

A TOOL TO PRESERVE AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL HERITAGE

As we struggle to invent ways to preserve and protect our Natural heritage from division, overcrowding and development, all phases of our population need to become involved. An overlooked resource is landowners of low or modest income, many of whom are retired and own relatively large parcels of land.

With rising property tax assessments there is a great tendency to divide and/or sell parcels not only for cash but in many cases to escape the escalating real estate taxes. Many of these owners would prefer to keep their land in a natural state or to pass it to their heirs in a natural state. But increasingly neither they nor their heirs can afford to do so. It should also be noted that, because of their low income, many of these land owners are not eligible to take advantage of federal income tax deductions available to those who choose conservation easements through organizations like the Minnesota Land Trust.

Undeveloped woodlands, wetlands and prairies that are not used for commercial purposes can serve as a strong nucleus for wildlife preservation, both flora and fauna. Birds and animals that are raised on these properties will disperse either themselves or by their offspring to nearby areas. So will seeds of native and endemic plants. Inadvertently, much needed wildlife corridors may be established.

We know that wetlands, forests and prairies that stay intact are good for groundwater, surface water and the air we breathe as well as wildlife and the general public. Such parcels would be a great benefit far beyond their borders. Therefore, we need to devise a system whereby the low and modest income landowner will be inspired to neither develop, divide nor destroy the natural amenities of their property.

Therefore be it resolved the Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America, in convention April 11, 2010 urges that a system be devised by the Minnesota Legislature whereby real estate taxpayers of low and modest income, who engage in an acceptable conservation easement governing the use of such property in perpetuity, pay considerably less real estate tax on such portion of their land according to an escalating scale base on their income, to inspire to neither develop, divide nor destroy the natural amenities of their property.

Submitted by: Walter J. Breckenridge Chapter
Author: Richard Brown