Turf Wars Escalate

Mutiny is taking place in backyards throughout Washington County, and more than one manicured lawn is being asked to walk the plank. Participants in this insurrection aren’t some radical anti-turf revolutionaries. They’re your average law-abiding home owners who are realizing the benefits of natural landscapes and the joys that come with gardening for wildlife.

These backyard naturalists are rejecting the 50’s approach of sterile and mono-cultural gardening because they understand their natural landscapes contribute positively to the overall quality of the environment by improving air, water and soil quality throughout the community while providing much-needed wildlife habitat. Habitat restoration is critical for wildlife in urban and suburban settings where commercial and residential development have eliminated most natural areas.

The positive aspects of natural landscaping for both the individual property owner and the community far outweigh the occasional negative perceptions of those addicted...

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to the traditional lawn. With the help of groups like Riveredge, Wild Ones & the West Bend Beautification Committee, habitat enthusiasts have learned how to make their landscapes more hospitable to wildlife, while building a haven for escaping the stresses of everyday life. Time spent surrounded by a more natural landscape gets people closer to nature and in touch with her real beauty. Children especially love secret spots in the garden where they can hide, think, get away from big people, and learn about the natural world in their own way, at their own pace.

By establishing a more natural landscape environmentally conscious gardeners are endorsing the use of plants native to the soils and climate Washington County. These plants provide the best overall food sources for wildlife, while requiring less fertilizer, less water and less effort in controlling pests.

Over time this translates to less cost to maintain a garden. Americans spend $27 billion a year on lawn care, 10 times more than we spend on school textbooks. The average lawn requires 9,000 gallons of water per week and 5-10 pounds of fertilizer per year, more than the entire country of India uses for its food crops. With natural landscaping many of these costs are weeded out. Best of all, these landscapes demand less routine maintenance so people can spend more time enjoying and feeling connected to the wonders of nature. Simply stated, natural landscaping is designed to work with, rather than against nature.

It’s not just homeowners who are jumping on this band wagon. Several local businesses are also recognizing the benefits of natural landscaping. Take a look at the environmental commitment West Bend Mutual & Serigraph have made recently.

Lorrie Otto, a Milwaukee natural landscaping activist who has been referred to as the “high priestess” of the natural landscape movement, makes the argument for natural landscapes best when she says “If suburbia were landscaped

with meadows, prairies, thickets, or forests, or combinations of these, then the water would sparkle, fish would be good to eat again, birds would sing and human spirits would soar.”

Creating natural landscapes in your own backyard is one step you can take towards environmental stewardship.

For more information or to receive a natural landscaping packet call the Land Conservation Office at 262-335-4800.

**Conservation News** is a quarterly newsletter for Washington County residents. Its purpose is to increase awareness and promote action to protect our land and water resources. Viewpoints of authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Land Conservation Committee or the Washington County Board of Supervisors. The Committee and Land Conservation staff encourage responses from our readers.

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**Land Conservation/Natural Resources Staff**
Troy Kuphal, Scott Petges, Paul Sebo, Fay Fitts, Dan Knickelbein, Karen Long, Stephanie Egner, Bruce Zellner, Orville Kurth, Mary Jo Crass

**Education Coordinator and Editor**
Sue Millin
The Nitty Gritty of Soils and Topography

As you look over your property, take time to notice soil type and land characteristics. Is your soil mostly clay, sand, or a mixture? Is your land high and dry or low and soggy? Are there steep hills or rolling fields? If so, what kinds of plants grow on the slopes facing north and those facing south? Is there a difference? These observations will help determine what kinds of vegetation to manage for or to plant. If you are unsure, ask for help before making a large investment in trees, shrubs, grass seeds or prairie flowers. Contact the Land Conservation Department, garden center or County extension office for more information about soil testing, planting or soil survey maps.

"We are of the soil and the soil is of us."
- Luther Standing Bear

Soil Testing More Important Than Ever

By Scott Petges, LCD Technician

It's the time of year when many of you are ordering fertilizer and I can't help but wonder if this is the year you will take time out of your busy schedules to do some soil testing. In these times of ever increasing fertilizer costs and decreasing commodity prices you can no longer apply fertilizer at the same rate that your father did or because "it's the way you've always done it."

