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## Natural Area Management Made Easy for Landowners

For two decades, Steve Pittner and his wife Laura knew they wanted to do something with their 2.7 acres of rural Kane County property nestled some eight miles west of Elgin. They didn't know what that "something" would be. They knew only that the land outside their home's windows should remain as natural as possible.

"This rural lifestyle, it's part of the reason we came out here," Steve Pittner said. In recent years, subdivision after subdivision approached their secluded neighborhood. Doing something took on a sense of urgency. That's when the Pittners heard about Fox Valley Land Foundation's *Heritage Land Registry*.

The *Heritage Land Registry* gives landowners access to natural area restoration information. The program is voluntary and free of cost. For the Pittners, their return was invaluable. "We knew, to some extent, what we wanted to do: restore the oak savannas, restore the grasslands, and restore the prairie," Pittner said. "But I'll tell you, it would've taken us a heck of a long time to do all that work."

Fox Valley Land Foundation staff came out to the Pittners' property, assessed it, identified specific plants and trees that should stay or go, developed a restoration work plan, and provided a list of people who could do the work.

"It was just phenomenal," Steve Pittner said. "Could we have done it ourselves? Maybe, but really, we probably wouldn't have done it right. "And knowing what we know now," he said, "we probably would've made it worse." They have even obtained a grant to help fund the work.

Fox Valley Land Foundation recently received a grant to hire Fox Valley native and restoration ecologist Liz Aicher to oversee a Kane County Landowners Contact Program. Now we are starting an all-out push to gain the attention of other Fox Valley land owners who want to recognize, save and enhance the irreplaceable natural features that are on their land.

Unprecedented amounts of farmland and natural areas are developed each year. When that happens, our area's "sense of place" is lost. We live in an area that is different from downstate Illinois. The Wisconsin glacier stopped here, made gravel deposits, and carved out hills and valleys. This program helps to preserve that natural heritage.

The management plan landowners get by joining the *Heritage Land Registry* identifies the land's characteristics, creates an objective for the land (such as restoring a plant community or eliminating an invasive, non-native species), details the work needed to meet the objective (such as seed spreading or herbicide application), prescribes a time to do the work, and sets priorities.

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Laura Pittner with *Heritage Land Registry* sign on their land.

Photo by Tom Nelson

## Natural Area Management cont.

Unlike other conservation tools, such as conservation easements, the *Heritage Land Registry* does not legally bind the property in any way. Simply, it provides help and insight to landowners who may not know where to turn if land restoration is on their minds.

“Most of the people I’ve met so far know they have some good natural areas on their property, but they have no idea how to manage it,” Aicher said. “I can point them in the right direction, identify their native plants, develop a natural area management plan, and give them the names of contractors who’ll do the work if they don’t want to do it themselves.”

And people have been responding, Aicher said. “Open space is becoming more critical each day as development happens,” she said. “When people see those cement trucks getting closer and closer to their property, they think a little harder about managing what they have.”

Other *Heritage Land Registry* sites:

Stewart: 4 acres of mesic woodland in Wayne

DeSanto: 3 acres on Brewster Creek near Elgin

Lucietto & Scheffrahn: 3 acres along Blackberry Creek near Yorkville.

Lindoo: 6 acres of oak/hickory woodland near Big Rock.

## YOU CAN HELP!

Stewardship is needed on some of the land on which FVLF holds easements. A cadre of wonderful volunteers helps to clear brush, herbicide noxious weeds, and burn these natural areas. Fens, sedge meadows and woodlands all benefit from the labor of these dedicated people. Enough cannot be said in appreciation of their efforts. *However*, the number of volunteers has taken a nose dive. The last two workdays had only three people attend. If we are to accomplish work at the sites we now have, to say nothing of future easements, we really need more help. Please come help us out. Our workday schedule is on our website: [www.fvlf.org](http://www.fvlf.org). Thanks!



Photo by Tom Nelson

## Meet Liz Aicher

*Land  
Protection  
Specialist  
for  
Fox  
Valley  
Land  
Foundation*

It took years in the workforce, but I have finally landed the perfect job! As Fox Valley Land Foundation’s Land Protection Specialist, I get to meet and work with some really neat people!

Fox Valley Land Foundation has embarked on a *Landowner Contact Program*. My job is to contact landowners who own high quality natural areas, and explain the benefits of protecting and restoring their land.

