

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Owners of natural shorelines on lakes, rivers and streams in Vilas County are being encouraged to consider lasting protection of their properties to benefit future generations.

According to Northwoods Land Trust (NWLTL) Executive Director Ted Anchor, the regional nonprofit conservation organization is advancing its Shoreland Protection Initiative with a focus on Vilas County. NWLTL is partnering with the Vilas County Lakes & Rivers Association to share information about land protection tools and benefits available to shoreland owners with sizable properties.

Vilas County is rich in water resources, and some of the 1300+ lakes and 70+ rivers have large parcels along their shores still left undeveloped. These large stretches of shoreline play a big part in maintaining good water quality. Unlike developed lots with native vegetation removed, properties with natural shoreline hold sediment and nutrients in place, and act as filters when heavy rains fall. They also provide valuable habitat to wildlife. Remarkably, 90% of wildlife associated with lakes depend on areas where land and water intersect.

Without a doubt, water is the most valuable natural resource in Vilas County. Seventy-five percent of property tax revenue comes from waterfront property owners. If lakes and rivers become degraded, property values would decline. Tourism and fisheries would decrease, impacting the regional economy.

“Vilas County is extremely important when it comes to water. It has one of the highest freshwater lake densities in the world, rivaled only by parts of northern Minnesota, Ontario and Finland. Many of the lakes have sandy soils and shallow groundwater tables, so they are very susceptible to contamination and pollution. Further conservation along our waters is needed, and can be done by private landowners. This is a great way individuals can have a direct role in lessening adverse impacts to our waters and natural environment especially in the face of a changing climate,” said Susan Knight, Vilas County Lakes & Rivers Association board member.

Since 2001, over 100 families have worked with NWLTL to protect 14,600 acres of land and 80 miles of shoreline in seven counties in the northwoods. These families decided that conserving their property was the best option to ensure it remains as it is today. Their collective generosity and foresight has left a lasting legacy and will benefit future generations of people and wildlife.

“The main conservation tool families opt for when working with NWLTL is a conservation easement. They can preserve their natural shoreland, woodlands and wetlands, while continuing to own, enjoy and manage their property. The natural areas are essentially protected by deed restrictions that are conservation focused,” said Anchor. “The land can be sold or passed on to heirs, but whoever owns the land in the future has to follow the terms of the easement. NWLTL ensures the integrity of the easement into the future.”

In some cases, when planning for the future, families struggle to identify suitable heirs to take on the responsibilities of owning larger properties. Donating property outright to the land trust becomes a favored option in these cases. Natural areas can be separated from developed areas and gifted, providing an array of public benefits including clean water and air, scenic beauty, plant and animal habitat and fewer impacts from natural disasters like flooding.

“Many times, word of mouth is the best reference. Conversations between neighbors spark interest and further learning. Some families conserve their land soon after talking with NWLTL, and others take years before the time is right for them,” said Anchor.

NWLT encourages landowners in Vilas County (and beyond) with natural shoreline and sizable properties to learn more about permanent conservation options by calling (715) 479-2490 and visiting [www.northwoodslandtrust.org](http://www.northwoodslandtrust.org).

Landowners can learn more about improving and maintaining shoreland areas through the Vilas County Lakes & Rivers Association ([www.vclra.org](http://www.vclra.org)) and Vilas County Land & Water Conservation Department ([www.vilascountywi.gov/](http://www.vilascountywi.gov/)).

*A Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Lake Protection Program grant is supporting the Northwoods Land Trust's Shoreland Protection Initiative in Vilas County.*

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Photo captions:

- Wildcat Lake's Hemlock Island in Vilas County was protected by the Phillips family in 2020 through a donation of a conservation easement. The island, while still privately owned, is benefiting the public through the protection of water quality and plant and animal habitat.
- Swan nest with eggs on Hemlock Island.