

Avon Hills INITIATIVE

First Avon Hills Conservation Easement Complete

MN Land Trust Staff

Conservation Easements:

- Landowners retain their property and all inherent property rights except those explicitly granted to a third party, such as the MN Land Trust.
- A grant from LCCMR will cover expenses to create up to 9 more easements in the Avon Hills in the next 2 years.
- Nearly 20 landowners have come for lunch and a private consultation to learn more about the program.
- Contact Bill Fahrney at 320.333.5183 or Tom Kroll at 320.363.3126 to make an appointment.

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The Minnesota Land Trust recently completed a conservation easement that will permanently protect approximately 34 acres of land in the Avon Hills. The easement, donated by landowners Robert and Bonnie Thomsen, will provide critical habitat for wildlife, enhance the water quality of Watab creek and preserve the character of the surrounding community.

The project is the first success of a recent partnership between the Minnesota Land Trust and Saint John's Arboretum on behalf of the Avon Hills Initiative. The partnership works on a voluntary basis with local landowners to establish between six and ten conservation easements in the Avon Hills. The project is funded by a grant from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

By placing a conservation easement on their land, the Thomsens have taken a step toward ensuring their goal of providing long-term habitat for the flora and fauna of the area. The Thomsens were introduced to the Minnesota Land Trust several years ago, but the timing wasn't quite right to move forward with a conservation easement. In 2008, the Thomsens were

excited to be the first landowners to complete a conservation easement through the LCCMR grant.

The Thomsens also were well aware that their actions would extend far beyond themselves. Many conservation organizations and agencies have recognized the unique natural, historic, and cultural significance of the Avon Hills region. Native plant communities of tamarack swamp, oak forest, and maple-basswood forest provide nearly un-altered habitat and significant ecological value as remnants of larger historic forest complexes that are an important yet threatened natural resource to the state.

However, Stearns County faces up to a 33% increase of its population from the year 2000 to the year 2030 (Stearns County Comprehensive Plan, March 2008). As development ensues, the destruction and fragmentation of forest and wetland resources reduce critical habitats that have existed for generations.

The Thomsen's land epitomizes the very resources and character of the Avon Hills landscape that this newly launched program seeks to preserve. The land consists of upland forest, wetland, and grassland that supports the type of habitat necessary for a variety of "Species in Greatest Conservation Need" as identified by the Minnesota Depart-

ment of Natural Resources (MN-DNR).

Further, as part of a larger wetland complex that feeds into Watab Creek, this land helps preserve the water quality of the creek which flows into the Mississippi River. By helping to protect land in such an important region, the Thomsens have also enabled the protection of critical habitat and other natural resources that benefit the entire state.

The Thomsens retain ownership and all their rights except that conservation easement restricts future development and any use of the property that would be inconsistent with the protection of the natural features. Subsequent owners will be bound by the terms of the easement, preserving the land's conservation values in the future.

The Minnesota Land Trust has completed 387 conservation projects protecting over 34,000 acres and 702,000 feet of shoreline which benefit the public by conserving important plant and animal habitats, protecting water quality, and preserving scenic landscapes that contribute to a community's sense of place.

The Minnesota Land Trust is the only private conservation organization in Minnesota working extensively with perpetual conservation easements. More information can be found at: www.mnland.org or by calling 651-647-9590.

CAPX2020 Seeks Public Input as They Finalize Route Options

Erin Klegstad

Route options for the CapX2020 Red River-St. Cloud 345 kilovolt transmission line project, including those near Avon, are being finalized. CapX2020 is hosting open houses to take public comments and feedback about route options that will be proposed in the upcoming Minnesota Route Permit application, which will be filed in the fall.

Project information, including maps depicting potential route options, are available at <http://www.capx2020.com/routemaps/FM-routemaps.html>, and will be displayed at the open houses. Landowners and stakeholders are encouraged to stop by to provide comments on the route options. No formal presentation is scheduled.

This line is one of three 345 kilovolt transmission

lines proposed by CapX-2020, a joint initiative of 11 transmission-owning utilities in Minnesota and the surrounding region. The initiative is designed to expand the electricity infrastructure to ensure continued reliable service, meet the growth in electricity demand and support renewable energy expansion.

