

Community

White River purchase assures preservation

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The Bayfield Regional Conservancy, working with Friends of the White River and Trout Unlimited, has purchased 80 acres of vulnerable land along the White River, a move that will protect the parcel from development and allow anglers continued access to the popular waterway.

The property, once known as the Hanson farm, is in the Town of Delta and includes more than 2,000 feet of shoreline on both sides of the river. It is on the edge of the Bibon Swamp and includes black ash swamp on the north side of the river and an old hay field on the south side on Sutherland Road. The groups bought the highly scenic property to keep it in its natural state, protect its shoreline and to ensure continued non-motorized access for anglers, paddlers, birders and other nature enthusiasts.

The landowner who sold the property to the conservation groups was Thomas Walker of London, who bought the site for his father some years ago so they could fish the White together. Walker's father recently passed away, and he was looking for a way to sell the land yet keep it protected.

Ownership of the property is intended to be temporary. The Conservancy will hold the property until the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources can eventually purchase it to add to adjacent parcels it already owns. The interim purchase was made because DNR funding won't be available until next year, according to Bill Heart, who chairs both Friends of the White River and the Wisconsin chapter of Trout Unlimited.

The DNR can't always act quickly," Heart said. "Right now they had no money to purchase it. We need somebody to hold onto it to protect the White. Having the BRC able to do that is (critical). It's just like a win-win for the White River.

"Using that partnership is the key to the whole thing. The last thing we all want to see is a row of condos or cottages along this stretch of the White."

The White River extends roughly 60 miles of perennial rivers and streams, of which 44 are classified as outstanding and excellent resource waters by the DNR. Twenty miles are Class 1 trout waters, and the watershed is home to a diverse group of plant and wildlife that includes nine high priority conservation natural communities and many more species of "conservation concern."

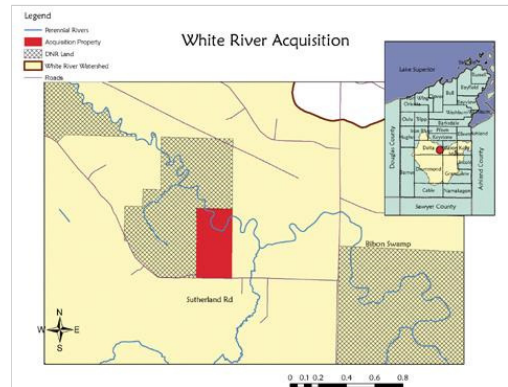
That makes the purchase a natural for BRC and the other groups, said Ellen Kwiatkowski, executive director of the Conservancy.

"Development along this sensitive waterway would have detrimental effects on the river and the fish and wildlife that depend on it," she said.

The move is likely to please the many fishermen who visit the White River annually. In "Exploring Wisconsin Trout Streams," author and fisherman Steve Born wrote, "Trout anglers often speak of the White in almost reverent tones because it harkens back to a day when Wisconsin was on the country's frontier. You can still experience a little bit of that frontier danger by venturing into the sprawling and spooky Bibon Swamp, one of the largest undeveloped marshlands in the state, and casting for big trout."

If and when the DNR is able to purchase the property from BRC, funds will be dedicated to a permanent White River Protection Revolving Loan Fund. Heart said that could make this just the first step toward other preservation efforts.

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Map of purchase area

While BRC has closed on the land, the groups are continuing to raise money to cover the \$150,000 acquisition cost. On July 26, the Conservancy is hosting a half-day White River canoe trip led by Heart that will include breakfast at the nearby Delta Diner and a stop for lunch on the property. Cost is \$150 per person and includes transportation and meals. The trip is limited to the first 12 who register.

In addition, Heart has agreed to take donors of \$5,000 or more on a personally guided fly-fishing trip on the White River. To sign up for the half-day paddle, to donate to the White River Protection Fund or for more information, e-mail Hannah@brcland.org or call (715) 779-0202.

The Bayfield Regional Conservancy is a non-profit land trust that has been working to protect natural lands, waters, forests and farms in the Lake Superior basin and beyond since 1996. To learn more visit www.brcland.org.

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