

## For Immediate Release

### Madison Area Shines with Three Winners among Statewide Conservation Achievement Awards

September 16, 2010 Madison-area conservation leaders dominate the lineup of conservation honorees this year, winning three among five Wisconsin Land Conservation Leadership Awards given annually by the statewide group, Gathering Waters Conservancy.

Mike Strigel, Gathering Waters' Executive Director, comments "for eight years we have acknowledged people and organizations for notable conservation achievements all over Wisconsin. The concentration of Madison-area awards this year is a coincidence but not a surprise. It's a testimony to this region's sustained commitment to the special places that make it such a wonderful place to live."

Area Winners this year include **Gene Roark**, receiving a **Lifetime Achievement Award**.

Roark was one of the three founders of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin, which is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Of Roark's influence, Nature Conservancy State Director Mary Jean Huston remarks, "Gene has been a driving force behind our success. We've felt his leadership over our entire 50-year history."

In addition to his work with The Nature Conservancy, Roark has served on boards of directors and volunteered for conservation organizations for 60 years. "Roark's conservation accomplishments are so numerous it's hard to keep count," remarks Strigel. He joined the Madison Audubon Society as a teenager, founded The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin while in graduate school, and went on to hold positions on boards of directors for, among others, the Natural Heritage Land Trust, Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Dane County Conservation League, the Wisconsin Wetlands Association and currently serves as President of the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

Among the many organization's Roark has served, **The Natural Heritage Land Trust** is being honored as **Land Trust of the Year**. Founded in 1983, the Natural Heritage Land Trust has permanently protected more than 6,500 acres at 13 conservation parks and natural areas, 14 scenic areas, 5 hunting and fishing areas and 23 working farms.

The Land Trust has had a hand in the preservation of several of the area's iconic landscapes, including Cherokee Marsh on Madison's north side, Patrick Marsh in Sun Prairie, sections of the Ice Age Trail, and portions of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway.

The Land Trust co-holds conservation easements on working farms in the Town of Dunn, and are a partner in the first and certainly the most successful farmland preservation program in the state. Strigel notes that, "Natural Heritage Land Trust's innovative partnerships with governments on all levels makes them a model and mentor for land trusts statewide."

“We’ve bestowed this award annually since 2004,” Strigel continues, “and Natural Heritage Land Trust received a record number of glowing nominations. This organization is admired by landowners, the County, the DNR, municipalities, farmers and the land trust community as effective and exemplary.”

“We are reassured by so many nominations,” says Natural Heritage Land Trust Executive Director Jim Welsh. “We try to focus our work on the meaningful landscapes where people connect with nature and become inspired to support more land conservation. It’s nice to know that strategy has so many supporters.”

The third Madison area award winner is **The Baraboo Hills-Highway 12 Preservation Team**, a ten year long partnership of agencies and conservation non-profits responsible for permanent conservation of 13,000 acres in the Baraboo Hills and along the Highway 12 Corridor between Middleton and Wisconsin Dells.

Representatives from The Nature Conservancy, Baraboo Range Preservation Association, Dane and Sauk Counties, the DNR Knowles Nelson Stewardship Grant Program, and DNR Lands Division are being honored with the **Harold “Bud” Jordahl Conservation Leadership Award**.

Between 2000 and 2010, this partnership coordinated to leverage an impressive mosaic of state, federal, and local funds and private donations totaling approximately 20 million dollars to purchase conservation lands and easements in the Baraboo Hills and along the Highway 12 corridor.

Strigel remarks that “the numbers of dollars invested and acres protected are impressive, but the thing we most want to celebrate is that for ten years, a core of people from five different organizations, worked with landowners and families who were voluntarily enacting conservation measures on their properties. That small team accomplished landscape-scale land protection one conversation at a time.”

These Madison area honorees will share the spotlight with two other award winners. Noel Cutright, an influential ornithologist and conservation advocate from West Bend is receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award, and Milwaukee Alderman Nik Kovak is being honored as Conservation Policy Maker of the Year for helping pass comprehensive river protection legislation to protect 800 acres of urban river corridor in the heart of Milwaukee.

The 2010 Land Conservation Leadership Awards Celebration will be held September 30, 5:30 to 8:00 pm at the Monona Terrace. All are welcome, please RSVP. Information at [gatheringwaters.org/awards](http://gatheringwaters.org/awards).

**Gathering Waters Conservancy’s mission** is to help land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special. Our goal is to increase the amount of land protected in Wisconsin through private, voluntary action. More at <http://gatheringwaters.org>  
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