

Reflecting on the Journey

by SUSAN BUCHANAN, TPC Executive Director



faith and support and without whom we couldn't do our work – and the very many amazing landowners who have made the heartfelt and difficult decision and foresight to protect their land for now and for not just their children and grandchildren but for the entire Lake Country community.

After almost two decades of dedicated commitment to preserving the rural character of Lake Country, I am stepping down from my current role as Executive Director with Tall Pines Conservancy.

Reflecting on the journey that's brought me to this moment of retirement, I am reminded of how Tall Pines' contributions have influenced the broader community. I must admit, it's a bittersweet feeling – both the excitement of the next chapter and the nostalgia for the path I've walked. I can't help but think of the early days when I first started at Tall Pines, full of energy and ambition, eager to learn and contribute. And now, after 16 years, I realize that this journey has been about more than just hard work and goals – it's been about the people. Specifically, the donors – who have given us their

The Land

The board that hired me in 2008 directed me to move our land preservation work into farmland preservation projects, to broaden our influence in the larger community and to achieve National Accreditation (accomplished in 2015). The next thing I knew, I was hip deep into learning about farmland preservation, "the Working Lands Initiative," policy making for the land protection in the state – and working with giants in the field like Rod Nilsestuen, Ben Brancel at DATCP, Margaret Krome and Tom Lyons. I am proud to say that through this initiative, the Zwieg Maple Acres stepped forward to be one of 16 farms to be protected through the State's Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) program, and the Towns of Ashippun and Oconomowoc became one of the first Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) offering tax incentives for

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Get involved and join TPC today.
Visit tallpinesconservancy.org
or call 262-369-0500.



25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

BETH HOEFER-JEZO, TPC Director of Outreach & Development

Tall Pines Conservancy's 25th Anniversary Celebration at Folk Song Farm offered an incredible opportunity to recognize two very special people who have been instrumental in the organization's transformation from an all-volunteer, local conservancy known as Chenequa Land Trust to its current status as the leader in land and water conservation within the greater Oconomowoc River watershed. Because of these tenacious visionaries, and you, our generous supporters, we're on the road to protecting more than 1600 additional acres by the end of 2025! PLUS – a very successful Funda and



Photo by Suvi Tory Photography.

subsequent pledge from an anonymous donor enabled us to more than meet our \$250,000 challenge grant match for land conservation. There's still time to help protect more land by meeting TPC's overall fundraising goal of \$2.5 million by the end of 2025. Call us today at 262-369-0500.

2024 Guy Kieckhefer Pioneer Award to Truman Schultz

During his more than 20 years with TPC, Truman has worn many hats – member of the Board of Directors and Conservation Committee, past President, and now the Advisory Board. Photos over the



Truman Schultz

years showcase his good humor in collecting trash, pulling garlic mustard and monitoring properties (rain or shine!), but his most favorite role was sharing his love of beekeeping when serving as host for several Ride to the Barns events. Truman grew up in the Lake Country and has lived at his beloved Hazelglenn Farm in NW Waukesha County with his wife, Barbara, and two daughters for 54 years. All throughout his life Truman has enjoyed and appreciated open spaces, the lakes and rivers of the area and explored them on foot, horseback, canoe and sailboat.

Truman is a graduate of UW-Madison School of Landscape Architecture who began his career in the 1960s at SEWRPC. He was then employed by a landscape firm in Milwaukee. Truman spent the majority of his career with Waukesha County Park System as Landscape Architect and Parks Supervisor for 30 years overseeing the parks, golf courses and ice rinks.

Truman continues to enjoy the great outdoors, the sunshine, birds and trees. In July 2023, Truman and his family fulfilled their wish to permanently protect Hazelglenn Farm through a conservation easement with Tall Pines Conservancy.



Photo by Suvi Tory Photography.



Bill Biersach (left) & Jeff Spence (right).

Outstanding Service Volunteer Award to Jeff Spence

Jeff Spence, with deep roots in Lake Country, has been an integral member of Tall Pines Conservancy since its inception in 1999. Prior to – and even after – the addition of full-time staff, Jeff served as central control for the organization – establishing an integrated donor/accounting system, ensuring accurate recordkeeping, making sure the bills were paid and easing each transition as the organization has continued to grow. Jeff played a critical role as Treasurer of the Board and member of the Finance Committee for many years.

