CROSSROADS
A NEWSLETTER FOR CROSSROADS AT BIG CREEK

Crossroads a Cr Learning Center and Nature reser7e ol. 18, Issue 1 - Spring 2020

Celebrating habitat! Field Forest Meadow Creek

Designated trails highlight distinct habitats

How do you use Crossroads Maybe you wander. Or, maybe you set off with determination, following a route that helps meet your daily step goal or takes you to a favorite preserve feature. One of the reasons people love Crossroads is that with nearly 200 acres to explore, there are many paths to take and every visit is unique.

But, people are not the only creatures that use Crossroads. For the past 25 years, Crossroads has been intentionally transforming its lands from a virtual monoculture into a place that attracts, shelters and provides sustenance to all kinds of plants and animals.

A new trail map, being published this June, introduces four marked loops highlighting distinct habitats found at Crossroads – Field, Forest, Meadow and Creek. The new map describes each habitat and gives information on the wildlife that thrives there. The habitat loops, of varying lengths, offer nearly five miles of trails to explore, with numerous secondary trails available to lengthen or customize a hike.

new trail map, illustrated by artist Laura Congdon, highlights natural features and destination points located throughout Crossroads at Big Creek.

Trail markers delineate new habitat hiking loops at Crossroads.

Creek Trail leads to bridges over Big Creek, where pike and suckers spawn in spring. Field Trail follows a ridge along an upland overlook where harriers hunt voles. Forest Trail winds through dark, dense cedars and the tiny remnant of a boreal forest. And the Meadow Trail is ablaze all summer and fall with colorful prairie plants that attract pollinators and songbirds. In addition to natural features, the map includes destination points like our kayak launch at The Cove, the gazebo at the arboretum, the Astronomy Campus and more.

We invite you to come explore the habitats of Crossroads at Big Creek. Watch for our new Habitat Loops Trail Map in early summer!

The estuary at The Cove Preserve provides habitat for all sorts of waterfowl and fish and is a point of interest for curious middle school students.

Note *Trail maps will be available at Crossroads trailheads at no charge thanks to generous underwriting from the oor County Medical Center, from an anonymous donor, and from the following funds at the oor County Community oundation Carol Coryell cholarship, Eleanor R. ean and ohn L. osney, illiam C. and Mar orie . lenn Endowment, ohn and ell Herlache.*

CROSSROADS AT BIG CREEK inc.

Crossroads at Big Creek is a preserve that offers education, conducts research and provides outdoor experiences to inspire environmental stewardship in learners of all ages.

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Creating a sustainable future for Crossroads

I didn't know this was possible, but today I love Crossroads more than ever. And I want to tell you why. Over the past several months, we have been working incredibly hard to make certain Crossroads is in a solid place for sustainable growth. A key component of this is making sure we have a leadership plan that allows us to fulfill our mission and serve our community far into the future.

I am happy to share a new staffing structure that accomplishes just that. Director Coggin Heeringa has accepted a position as Program Director and Naturalist, and Assistant Director Laurel Hauser will take on the role of Interim Executive Director. In the spirit of open communication, this is a decision that was vetted collaboratively through lots of conversation and included feedback from staff, our board and several community stakeholders. Throughout this process, I have grown even more impressed and proud of our organization.

The first person I ever met at Crossroads was Coggin Heeringa. On one of my first days living in Door County, I visited with my dogs. I had heard it was a great place to hike. Coggin introduced herself and told me to enjoy the beautiful surroundings, all of it.

And this is how Coggin has led Crossroads since 2001 – inspiring kids, adults, everybody, to just get out in nature and take it all in. Put your boots on, hop in the water, see the fish run, touch the bark on the tree, look for a soft spot in the tall grass and just smell and enjoy the beauty of nature around us. I am so grateful she will continue to do this through management of our educational programming and oversight of our research efforts.

I am also incredibly grateful to Laurel Hauser who has already done some very impactful work in her first year here. Her long experience at the Door County Land Trust and her involvement with so many other nonprofit organizations, along with her energy and creativity, will serve us well. We have a great team and are looking forward to a bright future.

And this is why today I love Crossroads more than ever.

Sincerely,

Matt

Matt Luders, Board of Directors President

Long-time director Coggin Heeringa to become Program Director and Naturalist.

Laurel Hauser accepts role as Crossroads' new Interim Executive Director.

