

Natural Legacy News

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A non-profit land trust ❖

An Economic Walk through Conservation Cemeteries

By Nicole LaBissoniere, MN Chapter, nicole@naturallegacies.org

Whether you are an artist, a nurse, or an engineer, financial news has become a part of everyday conversation. It has already been documented that the cost of a conventional funeral, including embalming, a leak-proof casket, and a concrete vault will cost consumers more money in almost all cases. Beyond the monetary benefits that green burials provide to individuals, let's consider how a conservation cemetery is a substantial community asset.

Conservation Cemeteries and Comprehensive Planning

Conservation cemeteries are large natural landscapes that provide many benefits. They are good recreation areas because green burial is unobtrusive and is allowed only at low densities. Natural preserves such as these increase the value of adjacent land. When compared to the option of developing the same parcel of land, other benefits of open space include better air quality (think fewer medical bills) and increased biological diversity (think more low-impact recreation/tourism). Natural depressions in the land can be used to mitigate storm water, thus saving cities and their citizens money that would otherwise be spent on expensive traditional pipe and gutter systems.

The economic value of natural space is often under-represented when planning decisions are made. It is not that we do not value open space and nature; it is that we do not have an adequate way to measure, relay, and compare its value beyond monetary scales. Any municipality's comprehensive plan that equates development with increased tax base without considering the more nuanced factors of economic development is not comprehensive at all.

There is a planning trend, both in education and practice, toward conservation communities. Jackson Meadow in Minnesota is a planned community that uses its shared open spaces and the nearby regional trail system as a successful marketing tool. Even those looking to sell a traditional home in the suburbs or city are quick to list the nearby parks, trails, and recreational amenities. So, our admiration of open space is obvious, however, efforts to protect the space are often halted due to poor "economic viability" despite examples pointing to the contrary.

(continued on page 2)



An Economic Walk... (continued from page 1)

Sadly, we often dismiss or fear the unknown. Those who face opposition when planning a conservation cemetery may experience this. Opponents will cite perceived negative health effects or danger to drinking water sources. In reality, this open space provides better health benefits. The maintenance of a conventional cemetery causes much more land and habitat degradation than land managed for natural burials. Those who are unfamiliar with conservation cemeteries may ask, "Why not just set the space aside as a regular park or forest?" Many organizations do just that and they do it well, but we can take it a step further and develop a personal, spiritual attachment to the land through burial. Once the land is designated as a cemetery, it is preserved forever, with diverse attachments throughout the community.

Basic physics tells us that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction - everything is part of a larger system. Just as we can connect the negative dots from poorly managed home loans to increased unemployment numbers to government bailouts, we should also make positive connections between city parks, conservation cemeteries, regional trail systems, and state budgets that rely on outdoor tourism and see the benefits of preserving and connecting all of these assets. ❖

TNL Looks at Fundraising in Light of the Economy

By Mark Dahlby, mark@naturallegacies.org

According to a recent study by the Chronicle of Philanthropy, grant-making foundations have been hammered by the stock market so badly that their assets have declined by a median 28 percent. As a result, many foundations across the country are cutting back on or eliminating giving in 2009.

This economic downturn differs from past ones because of its duration and severity, according to Robert Teeter, president of nonprofit consulting firm Teeter Associates. "I haven't seen anything this bad," Teeter said. "I have never seen so many (nonprofit) agencies as concerned about the future as now."

For many surveyed grant-giving organizations, 2009 grant payouts will only be three-quarters of those made in 2008, which were already lower than in previous years. Many foundations said they would not be making any grants in 2009 and would be watching the economy to see where they would be in 2010.

With less money to hand out, foundations are looking for ways to prioritize the grants they award. Funding for capital projects like buildings and land is evaporating. Instead, foundations have been reprioritizing to provide support for financially struggling families in the areas of food, shelter, transportation and jobs.

The same trends have been seen among individual donors, who have all been hit as hard as the foundations financially, and often share the same concerns about helping people with the most immediate, pressing needs.