One option is The *Heritage Land Registry*, a program to recognize landowners for managing and protecting their natural areas. This is a win-win agreement: FVLF sees more land under stewardship, and the landowner receives some direction on how to preserve his natural areas and the critters living upon and within that land. How does that happen?

First, I visit the property and inventory the plants thereon, so the landowner knows exactly what resources he holds. I also write up a basic management plan to provide direction in restoring the land to a healthy ecosystem. (Sadly, all our natural areas are in need of at least some restoration efforts.) Lists and sources of native plants for the ecosystem are provided. Names of restoration contractors are also furnished. We have a sign for the landowner to display so he can express pride in his restoration efforts. **Continued on page 3**

*Fox Valley Land Foundation  
Annual Dinner*

*6 p.m. Social Hour, 7 p.m. Dinner  
Riverside Reception & Conference Center  
35 N. River Lane, Geneva*

## Home, Land, Security

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001 the word "Security" has become much more dominant in our conversations and mindset. The usual phrasing is "Homeland Security", not "Home, Land, Security." But Curt Meine, a conservation biologist and writer, says that **it is impossible to think about security without thinking about the land.**

Hear Meine's insights at the Fox Valley Land Foundation Annual Dinner on December 2, 2004. His presentation coincides with publication of his new book, *Correction Lines: Essays on Land, Leopold and Conservation.*

The last 15 years have been a period of dramatic change, both in the world at large and within the fields of ecology and conservation. The end of the Cold War, the dot-com boom and bust, the globalizing economy and the attacks of September 11, among other events and trends, have reshaped our worldview and the political environment in which we find ourselves. At the same time, emerging knowledge, needs, and opportunities have led to a rapid evolution in our understanding of the scientific foundations and social context of conservation.

Meine is author of several books, including the biography *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (1988) and co-editor of *The Essential Aldo Leopold* with Richard L. Knight. He serves as a senior fellow with the Aldo

Leopold Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and as a research associate with the International Crane Foundation. Meine has served on the board of governors of the Society for Conservation Biology and currently sits on the editorial boards of the journals *Conservation Biology* and *Environmental Ethics*. He is active in local conservation as a founder and member of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance in Sauk County, Wisconsin.



Meine will be autographing his new book, *Correction Lines*, which will be for sale, at the annual dinner.

### Meet Liz Aicher cont.

And this is all for FREE! (Okay, maybe one day these landowners will decide to place conservation easements on portions of their land. That will be the ultimate reward for Fox Valley Land Foundation.)

I have yet to 'land' my first conservation easement, but I know it's just a matter of time. The people in the Fox River watershed are increasingly aware of encroaching developments and the loss of open space and wildlife that occurs as a result of this 'progress'.

Thanks a million to FVLf and the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation for funding this staff position. I am loving this job! You can contact me by calling 630- 564-0548.

*"Conservation is a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of ensuring the safety and continuance of the nation."*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT



The best way for Fox Valley Land Foundation to be successful in land conservation is to partner with other individuals and organizations. We strive to operate as a professional land trust, and have endorsed the *Land Trust Standards and Practices* of our national organization, The Land Trust Alliance (LTA).

About two years ago, LTA member members in the Fox River Watershed started to meet. We believed that by working together we could more quickly and efficiently protect our river and "the best of the rest" of the remaining high quality open spaces. We were all facing the same threat: suburban sprawl. And each of us wanted to promote conservation easements as a primary tool to protect the remaining high quality open spaces.

The first joint venture was a brochure: *Conservation Easements, A Legacy of Land*. (For a copy, please contact the FVLF office.)

Now the group has grown to twelve organizations, and has broadened its boundaries to the entire Chicago Region. We are in the process of drawing up a partnership agreement, and applying for funding to meet our joint goals.

**Our vision** is a future where all the land conservation organizations have the capacity to effectively protect the diversity of natural resources and landscapes that contribute to the quality of life for residents in the Chicago Region.

**Our mission** is to combine our skills, knowledge, and expertise in ways that increase the effectiveness of our strategic regional land conservation efforts so that we are individually and collectively positioned to permanently protect critical lands in emerging growth areas.

*Our Mission*

*To protect,  
restore,  
and preserve  
significant  
natural lands  
and open spaces  
through  
public and  
private  
partnerships.*



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Check us out on the web at

[www.FVLF.org](http://www.FVLF.org)

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