Crossroads – *now more than ever*

Greetings! As you will notice, there's a lot of talk in this issue of our newsletter about habitats. That's because "Habitats" is Crossroads' educational theme for 2020! We are appreciating, studying, sharing, restoring, surveying and celebrating the diverse habitats that makes Crossroads at Big Creek the special place it is – for human beings and for wildlife.

While "business as usual" is anything but these days with programming postponed and the Collins Learning Center closed, we are pleased to report that Crossroads remains a busy place. Individuals and families are discovering and rediscovering all the reasons there are to love Crossroads – fish in the creek, tadpoles in the ponds, birds on the wing, and the mood lift and mental clarity one gets from being outdoors. We are so pleased to be a place of respite for our community.

All the good things happening here are thanks to you! Support from the individuals, families and businesses listed on pages six and seven allows us to provide an incredible community resource at no charge. If you are already a Crossroads supporter, thank you. If you're not, we invite you to become one. *Now more than ever*, we are grateful for and need your help, because, now more than ever, our community needs Crossroads.

In addition to the news found in these pages, there are other exciting things to report. Our archaeologist-in-residence, Emily Rux, is conducting cultural research at our Ida Bay Preserve, and students from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh will soon resume water quality testing and analysis in our lab. Events we hoped could take place in June– habitat hikes, art classes, summer naturalist sessions, community science, restoration work groups and more – are in the hopper for July, August and September. Watch our Facebook page and website for details.

We look forward to the time we can be together again. In the meantime, take care of yourselves, take care of each other and enjoy the great outdoors!

Crossroads Trail Run 2020

Last year, more than 400 people participated in the Trail Run to benefit Crossroads at Big Creek. For many, it's an annual event. Plans for an altered 2020 Run are in the works and we hope to have more detailed information soon. For news of this year's Trail Run, please visit www.crossroadsrun.com.

Welcome new board members!

Mike DeCheck

Mike DeCheck joined the Crossroads board in March of 2020. He is a transplant to Door County, having been born in southern Wisconsin, and is currently employed as a lawyer at Pinkert Law Firm in Sturgeon Bay. Prior to becoming a lawyer he was a helicopter pilot for the US Army and served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, Korea, and all over the United States. He loves the outdoors and looks forward to being on the Crossroads team. In his spare time he enjoys gardening, fishing and visiting our state parks. One of his long-term goals is to hike the Adirondack or Pacific Crest trails.

Brooke Ulrich

Brooke Ulrich moved to Door County with her daughter, Jett, in January 2016. Brooke is the president and founder of Brilliant Marketing Communication in Sturgeon Bay. Brooke and Jett visit Crossroads to slow down, learn, explore and play. According to Brooke, "We always leave feeling refreshed, inspired, and grateful for this bright, shining gem. The passion of everyone involved is palpable and contagious; the staff infuse magic and love into the land, and we reap the benefits." Brooke joined the board in March of 2020 and wants to apply her marketing expertise to help amplify the mission of Crossroads at Big Creek, inspire community support and ensure the longevity of its stewardship.

Crossroads is for the birds: calling eBirders!

Crossroads at Big Creek is a great place to watch birds. Whether you're an inveterate birder or new to bird watching, we invite you to visit Crossroads and to record the birds you see on eBird.

eBird is an online program created and managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It helps birders identify birds, maintain a life list and see what other birders in the area have recorded. Most importantly it allows everyone to contribute to science and conservation as part of the world's largest birding community.

Because Crossroads is an eBird "hotspot," by recording sightings made at Crossroads, you help us gauge our habitat restoration successes and may even help us qualify for grant funding.

Visit www.eBird.org for everything you need to know to get started. Happy birding!

Great egret (photo by Roy Lukes)

Healing habitat:
Crossroads adopts new "Begin with the Creek" Ecological Restoration Plan

Big Creek provides necessary habitat to migratory birds and other wildlife.

When the northwest portion of what is now Crossroads at Big Creek was put up for sale in the early 1990s, it was marketed as "a great place for a gas station." Located along the highway and used and altered for agricultural purposes, the property was degraded and uninspiring. Crossroads Program Director and Naturalist Coggin Heeringa describes it as a "derelict orchard."

"It was far from pristine," she said, "but our founders saw potential and were committed to the idea of ecological restoration and education."