When CapX2020 finishes its evaluation and has determined its final route options for the proposed transmission line, a Route Permit application will be submitted to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MN PUC). The MN PUC application will begin the next process specified in state regulations. This includes public meetings, scoping for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and any routing additions recommended by the public or interested parties, develop-

ment of a citizen's advisory task force if needed, public hearings, a draft and final EIS, and a Route Permit decision. After a comprehensive public process, the MN PUC determines whether the Route Permit application should be granted, and if so, what route the transmission line should take.

The Minnesota Office of Energy Security is also significantly involved in the process, including developing an EIS and conducting public meetings regarding the report.

If you are unable to attend an open house, submit comments by visiting www.capx2020.com, calling 1-866- 876-2869 or sending an email to fargoinfo@capx2020.com.

Erin Klegstad is a communications representative for CAPX2020.

Stearns County Begins Work on CSAH 51

Jenny Kutter

Construction season is upon us and work is underway for the planned reconstruction of CSAH 51 between CSAH 2 in Saint Joseph and CSAH 50 in Avon.

After being awarded the contract in June, Central Specialties of Alexandria, Minnesota began the initial work removing trees and preparing areas of the site for construction.

A special provision was added to this contract to help prevent the spread of oak wilt during construc-

tion. Oak wilt is caused by an aggressive fungal pathogen that kills thousands of oak trees a year in the U.S.

As trees are cut during construction, all cut surfaces must be treated with a paint within minutes of being cut. This provides a physical barrier to the sap that attracts picnic beetles. Picnic beetles inadvertently carry the oak wilt spores from tree to tree. Road construction is one of the common ways oak wilt is spread. Stearns County is taking these preventive measures to preserve the landscape along CSAH 51.

Phase one of the construction began in mid-July. Expected to run from now until mid-September, phase one includes the grinding up and reconstruction of the road between CSAH 2 and County Road 159. Phase two, between County Road 159 and CSAH 50 should be completed by November. The final coat of pavement will be added in the spring of 2010, with the entire reconstruction scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2010.

The main proposal for updating CSAH 51 was to
CSAH 51, continued on page 3

CAPX2020

OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE

Monday, July 27

5 – 8 p.m.
 St. Mary's School
 210 4th Street North
 Breckenridge, MN 56520

Tuesday, July 28

10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
 Barnesville Public School – old gym
 302 3rd Street SE
 Barnesville, MN 56514

5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Best Western Bigwood Event Center
 952 Western Avenue
 Fergus Falls, MN 56537

Wednesday, July 29

10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
 Barrett Community Center
 109 Barrett Avenue
 Barrett, MN 56311

5 – 8 p.m.

Broadway Ballroom
 115 30th Avenue East
 Alexandria, MN 56308

Thursday, July 30

10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
 Melrose High School
 546 North 5th Avenue East
 Melrose, MN 56352

Monday, August 3

5 – 8 p.m.
 Albany Elementary School
 10 Forest Avenue
 Albany, MN 56307

CURRENT CSAH 51 SCHEDULE

PHASE 1: CSAH2 to County Road 159, to be completed by September 15

PHASE 2: County Road 159 to CSAH 50, to be completed by November 6

FINAL PAVING: Spring 2010

www.co.stearns.mn.us/686.htm

CSAH 51, *continued from page 2*

alleviate various safety concerns. A winding and hilly road, several sections of CSAH 51 currently meet only 40-45 mph design speed. By softening some of the curves and hills, the reconstructed road will meet a minimum 50 mph design speed, meeting the needs of traffic that already generally travels much faster.

Bicyclists and pedestrians will also benefit greatly from the road reconstruction. CSAH 51 currently has only three foot wide aggregate shoulders. The design of the

reconstructed road includes eight-foot paved shoulders to accommodate the heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic along the roadway. The wider shoulders will not automatically designate the road as a trail, but will make it safer for those who use the road as such.

While construction on such a heavily traveled road is certainly an inconvenience, the end product will result in a drastic increase in safety along the road. There is a significant crash history along CSAH 51 and by updating the road to meet the needs of its current use—

heavier traffic, bicycle and pedestrian access—the county expects to see a great improvement in safety on the road.

To keep updated on the reconstruction schedule, check the Stearns County Web site, www.co.stearns.mn.us/686.htm, and look for the CSAH 51 Project Updates link.

