

Friends of the Mukwonago River



Longear Sunfish
(*Lepomis megalotis*)

The Mukwonago River watershed is home to over 50 species of fish including the threatened Longear Sunfish (*Lepomis megalotis*), several species of rare freshwater mussels, an incredible diversity of wetlands, and some of the highest water quality in Southeastern Wisconsin. The mission of the Friends of the Mukwonago River is to protect the Mukwonago River and its associated watershed ecosystems by way of education, advocacy, and promotion of sound land use throughout the watershed.

FALL 2002 NEWSLETTER

It has been a while since our last newsletter, but this does not mean we haven't been busy. On the contrary, we've been so busy that it has been difficult to find time to get this information out. We apologize for the delay!

Hello and welcome to all of our old Friends and to our new Friends, especially those from Two Rivers Homeowners Association and the Phantom Lakes Management District. We appreciate your interest in and support of our river protection efforts and look forward to working with you in the future!

This is a very important newsletter as it contains our first appeal for people to "officially" join the Friends of the Mukwonago River by signing up as members and contributing a nominal membership fee to help us cover our costs for mailing newsletters, preparing documents for public hearings on development proposals, and potentially for hiring engineering or legal consultants in the future to help us make our case for the protection of the Mukwonago River.

Please turn to the back page for our Founding Member Special and join now to help us get this organization officially off the ground.

Since our last newsletter, the Village of Mukwonago's Highway 83 "bypass" or Bay View Road extension (the Friends' first major project) has been completed without any adverse impacts to the river. The Village of Mukwonago, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources all deserve credit for working together to implement state-of-the-art erosion control and stormwater management techniques on this project. (All of that happened, of course, with more than a little arm-twisting from the DNR and lots of involvement on the part of the Nature Conservancy as well). Unfortunately, this project is just a "scratch on the surface" of potential development-related threats to the exceptional Mukwonago River. Please see page 3 for a summary of our current concerns and campaigns with respect to development within the watershed. But first, some exciting news...

NOW AVAILABLE: MUKWONAGO RIVER VIDEO!!!

After 2 long years and countless hours of volunteer time put in by "Friend" Nancy Gloe and others, the Waukesha Land Conservancy has finally completed its educational video on the Mukwonago River watershed, entitled:

Glacial Refuge: The Phenomenally Diverse Mukwonago River

Trust us...it was worth the wait! In the new video, which is now available for purchase (see below), experts on fish, wetlands, river ecology, and water quality discuss various aspects of the river and explain why the Mukwonago River is the most diverse stream in southeastern Wisconsin and one of the best in the entire state. For example, they point out that:

- The Mukwonago is the only stream in Wisconsin that contains 10 of the state's 11 species of Sunfish
- The Mukwonago is the only Wisconsin stream containing all 3 species of Killifish found in the state, including the federally endangered Starhead Topminnow
- If a stream the size and length of the Mukwonago were to have 20 species of fish in it, it would be considered to be quite diverse; the Mukwonago River contains as many as **57 species of fish!**
- Due to the quality and diversity of the Mukwonago River and its adjacent wetlands, it has been chosen as one of "three high-priority conservation areas or 'focal'

landscapes" in The Nature Conservancy's global Wetland Management Network. The two other project sites are a reserve at the headwaters of the Amazon River in Peru and the Great Salt Lake Ecosystem in Utah. The Nature Conservancy's research on the Mukwonago will be used worldwide to enhance wetland conservation efforts in other special places.

The video includes some incredible aerial and underwater footage. It features footage, for example, of the very unusual and fascinating breeding behavior of some of our native freshwater mussels. Importantly, the video also explains how the health of the river is currently threatened and discusses what citizens and others can do to preserve this "jewel."

Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about the wonderful treasure in YOUR BACK YARD!

We intend to show the video in various venues locally over the coming months. Also, copies are now available on loan from the Mukwonago, Eagle, and East Troy libraries. Finally, copies of the video can also be purchased (another way you can help support our work). Please contact Nancy Gloe at (262) 782-8876 or by email at gloe@execpc.com for further information on the availability of the video for viewing or for purchase.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WATERSHED

As mentioned previously, we are monitoring and/or actively working on several specific proposed development projects within the watershed. This section contains detailed stories on the history, current status, and future of each project.

RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISION ON THE 200-ACRE FORMER O'BRYAN BROTHERS PROPERTY IN THE TOWN OF MUKWONAGO PROPOSED BY HARMONY HOMES, INC. OF WAUKESHA:

When we jumped into the fray on this project last March, it appeared that the site was destined to be carved up into a 5-acre lot subdivision with around 30 homes. This plan would have caused increased volumes of stormwater runoff to flow into Brown's Lake and the surrounding wetlands, both of which lie to the west on an adjacent piece of property, causing habitat destruction and diminished water quality in this tributary to the Mukwonago River and in the River itself.

The entire area around Brown's Lake is very special. It is a groundwater discharge zone (meaning there are many springs there) and a tributary headwaters to the Mukwonago River, which runs half a mile or so to the south across County LO. The wetlands surrounding Brown's Lake contain a wide variety of high quality wetland plants including the plant community that is referred to as a calcareous fen. In a calcareous fen, calcium and magnesium bicarbonates picked up from the limestone bedrock by the groundwater emerging at the surface

create highly alkaline (basic) soils that only a select group of plants can tolerate. Thus, this rare wetland community of "specialists" can only occur in exceptional places where all the necessary factors occur at once. According to "Wetland Plants ... of Minnesota and Wisconsin" by Eggers and Reed, the calcareous fen is the rarest wetland plant community in Minnesota and Wisconsin and is probably the rarest wetland type in North America! The Mukwonago River watershed contains intact remnants of calcareous fen in several places, and it is our opinion that every effort should be made to protect these rare ecosystems from the adverse impacts of nearby development.

Harmony Homes' initial proposed development plan would also have fragmented the Environmental Corridor on the property, which is composed of steep wooded slopes lying to the north of the property's flatter agricultural fields visible from County LO. It is our belief that the limited amount of Environmental Corridor that remains in the watershed should also be protected from the impacts of development to the greatest extent possible by limiting development in those areas as well as minimizing the impacts on them from adjacent development.

This property also contains remnants of rare oak savanna (oak savanna is a globally rare natural community with only about 500 acres remaining in the state, less than 1% of what once existed) that were slated to be

included in lots, a situation that would not likely have led to the oak savanna's protection and restoration. Oak savanna is characterized by sprawling open-grown oak trees spaced several hundred feet apart with a meadow of prairie grasses and wildflowers growing between them. We believe that oak savanna, too, is deserving of special protection wherever practicable to preserve its existence and allow for the possibility of its restoration.

We met with the developer of this parcel, Tim Styza from Harmony Homes, and attended several Town of Mukwonago planning commission and board meetings over this past summer. Along with several concerned citizens, we spoke out against the original proposal and its potentially adverse impacts to the environment. We asked the Town and the developer to consider what is often referred to as a conservation subdivision for this site. A conservation subdivision is a kind of "planned unit development" (PUD) that tailors the design of the subdivision to the specific characteristics of the land being divided.

Ideally, this conservation subdivision would preserve the oak savanna and leave a large, undeveloped buffer zone around the woods and wetlands, leaving the remaining land in the former agricultural fields as a place for the desired number of houses to be "clustered" or grouped on smaller (but still decent-sized) lots meeting the requirements of the Town's agricultural or rural home zoning ordinances. This conservation subdivision would also leave intact large natural areas where

runoff from roads, driveways, and rooftops could soak into the ground rather than running off directly into the adjacent wetlands. This "infiltration" of stormwater is critically important in that it keeps groundwater recharge at or near its current level, which thereby maintains the water table and keeps the Mukwonago River's crucial springs healthy and flowing.

Over the last few years, the Mukwonago Town Board's concern for open space and the environment in the area has been steadily growing. On this issue, many members of the Board and Planning Commission made pro-environmental comments that dove-tailed nicely with the public's comments. In the end, the Town asked the developer to submit a conservation subdivision proposal and he agreed.