In 1998, Crossroads purchased an additional parcel to the east that included Big Creek, and soon after, plans were made to fill in an artificial channel that had been cut near Michigan Street. This allowed Big Creek to re-meander to its natural hydrological path and was a step forward for habitat.

Over the next two decades, board and staff, volunteers, Scout troops and others have planted trees, fought invasive species and conducted biotic surveys. "We've worked hard," said Heeringa, "but our efforts have been somewhat disjointed."

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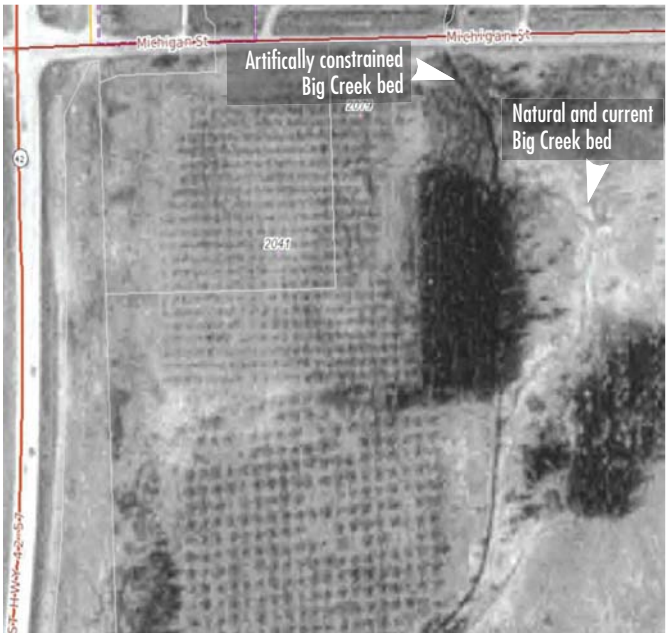


Land and Facility Manager Nick Lutzke heels graminoids (grass and sedge plugs) in Crossroads' new nursery. The nursery area is a component of the Ecological Restoration Plan. It will be fenced in and used to shelter trees, shrubs and other native plants prior to their distribution in the preserve.

This orthophoto from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service captures Crossroads in 1992 when much of the land was orchard. An artificially straightened Big Creek is visible near the center of the photo, running under Michigan Street and entering and exiting a spruce plantation. In 1998, the USFWS filled the artificial channel, allowing the creek to re-establish its natural path, closer to where visitors find it today.
(photo courtesy of USFWS)

Fieldwork being done by Dan Collins, left, of Landscapes of Place, and intern Emily Hearley.

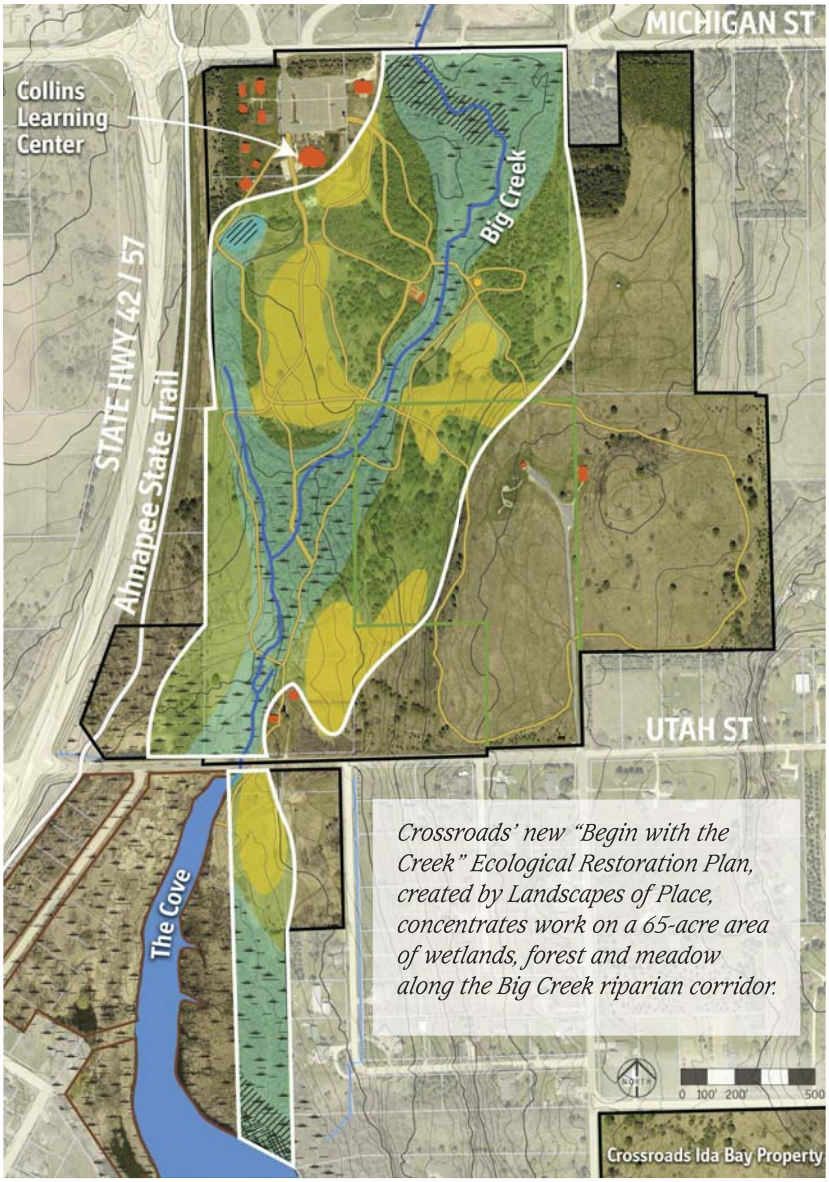
Although work was not always as orchestrated and efficient as possible, aerial images of Crossroads' property show that much progress has been made. In 2019, Crossroads was included in the "WDNR Migratory Bird Conservation Plan" as one of 42 "stopovers of significance" along Lake Michigan.