Jenny Kutter is the Saint John's Arboretum department coordinator. Jodi Teich, Stearns County assistant engineer, contributed to this story.

Local Lake Association Receives Honor From Minnesota Waters

In early July, *Minnesota Waters*, the statewide non-profit dedicated to empowering citizens to protect and improve the lakes and rivers of Minnesota, announced its 2009 award winners, selected from nominations around the state.

The Pelican Lake Association of St. Anna, just four miles north of Avon, is the 2009 Lake Association of the Year, sponsored by HDR Engineering. The award will be presented to the group on August 19 in Saint Paul.

Organized in 2003 and comprising 91 members, equaling 91 percent of the lake's property owners, the Pelican Lake Association of St. Anna funds its projects with membership dues, contributions of money and materials, fundraiser proceeds, cost share partnerships, and volunteer labor.

A partial list of projects accomplished by the Pelican Lake Association includes:

- ♦ The construction of sediment ponds

- ♦ assistance with installing CRP measures
- ♦ the development of wall-eye spawning beds in partnership with the DNR and Initiative Foundation
- ♦ the improvement and repair of a public lake access
- ♦ habitat restorations and community outreach and education on aquatic invasive species and fisheries.

The association also arranged for lake assessment and aerial lakeshore analysis to determine nutrient loading. This led to native vegetation plantings, buffer strips, the need for more sediment ponds, the need for a dam, and increased rain gardens, which together produced improved Secchi disk readings in just two years.

The group continues to coordinate volunteer water monitors and provides the data to a variety of state agencies.

Each year, Minnesota

Waters presents awards to honor citizen volunteers who have made exceptional commitments to protecting their local lake or river. Minnesota Waters believes an engaged citizenry will effectively protect and restore Minnesota's irreplaceable natural assets—clean and healthy lakes and streams—for current and future generations.

The non-profit organization provides, training, connections and support to empower citizens and citizen-led groups to be active, effective advocates for Minnesota's unique waterscape.

For more information, contact Marian Bender, executive director of *Minnesota Waters*, at 320-257-6630 or visit www.minnesotawaters.org.

Excerpts for this article were taken from a Minnesota Waters press release announcing the 2009 awards.

Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board

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Jenny Kutter
Saint John's Arboretum

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The Executive Board meets the last Wednesday of the month at 4:45 p.m. Contact us for more information or directions.

July 2009
Summer Update

Avon Hills INITIATIVE

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[http://www.csbsju.edu/
arboretum/avonhills](http://www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills)

The Avon Hills Initiative is a group of local landowners, interested citizens, and organizations.

Our Mission

To preserve the rural character, the ecological integrity, and the economic viability of the Avon Hills, an area of approximately 50 square miles including land in Saint Joseph, Avon, Saint Wendell, and Collegeville townships of

Schuman Lake Road Considered for "Rustic Road" Designation

Jenny Kutter

Collegeville township is discussing designating Schuman Lake Road (SLR) as a "rustic road." The purpose of this designation is to reduce township liability while maintaining the unique character of this one-mile road.

A rustic road is defined by the state of Minnesota as a road that is not on the state aid system that has the following characteristics: outstanding natural features or scenic beauty; average daily traffic volume less than 150 vehicles per day; year-round use as a local access road; maximum speed of 45 miles

per hour (Minn. Statute §160.83).

On July 17, Robert Simon, Collegeville township treasurer, reviewed the trees, vegetation, and drainage issues along the road with Mark Conway, SLR resident, and Tom Kroll, local forester and Saint John's land manager. The purpose of the review was to mark trees and vegetation that should be cut to provide for safety and maintenance issues along the road.

Concerns about the rustic road designation for SLR include the loss of state aid for the road and the addition of 1.5 minutes travel time if the speed is reduced to 20

mph to improve safety.

The Collegeville township board of supervisors will discuss the rustic road designation at their regular meeting on Tuesday, July 28. A public hearing will likely be scheduled in August before a final decision is made later this year.

Schuman Lake Road is a one-mile long road between CSAH 50 and Kalla Lake Road, south of Avon, Minnesota.

Jenny Kutter is the department coordinator for Saint John's Arboretum

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