

Department: BARABOO RANGE PROTECTION PROGRAM

Mission of the Department in 2005:

The Baraboo Range Protection Program (BRPP) is a part of, and implements, the U.S. Highway 12 Memorandum of Agreement with the purpose of developing a comprehensive program which is necessary in order to satisfy the parties (signing the MOA) mutual concerns about the need for transportation improvements in the USH 12 corridor, as well as the need to protect and preserve the Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark (BRNNL), the Ice Age National Scientific Trail, farmland, and other important natural resources in the area, and to better address local growth and development issues in the region which will be impacted by the USH 12 project (the four lane selected alternative between Sauk City and Middleton and the current proposal between Lake Delton and Ski Hi Road).

The Baraboo Range Protection Program operates within the oversight of the Baraboo Range Commission, a nine member special commission of the Sauk County Board of Supervisors. In 2005, members of the Baraboo Range Commission included: Judy Ashford, chair (representing the Sauk County Board), William Beard, Forrest Hartmann, Gary Kowalke, Ron Persche, Dean Steinhorst, Terry Turnquist, Marcus Wenzel and Roman Statz. Current staff serving the Baraboo Range Commission consists of Dave Tremble, Sauk County Dept. Of Planning and Zoning Land Preservation Specialist / Planner.

Changes in 2005:

The Baraboo Range Commission membership remained unchanged in 2005. Commission by-laws require at least three members in addition to the County Board representative to be elected officials. Mr. Dean Steinhorst's non-elected community representative term was renewed for a full three years to June 2008. Judy Ashford continued to chair the Commission, as the representative of the Planning, Zoning and Land Records Committee of the County Board. All members are now serving full three year terms.

Quality: In 2005 BRPP staff applied for and received reimbursements from WisDOT for acquisition related costs for three 2004 easements totaling \$233,744.47. Sauk County also received a grant of \$125,000 from WisDOT as the final installment of the \$625,000 (\$125,000 / yr. for five years) administrative funding stipulated in the USH12 MOA.

The BRPP staff was able to complete negotiations and close six new conservation easement transactions in 2005, covering 416.63 acres at a cost of \$755,188.30, an average of \$1,813/ac. (See attached Sheet 2: *Completed Conservation Easement Activity in 2005*) . Staff has submitted a reimbursement request to WisDOT for the John Waldinger Jr. easement acquired in 2005, covering 34.75 acres and costing \$247,240.00. Staff has also submitted applications to the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources for Knowles-Nelson Stewardship fund grants totaling \$304,967.68 to cover the costs of another three of the six conservation easements purchased in 2005, protecting 171.98 acres. Two additional Stewardship grant applications have subsequently been submitted in January, 2006.

Sauk County was not able to utilize a FY2004 United States Dept. of Agriculture Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program grant of \$79,000 for costs related to the 183 acre John

Waldinger property conservation easement acquisition in the Town of Honey Creek. The Waldinger property lies partly outside the BRNNL. The use of those funds use required matching monies be supplied from non-BRNNL funds to acquire development rights outside of the Baraboo Range. The Sauk County Board elected in December, 2005 not to support the authorization of the Baraboo Range Commission to access non-BRNNL funding. The federal grant remains viable until September 30, 2006. The infusion of this federal, non-transportation funding would have released an equal amount of state Stewardship funds for additional Baraboo Range protection, as stipulated by the USH 12 Memorandum of Agreement. Sauk County did acquire an easement on 34.75 acres of the Waldinger property lying within the BRNNL.

BRPP staff met with the Baraboo Range Commission monthly throughout 2005. All of the Resolutions to Approve the Purchase of Development Rights submitted by the Baraboo Range Commission in 2005 were adopted by the Sauk County Planning, Zoning and Land Records Committee and the Sauk County Board of Supervisors.

In 2005 BRPP staff continued monitoring existing BRPP conservation easements, inspecting seven properties protected by BRPP easements and completing reports on each. No violations have been identified on any of Sauk County's BRPP protected properties. Again in 2005 BRPP staff represented Sauk County's land protection program to visiting groups of national conservation organizations and resource agency staff visiting the Baraboo Range area, including helping organize and present to a large field trip group of participants in the 2006 Land Trust Alliance National Rally. The BRPP staff represented Sauk County at the annual Earth Day event in Rock Springs, and continued to provide facilitation and plan writing assistance to comprehensive planning processes in the Town of Westfield and Winfield. BRPP staff demonstrated Land Use concepts at the annual Youth Day conservation education event at the Hartje Preserve outside Reedsburg. Finally, BRPP staff remains involved in the disposition of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant, participating in regular Badger Intergovernmental Group meetings, and helping create the newly convened Badger *Interim* Oversight Management Commission.

