

St. Mary's Receives a Conservation Grant By Theodore Bryant-Nanz

St. Mary's Dousman applied for and received a grant of \$4,000.00 from the Waukesha County Community Foundation to preserve and restore a natural area on the church's property along the Bark River. The granting process was competitive and St. Mary's was one of only two organizations that received money for conservation work out of 25 groups that received funding from the foundation.

St. Mary's purchased land for its new church in 2006, which included about 1,200 feet of the Bark River. In 2012 a parishioner discovered the significance of the riverbank. It is a combined sedge meadow and fen habitat. The area is a nearly intact natural community. 142 native species of plants have been identified. Over 99% of this type of habitat has been destroyed by development or overrun by invasive plants leaving just 10,000 acres remaining in the State of Wisconsin.

The river itself is an important piece of stream habitat. It has a mussel species and three species of fish, which are on the Wisconsin endangered species list as threatened or endangered. The river flowing clean and alive past Saint Mary's property has been classified as critical fish habitat. A species of damselfly, the Blue Ringed Dancer, was identified for the first time in Wisconsin at Saint Mary's riverbank. The discovery touched off a major study by the DNR to locate breeding populations of this insect. This combination of intact riverbank and stream habitat is very rare and fast disappearing.

Our Lord has entrusted this important site to the care of St. Mary's. The congregation has risen to the challenge, providing both funding and volunteer work. As Wisconsin's native habitats disappear, each piece that remains is like a Noah's Ark carrying our natural heritage into the future.