TNL's Adaptation to the Shift

TNL is adapting to this new funding environment. We had planned to launch a major fundraising campaign in 2009, but have now decided to postpone it both in support of individuals' reprioritized giving goals and in recognition of how difficult it would be to obtain funding for our major projects.

However, TNL will continue to develop a long-range funding plan and will continue to seek smaller grants on a case-by-case basis. For example, we recently requested a small grant for some graphic design work. We will also likely be seeking a small grant of around \$500 to support development of a "Green Cemetery Operators Guide", which is one of the educational tools we intend to share with the many individuals who have been inquiring about how to establish and operate small green cemeteries on their own land. We may also seek some support for our growing "land search" committee, which is developing, among many things, a computer-based system to help best locate and plot potential green cemeteries throughout the Midwest.



Fundraising *(continued from page 2)*

As we will detail in our upcoming annual report, TNL currently has the funds necessary to carry out its basic mission for this new fiscal year, but not to expand into new areas or have a positive balance going forward in the next fiscal year. So we strongly encourage you to join or renew your memberships. Even small-donation memberships go a long way towards helping us continue our work during these uncertain times.

Participation of our Friends

As we turn away from spending money on projects, we grow more dependent on volunteers to make those projects a success. It's probably fair to say that you, as a reader, support our mission. With that said, we particularly need you to support us now with your action.

As detailed below, TNL's annual board elections are coming up again. As some long-standing board members' lives have led them in different directions, our board and project teams need an infusion of new ideas and energy. New volunteers are critical if we are to have continued success beyond this year. Although in the past we've asked for specific expertise – management, financial, legal, ecology, etc. – in volunteers, we are now simply asking for your volunteer support regardless of whether you have special skills or just a willingness to move this important concept forward into reality.

We've found that the day-to-day work of our board and project teams is less dependent on any specific expertise and more dependent on being motivated to help and concerned about the issues that make up TNL's mission. As the saying goes – individually we do what we can with the abilities we have, but by working together we can achieve much, much more.

If you would like to volunteer or have any questions about volunteering or donating, please contact me at mark@naturallegacies.org or at 608-628-3594 (email preferred). We thank you for your continued support. ❖

Seeking Board Member Nominations

"There is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task." -President Barack Obama

In his inaugural address, President Obama called on each of us to find ways to build a better future by contributing what we can to our communities. As we work to meet new challenges, he said, citizens acting on our underlying values have been "the quiet force of progress throughout our history."

Is having green burial options for you and your family important to you? If so, help build this better future by serving on our Board of Directors. We can't reach this goal without you. If you would like to be a part of our Board of Directors or know someone who you'd recommend, please contact us and submit your nomination. We look forward to having you join us on our journey!

What Does a Board Member Do?

Members of the Board of Directors serve two year terms. Board meetings are held once per month in Madison, WI (all meetings are tele-conferenced so you do not need to live in the Madison area). Each Board Member is also expected to do some work outside of the monthly meeting, such as working on a committee, organizing outreach events, doing site investigations, etc...whatever aspects are of most interest to you.

Board Election Process

- All nominations should be emailed to mark@naturallegacies.org or mailed to the TNL office at 222 S. Hamilton St., Suite #1, Madison, WI 53703. If nominating yourself, include a brief description (2-3 paragraphs) about your qualifications/experience and why you would like to serve on the board. Please include a head shot photograph if possible. If nominating someone else, please include contact information for that person so we can verify that they wish to be nominated, as well as a brief description of why you think they would be a good candidate.
- Nominations must be received by the date of the Annual Meeting: **Sunday, June 8, 2008**. Nominations may also be submitted during the Annual Meeting.
- Board candidates will introduce themselves at the Annual Meeting (please plan to attend), and members may cast their votes at that time if present.
- The July newsletter will contain information about the Board nominees and a ballot, and members may subsequently mail in their votes (the voting deadline will be specified on the ballot). ❖

