

## Plum Creek Land buy creates extremely large conservation area

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

Local land trust Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC) has purchased 1,600 acres of rugged land along the lower Kickapoo River for permanent protection. The site, just north of Wauzeka in Crawford County, which includes a stretch of Plum Creek and is located on both sides of Plum Creek Road, will be known as Plum Creek Conservation Area.

The property includes over five-and-a-half miles of frontage along the west bank of the Kickapoo River, and over two miles along both banks of Plum Creek, a Class I trout stream. It is next to DNR's 1,927-acre Kickapoo Wildlife Area-Wauzeka Unit that includes the 635-acre Kickapoo Wild Woods State Natural Area.

"These protected areas, now enlarged by the MVC purchase, support one of the highest concentrations of rare forest-interior breeding birds in southern Wisconsin, including many considered high conservation priorities in eastern North America," the WDNR's Craig Thompson said.

The protected land will be open to the public for hunting, fishing, and low-impact recreation such as hiking, paddling, and wildlife observation.

"Public lands are an asset to Crawford County," said Dave Troester, the Crawford County Conservationist. "People come here to fish the streams, to hunt, to enjoy the rivers and scenic beauty. Public land makes that possible for more people, as access to private land for hunting is harder to find these days."

Troester also cited Crawford County's Comprehensive Plan, in which a survey of county residents rated the things they most value about living in Crawford County.

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## Riverway meeting History of bridges explained by Cupp

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board met in Muscoda on April 14 to conduct a regular monthly business meeting.

Mark Cupp, Executive Director of LWSRB, started the meeting with an educational presentation on the history of river-crossings at Muscoda. Cupp said that one of the most important issues in the Riverway in the post-settlement era has been river-crossings, which he said are essential to promote travel and commerce. Historically, ferries had crossed the river at Harper's Ferry, Avoca and Muscoda.

"The Moore family originally ran a ferry across the river from Muscoda to Richland County. Following the Civil War, General Jonathon B. Moore, a former Sheriff of Grant County and former member of the state legislature, agreed to invest \$16,000 in a new toll bridge with additional investors putting in another \$8,000," Cupp told the board. "There were complaints about the tolls for using the new bridge, but it provided an important link across the Wisconsin River."

Cupp said that in 1888, the toll bridge was sold to John Postel and John Schwingle for \$10,000. The remnants of the stone piers for the toll bridge can still be seen on the upstream side of the existing bridge. In 1920, Cupp said, a severe storm had destroyed major parts of the toll bridge, requiring significant repairs.

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Enjoying an egg hunt moment

Four-year-old Colby Hooker, son of Tara Heisz, was on the move, gathering up Easter eggs at a furious pace. The little fellow shot out of the starting gate with gusto, and seemed to be filling up his bag in short order at the Gays Mills Easter Egg Hunt held Saturday at the Log Cabin Village Park. Was Colby having fun? You bet.

## Perseverance pays off

# Drone team competes in Milwaukee

By CHARLEY PREUSSER

Despite some real obstacles, the North Crawford High School drone team rose to the occasion at a competition held in Milwaukee recently.

The team's adviser Liz Bransky brought some of the participants to the Gays Mills Public Library last Saturday to discuss their work and the competition.

There was a huge problem with receiving the drone kits for the 12 teams from around the state. Materials to build and ready the drones was supposed to arrive in December. In fact, nothing arrived until March just one week before the competition. That was very unfortunate and due to ongoing supply chain problems.

Working with the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium, the UW-Whitewater GIS Center,

along with Carroll College, organized and ran a state-wide drone competition for high school teams from around the state.

Inspired by the Artemis NASA mission to the moon, teams were tasked with building sensor platforms that would be mounted on a drone and used in the competition to sense and measure a simulated lunar environment.

The competition took place in the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. All of the teams attended the Milwaukee Bucks game the same day as the competition.

The Bucks game, the chance to eat some different types of food and the hotel pool made the it all very enjoyable to the local high school students, according to adviser Liz Bransky.

The competition was created to spread awareness of NASA to help the younger generation learn what trying to go to moon involves," Bransky said.

The adviser had three of the students from the drone team (Rivyn DiPadova, Aiden Unseth and Sarah Bransky) on hand for the presentation.

The students took turns explaining the project and the competition.

The project was intended to use a drone to collect soil samples and take other measurements. It's similar to what will be done on the moon in the coming unmanned launch in the Artemis mission.

The students needed to program sensors to work with drone sensors and collect information with a supplied APP, using a Bluetooth connection to transfer the information.

"It was simple enough to understand," Sarah Bransky said.

Aiden Unseth indicated that making the sensors work was bit harder. The group wanted to test for moisture in air and soil. There was also a color sensor to record colors.

Then, there was the servo, a scoop to retrieve a soil sample. There was also Lidar to map the area.

Unseth noted a battery to supply power was too weak and some of the sensors were too heavy for the drone.

Well, the group struggled to make progress in a week on the project, which was originally scheduled for three months. Progress was made.

Rivyn DiPadova was charged with communications about the project. Her tasks included writing releases and making videos to place on multiple social media platforms—among other things.

Adviser Liz Bransky acknowledged the group hit a lot of dead-ends in the short period of time they had to complete the project.

Unseth added that the drone had to be assembled as well. He served as the drone pilot. At the end of the presentation, the group assembled outside to see the drone fly.

