

Volunteer-led fund aids in property purchase

BY DENEEN SMITH

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The volunteer-led Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund also worked to protect additional property in the area this year.

The volunteer-led group, which raises money for land purchases and does stewardship, education and restoration projects on the public lands, purchased 10 lots this year to add to the public ownership of the property.

Ingrid Verhulst, board secretary and land chair of the group, said the 10 vacant parcels include seven lots near what would be 128th Street and three lots near First Court and 125th Street.

"These are all vacant lots out there," Verhulst said. "Our goal is to pick up the privately owned properties that are scattered throughout the protected natural area."

In addition, the group helped the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources complete acquisition of a parcel in the northern section of the prairie. That purchase had been in the works for two years and finally closed this month.

Together, Verhulst said, the 11 parcels total nearly three acres. The cost of acquiring the properties was just more than \$71,000.

The prairie was once destined for residential development, and the land was platted into small individual lots. While much of the land has been purchased and preserved, there are still privately-owned lots that have remained undeveloped in the ownership of individuals and families for decades.

According to the Preservation Fund newsletter, there are still 48 individually owned lots with 24 different owners.

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Ingrid Verhulst

of the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund

Verhulst said the acquisition and preservation of the remaining privately owned properties has been a main mission for the Preservation Fund. "In the past, what we've done is donated to the Nature Conservancy to help them buy lots," she said. "Later, the Nature Conservancy passed their lots in Chiwaukee to the DNR, and then we contributed to the DNR to acquire lots."

This year, she said, the group opted to buy the lots directly and to maintain ownership with the Preservation Fund. "It's our intent to continue to do that," she said. "In the long run we may pass it on

to the DNR, just like the Nature Conservancy did."

The fund is in the midst of its annual fundraising drive. Longtime patrons of the group have agreed to match every dollar donated through Jan. 31.

Donation information is available through the group's website, www.chiwaukee.org. Donations can also be sent to the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund Inc., P.O. Box 1802, Kenosha, WI 53141.