With possible shortages in nitrogen and higher than average prices.....this is the year to commit to doing soil tests and following recommendations. I know some producers are afraid of the phrase "nutrient management." All it really means is to take into account what fertilizer is available on the farm, what needs to be purchased and then applying it in amounts that the crop can use.

One of the landowners that we are working with used to put on extraordinarily high amounts of starter fertilizer in addition to applying manure to his fields. All this did was build up the phosphorus and potassium levels while shortchanging the corn on its nitrogen requirements. Based on soil samples we were able to decrease his starter rate and apply nitrogen according to the needs of his corn crop. He saw an immediate increase in bushels per acre. In addition to being more profitable the farmer was also helping to protect the environment.

If you don't know the fertility level of your soil..it is impossible to determine the amount of fertilizer to apply? Compare this to cooking dinner - would you cook twice, maybe three times the amount of food you plan on eating, only to throw the leftovers away?

If money is not an issue then I suppose buying excess fertilizer isn't a concern. I trust this is not the case. If you would like more information on soil testing and nutrient management give me at 335-4800. We are currently offering free soil testing on up to 40 acres of your farm. Don't delay. Call to make a reservation.

"An old error is always more popular than a new truth!" - German Proverb
Quaas Creek Committee Works to Protect Unique Water Resource

Protection Committee To Take Action!
Representatives from the Towns of Polk, West Bend, Trenton and the City of West Bend and Washington County have joined forces to develop a plan which will not only protect the Quaas Creek watershed but serve as a model for our county and state.

This unique intergovernmental group hopes to have the plan completed and ready for action by the end of this year. The Department of Natural Resources, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, City of West Bend Engineering Department, UW-Milwaukee, and the County’s Land Conservation and Planning and Parks Departments are providing technical support, data and other “behind the scene” services.

According to County Conservationist, Troy Kuphal “communities within the watershed have already made some progress through land use planning, erosion control and stormwater management...but, a more comprehensive approach is necessary to successfully protect the Creek.”

The plan will incorporate practices tailored to the needs of Quaas Creek, including:
- Land Use Planning & Zoning
- Land Conservancy & Preservation
- Better Site Design
- Stormwater Management
- Erosion & Sediment Control
- Habitat Restoration & Management
- Outreach & Stewardship Education

“Success of the protection effort will depend on the ability of the five communities to work together” states Kuphal. “Not only do we have to agree on the Plan components, but everyone involved must remain committed to its’ implementation.”

The committee believes that an aggressive education campaign is critical to the Plans’ success. Media coverage and presentations to local officials are on deck.

Water quality monitoring data collected by Dr. Timothy Ehlinger shows that portions of the

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Impervious Surface Coverage...
The Emergence of a Key Environmental Indicator

Urban landscapes are covered by *impervious surfaces* like sidewalks, parking lots, roads and driveways. They prevent water from percolating down into the ground, cause runoff to accumulate, and funnel into storm drains at high speeds. When quickly flowing runoff empties into receiving waters, it can severely erode streambanks. Paved surfaces also transfer heat to runoff, thereby increasing the temperature of receiving waters. Native species of fish and other aquatic life cannot survive in these warmer waters.

As development alters the natural landscape, the percentage of the land covered by impervious surfaces increases, initiating a chain of events that culminates in degraded water resources.

Conventional stormwater management practices cannot provide all the relief needed, and the loss of groundwater recharge poses additional problems...particularly for cold water streams.

How do we get a handle on protecting our water resources? While no magic bullet exits to simplify all of the complexities involved, a useful tool seems to have emerged...the “impervious surface coverage” indicator.

Research for the last 15 years consistently shows a strong correlation between the imperviousness of a drainage basin and the health of its receiving stream. Impervious coverage is also a readily identified, measurable aspect of the landscape, facilitating its use in both planning and regulatory applications.

Strategies making use of impervious surface coverage has become a major factor in the Quaas Creek Protection Plan and will be used to address other areas in the County. Innovative landscaping, land use planning and land preservation aimed at preserving the watershed’s capacity to infiltrate water are critical components in protecting rivers and streams.

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**Runoff pollution** occurs when water runs over land or through the ground, picking up pollutants, and depositing them in surface waters or introducing them into groundwater.

