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Chiwaukee Prairie addition

Purchases protect prairie

About 60 acres of undeveloped land to buffer conservancy area



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The Chiwaukee Prairie is getting a new layer of protection through a purchase by the Nature Conservancy.

According to county property sales records, the Nature Conservancy recently purchased about 58 acres from a develop-

ment company to augment the protected area near the prairie. The undeveloped properties lie between Sheridan Road and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, north of 126th Street.

The conservancy paid \$700,000 for the property, according to county records. Funds from the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service helped pay for the property.

The Nature Conservancy seeks to protect natural areas, working in 69 countries. In Wisconsin, since 1960 the state arm of the organization has protected about 230,000 acres. The Chiwaukee Prairie along Lake Michigan in Pleasant

Prairie, one of the last unbroken pieces of prairie in the state, is a key property for the conservancy, and is designated a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service.

The conservancy has been purchasing property in the prairie itself for about 40 years, with almost all of the land

purchased donated to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The state owns 477 acres of the prairie, according to the DNR.

The new purchase is the conservancy's largest in the area to date.

The conservancy has

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CHIWAUKEE: Land purchased to protect prairie

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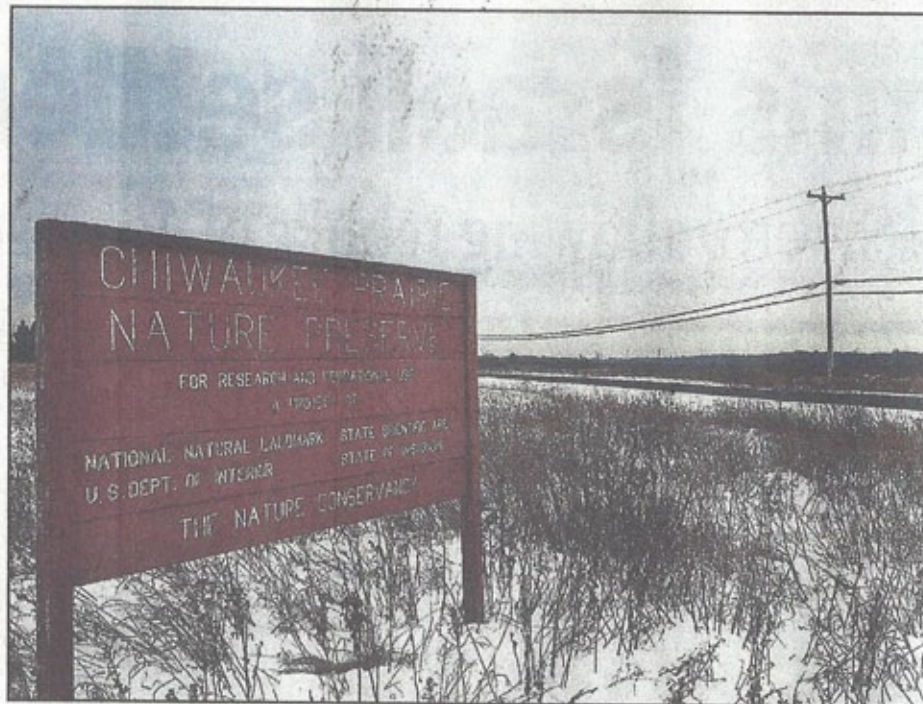
been working for some time to protect the open areas between the railroad tracks and Sheridan Road from 116th Street south to the Illinois state line, according to people familiar with the deal, seeing the area as an important buffer zone to protect the prairie.

The new purchase joins a 30-acre parcel near 116th Street as part of that plan.

Long-term plan

"This has been a long-term plan of theirs," said Pam Holy, president of the volunteer-led Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund. The fund, a local group, works to raise money for land preservation and does volunteer-led conservation and stewardship of the prairie.

The idea behind the purchases is to protect the groundwater that charges the wetlands in the prairie itself. The fens of the prairie are fed by groundwater, and changing the way water runs through the property could have a profound impact on the area. According to a study by the Southeastern Wis-



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY BILL SIEL

The Nature Conservancy has recently purchased land close to this location to help protect the Chiwaukee Prairie. It hopes to purchase more in the future.

consin Regional Planning and the U.S. Geological Survey, development of land in the corridor the conservancy is seeking to protect could cause water levels in the prairie to drop by two feet.

Nick Miller, the conservancy's science director

in Wisconsin, said in a statement that a significant drop in groundwater levels would threaten the wetlands and rare native plants in the prairie.

The area also is considered a key stopover for migratory birds.

In the future, the con-

servancy hopes to restore the property — which is currently agricultural land — to a natural state of prairie and oak savanna. The 58-acre parcel includes 11 acres of existing wetland and about 20 acres that could potentially be restored to wetland.

Volunteer-led fund aids in property purchase