

## County Stewardship Fund Protects Valuable Forestland

### Issue: Shoreland development threatens lakes

In Chippewa County in recent years there has been a significant trend toward locating rural residential development in shoreland areas around smaller lakes that were previously undeveloped or only partially developed. Many of these lakes are adjacent to the Chippewa County Forest.



*Forest fragmentation is a growing problem in shoreland areas.*

The forests are being fragmented beyond their ability to regenerate and fulfill their functions. These functions include providing wood and forest products while protecting soil and water and providing wildlife habitat.

*Chippewa County is a rural county in northwestern Wisconsin. Forests cover 37 percent of the land; 89 percent of the forestland is privately owned.*



From 1960 to 1998 the number of lakefront structures more than doubled from 1230 to over 2500. Some land owners of large blocks of forestland with lakes are logging the timber, then subdividing and selling the properties for shoreland development.

### Approach: Chippewa County forms Stewardship Fund

The County Land Conservation Department (LCD) had recognized the forest fragmentation trend as a problem. Then in 1997, all Chippewa County departments were asked to submit proposals for spending revenue generated by a previously enacted 0.5% county sales tax, which had funded a new county jail. The Chippewa County Parks and Forestry Department and LCD submitted companion proposals that each department would receive \$100,000 annually for eight years to be used in two areas:

- The Parks and Forestry Department acquires lands to extend the County Park and County Forest System.
- The Land Conservation Department establishes a County Stewardship Fund to provide matching funds to nonprofit organizations and land trusts, for purchasing land and conservation easements.

The proposals were adopted by the County Board. The LCD has received five allocations from the county totaling about \$450,000 and has successfully cooperated with nonprofit organizations to acquire three significant parcels at much less than their appraised value. (See the table below).

Public access is a requirement for all projects funded but additional criteria are considered, such as having shoreland to being proposed by a new land trust

### Chippewa County values forest conservation

Name of Property	Property description	Forest Protection Tool used	Organization or Land Trust	Timber management plan?	Payment arrangements
<b>Lake Hallie</b>	22 wooded acres on Lake Hallie	Bargain Sale and Conservation Easement	Village of Hallie holds title and easement	Yes Revenue to Village of Hallie	Property and easement cost \$74,500 ¼ donated by owner ¼ paid by County Stewardship Fund ½ paid by DNR Lake Protection Grant
<b>Lower Long Lake</b>	60 wooded acres on Lower Long Lake	Bargain sale	Lower Long Lake Foundation acquired title to property	Property management plan, but no commercial timber harvest	Property sold for \$100,000 (50% of appraised value) ½ paid by County Stewardship Fund ½ paid by DNR Lake Protection Grant
<b>Lake Wissota</b>	40 wooded acres on Lake Wissota	Bargain sale	Chippewa County Land Conservancy acquired title to property	Yes Sustained level of timber harvest; revenue to land trust	Property sold for \$200,000 (60% of appraised value) ¼ paid by County Stewardship Fund ¾ paid by State Stewardship Fund

## Reflections on the Stewardship Fund

### Strengths

There is a definite demand for Stewardship funds. As a local version of the State Stewardship Fund, the County Stewardship Fund gives land trusts, lake associations, local governments and other organizations extra leverage in the form of matching funds when applying for outside funding, providing a clear incentive for them to propose conservation projects in Chippewa County. The County does not lose property tax revenue from the lands it conserves. Participation by a property owner is voluntary. Cooperating property owners allow public access as a condition of their participation, which provides recreational opportunities. The conservation projects not only conserve local forests for the long-term, they also protect the water quality, fisheries and wildlife of local lakes while providing forest products and recreational opportunities.



*This property acquired on Lake Wissota illustrates the benefits of waterfront forested land.*

### Weaknesses

The initial eight year funding period for the County Stewardship Fund will end soon. The County Board will compare competing uses of the county sales tax with the benefits of the stewardship fund to decide whether to continue allocations. Tight budgets and an expanding movement to prevent public money from being spent on private land conservation may be a challenge. The board may also consider different tools that may conserve more forestland at less cost to the county over the short term, such as forest zoning districts, subdivision regulations etc. Seeking permanent funding of the stewardship fund through sales tax allocations or other means would ensure continuation of this program though.

### Future

In addition to a number of existing land trusts, an additional land trust that is more experienced with tax law is interested in Chippewa County. Numerous land trusts are beginning to work with private landowners to allow them to manage their land for production (agriculture and forestry) while placing it under easement. Additionally, land trusts see hunting as an activity that should be either allowed or encouraged. These innovations may expand the number of property owners interested in selling their lands or certain land rights as part of the stewardship program.



*Lower Long Lake is a popular Chippewa County Lake. The Stewardship Fund protects an important piece of wooded shoreland and ensures that people will be able to continue to enjoy the lake*

### Conclusion

The long-term effects of the County Stewardship projects will not be seen for several years, but initially many acres of valuable forestland have been conserved for the good of the community. The fund may not directly stop demand for shoreland development, but news that these parcels have been protected heightens awareness about the importance of intact forests in maintaining quality watersheds and surface waters, and may lead to conservation of larger parcels in the future. The Chippewa County Stewardship fund illustrates a win-win option for landowners and local governments who want to conserve forestland for the future. Considering the variety of opinions on and demands for land use, we conclude that a County Stewardship Fund is an effective tool for long-term conservation of forested land.

*This case study was written by Bobbie Webster and Lynn Markham*

### **For more information:**

Dan Masterpole - Chippewa County Conservationist 715- 726-4590 <http://www.chippewa-landconservtn.org/>  
Lower Long Lake Foundation <http://lllprd.org/foundation.htm> 2712 Keith St. Eau Claire, WI 54701 715-832-4217  
Chippewa County Land Conservancy P.O. Box 884, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729  
Jim Bakun - Lake Hallie Association 715-723-0300  
DNR Lake Protection Grant <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cfa/Grants/Lakes/lakeprotection.html>  
State Stewardship Fund <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cfa/lr/stewardship/stewardship.html>