His former additional role as landlord meant that he was often called into volunteer service at a moment's notice which he always did willingly, lending a hand and his truck to put up the tent, haul event supplies and even providing sweat equity.

Until recently, Jeff served as President of Mod-U-Dock, Inc., a Nashotah-based manufacturing firm featuring maintenance free modular dock systems. ▲

Turning Fragile Land into a Community Asset

Restoration Efforts along Saeger Creek Preserve

by PAUL MEUER, TPC Land Protection Manager

Long before our acquisition of the 76-acre Saeger Creek Preserve in the Village of Lac La Belle, Tall Pines Conservancy recognized the critical significance of this land and the opportunity it provides to enhance water quality for the residents and community. Purchasing the property reflects not only our dedication to saving land but also our commitment to protecting and preserving our lakes and waters for future generations.

A walk through the preserve or a paddle along Saeger Creek reveals a long-neglected ecosystem struggling to thrive and dominated by invasive species. Yet, if you look closer, you'll find that amid the invasive overgrowth and channelized stream, there are high-quality native

to benefit the community for years to come. To date, we have engaged with professional environmental consultants and engineers and applied for grant funding from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to support preliminary planning along the Saeger Creek corridor.

Our primary focus will be on invasive species removal, particularly European buckthorn, to reestablish native species that are far more effective at reducing erosion and filtering water before it enters the lake.

Additionally, Tall Pines is exploring innovative solutions like "floating islands," or "floating treatment wetlands." These artificial islands, constructed



Saeger Creek as it appears today – a heavily degraded stream and wetland severely impacted by invasive species and decades of neglect – but also a key system for improving water quality and positively benefiting the Lac La Belle community.

Together, these efforts aim to revitalize Saeger Creek and safeguard the health of our lakes, ensuring a thriving ecosystem for the future.

The Saeger Creek Preserve also includes an approximately 13-acre section on the east side of Saeger Road, where a different vision will be implemented. This area features a natural pond, woodland, and open prairie, bordering The Club at Lac La Belle, a historic and world-class golf course. In addition to invasive species removal and ecological restoration, TPC will create and manage a trail system that will provide additional recreational benefits for the community of Lac La Belle.

Tall Pines has the experience, knowledge, and expertise to complete this work, but we need your support to make it happen. Please consider donating to Tall Pines Conservancy – let us know if you would like your contribution to specifically support efforts at the Saeger Creek Preserve – or help us expand our capacity to undertake similar projects throughout Lake Country. Either way, your contribution supports our mission, which is about so much more than protecting land; in protecting land, we are also investing in our future. ▲



Expansive wetlands within Saeger Creek Preserve absorb and filter water before it enters our lakes and streams. Through restoring critically degraded areas, we can improve the natural ability and function of the wetlands to protect water quality.

plant species, cold-water springs, and vital habitats for fish and wildlife. These elements are essential for maintaining a healthy lake and a vibrant ecosystem.

Our vision for the Saeger Creek Preserve includes restoring its natural beauty and ecological function to ensure it continues

from biodegradable geofabric, support native wetland plants anchored along the stream. Over time, the plants' root systems establish themselves in the streambed or streambank, helping to protect existing banks while absorbing and filtering harmful sediment and excess nutrients, such as phosphorus.

SAVE THE DATE!

17TH ANNUAL

Ride to the Barns

AUGUST 9TH 2025

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NOV 1-DEC 31, 2024
tallpinesconservancy.org**



Sponsor Spotlight Implecho Partners with Tall Pines to Improve Rider Experience

It takes many people, stationed many miles from each other, to make Ride to the Barns run smoothly and efficiently. Often, keeping the communication channels clear is a challenge, especially in rural areas where cell phone service can be unreliable.