Although there were some interesting twists along the way, including potential lawsuits (on the part of the developer) and disagreements over the appropriate number of lots, the proposal, as it stands now, is for a 29-lot conservation subdivision with a buffer around the wetlands and Brown's Lake and common ownership of the wooded environmental corridor. It is our opinion that ***if*** this proposed development is done properly (i.e., with stormwater management techniques that minimize the volume and intensity of stormwater runoff into the adjacent wetlands and Brown's Lake and maximize the infiltration of stormwater into the ground for groundwater recharge), the adverse impacts to the surrounding environment and the river will be minimal. We will continue to monitor this development and work

with the developer, the Town, and the Town Engineer to see that these ideas are carried out.

TOWN OF MUKWONAGO CITIZEN SURVEY:

The results of the Town of Mukwonago's citizen survey on future development in the Town have just been released. They are now available to the public at Town Hall and other locations. Call Town Hall at 363-4555 for more information.

This survey serves as the Town's first step in the direction of complying with the State's recent 'Smart Growth' comprehensive planning legislation, which requires every municipality in the state to prepare a comprehensive land use plan by 2010 that meets several requirements spelled out in the law.

The response rate to the Town survey was 53.5%, which is excellent and shows that Town of Mukwonago residents are concerned about development and its impacts on their Town. Town residents sent a strong message to their leaders that they wish to see the rural character of the Town preserved and that they favor using regulation to slow growth from previous levels. A majority of Town residents feel that the Town should put greater emphasis on protecting streams, lakes, groundwater, farmland, and open space, and many indicated that they are willing to pay at least some additional taxes to achieve this (for example, through the purchase of development rights from property owners).

We would like to see the Village of Mukwonago, the Town of Eagle, and all the other communities in the watershed begin to work on complying with the Smart Growth legislation, perhaps starting with asking for their residents' opinions on future development and environmental issues in a survey, as the Town of Mukwonago has done. One of our priority future campaigns will be to ask the watershed communities to do just this. Are any of you local residents out there willing to talk to your Town or Village Board members and planning commissioners to help us get this campaign off the ground? If so, please contact Nancy at (262) 782-8876.

TWO RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISIONS (ON THE FORMER DENEEN AND MINOR PROPERTIES) PROPOSED BY TWO DIFFERENT DEVELOPERS IN THE AREA EAST OF COUNTY I, SOUTH OF COUNTY NN (AND THE MUKWONAGO HIGH SCHOOL), AND NORTH OF COUNTY LO ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE VILLAGE OF MUKWONAGO:

The development slated to occur on the former Deneen property is proposed by the Simon Group of Brookfield and is to be called Pinehurst Village. Spheeris Development Corporation of Oconomowoc is proposing the development on the former Minor property, to be called Minor's Homestead. As indicated above, both developments will be part of the Village of Mukwonago. Both parcels were recently annexed to the Village at the request of the then landowners.

Taken together, this 205-acre parcel is slated to be divided into approximately

220 one-half to one-third acre house lots with municipal water, sewers, and urban-style streets featuring curbs and gutter as well as sidewalks on both sides.

The majority of the Minor property and a sizeable chunk of the former Deneen property are wetland areas that drain south under County LO, through the Village park, and into the Mukwonago River as it opens up into Lower Phantom Lake. According to a report from the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, one of these wetland areas contains "good quality Southern sedge meadow" and low prairie, "a rare wetland type in Southeastern Wisconsin."

The high level of impervious surfaces in these developments (roofs, driveways, roads, and sidewalks, which prevent precipitation from reaching the ground and soaking in to recharge the groundwater) combined with their proximity to the wetlands and the general topography of the area (slopes running towards the wetlands, the lake, and the River) mean that there is likely to be a significant negative impact on the hydrology (water flow) of the area, the wetlands, downstream water quality, and the overall health of Phantom Lake and downstream reaches of the Mukwonago River.

We have attempted to work with the two developers and with the Village to move these developments toward a goal of improved site planning and stormwater engineering that will minimize the negative environmental impacts of the developments without affecting the economics for the developers or the Village. We have had very limited success in this effort to

date. Our argument has not been that these developments should not happen at all; rather, we have advocated for special consideration for the wetlands and river given the close proximity of and direct link between the developments and the adjoining high quality natural resources.

