

TOWN OF MERRIMAC SOLICITS FUNDS TO CONSERVE LAND

Adjoining BAAP property, Purchase conserves 17 acres & 1/2 mile of shoreline
For Release January 30, 2003

(MERRIMAC, WI) - The Town of Merrimac is currently seeking donations and grants to assist in the purchase of 12.5 acres of land on Lake Wisconsin for the purpose of conservation. The main goal of the purchase is to protect more than 1/2 mile of lake frontage from development.

The township is seeking to purchase 8.5 acres of property currently owned by Evan Clingman of Pennsylvania. The property has been in the family for years and was last resided upon in 1938. The natural surroundings create one of the oldest growth forests on Lake Wisconsin as well as one of the largest undeveloped shorelines on the lake.

Mr. Clingman initiated the sale when he contacted the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) early in 2002. It is the Clingman family's desire to see this portion of Lake Wisconsin remain as much as it is today. It is anticipated that the DNR will get the property adjacent to the Clingman property when the United States Army transfers the BAAP properties as the plant has been closed. The Natural Resources Board has already approved the purchase by the DNR of the 3.5 acre parcel next to the BAAP pump house property. The town is now working to provide funding for the 8.5 acres it intends to purchase. The town plans to acquire an additional 5 acres for the park when Hwy. 78 is relocated in 2007.

The town plans to submit for a Lake Protection Grant from the DNR which will cover up to 75% of the \$260,000 purchase price. The remaining \$65,000 will be raised through private donations. The town's goal to raise private money for the balance of the purchase would alleviate any need to raise tax revenues. This is an important part of the purchase considering the money needed for the purchase is currently about 40% of the town's current tax levy.

Unlike other major lakes in Wisconsin, such as Castle Rock or Petenwell lakes, Lake Wisconsin does not have a major park area on the lake. Presently, there is a DNR boat ramp at Moon Valley Resort and a Sauk County boat ramp next to Summer Oaks Resort, but neither facility allows people to enjoy a nature hike or provide major access to on-shore fishing access.

Once the land is acquired, the town plans to work out an arrangement with the DNR to manage the property. Some of the early vision for the park shows the town's portion mainly being used for hiking trails and nature observation points. There would also be areas that provide excellent off-shore fishing opportunities in Weigand's Bay. When Hwy. 78 is abandoned, it is possible the abandoned stretch along the bay could be utilized for handicapped fishing. The DNR also has a long range vision of providing day camping sites and possibly boat access on its portion. Throughout the bay, the DNR has also discussed the possibility of improving the fish habitat with off shore reefs and fish cribs. DNR officials are cautious about their future plans as these projects take funding and might not be able to happen for several years.

The initiative of purchasing land by the Town of Merrimac for conservation is unique in that these projects are generally seen at the county or state level. The township's effort to conserve this property might be one of the first for a local township. While other municipalities (such as cities and villages) and counties often preserve park space, it is rarely seen at the township level. The DNR hopes the success of this project will encourage other townships to follow suit.

The town has authorized recognizing those who make donations to this project by honoring them with a plaque or monument. Donations of \$500.00 or more will qualify for this recognition. Because the donation is being made to a government entity, and for park conservation, donations are tax-deductible. Donors are asked to consult with their tax professional to make certain their donation is in fact eligible.

If you would like to make a donation for this conservation project, you can make your check payable to the "Clingman Property Acquisition Fund - Town of Merrimac, Attn: Tim McCumber, Deputy Clerk/Treasurer, P.O. Box 115, Merrimac, WI 53561.

Inquiries about the project can be made by contacting Tim McCumber at (608) 643-6332 or by email at mccumber@shopstop.net.