Implecho, based locally in Pewaukee, partnered with Tall Pines to provide rental radios for this year's Ride to the Barns event. These radios helped streamline communications across the sprawling event boundaries to ensure seamless coordination among volunteers, event staff, and safety personnel. With hundreds of riders covering lengthy stretches of scenic roadways, efficient communication was crucial for maintaining the flow of the event and addressing any logistical or medical concerns swiftly. Implecho's reliable radio systems enabled instant updates on rider progress, emergency responses, and general event management, contributing to a successful and well-organized experience. For more information on Implecho's audio communication solutions, visit www.implecho.com. Thank you, Implecho! ▲

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New Stewardship Coordinator at TPC

We are excited to welcome Jessica Mysliwski as Tall Pines Conservancy's new Stewardship Coordinator! Having served as the WisCorps Service Member this summer in a shared role with Waukesha County Land Conservancy (WCLC), we are thrilled that she will continue her impactful work with us. A proud native of Waukesha County, Jessica has always had a passion for the outdoors. She graduated from UW-Oshkosh in 2022 with a degree in Environmental Studies, solidifying her commitment to conservation. After completing her degree, she joined the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), where she discovered her love for community service and nonprofit work.

In her new role as Stewardship Coordinator, Jessica will focus on our 260-acre farm, Ravensholme on the River, where she will help manage and support the development of an agroforestry-conservation-focused farming system.



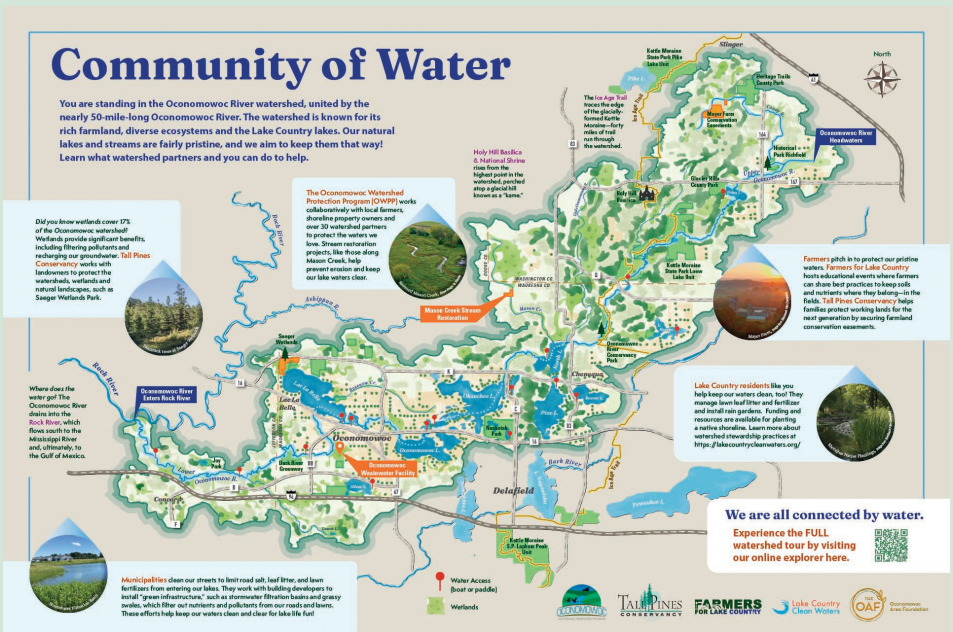
Here's a photo of Jessica installing native plant species in an area we transformed from turf grass into a pollinator habitat, made possible through a grant from the Xerces Society. We can't wait to see the positive changes she'll bring to our community! Welcome, Jessica. ▲

Our Community of Water Oconomowoc River Watershed Interpretive Signage Campaign

by ERIK JOOST, Watershed Manager, City of Oconomowoc

Water is one of our most precious natural resources, essential for drinking, recreation, agriculture, and sustaining ecosystems. It literally defines what it means to live in beautiful Lake Country! However, the quality of this vital resource is often taken for granted – until problems arise. With threats such as increasing pollution, sedimentation, and nutrient runoff affecting our waterways, the need for water quality awareness is more important than ever.

That's why the OWPP and TPC teamed together to create a program to address this issue by launching an interpretive sign campaign, focusing on the Oconomowoc River watershed. The objective of this project is to share with the many people who live, work and recreate within the watershed the importance of water quality and the interconnectedness of our local waterways.



Did you know, for example, that the Oconomowoc Watershed contains 17 lakes and more than 80 miles of river and streams?

