

Avon Hills Initiative

Summer Update 2008

August 2008

Avon Hills Initiative & Minnesota Land Trust form Partnership with \$377,000 LCCMR Grant

Sarah Strommen, Minnesota Land Trust

A new land conservation effort for the Avon Hills is set to launch thanks to a grant from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). The project involves a three-pronged approach that includes community outreach, promotion of conservation-oriented local ordinances, and conservation easements. The conservation easement portion of the project is made possible through a partnership between Saint John's Arboretum and the Minnesota Land Trust.

The Minnesota Land Trust's mission is, "to preserve the natural and scenic heritage of our state by permanently protecting lands and waters that define our community and enrich our quality of life." This is accomplished by establishing and monitoring conservation easements by which landowners voluntarily limit the use and development of their property in order to permanently preserve its

natural features. The Land Trust is the only statewide organization that extensively uses conservation easements as a protection strategy. To date, the Land Trust has protected more than 33,000 acres and 600,000 feet of shoreline in 367 projects around Minnesota.

As part of the Avon Hills Initiative (AHI), the Land Trust will work on a voluntary basis with individual landowners to establish between six and ten conservation easements in Avon, Saint Joseph, Colledgeville, and Saint Wendel townships. These easements will provide a public benefit by protecting high-quality natural habitats, water quality and the scenic integrity of Avon Hills.

Restrictions set out in each conservation easement will

reflect the unique characteristics of each property. Typically, easement restrictions address issues such as commercial, industrial, agricultural, and residential uses, division of the property into multiple parcels, and disturbance of vegetation or water features. The restrictions are designed to permanently follow the deed, thus protecting the property in perpetuity.

Saint John's Arboretum, as writer and manager of the grant, will help AHI facilitate the overall conservation efforts by promoting comprehensive local planning and zoning and environmental awareness. At least two conferences related

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Mark Your Calendars!

Monday Sept. 22, 7 p.m.	Ron Schara , <i>Minnesota Bound</i> nature writer and storyteller, will speak at Saint John's in the Pellegrine Auditorium-- <i>free and open to the public.</i>
Tuesday Sept. 30, 7 p.m.	Wangari Maathai , 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner will speak at Saint John's in the Stephen B. Humphrey theater-- <i>free and open to the public.</i>
Saturday Jan. 24, 2009	Avon Hills Initiative Annual Meeting & Conference at Saint John's University-- <i>details coming soon.</i>

Register Now!***Living in the Avon Hills—Art Exhibit***

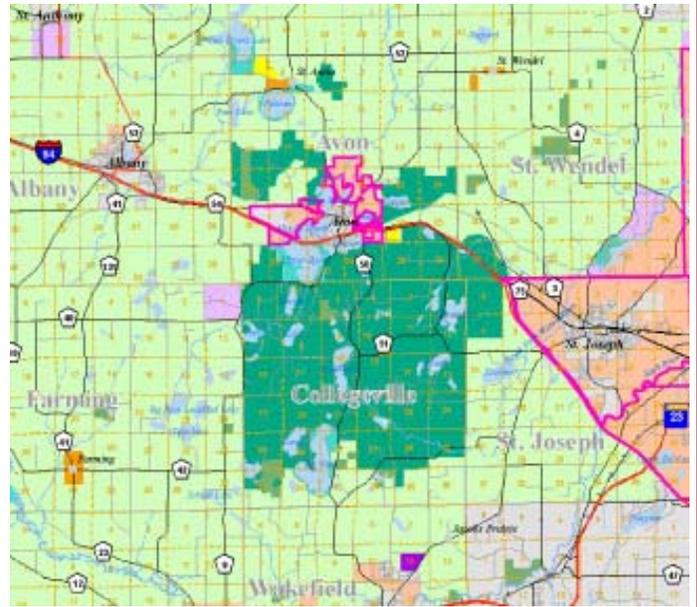
Artists of all ages are invited to exhibit original artwork along the theme: *Living in the Avon Hills*.

Artwork will be exhibited on **January 24, 2009, during the Avon Hills Annual Meeting and Conference** held at St. John's University. Several local businesses have offered to continue to display the exhibit pieces throughout the month of February.

Literary, visual and musical submissions will be accepted. Entries are limited to one per person and will be accepted on a first- come, first-served basis.

To register send your name, address, phone number, email and chosen art form to Jackie Leedahl at jleedahl@albanytel.com or call 320.290.0085 for more information.

Registration deadline is October 1, 2008.



The Avon Hills Conservation Area, in green, as described by the new Stearns County Comprehensive Plan.

Avon Hills Area Recognized in New Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

In March the Stearns County Board of Commissioners adopted a new county Comprehensive Plan. The plan covers a range of county policy issues, however the section on land use garnered the most public interest and is considered the central element of the plan.

The Land Use Plan is used to document existing and future land use and natural resource management. The plan defines several “policy areas” with the intention to recognize the diversity of environments and growth pressures across different areas of Stearns County.

The Avon Hills Natural Resource Area is one of the new defined policy areas. The area includes large parts of Avon and Collegetownship and Saint John's Abbey-owned property in

St. Joseph and St. Wendel townships. Policies applying to this area include: protection for open space through conservation easements, parklands and limited residential development; carefully planning development and road improvements to protect rural roads and scenic views, and continuing to work with community members on strategies for resource protection.

