



February 23, 2023

Dear Governance Council Members,

I was glad when your school leaders reached out to Ozaukee Washington Land Trust to determine if we might be of assistance in your effort to secure a new home for your Outdoor Learning School. We applaud the community of students, families, and community supporters and Riveredge Nature Center leaders who were behind the creation of this unique conservation-focused schooling option in our shared service area. We are eager to see how your impressive growth and need for a new and larger campus might align with our mission.

Since 1992, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust (OWLT) has worked to conserve the lands and waters that make our corner of Wisconsin special. From iconic nature preserves like Mequon Nature Preserve, Lion's Den Gorge and the newly conserved Cedar Gorge Clay Bluffs, some of our greatest successes in protecting habitat and scenic open spaces come in those moments when we listen to the unique needs of our community. I think the community's need to create this unique Outdoor Learning School option is one of those moments.

Ozaukee Washington Land Trust is happy to lend our expertise in conservation and real estate and perhaps more importantly the decades of relationship-building with conservation-minded landowners to find a new site that could very well serve both of our missions.

Land Protection Tools: Purchase for Nature Preserves and Conservation Easements

Overall, I believe there could be good alignment with your needs for an outdoor learning environment and our land and water protecting real estate acquisition goals. We understand the Outdoor Learning School would ideally see its' campus located in the context of a natural/rural setting of the Northern Ozaukee School District; the outdoor learning school next door to a newly acquired and permanently conserved Ozaukee Washington Land Trust nature preserve could be a win-win for the community.

While Ozaukee Washington Land Trust is perhaps most known for the popularity of the more than 30 nature preserves we have created, we have actually conserved more land via conservation easement of private land. A conservation-easement is a legal tool used by land trusts to ensure the conservation values of properties are forever protected. While this often involves the land trust working with individual, private landowners to conserve properties which remain closed to the public, in the cases of Mequon Nature Preserve, Lion's Den Gorge, and Cedar Gorge Clay Bluffs, OWLT purchased these properties and then transferred to a municipal partner with OWLT retaining a conservation easement over the land.

Our reputation of acquiring valuable conservation real estate for restoration and protection may also invite the participation of conservation agencies or private philanthropists who would be excited to see the fusion of an Outdoor Learning School in the context of a conserved property.

If the scope, scale, and natural resource features of your future school site aligns with the goals of Ozaukee Washington Land Trust and if our continued collaboration is deemed desirable by your community of stakeholders the either of these solutions could be useful tools.

Preserve Stewardship Expertise and Future Stewardship Facilities

While conserving land for permanent conservation is the hallmark of land trusts, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust's involvement in properties doesn't stop when we acquire a conservation property. We employ a team of 7 conservation professionals who thoughtfully work with our community of advisors and contractors to restore the natural resource features of properties as well as maintain the habitat features and public access at our preserves. Depending on the condition of the real estate the Outdoor Learning School acquires, and if it is connected to our conserved lands, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust might also be able to assist in the stewardship of our common property.

We have identified the need for a new facility for our Stewardship staff and equipment. Perhaps there will be alignment in such a facility near or adjacent to your future site. This is a bit early to plan for such a shared facility, but with the alignment of our missions, your need for facilities, and overlapping timing, it seemed appropriate to identify the potential point of collaboration.

In closing, we are very interested to explore and support a partnership between Ozaukee Washington Land Trust and your community of Outdoor Learning School supporters that will help us realize a larger conservation impact for our community than we would have seen working separately. In addition to potentially protecting more land and water, your mission of educating future conservation leaders helps Ozaukee Washington Land Trust to safeguard our community's long-standing conservation values. We view permanent conservation as more than the legal paperwork of a conservation easement or a sign advertising a forever-conserved nature preserve; permanent conservation of our lands only happens by sustaining the will of our community to support permanent conservation. Cultivating deep connections to land and instilling in our community members, especially our youth, the values of conservation is essential to maintaining permanent protection of our land and waters.

Thank you for your consideration of the above and I look forward to continuing the conversation,

Sincerely,



Tom Stolp
Executive Director