The Village of Mukwonago has been completely unresponsive to our letters and statements. Even the 15-minute presentation that John Siepmann of Siepmann Realty (a local leader in the development of conservation subdivisions) graciously agreed to give (free of charge) hardly caused the members of the planning commission to bat an eyelash.

On the other hand, we have had some success in working with the developer of Pinehurst Village, Scott Simon of the Simon Group, and his engineering consultants at RSV Engineering in the Village of Mukwonago. Simon has indicated that he believes that a conservation subdivision would be a better fit for this site. However, the Village's requirements essentially leave him with no alternative to the current, less environmentally friendly design. Simon has nonetheless pledged to work with the engineers at RSV to make his development as "runoff friendly" as possible in the context of the preliminary design that he and the Village have agreed on. Mr. Simon is in no way obligated to work with us on these issues, so he deserves a lot of credit and our gratitude for working with us on this.

We have received no response from the developer of Minor's Homestead; he has chosen not to return around half a dozen phone calls. On the one occasion when we were able to reach his assistant, we were told that there was little that could be done to modify the development plans at this stage due to the fact that the Village had already accepted a preliminary plat design.

We will continue to work with Scott Simon to minimize the impacts of Pinehurst Village, and we will continue to urge the Village and John Spheeris to improve the Minor's Homestead project before it is too late.

VILLAGE OF MUKWONAGO "GATEWAY" PROJECT (SOUTH OF THE I-43/COUNTY HIGHWAY 83 INTERCHANGE):

The Village recently asked its planning consultant from Ruekert/Mielke (of Pewaukee) to draw up a major development plan for the "Gateway" area at the south end of the Village, which includes, among other things, a proposed commercial district in the area closest to the freeway interchange (this is the site Home Depot has had its eyes on for several years), large land areas designated for corporate business between what is now Maple Avenue and I-43, and an extensive future industrial park in the area to the west and south of the interchange on what is currently open farmland.

So, you may be asking yourself, why do the Friends of the Mukwonago River care about the Village's planning activities and the future developments

that may occur in this area? Aside from a general interest in intelligent, well-planned growth in the Waukesha County region and in the preservation of agricultural lands as a basis for the sustainable production of food, the specific reason why we are interested in this project is that a small tributary to the Mukwonago River flows through this area and stands to be significantly impacted by the developments that will follow closely on the heels of the Village's adoption of the Gateway District plan. Any negative impacts to the tributary stream will of course translate into harmful effects on the main stem of the river.

We plan to work closely with the Village's planner (an idea to which he seems to be amenable – he is already mapping a substantial buffer zone around the stream in his future land use maps of the plan area) and with the Village planning commission and Board to ensure that whatever development occurs in this area does so without causing unnecessary harm to the tributary and the Mukwonago River itself.

Please watch for action alerts in the near future as this issue works its way through the multiple decision layers at the Village. We may ask Village residents and other Friends to help us make the Village and the developers aware that care must be taken to protect the Mukwonago River as the Gateway is developed. **So, please stay tuned for further updates on this one!!**

POSSIBLE PLANS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AT RAINBOW SPRINGS RESORT IN THE TOWN OF MUKWONAGO:

As many of you already know, the owners of the Rainbow Springs Resort appear, finally, to be coming forward with a plan to deal with the safety hazard presented by the old lodge structures that were damaged by last April's fire. Less encouraging is the news, reported in the September 20 Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, that the resort's owners intend to present a development proposal to the Mukwonago Town Board following clean up of the site. Evidently, the owners have not yet revealed what their specific plans are, but the article indicates that they "intend to raise the resort from the ashes and create a top-notch leisure destination for southeast Wisconsin."

The existing developments at Rainbow Springs have already degraded the River significantly. The main channel of the Mukwonago River flows right through part of the golf course, running through culverts in several locations to facilitate golf cart roads, fairways, and greens. The stream's natural banks and vegetation have been significantly modified, destroying and fragmenting plant and animal habitat and making it easy for many of the serious chemicals (herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers, etc.) that are required by golf courses to enter directly into the stream with stormwater runoff.