In conjunction with the new Avon Hills Natural Resource Area, the county created a new land use category: The Avon Hills Conservation Area. The new category recognizes the Avon Hills area as a “priority for natural resource protection, as well as its high amenity value for very low-density residential use.” The Avon Hills Conservation Area serves as a pilot project area

for a new natural resources overlay zoning district. The overlay district would take into account resources including wooded areas, wetlands, and native plant communities in future planning and zoning decisions. Details will be addressed more fully in the updated Land Use and Zoning Ordinance.

The Ordinance update process started in June of 2008. A series of public open houses will be held to obtain input from the public on various ordinance changes.

The Stearns County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance updates are available on the county web site, www.co.stearns.mn.us, if you are interested in further information.

Avon Area Arts—Where Fine Art Meets the Front Porch A Year in Review

Avon Area Arts is a group of volunteers interested in promoting the arts in Avon and the surrounding area. Formed in the spring of 2007, the group strives to “develop an artistic and cultural community within the Avon area, which encourages and nurtures the creative spirit.” One year later, Avon Area Arts is proud to have formed a 9-member volunteer Board of Directors and attracted a membership of 55 and growing.

In June of 2007, Avon Area Arts introduced itself to the community with the first annual two-day event, *A Celebration of the Arts*. Sherry Kutter, Avon Area Arts President invited people to enjoy the weekend, “We hope people who come leave with a sense that the experience has fed the spirit.”

MLT Partnership Continued

to land protection, ecological principles, and land stewardship are planned, with the intention of encouraging communication among landowners, environmental groups, and local government units so that they might work together to protect the area.

Land preservation is particularly important in the Avon Hills due to increasing land-use pressures along with wooded areas, wetlands, and high-quality native plant communities. Because the landscape has remained relatively undeveloped, the Avon Hills adds unique scenic value and abundant outdoor activities for

Jackie Leedahl, AHI
Several successful events followed, including the *Raised in the Hills-Teen Art Show*, a *Backroads Pottery Tour*, the *Avon Hills Wood Art Show* and several *Night Out for the Arts* events, at various locations throughout the year. The second annual *Celebration of the Arts* continued the trend as people came to see and experience a variety of local music and art and a third *Celebration* is being planned for June 2009.

Avon Area Arts strives to continue to bring the community the best of the arts. Join us for our next event, a *Local Artist Studio Tour*, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 16 and 17. See artists in action and try some artwork yourself. For more information visit www.avonartsconnection.org.

residents of Stearns County and beyond. However, due to increasing land values, landscapes like Avon Hills are increasingly prone to subdivision and development. This fragmentation of the larger landscape into smaller tracts of competing uses would diminish the natural and scenic quality of Avon Hills forever. Thankfully, this project will protect some of the land from the threat of development forever.

Landowners interested in learning more should contact Tom Kroll at 320-363-3126 or Bill Fahrney at 320-333-5183.

The Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board and Staff

Peter Dwyer
Committee Chair
Avon, MN

**Allan Davisson
& Steve Plantenberg**
Government Relations Comm.
Cold Spring, MN & Avon, MN

Mike Leedahl
Fundraising Committee
Avon, MN

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Land Stewardship/Biological
Sciences Committee
Albany, MN

Cliff Borgerding
Administration Committee
Avon, MN

Jackie Leedahl
Cultural History/
Sense of Place Committee
Avon, MN

**Will Huston & S. Phyllis
Plantenberg, OSB**
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Education & PR Committee
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Non-voting staff assistance
provided by: John Maide, *The
Nature Conservancy*; Jerry Kutter
and Tom Kroll, *Saint John's
Arboretum*; and Bill Fahrney,
Land Heritage Coordinator,
Avon Hills Initiative

CapX 2020 Powerline Routes Under Discussion

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MN PUC) held 19 public hearings in June and July as part of the approval process for a Certificate of Need application for the proposed 345-kV electric transmission line that could run between Fargo and Monticello. As the MN PUC continues the process of determining the need for the proposed power lines, CapX 2020 will begin filing applications for Routing Permits this fall. The routing of the proposed power lines will likely have a large impact on the Avon Hills.

In recent discussions

about routing options Darrin Lahr, the Xcel Energy representative for CapX 2020, noted that the potential I-94 route through the Avon area is “very constrained and poses significant challenges.” The routing bottleneck is due to the proximity of the homes, roads, and the Spunk Lakes to the freeway at Avon. Other proposed routing options would run either north or south of the I-94 corridor somewhere between Cold Spring and Holdingford. It is likely three options will be submitted and then the PUC will make the final routing decision.

The Avon Hills Initiative is encouraging all residents and landowners to remain informed and involved with the CapX 2020 project as the need and routing decisions are made. CapX 2020 is a joint transmission planning effort among 11 utilities that own transmission lines in Minnesota and the surrounding area. For more details about the proposed projects, visit the CapX 2020 web site at www.capx2020.com or the MN PUC web site at www.puc.state.mn.us. Contact Bill Fahrney at the Avon Hills Initiative for more information on how you can get involved.

The Avon Hills Executive Board meets the last Wednesday of each month at 4:45 p.m.

For questions or directions contact Bill

Fabrney at 320-333-5183, avonhills@gmail.com

or write to:

Avon Hills Initiative

PO Box 377

Avon, MN 56310

Contact Bill Fahrney to be added to our regular mailing list.

**Not a member of the Avon Hills Initiative?
Joining is FREE!**

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