The Oconomowoc River watershed is a vast and vital ecological resource in southeastern Wisconsin. The lakes we love in Lake County are all connected; the source of the Oconomowoc River begins north near Richfield and flows southwest before entering an inline series of lakes that together make up "Lake County." The Oconomowoc River then flows into the Rock River, which flows to the Mississippi River, and eventually all of the water that originates here in Lake County ultimately enters the Gulf of Mexico. We are all connected through a community of water, which is why both positive and negative impacts in the Oconomowoc River watershed can significantly influence both local and downstream communities. **Understanding that all waters in this watershed**

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Our Community of Water... (from PAGE 5)

are interconnected is crucial for fostering community engagement in and support toward protecting these waterways. This is why we're so excited to introduce our new interactive watershed signage program!

Education can be a powerful tool for increasing awareness and driving change. When community members understand the factors that impact water quality, it can lead to better individual and collective practices. The Oconomowoc River Watershed Interpretive Signage highlights the diverse ecology and rich historical significance of our watershed, includes visuals, infographics, and key facts that convey complex information in an engaging and accessible format. By focusing on specific water bodies and highlighting significant local conservation efforts that are taking place, we hope to inspire residents to take ownership of their environment.

The signs also serve as gateways for further exploration and feature a QR code that connects users to a virtual watershed tour exploring our vast watershed through an online interactive platform. The virtual aspect of the Oconomowoc River Watershed Interpretive Signage will serve as a dynamic resource to connect, explore, and inspire generations of Lake Country residents and visitors.

Our hope is that as the community engages with these signs, we can create a culture of water quality awareness that inspires lasting change. Understanding that all waters are interconnected will motivate us to work together towards cleaner, healthier waterways in the Oconomowoc River watershed for present and future generations. Be on the lookout for these signs as they spring up in our public spaces across the watershed. **Our first installation will be located near the very visible Fowler Lake boardwalk.**

This project would not have been possible without major financial support from the Oconomowoc Area Foundation (OAF), Oconomowoc Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Inc., Kettle Moraine Garden Club (KMGC), and the dedication from members at Tall Pines Conservancy and the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program. We would also like to thank our graphic designer, Lauren Brown with LVBrown Studio, for her tremendous efforts with this project, and Pennier Graphics for their production of the physical signage. ▲

Reflecting on the Journey...

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shorter term preservation. As a result, my passion for farmland protection was initiated and was eventually fueled by many wonderful mentors.

Fast forward to recent years in the absence of PACE (de-funded in 2012), we've been able to leverage federal funding through the national Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE) to accomplish the preservation of 5 more farms – BUT we have never given up on working to re-establish the state PACE program. Three years ago, being frustrated with a decrease in federal funding for the state, I had a big idea and the result was that Tall Pines and the American Farmland Trust came together to form the Statewide Farmland Preservation Program whose goal is to protect 5,000 acres through the Federal Regional Conservation Protection Program with 12 partners in the state. Currently, TPC is protecting 2 more local farms with encroaching development through this program.

Now owning Ravensholme on the River, our 268-acre farm given to us through the incredible generosity of Anita Kuchler – we have great opportunities to showcase regenerative agriculture through educational events and reshape this world through Anita's vision to add trees and stop carbon sequestration!

We can't forget the creation of Ride to the Barns that married two of my great passions – cycling and farmland protection. Not only did it become our major fundraiser over the years, but more importantly, a way to introduce new host farms to protect their land.

The Water

TPC has been focused on protecting our water resources. We are proud to have



OWPP Paddle

You never know what you'll find when you bring a net and a pair of gloves to the OWPP Paddle! A popular feature of the annual event is the (friendly) contest to find the most unusual garbage. In addition to fishing lures, beer cans and dog chew toys, one "lucky" participant found a water-logged wooden bar stool in Fowler Lake! ▲

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Reflecting on the Journey...