TNL's Third Annual Membership Meeting



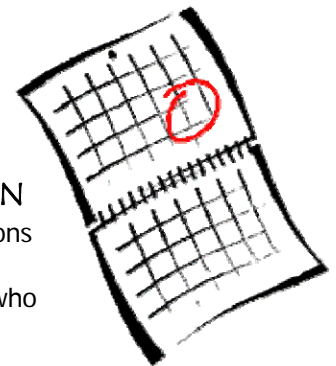
Come help us celebrate our third birthday as a non-profit land trust at TNL's Annual Membership Meeting. All members* are welcome and encouraged to attend to learn more about the year behind, the year ahead, to meet the current Board of Directors, and to nominate and cast votes for new Board Members (see article on p. 3). And, of course, to eat birthday cake!

When: Sunday, June 8, 2008
1:00-2:30 PM
Where: 222 S. Hamilton St., Suite #1, Madison WI 53703
(TNL office)

* Non-members are also welcome to attend if they would like to learn more. Only members may vote.



Upcoming Events—Save the Date!



Minnesota Living Green Expo

Sat.–Sun., May 2–3 (Sat. 10–6; Sun 10–5), MN State Fair Grounds, St. Paul, MN
The Living Green Expo is Minnesota's largest environmental event, providing real solutions for people to live better, healthier lives with less impact on the environment. It's a free, family-friendly event. Look for TNL-Minnesota's booth, and get connected with people who are interested in making a positive difference in their lives and in their communities. For more information, visit <http://www.livinggreen.org/index-expo.cfm>.

From Dust to Dust: Green Coffins & Containers – A Hands-On Weekend Workshop

Fri–Sun, May 8–10, Madison, WI. Workshop presented by Natural Passings.

Registration (includes materials & meals): \$125

Measurements, designs, tools and techniques for creating a handmade coffin. One or more simple coffins will be constructed during the workshop. For more information, contact Math Heinzl at 608-444-9406 or workshops@hedgecroft.net. To register, send check, contact information, & any dietary restrictions to Math Heinzl at P.O. Box 14413, Madison, WI 53708-0413.

TNL Annual Membership Meeting

Sunday, June 8, 1:00–2:30, TNL Office, 222 S. Hamilton St., Suite #1, Madison, WI

Join us for our Annual Membership Meeting to learn about what has been accomplished in the past year and our future directions. Meet current Board members, hear from Board nominees, and eat birthday cake! (See article above)

Midwest Renewable Energy & Sustainable Living Fair: TNL Presentation (date/time of presentation TBD)

June 19–21 (Fri.–Sun.), ReNew the Earth Institute, 7558 Deer Rd., Custer, WI

This annual event is quickly becoming a TNL favorite...and this year marks the MREA Fair's 20th anniversary! Join us for an invigorating weekend among thousands of like-minded people, motivating speakers and cutting-edge vendors. Check out http://www.the-mrea.org/energy_fair.php for the schedule of events and more.

Member Spotlight ❖

This month we honor a member of our community who we now miss deeply.

Rae Atira-Soncea was a founding member of the Natural Passings Collective in Madison, WI, an organization dedicated to re-educating ourselves on our rights to care for our loved ones when they die. TNL first met Rae and her husband Math Heinzl at the Midwest Renewable Energy & Sustainable Living Fair a few years ago. Both organizations were brand new, and we were excited to form a partnership. Since that time, Math has joined TNL as a board member, and the Natural Passings Collective has hosted workshops each year for those who wish to make the end of life more meaningful, simple, and personal.



Rae passed away unexpectedly on March 1st, just before the third annual Natural Passings workshop. Math and their son Casey were able to provide a mostly green burial in Mazomanie, WI, with Casey building a beautiful, cradle-like open casket, and Rae's friends finishing a quilt that Rae had started, to wrap her in.

Rae was not only interested in end of life issues, but she was a passionate artist and advocate. Her work in wood and embroidery glows with color and light. Rae strove to make art accessible to everyone, serving on national boards and in myriad capacities throughout our community. Always very highly thought of, she leaves a strong legacy reminding each of us of the difference we can make in our world.

