

From Bumblebees to Cranberries: THE FOLSOM LAND LEGACY

By Thomas Eddy



Bumblebee (*Bombus* sp.) foraging on common boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*). Of over 250 bumblebee species identified, 13 occur in Wisconsin. Photo by Thomas Eddy.

Tom Folsom is a successful Wisconsin cranberry grower. He knows more about the subject than anyone I know. I asked him once “who” pollinates cranberry flowers. “Bumblebees,” he replied, matter-of-factly. Without bumblebees and other pollinators there would be no cranberries and other fruits that require insect-pollination for a bountiful harvest. The ecosystem services that pollen-transferring insects convey help ensure a legacy of harvest and livelihoods for producers and

consumers alike. Together, the Green Lake Conservancy and Tom Folsom have established another kind of legacy—a land legacy that honors the memory of Tom’s father, Howard Folsom.

In 1959 and 1960, with dollars earned from farming cranberries in northern Wisconsin, Howard acquired two small contiguous farms in mainly rural Green Lake County. Through a conservation easement over 500 acres of agricultural land, woods, and wetlands are now protected in perpetuity, a fitting tribute to a man who loved this bit of east central Wisconsin earth. Just imagine—for bumblebees that pollinate cranberry flowers, two farms bordering Silver Creek, the main tributary of Green Lake, were purchased and then protected forever.

Through a conservation easement, the Folsom land legacy was made permanent when Tom Folsom contacted the Green Lake Conservancy and requested assistance with protecting the farms his father acquired decades earlier. A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between the landowner and the land trust, whereby specified development rights are relinquished to enhance and sustain the ecological services and value of the property. The landowner gains a tax benefit from the IRS and continues to hold title to the land. In fact, a conservation easement with the protection it conveys is perpetual, even when the land ownership is transferred. According to Tom, “If Dad lived longer he would have done the same thing as I did [conservation easement].”

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the land
that protects
the lake**

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about our local land trust
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**Bur Zeratsky, President
920-294-3592**

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(L-R) Brothers Robert and Tom Folsom and their father, Howard Folsom at Folsom Cranberry Marsh, Manitowish Waters, WI, circa 1990. Photo submitted by Tom Folsom.

Given thoughtful deliberation by Tom, and with the Conservancy's guidance, a covenant that imparts the stewardship values he learned from his father was finalized. The Folsom farms will not be divided and developed. Agricultural land is preserved and makes possible the livelihood for a small-farm operator who employs no-till practices on cropland and all the while contributing to the local economy. Besides cropland, the conservation easement protects native habitats and the biodiversity they sustain, bestowing further ecological services that benefit people and promote the common good.

Since 1995, the Green Lake Conservancy has offered lake and watershed protection through acquisition, gift, and conservation easement. Trustworthy and experienced, the Conservancy is a recognized strategic lake partner, protecting distinctive places like Folsom farms, Mitchell Glen, Norwegian Bay Wetlands, Sugar Island, Sunnyside Conservancy, and Winnebago Trail Nature Preserve. Excluding the privately owned Folsom farms, all local

conservancy lands have some type of public access that includes trails and boardwalks.

The Folsom land legacy is a gift to the future—it is an investment in hope for what will become. As former Vermont Governor James Douglas observed: "Our deep respect for the land and its harvest is the legacy of generations of farmers who put food on our tables, preserved our landscape, and inspired us with a powerful work ethic." After nearly two decades of land trust accomplishments, the Green Lake Conservancy continues steadfast to this task, contributing to the ecological, social, and economic well-being of our communities.

Thomas Eddy is a founding member of the Green Lake Conservancy and serves as VP for Conservation. To make a donation or to learn more about the work of the Conservancy, go to greenlakeconservancy.org. To contact the Conservancy, call (920) 294-3592 or email info@greenlakeconservancy.org.

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