-threatened Hill's thistle. Other rare species include Bell's vireo, ottoe skipper, Richardson's sedge, and purple milkweed. To the south, the ridge widens and the prairie grades into oak woods and an overgrown savanna with several savanna indicator plant species. Management activities such as controlled burning and brush removal are helping restore the integrity of the savanna and prairie.

The Hogback Prairie State Natural Area protection was initiated in 1992 year by The Nature Conservancy. The project focuses on the protection of the area's unique geological features and the habitat needs of the Regal Fritillary butterfly as well as other species named above. The unique nature of this ecosystem coincides with the goal of the project to protect biological diversity and provide research benchmarks for these rare resources. Other recreational activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, and hunting are also provided by this land.

Located in the heart of North America's Driftless Area, the Kickapoo River is the largest river originating wholly within this unique landscape. Cold, spring-fed headwater streams originate in northern Monroe County and eventually coalesce to form the main stem of the river. By the time the river reaches Vernon County, it is best characterized as a low gradient, meandering, warm-water system with a rich mosaic of extensive wet meadows, marsh and lowland hardwood forest. Upland vegetation in the lower valley consists of bluff prairie, oak forest, oak savanna and mesic forest. A high percentage of forest cover (exceeding 60% in some sub-watersheds) is unusual for southern Wisconsin and offers important habitat for numerous species of forest interior songbirds, many considered conservation priorities

The lower river valley is particularly important biologically, harboring one of the most diverse assemblages of natural communities in the state. Due to the nexus of biological communities and high concentration of rare species, the Lower Kickapoo River Valley (LKRIV) has been designated:

- A Legacy Place by the Wisconsin Land Legacy Report
- A Conservation Opportunity Area of Continental Importance by the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan
- An Important Bird Area by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative Important Bird Area Program

In addition to its ecological value, the valley is extraordinarily scenic and contains significant archaeological, cultural and historical sites.

Land protection for the LKRIV offers significant conservation and public recreation opportunities. Due to the efforts of The Nature Conservancy, as well as local Department staff, private landowner interest in conservation within the LKRIV is very high. Thus, the Department is requesting approval to undertake a feasibility study within 17,000 acres of the LKRIV. Specifically, the Feasibility Study will examine:

- The opportunity to work with private landowners to increase the level of protection and management for ecologically significant sites and species;
- The opportunity to establish linkages between existing conservation lands within the LKRIV and connect those lands to the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway;

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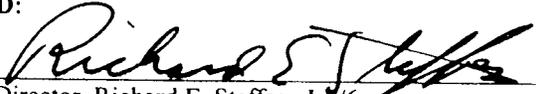
- The opportunity to incorporate sustainable, local agriculture into the matrix of conservation lands;
- The opportunity to work with local communities to manage and protect wetland and floodplain resources to buffer against increasingly frequent, severe flood events;
- The opportunity to expand public recreation opportunities in an area with additional need for public land.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Board accept the donation of 959.93 acres of land for the Statewide Natural Area program, that a certificate of appreciation be sent to The Nature Conservancy and that an expression of appreciation be made a part of the official records of the Natural Resources Board; and that the Board approve a feasibility study to be conducted on 17,000 acres of the Lower Kickapoo River Valley.

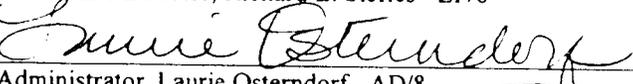
LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|----------|
| No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fiscal Estimate Required | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached |
| No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Environmental Assessment of Impact Statement Required | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached |
| No <input type="checkbox"/> | Background Memo | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Attached |

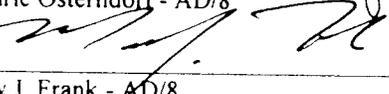
APPROVED:


 Real Estate Director, Richard E. Steffes - LF/6

12-17-08
 Date


 Administrator, Laurie Osterndorf - AD/8

12/22/08
 Date


 Secretary, Matthew J. Frank - AD/8

12/30/08
 Date

- cc: S. Miller – LF/6
 R. Steffes – LF/6
 L. Ross – AD/8
 S. Holtz – ER/6
 S. Humrickhouse – WCR/Eau Claire

DATE: December 17, 2008 FILE REF: NA 20010
 TO: Natural Resources Board
 FROM: Matthew J. Frank *[Signature]*
 SUBJECT: Proposed Land Donation, The Nature Conservancy Of Wisconsin, Inc., Tract
 File # NA 20010

1. PARCEL DESCRIPTION:

Statewide Natural Area - Hogback Prairie
Crawford County

Grantor:

The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin, Inc.
c/o Patricia Stocking
633 West Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

Acres: 959.93
Price: Donation
Interest: Fee
Improvements: Outbuildings

Location: The tract is located in central Crawford County about five miles southwest of Bell Center.