In an article titled, "Conserving Stopover Sites for Forest-dwelling Migratory Landbirds," published in 2005, a group of scientists called for measures to address declining migratory bird populations. They defined habitat quality and function using the terms, "fire escapes," "convenience stores" and "full-service hotels."

"Crossroads has worked its way up from barely being a 'fire escape' to a pretty decent 'convenience store,'" said Heeringa. "We once might have been used only as an emergency stopover. Now, we can attract and provide some amount of hospitality – fresh water and enough nutrients to get migratory birds to the next stop on their route. What we want to be in the future, for the birds and other species who use Crossroads, is a full-service hotel."

"We're all learning that we need to be stewards of the earth."

Toward that end, with help from Healthy Water Door County, Crossroads hired Nancy Aten and Dan Collins of Landscapes of Place in early 2020 to create an Ecological Restoration Plan. The first phase of the Plan focuses on the 3,450-foot riparian corridor along Big Creek. The plan will involve, over time, removing approximately 20 acres of invasive species, planting more than 12,000 native trees, shrubs and plugs and spreading hundreds of pounds of seed. The long-term goal is a restored and coherent 125-acre preserve that will serve as a model for others working to restore challenged lands.



Crossroads' new "Begin with the Creek" Ecological Restoration Plan, created by Landscapes of Place, concentrates work on a 65-acre area of wetlands, forest and meadow along the Big Creek riparian corridor.

Community involvement

A key component of Crossroads' Ecological Restoration Plan is community involvement. "One of the most predictive indicators of success," explains Aten, "is the involvement of a committed group of people who love the land and can work together and celebrate successes together. They are what we call 'Keepers of the Place.' They help solidify a restoration culture."

Land and Facilities Manager Nick Lutzke agrees. "We're really thankful for all the work that's been done here over the years and we're looking forward, using this plan, to continuing and expanding that."

Once Covid-related restrictions are lifted, Crossroads will be putting out a call for help and organizing work parties. "We're looking forward to engaging the community in a project that's rewarding and fun, even while some of the projects may be difficult at times," Lutzke said. "There are a lot of individuals and families who would like to work outdoors and be part of a bigger effort. We're all learning that we need to be stewards of the earth. This is a good place to start."

If you're interested in volunteering to do land restoration work at Crossroads, please contact Laurel Hauser at laurel@crossroadsatbigcreek.org. The full version of Phase One of Crossroads' Ecological Restoration Plan is available at www.crossroadsatbigcreek.org.

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Total cash gifts received in 2019.