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protected 340 acres of land adjacent to lakes. In 2014 through our work on Mason Creek and, with the national movement of land trusts focusing their work on watershed protection, TPC and the City of Oconomowoc came together with 30 other community partners, and the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program (OWPP) was born. I congratulate the vision of Tom Steinbach (then, the City's Wastewater Manager) and the City for being one of the first adaptive management and RCPP programs in the state. OWPP to date has reduced 1800 pounds of phosphorus in the watershed keeping our lakes and rivers clean through implementing numerous best practices on the land. And in 2022, together we completed the "re-meander" of a section of Mason Creek, keeping phosphorous and sediment out of North Lake – a project we're all extremely proud of! This year, we completed the purchase of the Saeger Preserve – 76 acres along Lac La Belle, that will eventually be restored to assist in lake water quality enhancement.

And born out of OWPP, the Farmers for Lake Country was initiated – a peer to peer group of farmers guided by OWPP and TPC on implementing best practices including 2257 acres of cover crops.

In 2018, TPC was approached to create a new non-profit focused on the issues attributed to the 40+ lakes in Lake Country. Lake Country Clean Waters was established to serve as a resource to protect and improve lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater in Lake Country.

Thank You

A special shout out to my current team Beth Hoefer-Jezo, Paul Meuer and Erik Joost (and past team members Darrell Smith, Carol Bell and Katie Brumder). I've been incredibly fortunate to work

alongside such talented, smart and dedicated individuals and it has been an honor to mentor you all. You've been more than just coworkers; you've become friends and family – thank you for the trust you've put in me to lead. We've shared a lot – long hours of collaboration, challenging projects, and endless events! I trust that current staff will carry the organization forward to even more successes.

A great big thank you to the 2008 Board of Directors that hired me especially Jeff Harris, Truman Schultz, Jeff Spence and the late Charlie Brumder – thank you for trusting me, guiding me, and allowing me the opportunity to grow both professionally and personally – without whom, my passion for farmland protection would not have been realized. The lessons I've learned from each of you will remain with me long after I leave Tall Pines Conservancy.

The Future

To Becky Fedak, the newly named Executive Director, who will continue the journey here, I leave with confidence

in the incredible work you will do. Remember, success is not just about reaching the destination – it's about the journey, the relationships you build, and the impact in the community you have along the way.

As I move on to the next chapter of my life, I'm filled with gratitude. Retirement isn't the end, it's the beginning of a new adventure. I am honored to be a member of the National Agricultural Land Network's steering committee of the American Farmland Trust as well as the Wisconsin Farmland Protection Policy Working Group and hope to continue to make significant contributions to farmland preservation policy making statewide and nationally.

Thank you again to all of you for making this journey a remarkable one. I will miss you, but I look forward to hearing about the amazing things you all will continue to accomplish.

Wishing you all the very best. ▲



OCONOMOWOC FARMERS MARKET

Saturday mornings
May through October • 8a–12p
oconomowoc.org

LUMINARY WALK

Saturday, February 1
Camp Quad
tallpinesconservancy.org

LAKE COUNTRY CLEAN WATER FESTIVAL

Saturday, June 21
cleanwaterfestival.com

11TH ANNUAL OWPP PADDLE

Saturday, July 12
oconomowocwatershed.com

17TH ANNUAL RIDE TO THE BARN

Saturday, August 9
tallpinesconservancy.org



Photo by Jill Bedford.

Healthy Lakes Conference

Lake Country Clean Waters, Tall Pines Conservancy and the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program continued their partnership in presenting the annual Healthy Lakes Conference. This year's event featured a new location – the Oconomowoc Lake Club. The morning began with an interview with New York Times best-selling author Dan Egan moderated by WUWM public radio host Susan Bence. ▲

Will You Help?

This year's annual appeal is an opportunity for you to help **preserve local farmland** so that it will remain productive – generation after generation – and never be developed. Plus, protecting important local land will help to **safeguard the quality of the lakes, rivers and streams** that define our community.



Even as development pressures continue to grow, and the cost of local farmland reaches an all-time high, Tall Pines is excited to report that the momentum is quickly building to protect even more local farmland. And, that means more and more farmers are asking for your help. We want to be ready to provide the support they need to protect their land. **Will You Help?**

Please make your year-end contribution using the enclosed envelope. Or, provide your donation to Tall Pines Conservancy by credit card. You can make a one-time online donation or arrange for a recurring contribution of support on a monthly basis.

Simply visit tallpinesconservancy.org and click on the **green** donate button. **Thank you!** ▲

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