Land Description: The subject land is gently rolling to sloping steeply

<u>Covertypes Breakdown:</u>	<u>Type:</u>	<u>Acreage:</u>
	Upland Woodland	474.18
	Cropland	354.23
	Grassland Pasture	95.22
	Brush	16.72
	Building Site Road Right-of-Way	<u>19.58</u>
	TOTAL	959.93

Zoning: Agriculture
Present Use: Conservancy
Proposed Use: Natural resource Protection and Public Recreation
Tenure: More than 10 years
Agreement Date: March 14, 2008

Stewardship Land Access: This property will be open to the public for all nature-based outdoor recreational activities to include hunting, trapping, hiking and cross-country skiing.

2. JUSTIFICATION:

The Nature Conservancy offered to donate 959.93 acres of land in Crawford County to the Department for the Statewide Natural Area, Hogback Prairie. The tract is located in the Village of Stuben, and in the Towns of Eastman, Haney, and Marinette in Crawford County. The parcel is within the project boundary of the Hogback Prairie State Natural Area. Geologically, this area is unique because of its narrow, limestone-capped ridge. In addition, it provides habitat for many protected flora and fauna species. Water



resources include more than two miles of intermittent stream, and watershed, which flows into the Kickapoo River. The Department recommends acceptance of the gift to allow for natural resource protection and restoration, and to provide opportunities for public recreation and education on the Hogback Prairie State Natural Area. The cropland and farm buildings present on the property will be rented for a number of years, but eventually that area will be restored to a natural condition.

Hogback Prairie was designated a State Natural Area in 2002 and is situated on an impressive geological formation (a narrow, steep-sided, limestone-capped ridge that rises 300 feet above the Citron Valley), a former oxbow of the nearby Kickapoo River. The Hogback's western and eastern slopes support dry prairie vegetation from the ridge's crest down to its bases. There is also a small segment of north-facing prairie. The multiple aspects of the prairie have resulted in an unusual mix of plants, blending typical dry prairie species such as side oats grama, little blue-stem, purple prairie-clover and hoary vervain with species such as needle grass and mountain mint that are more characteristic of moister prairies. The variety of slope aspect has also contributed to the existence of an excellent population of the state-threatened Hill's thistle. Other rare species include state threatened Bell's vireo, ottoe skipper, state endangered Regal Fritillary butterfly, Richardson's sedge, and purple milkweed. To the south, the ridge widens and the prairie grades into oak woods and an overgrown savanna with several savanna indicator plant species. Management activities such as controlled burning and brush removal are helping restore the integrity of the savanna and prairie.

The Hogback Prairie State Natural Area protection was initiated in 1992 year by The Nature Conservancy. The project focuses on the protection of the area's unique geological features and the habitat needs of the Regal Fritillary butterfly as well as other species named above. The Natural Area project currently includes 356 acres, which have been formally dedicated as a conservation easement to the Department. An additional 60 acres will be dedicated as an easement per the terms of an earlier Stewardship Acquisition Grant. The unique nature of this ecosystem coincides with the goal of the project to protect biological diversity and provide research benchmarks for these rare resources. TNC's acquisition of roughly one-half of the 959.63-acre tract were funded in part by the Department's Stewardship grant. In addition, in 2001 and 2005, TNC dedicated several hundred acres of easement to the Department. These lands have since been managed in cooperation with the Bureau of Endangered Resources. TNC is participating in the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and they have a \$33,900 contract with NRCS to remove brush, plant prairie, and remove invasive plants. TNC will transfer the WHIP contract to the DNR. Also, TNC has two agricultural leases on 240 acres where farmers are allowed to crop, graze, and use the out buildings. The agricultural leases will also be transferred to DNR at closing and agricultural uses will continue for the next several years. The ultimate goal is to restore agricultural fields to prairie.

The purpose of the Statewide Natural Area program is to protect the best remaining examples of Wisconsin's native plant and animal communities, their component species, and habitat for rare plant and animal species. Natural areas protect the natural diversity of the landscape for future generations. Natural areas are used for study by school groups of all ages and researchers as well as by the general public. Other recreational activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, and hunting are also available to the public on these lands.

The Department recommends acceptance of the 959.93-acre TNC property to protect and restore natural values of this site, and provide access for scientific, educational, and non-intensive recreational use while providing significant educational opportunities through partnership with the University of Wisconsin.

The Lower Kickapoo River Valley (LKRV) offers significant conservation and public recreation opportunities. Due to the efforts of The Nature Conservancy as well as local department staff, private landowner interest in conservation within the LKRV is very high. Thus, the Department is requesting approval to undertake a feasibility study within 17,000 acres of the LKRV. Specifically, the feasibility study will examine:

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- The opportunity to establish linkages between existing conservation lands within the LKRV and connect those lands to the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway;
- The opportunity to incorporate sustainable, local agriculture into the matrix of conservation lands;
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- The opportunity to expand public recreation opportunities in an area with a paucity of public land.

3. FINANCING:

No funding is required for this transaction.

