

Wildcat Falls nudges closer to a Community Forest

The Wildcat Falls Community Forest, a forestland conservation effort in Ontonagon County, has recently gained further traction with recent support from two sustainable forestry funds: the Upper Peninsula Sustainable Forest and Wildlife Fund of the Community Foundation of the Upper Peninsula (CFUP), and the Weyerhaeuser Community Fund. The Wildcat Falls Community Forest project is spearheaded by Northwoods Alliance Inc. (NWA), and prioritizes sustainable forest management, public recreation, and the protection of wildlife habitat, multiple freshwater ecosystems, and unique flora and fauna. This 160-acre project showcases waterfalls and bedrock features on a trout stream, sustainable management of hardwood stands, old growth characteristics in cedar-hemlock forest, impressive rock mounds and outcrops, ponds and vernal pools, and a wide diversity of woodland plants. The recent foundation support moves the Community Forest closer to completion.

“We are grateful for the financial support of \$2500 from the Community Foundation of the Upper Peninsula, and \$1000 from the Weyerhaeuser Giving Fund. These community partners help us reach our goal of establishing the Wildcat Falls Community Forest and providing future generations the opportunity to visit this special place”, said Casey Clark President of NWA.

These two recent awards add to other support from the UP that include the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, Friends of Sylvania, and dozens of citizens. In addition, both the James E. Dutton foundation, which supports projects that benefit wildlife and environmental reservation, and the John C. Bock Foundation, which is dedicated to the preservation of old-growth forest, committed support to Wildcat Falls this year.

Earlier this year, the USFS Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program recognized the value of Wildcat Falls, and ranked it fourth nationwide among fifteen funded projects. The Community Forest Program partners with qualified non-profits, local governments and Indigenous tribal organizations, to establish publicly-accessible forests that benefit local communities for recreational and conservation values. The successful Community Forest grant for Wildcat Falls provides half the funds necessary to complete the project, and current fundraising efforts are raising the required 50% match. With the recent awards from local organizations and individuals, the Wildcat Falls fundraising effort has raised half of capital required to match the USFS grant.

Based in Vilas County Wisconsin, NWA has a long history of conservation and has been especially active in the border lakes region, where the UP adjoins the Northwoods of Wisconsin. The mission of the organization is to promote the economic, social, environmental and intrinsic benefits of land conservation to communities, using forest management, non-motorized recreation, wildlife habitat for hunting and fishing and viewing special legacy trees as examples. Through its Land Conservation Initiative, NWA seeks out opportunities to protect important habitat which conveys these community values, and more.

For more information on Northwoods Alliance and the Wildcat Falls project please see www.northwoodalliance.org, or call NWA director Joe Hovel at 715-479-8528.