In contrast to the beautiful, natural state that it is in throughout much of the rest of the watershed, the river has been seriously impacted in the area around the Rainbow Springs Resort. Any potential future development on that property must be examined very closely for potential additional impacts

it may have on the River. We will continue to investigate and monitor this situation and stay in contact with Town officials to ensure that future developments at Rainbow Springs don't cause further degradation of the Mukwonago River.

VILLAGE OF EAGLE'S PROPOSAL TO DRILL A HIGH-CAPACITY MUNICIPAL WATER-SUPPLY WELL IN THE TOWN OF EAGLE:

Another piece of information that many readers may already be aware of is that the Village of Eagle has recently acquired a 40-acre parcel of land on the south side of the intersection of County Highways 67 and LO in the Town of Eagle. The tract was purchased for the purpose of installing two new shallow, high-capacity municipal wells to help enable the Village to address the problem of excess radium in the water coming from its existing, deep, water-supply wells. (Radium is a naturally occurring element in some groundwater that can cause human health problems above certain levels)

Initially, the Village planned to blend water from the new wells with water from the existing wells to bring the Village's drinking water into compliance. (This is the approach currently used by the Village of Mukwonago and other Waukesha County communities facing the same problem meeting radium standards.) Due to concerns over high pumping costs, however, the Village of Eagle has dropped its "blending" plan and now intends to use the two proposed new wells as the sole source of the Village's drinking water supply.

The new wells will be located just east (by approximately 1 mile) of the headwaters of the Mukwonago River and Lulu Lake. This is a concern for us, and others who care about the future health of the Mukwonago River and her watershed, as large-scale groundwater extraction in this area could draw down the local water table, drying up some of the wetlands and springs that feed the River and ultimately affecting the River itself. As indicated by the extensive press this issue received over the past summer, pumping in the new wells could also potentially dewater local private wells, which caused many neighboring property owners in the Town to take issue with the Village's proposal.

The Village's engineer (from Ruekert/Mielke) has said that their testing shows that the pumping in the

high-capacity wells will not cause any of the problems described above. Village officials have stated that if there are any environmental or private water supply problems associated with the new wells they will take actions to address those problems. The Friends of the Mukwonago River and others who are involved in the Mukwonago River Watershed Initiative (see article below) will continue to monitor this issue and work to ensure that the Village of Eagle's new water-supply wells do not cause any undue harm to the Mukwonago River.

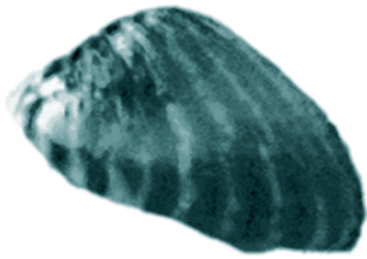
It should be noted that other watershed municipalities (such as the Village of Mukwonago and the Village of East Troy) face similar drinking water supply issues, which means that the groundwater that is such an integral part of the Mukwonago River may face additional threats in the future.

OTHER NEWS

ZEBRA MUSSELS/NATIVE MUSSEL WATCH:

Thank you to all of the great folks at the Phantom Lakes Management District for volunteering to help "scrub" invasive, exotic Zebra Mussels (see accompanying photos) off of native mussels (freshwater clams) in the Mukwonago River if need be in the future. Those of you on Beulah and Phantom Lakes (currently, the two areas in the watershed where Zebras have been reported) can also help by monitoring native mussels in the lakes to see that they aren't being overtaken by Zebra Mussels.

If you find that Zebra Mussels are attaching themselves to the "natives," you can quickly remove the native mussels from the water, pull the Zebras off by hand (if you're cleaning more than a couple of mussels, you'll want to wear gardening gloves to avoid cuts), and then smash the Zebras with a hammer or simply put them in a tin can to die. It is very important that you do not put the Zebras back in the lake.



Zebra Mussel

After cleaning a native mussel, immediately put it back as close to its original location as possible. Remember that our native mussels will die if they remain out of the water too long. **IMPORTANT:** The best way to put a mussel back on the bottom of a lake or stream is to remember which end **was** buried when you picked it up and embed the mussel back in the bottom that same way. If you're not sure which end was down, the next best thing is to simply lay the mussel flat, as burying the wrong end could cause the mussel to be unable to feed or breathe.