Quantity: The Baraboo Range Department staff consists of a single, FTE Land Preservation Specialist / Planner. Baraboo Range Protection Program easement acquisition activities currently demand a declining percentage of staff time, but easement site inspections and monitoring reports are filling in the hours between preparing baseline reports, conducting the remaining (and less certain) easement negotiations, and fulfilling the other administrative program requirements. Mapping, database management and support, easement record archiving, financial accounting and other administrative functions require the regular support of GIS and administrative staff from the Dept. of Planning and Zoning. For example, P&Z administrative staff is archiving all closing and baseline documents for completed projects onto compact disc format for long-term secure storage.

Cost: The Baraboo Range Protection Program staff and operating costs are currently funded by the State of Wisconsin transportation funds. All acquisition costs are reimbursed by the WisDOT. As of December 31, 2005, a total of \$3,375,901.88 of acquisition-related costs have been submitted to WisDot for reimbursement through the BRNNL fund, leaving an Active BRNNL Fund Balance of \$999,098.12. (See attached Sheet 1: *Currently Completed Projects*).

That figure includes the \$300,000.00 Transaction Clearing Account fund already received by Sauk County from WisDOT. It does not include potentially reimbursable costs associated with projects not yet completed, such as appraisals for projects subsequently discontinued for lack of an accepted offer from the landowner. These costs, for twenty active and inactive projects come to \$41,036.43 (See attached Sht. 3: *Potentially Reimbursable Expenses*) To date these costs have been absorbed by Sauk County. Adequate funds should be maintained in the Transaction Clearing Account to cover these costs before Sauk County fully commits the remainder of the BRNNL fund.

Grant funding is also available through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund for land protection in the Baraboo Hills. In 2005 BRPP staff submitted application for Stewardship funding for three conservation easement projects to protect 171.98 acres, totaling \$304,967.68. Grants had not been awarded as of the end of the calendar year.

Availability: Land protection staff is full time. All Baraboo Range Commission meetings are open to the public and fully noticed per the requirements of the Wisconsin Open Records Law. Newsletters and brochures published in the initial years of the program to inform the public about the BRPP remain available in the Planning and Zoning Dept. office. The Sauk County website has a page dedicated to the BRPP. Staff continues to participate in media interviews and public presentations related to Sauk County's land protection efforts, but publicity related to individual easement acquisitions is limited to specific media requests for information. Efforts to inform the public about the value and purpose of permanent Baraboo Range land protection include planning for a spring birding hike, and a collaborative project to develop a National Recreational Trail dedicated to the Memory of Roger Shanks, longtime Sauk County Board member, conservation leader, and the first Chair of the Baraboo Range Commission.

Accomplishments in 2005:

Seven additional Baraboo Range landowners applied to the BRPP in calendar year 2005, bringing the total of potential acquisition projects enrolled since March, 2000 to eighty-eight. As of December 31, 2005, thirty-three Baraboo Range landowners had sold conservation easements to Sauk County, and one sold an easement to the Baraboo Range Preservation Association, which as an eligible participant to the USH 12 MOA, utilized Sauk County BRPP funding to purchase the easement. The six easements purchased in 2005 protected over 416.63 acres of the Baraboo Range at a cost of \$755,188.30. Sauk County applied to the Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation in 2005 for reimbursement for the cost of three conservation easement purchases completed in 2004, returning \$233,744.47 to the County. These costs included the easement purchase itself plus all related costs such as appraisals, survey work, recording of documents, etc.

In 2005, with the critical assistance of Planning and Zoning administrative staff, the BRPP tracking database was unveiled, completing a long term program objective. The tracking database "flags" the digital tax-parcel land records of easement-protected properties (whether protected by Sauk County or its other USH12 MOA partners) to prevent land use, sanitary or other building permits to be issued for them. BRPP Staff continued the easement monitoring process in 2005 with the inspection of seven easement protected properties. The Baraboo Range Commission continued its careful prioritization of conservation easement projects to attain the

most critical conservation objectives with the remaining funds. Current projects, if completed, will fully account for the balance of the BRNNL funding.