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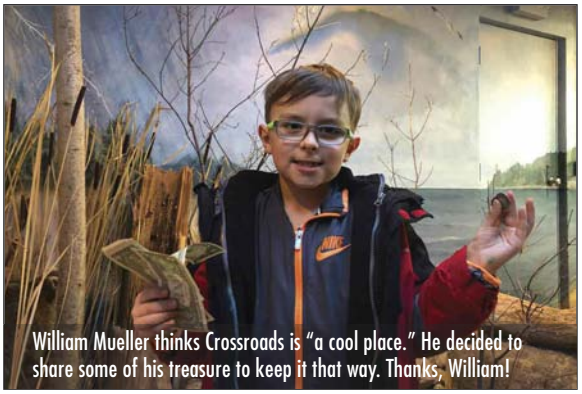

William Mueller thinks Crossroads is "a cool place." He decided to share some of his treasure to keep it that way. Thanks, William!

Memorial and tribute gifts

Gifts received between October 16, 2019, and April 15, 2020.

TRIBUTES

In honor of Gretchen Schmelzer
Skahen, Dennis and Marguerite

In honor of Dale and Jeanne Vogel
Vogel, Carissa Jean

In honor of Brian and Joan Wake
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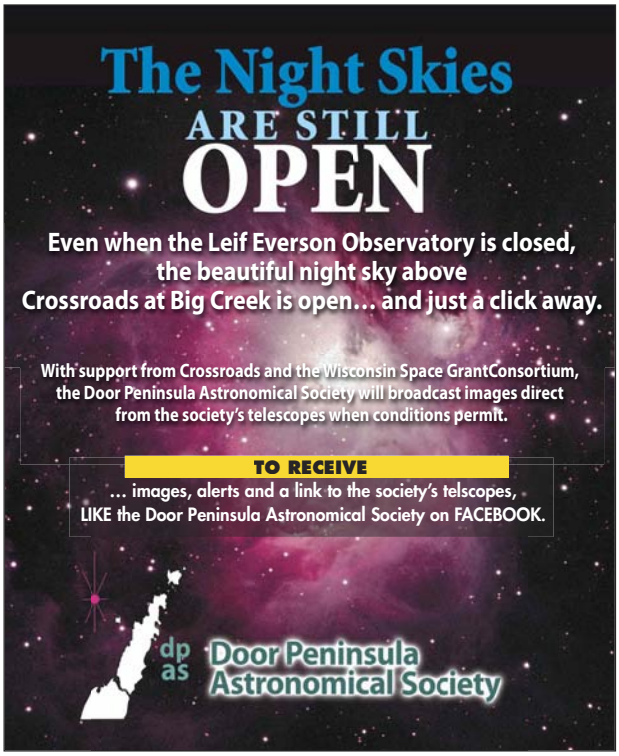

The Victory Garden at Crossroads at Big Creek

The Heritage Garden at Crossroads is usually a group effort. On a sunny day last fall, Master Gardeners and Sturgeon Bay High School students worked together. While this type of gardening isn't possible this year, individual gardeners will tend a Victory Garden. Be sure to take a look at how the garden grows when you visit Crossroads.

The Heritage Garden at Crossroads temporarily will have a new name. This summer, it is the Victory Garden at Crossroads.

Several years ago, for its Fall Symposium, Door County's Master Gardeners group flew award-winning author and presenter Lee Somerville in from California. (Lee was the Heritage Garden leader when she lived in Door County.)

In her lecture, "Potatoes, Petunias and Patriotism," Lee described the Victory Gardens that were developed during WWI to mitigate a global food crisis. If Americans would plant gardens at their homes and in public places, the United States would be able to feed its own citizens and help feed the people of the world in a time of need.

Listeners at that lecture never dreamed we would experience a global health emergency. But, here we are in a pandemic. Inspired by the Victory Garden concept, our current garden leader, Nancy Goldberg, suggested that instead of growing a variety of heirloom plants and flowers that are hard to tend and require group labor from Master Gardeners and Sturgeon Bay Home and Garden Club volunteers, Crossroads would concentrate on easier-to-grow vegetables. Work in the Victory Garden will be done practicing good social distancing and the fruits of the labor will go to local food pantries.

Organizers from the Door County Seed Library also heard Lee's Victory Garden lecture and were similarly inspired; they have been distributing free seed bundles so Door County families can start their own Victory Gardens. Additionally, they will be distributing free seedlings at Crossroads on Saturday, June 6, in a drive-through, "grab and go" distribution system. Watch Crossroads Facebook page for details.