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MAKING A CONNECTION was easy for drone team member Rivyn DiPadova, left, and her sister Aurelia. The pair hooked up the sensor and programed it. Behind them, Bjorn Unseth works with Liz Bransky to get the sensor programed.

## At North Crawford

# Board discusses developing referenda for fall election

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

At their Monday, April 18 meeting, the North Crawford School Board took up the topic of development of referenda to be placed on the November 2022 election ballot. The two referendums would authorize the district to exceed the property tax levy limit set by the State of Wisconsin.

"We need to make very clear to the voters in the school district that there will be two separate referenda placed on the ballot in November," board member Jesse Swenson said. "There will be an operating referendum to help the district maintain instruction and services, and a capital improvement referendum to allow the district to make needed repairs or improvements to our buildings."

North Crawford School Superintendent Brandon Munson reported to the board on the current status of referenda development, and the timeline for completing the process. He explained that the series of four meetings of the Advisory Task Force (ATF), composed of interested citizens in the school district has been completed.

### Securing ideas and input

These meetings were intended to secure ideas, input and feedback about what repairs or improvements are needed for district buildings, and what the voter's appetite is to support the district in paying for them through an increase in the property tax levy.

"We haven't invested any money in our district building for 30 years," board president Mary Kuhn said. "We all know that if we own a property, and don't engage in needed maintenance, then eventually the bill comes due for the work that we deferred, and the cost only goes up over time."

Munson pointed out that 80 percent of the referendums proposed by school districts on the April 5 ballot had passed, which is a historic high. He said that the results indicate that support for public schools is high.

Munson said that at the last meeting of the ATF, the district had revealed for the first time estimated numbers for what the scenario for the district would be if an operating referendum to pay for continuation of district instruction and curriculum were not passed. This estimated, developed with the district's financial consultant, Baird, projects budget deficits as soon as the 2024-2025 school year.

### Operating referendum

The proposed operating referendum amount would be for a recurring \$900,000 per year. This would be phased in slowly over the course of four years, at Year 1, \$300,000; Year 2, \$250,000; Year 3, \$200,000; and Year 4, \$150,000. Beginning in year five, we would then have an additional \$900,000 of revenue built into our base to use to pay staff salary and benefits, increased operational costs, sustaining our instructional programming and curriculum without making programmatic cuts, and to budget for deferred maintenance projects.

"Phasing the additional levied operating revenue in slowly over the course of four years would allow us to make adjustments based on any changes to state aid to schools that may come about in future state budgets," Munson said. "It is important to know that the numbers we are working with are just estimates, which is always how it is with school district budgets."

At the fourth ATF meeting, the district also revealed what the cost would be to property taxpayers under a \$5.5 million, and a \$6.5 million referendum, for debt service for borrowing to make needed repairs or improvements to district facilities.

"If both the operating referendum, and a capital improvement referendum at the \$6.5 million level were passed, that would result in \$150 per \$100,000 of assessed

value increase for the operating referendum, and \$76 per \$100,000 of assessed value for the capital improvement referendum," Munson explained. "That would mean a total of \$226 per \$100,000 of assessed value."

The board felt strongly that in the survey to be sent out in April to voters in the district, the language of the survey should make crystal clear that there would be two referenda on the November ballot. That survey will be made available electronically through e-mail and social media, and will also be available as a hard-copy paper option from the district for those that are less familiar with online options.

### Public survey available

The survey will be available to voters for at least five weeks, and Munson estimated the results would be available to the board for review at their May meeting. From there, the board will work to develop final referenda language at their June meeting. The final language of the two referenda to be placed on the November ballot must be finalized 75 days before the election or approximately in the month of August.

"I am concerned that voters will focus on the building/capital improvement referendum, and not understand that there will be an operating referendum as well," Kuhn said. "We don't want to appear to be 'dramatic,' as if we're overstating the consequences of not passing the operational referendum, but they need to clearly understand that without those additional funds, the district is poised to fall off of a financial cliff."

### Building projects rating

Coming out of the fourth ATF meeting, ratings for the various building maintenance or improvement projects proposed by the district and their architectural and building consultant partners (FEH Design and Kramer Construction) were available at the April 18 school board meeting. The numbers, provided by Kramer are refined rough estimates. Final numbers will be developed at such time as the projects are authorized.

The top nine projects identified by attendees at the fourth ATF meeting would come in within a \$5.5 million facility maintenance referendum amount. The projects, currently estimated at a cost of \$5,010,000, include (projects presented in descending order of ranking):

- Reroof of entire building \$2,890,000
- Repair Exterior Insulation & finish system at above roof walls \$170,000
- Replace exterior windows \$150,000
- Agriculture lab, finishing room and project storage addition \$700,000
- Add Childcare rooms \$130,000 (renovation option) or add if childcare is an addition +\$230,000 (total \$360,000) \*\*\*
- Outdoor concessions, restroom structure, new sanitary line, 600 SF \$175,000
- Replace parking lot paving south of the building \$175,000
- Media Center, teaching space, tutoring room, booth, windows \$100,000 \*\*
- Replace parking lot paving west and north of the building \$290,000

### Capital improvements

If a capital improvement referendum were authorized at the \$6.5 million level, then in addition to the projects listed above, these additional projects could be accomplished for a total of \$6,275,000 (projects presented in descending order of ranking):

- Renovate family Cons. Science, Life Skills, Career & Tech Ed rooms \$600,000
- Add mezzanine storage above commons to gain classroom back \$190,000
- Update Middle School Showers, \$75,000

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