

Lower Whitefish Landowners Choose to Protect Sensitive Shoreland

Over thirteen hundred feet (1,300) of shoreline on Lower Whitefish Lake will remain undeveloped, thanks to the generosity of landowners Martha and Geoff Davidge who have donated a conservation easement protecting their land in perpetuity. The property includes a large pond and wetland area with nesting habitat for diving ducks and high-quality habitat for wildlife species such as black bear, muskrat, otter, bald eagle, sharp-tail grouse and the common loon.

Protecting this particular piece of property is especially important as it is nearly adjacent to the Minnesota DNR's 110-acre Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Its protection helps create a more effective complex for wildlife habitat in an increasingly developed and popular resort area.

This is the first project completed under an effort led by the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF) in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust. Paula West, executive director of the LLAWF, is encouraged by the number of private landowners who have expressed interest in protecting their land: "Martha (Muffie) and Geoff have created a lasting legacy by protecting their own property. I can't think of a better gift to leave to future generations and I know that this will inspire others to do the same."

*Guard, protect and cherish
your land, for there is no
afterlife for a place that
started out as Heaven.*

-Charles Marion Russell

The Davidge's have donated the conservation easement, which will be held by the nonprofit Minnesota Land Trust. The land remains in private ownership but the easement places limits on future development and division of the land; the easement is binding upon all future owners of the property.

"With all the development we see around the lake, we feel it's important that some places are left naturally for wildlife habitat," observed Martha Davidge. "We regularly see families of mergansers hatch, using the pond as a nursery and then moving on to the lake as they get bigger. We believe that the world is a better place when it has some wild places protected for nature to remain less disturbed."

The Davidges were encouraged to proceed with the conservation easement after visiting with long-time family friends on Wabedo Lake who had just completed a conservation easement on 3,000 feet of sensitive shoreland on Wabedo Lake with assistance from Cass County Environmental

Services and the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation. Muffie Davidge's mother was friends with three other women during World War II who called themselves the "Stagnanttes" when the men in their lives went off to the war; they all remained life-long friends. Two of the families purchased property on Wabedo Lake in Cass County and the other two families bought land on Lower Whitefish in Crow Wing County. With the Davidge's completion of a conservation easement, all the families have now left a legacy of protected natural resources for their families and generations to come to enjoy.

Funding to cover routine transaction expenses and ongoing stewardship for the project have been provided by an Outdoor Heritage Fund grant to protect sensitive shorelands in north central Minnesota through the acquisition of permanent conservation easements. The Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation was awarded the grant by the legislature as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. The project is a partnership between the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation and the Minnesota Land Trust.

According to the Minnesota DNR, approximately 91% of the Whitefish Chain shoreline is privately owned, and includes 14 resorts. The DNR recently completed a sensitive-shoreline study that highlighted the importance of undeveloped shoreline and surrounding wetlands to the continued success of wildlife breeding. The Davidge property contains such shoreline, making it a perfect target for conservation.

"We're pleased to be able to assist the Davidges in realizing their family dream of protecting this unusual habitat area," says Kris Larson, executive director of the Minnesota Land Trust adding, "With the Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area to the south and the Galbraith Wildlife Management Area directly across the lake, the Davidges are playing a unique role in connecting these sensitive shoreline areas into a larger complex that benefits a wide range of wildlife."



Geoff and Martha Davidge with John Brosnan, Minnesota Land Trust, and Paula West, Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation, at the closing for the conservation easement on June 12, 2013.



Davidge shoreline on Lower Whitefish Lake.



Wildlife pond and wetland on Davidge property