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Did you know that because of **impervious surfaces** such as pavements and rooftops...

a typical city block generates 9 times more **runoff** than a woodland of the same size?
Creek have been severely degraded by recent urban development. Some of the damage is likely to be permanent.

But Kuphal believes there is still hope. “With a sound plan and commitment from local leaders the water quality, wildlife habitat, beauty and recreational uses for much of Quaas Creek can be preserved for future generation.”

Hats off to the committee members for their commitment to preserving our water resources. Their efforts will not only protect the Quaas, but will provide other watershed groups with a framework for combating the problems that development can bring.

Mow high, mow often, and leave the clippings.

Set mowing heights up to about 2 inches to develop deeper roots and crown out weeds.

Remove only one-third of the grass length at each mowing. Cutting too much at once stresses the grass.

Leave the clippings on the lawn. “Grasscycling” provides free fertilizer (at least 1/4 of you lawn’s needs), helps lawns grow greener and denser and doesn’t cause thatch buildup.

You can grasscycle with your existing mower. For best results, keep the blade sharp, mow when the grass is dry and mow a little more in the spring. Clippings left scattered on the surface will break down quickly. If there are clumps, mow again to break them up.
WATERWAYS
Program Gears Up for Spring

Champions of the Environment Competition Deadline...April 10
K-12 students are invited to participate in the fourth annual Champions Competition. This year’s theme is “We’re All Connected.” Medals and savings bonds will be awarded to the top three finalists in each age category. Submissions must be turned in by 4:30 PM on Tuesday, April 10.

Stenciling Kickoff ... April 28
Help educate Washington County citizens about stormwater pollution by stencilling “Dump No Waste, Drains to River” next to storm drains. All materials provided. Call ahead.

Milwaukee River Clean Up ... May 19
You can help by volunteering a few hours of your time to collect garbage along the Milwaukee River and local streams. Mark your calendars for 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Call for informational posters. Join us!

Champions Reception ... May 30
Winners of the 2001 Champions Competition will be honored at a environmental reception to be held at UW-Washington Co. at 7:00 PM.

Seafood Fest ... June 1-3
Visit the Hands on Education booth presented by the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust and the WATERWAYS program.

Monitoring Workshop ... June 9
We need the eyes, ears and hands of local residents to help us monitor Washington County waterways. Workshop will be held at the PAC Building with monitoring stations at Riverside Park. Call for reservation.

BULLETIN BOARD

THE TREES ARE COMING!
If you placed an order for the 2001 Tree Program...pick up will take place at the Washington County Fair Park on Thursday April 26th from 1:00 PM-7:00 PM and Friday April 27th from 8:00AM-12:30 PM.

Propionic Acid Update
Most of you are probably aware of the new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ruling that makes propionic acid a pesticide.

If you are paid to bale hay for more than three people or on more than 500 acres in a calendar year; apply propionic acid to the hay; and the preservative is labeled as a pesticide, then you are acting as a commercial pesticide applicator. In order to continue baling for others you will need to pass a commercial certification exam, obtain a pesticide applicator’s license and obtain a pesticide business license.

The EPA has not yet set a time requirement for when hay preservatives containing propionic acid must be relabeled as a pesticide.

For license information, call 608-266-4548 or send an e-mail to armweb@datcp.state.wi.us.

FREED
The last crystal of winter's snow tumers free, quicky flows down the slope to the lowland where red skunk cabbage grows

Then from atop the fuzzy willow near the end of its stay a farewell from noisy Redwings sends the droplet on its way

Now onward the escapee joined by others on the run seeking larger creeks and rivers ever thankful to the April sun

"Land use is key to managing runoff pollution"
-Chester L. Arnold Jr.

Submitted by Richard Finch / Kewaskum
WHERE IS THIS?
Write your answer on a 3x5 card along with your name, address & phone number.

MAIL TO:
Where in the County?
Washington County Land Conservation Department,
333 E. Washington St, Suite 3200, West Bend, WI 53095.

WIN:
One correct entry will be drawn to win a bundle of 25 evergreen trees.

Congratulations to Kenneth J. Weber of Hartford for his correct identification of the W. J. Nichols Observatory which is located at 3885 Pioneer Road in Richfield. Kenneth is the lucky winner of a rustic blue bird house.