

Closing Remarks



Sunrise over Cana Island in Door County

The goal of this report is to present those places that are believed to be most important to meet Wisconsin's long-term conservation and recreation needs, not which places are currently most threatened or would be easiest to protect.

By its nature, approaching the identification of important places with a 50-year vision creates a far different list than would develop from ten, 5-year plans prepared consecutively. Short-term plans are typically driven by current threats and opportunities—which places are most in need of protection right now and which landowners have expressed an interest in protecting an important resource or place. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with developing short-term plans, it can be difficult for the public and Department staff to see how day-to-day actions fit into longer-term land protection goals.

To help develop the long-term vision presented in this report, Department staff and the public were asked to evaluate the state's needs through the eyes of their children and grandchildren—to imagine how they will look back on our efforts, just as we look back now on our predecessors' past actions. Without completely ignoring current realities, the goal of this report is to present those places that are believed to be most important to meet Wisconsin's long-term conservation and recreation needs, not which places are currently most threatened or would be easiest to protect.

Should we expect to protect all the Legacy Places identified in this report? No, that's unrealistic, if for no other reason than some of these places will not be considered worthy of formal protection efforts in the future. Even over fifty years, the Department can probably only help protect a relatively small subset of these Legacy Places. The daily management activities of rural landowners, the countless decisions made by local governments, and the votes of residents—from those living in big

cities to those on the family farm—will continue to play the most important role in determining the long-term quality of these Legacy Places.

As the Department, local governments, non-profit groups, landowners, and citizens develop strategies to protect places identified in the report, it will be important that protection efforts not become solely focused on trying to stop development. Important places should be protected in a way that focuses on their exceptional conservation and recreation values, not because someone has proposed a housing, commercial, or industrial development. We need houses, highways, shopping malls, landfills, gravel pits, and the many other land uses that accompany our modern society. To be effective, protection strategies must address how our “green infrastructure” (conservation and recreation lands) fits into our developed infrastructure (cities, villages, towns) and our working farms and forests.

The flip side is equally true—the scattered developments occurring through our rural landscape have long-term impacts on our ability as a state to provide successful conservation and recreation lands and healthy farm and forest industries. Waiting to establish a protection strategy for important places until developments are proposed is likely to be ineffective and frustrating.

In many ways, this is a “golden era” of conservation. Remarkable progress has been made over the last few decades in understanding the science of conservation. Our state's population supports conservation

with a deep conviction. We have learned from past mistakes and recognize that a strong economy and a well-protected environment are the key ingredients in maintaining our exceptional quality of life. And, as a result, Wisconsin is blessed with an extraordinary array of special places.

The world has changed. In some ways, we live on an increasingly small planet; in other ways, more social, cultural, and economic barriers between peoples and nations exist now than ever. Although many aspects of our lives will continue to change, some things will remain constant, like our need for places where we can go with friends and family to connect with the natural wonder of the outdoors and with each other. Places to watch prairie chickens dance. Clean lakes where grandparents can teach grandchildren how to fish. And quiet places to talk over a campfire.

In the year 2048, Wisconsin will celebrate its bicentennial. By then, no doubt, this report will be dated and may appear simplistic in its approach and scope. But our hope is that this report, in some small way, will have helped create a land legacy that future citizens are pleased and proud to inherit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Roden".

Robert W. Roden

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven W. Miller".

Steven W. Miller
Land Legacy Study Directors