TNL Membership Form

Yes! I want to help promote the creation of conservation cemeteries across the Midwest. Enclosed is my annual membership to TNL.

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone: _____

Membership Levels

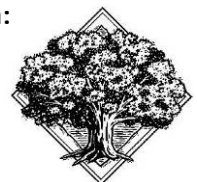
___ Legacy \$250	___ Sponsor \$50
___ Patron \$100	___ Basic \$30
___ Family \$60	___ Student or limited income \$20

- I would be happy to receive my quarterly newsletter via email to help TNL conserve costs!
- I would like to learn more about TNL's committees or contribute my time, skills, or interest. I am specifically interested in:

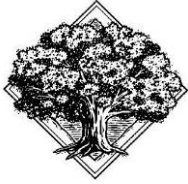
TNL Committees:	Programs & Events Communications	Site Selection Land Mgmt. (future)	Fundraising Finances	Membership Board Developmt.
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Thank you for your support!
 Make checks payable to "Trust for Natural Legacies, Inc."
 Please send this form along with your payment to:
 Trust for Natural Legacies, Inc.
 222 S. Hamilton St., Suite #1
 Madison, WI 53703

For additional information:
 Please visit our web site at
www.naturallegacies.org



The Internal Revenue Service has approved TNL's status as a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. Memberships and other donations to TNL are tax deductible. Additionally, all donations and memberships made to TNL over the past two years are deductible retrospectively. If you would like a receipt for a previous donation or membership, please contact us. Otherwise, any letter already received from TNL acknowledging the amount of the donation/membership is considered a receipt.



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Help us use our funds efficiently: Sign up for the TNL newsletter online!

A significant portion of our funds are used in printing and mailing the newsletter you are enjoying right now. To help us conserve costs, consider signing up to receive your newsletter via email. Just drop us a line at joy@naturallegacies.org to make the switch!

Green Cemetery Highlight: A Popular English Trend

By Theresa Peterson, TNL-Minnesota

In March 2009 I was fortunate enough to take a trip to England, and spent time in London and Cranleigh. Cranleigh is a small village about one hour south of London. Quite unexpectedly, as we arrived in the village, my friend pointed out to me the new “natural burial cemetery” along the road. I, of course, asked to go back to look around and take some pictures for my TNL friends back home.



A recent grave and plaque at Oakfield Wood.
Photo: Theresa Peterson

The cemetery was called Oakfield Wood and was part of Woodland Burials, www.woodlandburials.co.uk. My friend explained that natural burial has gotten quite popular in England. Woodland Burials operates 3 or 4 natural burial cemeteries. According to their web site, the cost for a natural burial ranges from £660-840 (about \$1,000 - \$1,200). The fee includes the plot, grave preparation, tree planting, tree guard, wooden plaque, and a maintenance fee to help care for the cemetery. The bodies are buried in shrouds or coffins made of cardboard, softwoods, or other biodegradable materials. No concrete vaults, embalming, or other materials are permitted.

At TNL, our ideal approach for a green cemetery is to look for land in its natural state that already has good conservation value. However, other approaches used for different circumstances, such as replanting previously farmed areas back to native vegetation, or allowing green, biodegradable burials in mown or more urban areas. The cemetery in Cranleigh was obviously a ‘young’ green cemetery—a flat open area with burial plots grouped close together, each one with a mound of dirt and a small wooden name plaque. Some of the older plots had grass or flowers growing, and in one section of the cemetery each mound had a seedling tree planted on it. Though at present it still looked a little barren, once the trees grow it should be more inviting and will hopefully live up to the vision of a “beautiful woodland” described on the website. Nature takes her time, and a green cemetery, like all ecosystems, needs space and time to grow through its many stages. I was happy to see an actual natural burial cemetery in use during this early stage, and encouraged by word of its increasing popularity in England. ❖