4. ACQUISITION STATUS OF THE STATEWIDE NATURAL AREA PROGRAM:

Established: 1972
Acres Purchased to Date: 37,071
Acquisition Goal: 41,000
Percent Complete: 90.4%
Cost to Date: \$21,733,219

RECOMMENDED:


Richard E. Steffes

12-17-08
Date


Bureau of Legal Services

12/22/08
Date


Laurie Osterndorf

12/22/08
Date

RES:ch

Acknowledgment of Gift

This is to certify that at its January 2009 meeting, the Natural Resources Board gratefully accepted gift of 959.93 acres of land from

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF WISCONSIN, INC.

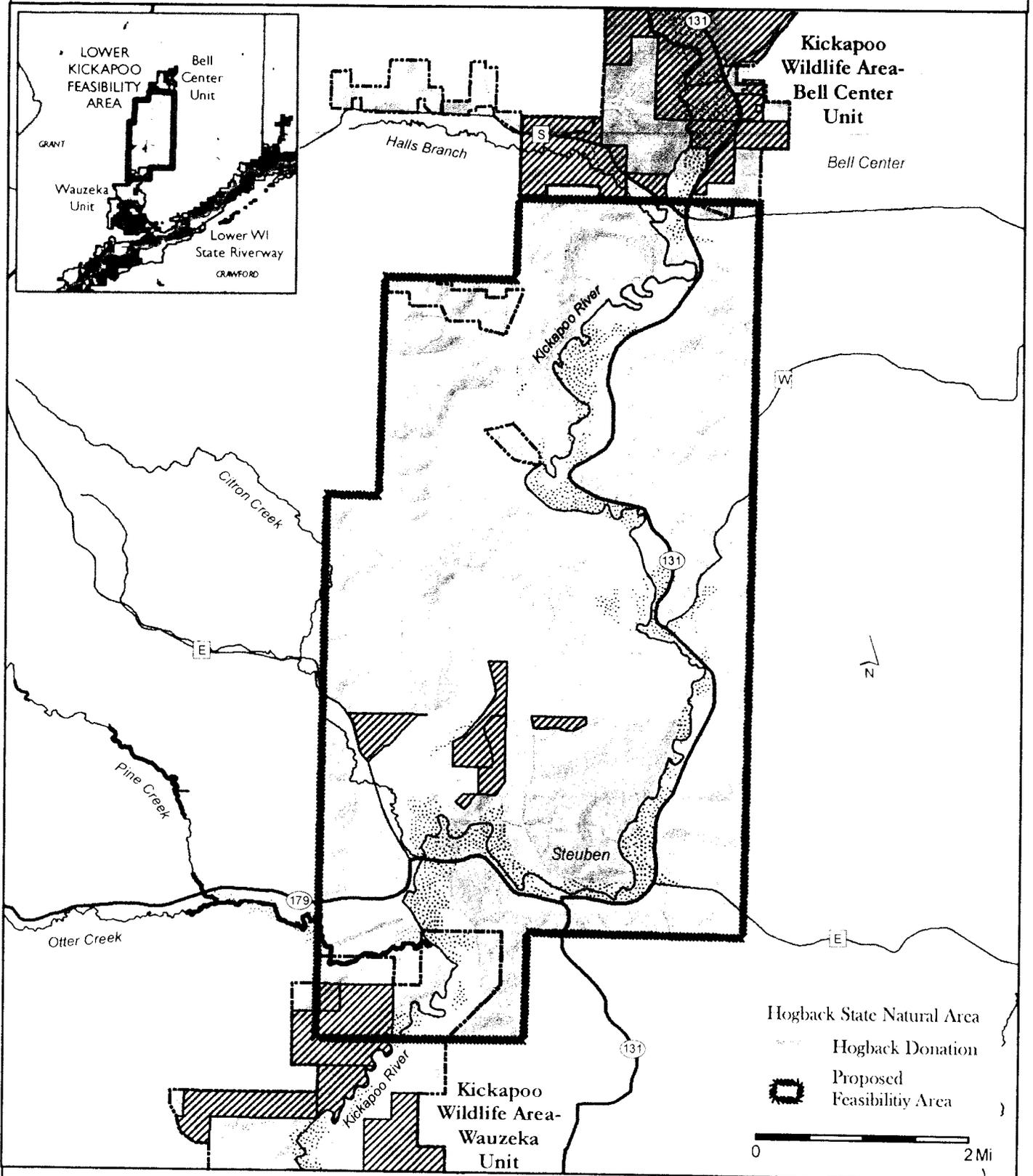
The land will be incorporated into the Statewide Natural Areas Program as the Hogback Prairie. It is significant that organizations such as yours are interested in helping protect Wisconsin's natural heritage and contribute materially toward this end.

An expression of our appreciation is a part of the official records of the Natural Resources Board. We present this certificate of sincere appreciation on behalf of present and future generations to thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Natural Resources Board

Christine Thomas, CHAIR

Lower Kickapoo River



-  WDNR Fee
-  WDNR Easement
-  NRB Authorized Acquisition Boundary
-  City/Village

-  Hogback State Natural Area
-  Hogback Donation
-  Proposed Feasibility Area

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Bureau of Facilities and Lands