Courtesy J. Ellen Marsden

Zebra Mussel Infestation

It is a good idea to remove Zebra Mussels from the water whenever you find them (on boats, piers, etc.). In some areas where outbreaks occurred,

coordinated manual removal of Zebras in early stages of the outbreak was credited with substantially "knocking back" Zebra mussel infestations.

MUKWONAGO RIVER WATERSHED INITIATIVE POISED TO HIT THE ROAD TO RAISE AWARENESS AMONG LOCAL DECISION MAKERS:

The Mukwonago River Watershed Initiative is a coalition of private and public organizations helping local citizens, municipalities, businesses, and landowners to protect the valuable resources of the Mukwonago River for future generations. Current member organizations include:

- The Nature Conservancy
- The Waukesha Land Conservancy
- Friends of the Mukwonago River
- Eagle Spring Lake Management District
- Waukesha & Walworth Counties
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR)
- WDNR - Bureau of Endangered Resources

The coalition anticipates taking "on the road" an educational program on the economic, social, and environmental importance of preserving water quality and the overall health of the Mukwonago River. Members of the group will speaking with local Planning Commissions, Town and Village Boards, and other public decision-makers, as well as interested private and citizen groups, on these important topics. The goal is to inform local decision makers and citizens of the high quality and

statewide importance of the Mukwonago River, of the potential negative impacts various kinds of development can have on water quality, and on ways in which beneficial development can occur while maintaining water quality and the health of the Mukwonago River watershed as a whole. Please watch for and support this Initiative effort. Thank you.

FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER T-SHIRTS AND SWEATSHIRTS NOW AVAILABLE:

In another promotional effort to help offset our costs in fighting for the protection of the Mukwonago River, we are now offering for sale t-shirts and sweatshirts featuring a colorful Longear Sunfish on the front AND a list of all 57 species of fish that live in the River on the back. T-shirts are available at \$18 each, and sweatshirts cost \$30 each. Please contact Nancy Gloc at (262) 782-8876 or gloc@execpc.com if you are interested in purchasing a Friends shirt as a gift ('tis the season after all...) or for yourself.

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE MUKWONAGO RIVER NOW AND RECEIVE A FREE GIFT!

Now is the time to join the Friends of the Mukwonago River! The River currently faces many threats from proposed and pending developments throughout the watershed. As we work to provide a voice for the River in the planning and decision-making processes surrounding these projects, we may need to hire experts from time to time to help us make the case for win-win solutions that will allow sensible development to occur while protecting the Mukwonago River. We also plan to pursue federal, tax-exempt non-profit status* so that we may be eligible in the future for certain federal and state grants as well as charitable donations. Your membership fee for the important coming year will help us to have the financial wherewithal to be able to do these two important things, **ensuring the future of the Friends of the Mukwonago River and our namesake.**

Join now at the level that's appropriate for you and we'll send you a free gift. Friends receive a copy of the Glacial Refuge video (see page 2), Founding Members receive a t-shirt sporting a colorful Longear Sunfish on the front AND a list of all 57 species of fish that live in the Mukwonago River on the back, and Founding Family Members receive a t-shirt as well as a sweatshirt featuring the same design as the t-shirt. Be the first one on your block to have these Friends of the Mukwonago River items! Just fill out the form below and mail it and a check for the appropriate amount to:

Friends of the Mukwonago River P.O. Box 145 Mukwonago, WI 53149-0145

* Sorry, contributions are not yet tax-exempt. We need the help of a few concerned people early on to help us through the steps required to attain tax-exempt status. Please donate now so that we can offer you a tax-deductible membership next year. Thank you very much!!

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Please sign me up as an annual member of the Friends of the Mukwonago River:

____ Friend (\$15) – includes one copy of the Glacial Refuge video

____ Founding Member (\$25) – includes one t-shirt (desired size: M__, L__, XL__)

____ Founding Family Member (\$35) – includes one t-shirt and one sweatshirt (desired t-shirt size: M__, L__, XL__; desired sweatshirt size: S__, M__, L__)

Please indicate here if you'd like to be a member but do not need a gift at this time.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone # (optional): _____

E-mail (optional): _____

Please indicate here if you'd prefer an email newsletter in the future.

Thank you!!!