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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Dropping Our Tools on the Way to the New HQ

*This is a great site for the new Wild Ones Headquarters. Rather than operating out of private homes, the trunk of a car, and a post-office box, Wild Ones will gain real credibility with a real HQ. This new HQ will be a destination for Wild Ones members everywhere, a place for landscape demonstrations, and a center for learning.*

In the last issue of the *Journal* I talked about National's unexpected opportunity to assume ownership of a building and 12-1/2 acres of land near Appleton, Wisconsin. Since that time, I have received a number of letters of support, and some letters of concern. Most people are enthusiastically suggesting that we "go for it!" Others are concerned about the possible negative effect that the "gift" might have on National's continuing monetary challenges.

Since I wrote the "Message from the President" for last issue, I have visited the site myself. For those of you who do not know, I am an architect (building, not landscape) by profession. The purpose of my visit was to conduct a preliminary condition analysis of the building and the site. I found the house to be in excellent physical condition. There will be no immediately necessary changes. Some will be needed in the future, but we will only undertake rebuilding when we have the funds in hand.

The site is well kept and appears to be ready for Wild Ones to begin our demonstration projects. The marsh is in good shape. During a recent visit to the site, Rick Buser, Chair/Team Leader of the Fox Valley Technical College Wildlife and Fish Management Department, noted that, "The emergent marsh vegetation contains a diverse mix of native species and is doing its job as both habitat and a riparian buffer."

Our Executive Director, Donna VanBuecken, has been busy working with Leslie Taylor, a Wild Ones member who is a grant writer, to complete the purchase and grant request requirements. They are identifying possible tenants to help us pay for the utility and maintenance costs associated with operating an office building.

Bret Rappaport, our past National President and an attorney, has been acting as one of our legal representatives for the purchase. He has also spent a great deal of time thinking about what acquiring a national headquarters might mean to Wild Ones.

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The following is a synopsis of his thoughts:

I support the acquisition of the West Shore Prairie Preserve for a Wild Ones Headquarters (HQ). I have thought a great deal about an HQ and what it means for Wild Ones. There are long-term and short-term consequences, but in the end, the decision to do it has everything to do with a simple cost/benefit analysis overlaid with a bit of faith to "drop your tools."

There are four main benefits. First, operationally, there is no question that an HQ will benefit Wild Ones. Currently, our facilities consist of Donna's basement, garage, trunk of her car, with a bit in Joe's office, three file drawers in an empty room at my firm – well you get the idea. We need space, computers, fax machines, storage for merchandise, etc. It is neither fair, nor effective to run an organization of our size and scope out of a duffle bag. With an HQ, Wild Ones will have all the space to do what it cannot do now. Volunteers and members can come and go without invading Donna's private home, and everything will be in one location – including the Wild Ones Library, which is now on the second floor of Rob Ryf's private home. There is no question that, organizationally, this is a great benefit.

Second, there is an economic benefit. Unlike the organizational benefit, the economic benefit cannot be quantified. There are two components. First, if we rent space we will have income to offset the expense of ownership, and at the same time will be able to reduce our fixed costs by sharing fax machines, phone lines, support staff, etc., with other organizations. Second, by having an HQ we may attract volunteers to do work that is otherwise being done by Donna, or not being done at all. This may translate into increased efficiency, and that means more money. How much? Who knows?

Third, the headquarters would be the site of a demonstration landscape. The lands adjacent to the home will be landscaped with native plants. Wild Ones will put its philosophy into practice for all to see, feel, smell, touch, and explore. This will in turn serve two goals. First, the landscape will be a living laboratory and showplace for members and visitors. It will serve as a source of pride and inspiration. Wetlands, woodlands, prairie and other plant communities will be shown off at the site. There can be experimental gardens to see what works where and with what, and there can be legacy gardens where members will plant forbs, trees, or shrubs to honor a person or idea. The second benefit of a demonstration landscape at headquarters is that it opens additional funding sources. By having a site to employ the practices that we espouse, Wild Ones will have a platform from which to secure site-specific grants from the Wisconsin DNR and others.

Fourth, there is a spiritual benefit. Like Dorothy said. "There's no place like home, Toto – no place like home."

Well, Toto, Wild Ones has no home. An HQ would mean we exist. We are not just a mailbox. HQ will become a destination. Having a home changes us from a loose affiliation of chapters

and partners-at-large across the country, held together with a national organization and a journal, to an organization of permanence with many branches. Having an HQ will engender a special sense of pride, purpose, and permanence that could not otherwise exist.

The burden is simple: if it does not work for any reason, we are stuck with a house that we have to sell. Since there are restrictions on the property, we would have to find a like organization to take over and that would take time. During that period we would have to continue to pay the insurance of \$200 or so each month.

On balance, by a huge distance, all factors point toward enthusiastically pursuing this opportunity. We should!

In deference to those who may be reluctant, I challenge you to "drop your tools." This metaphor comes from a paper written many years ago by a professor of administrative science who studied fatal forest fires. In studying two fires he found that the firefighters died because they refused to drop their heavy saws and gear and to take cover. They clung to what they knew – what was familiar – and they died. The lesson is clear – you have to be willing to take a well-thought-out leap of faith, and abandon that which may be comfortable, but ineffectual. We have been at the same membership level for many years. We have used the same model to try to grow chapters and members for as many years, and we continue to be challenged with attrition and apathy.

Maybe we need to drop our tools and take that leap of faith. Given that the state of Wisconsin is willing to support us in this venture, the answer seems totally obvious.

I support Bret's analysis and feel firmly that we need to press on. I hope that all of our members will support us in this endeavor. Please plan to attend the annual meeting to be held July 15, at this year's annual Wild Ones conference, to get an update on how we're doing with this project, and to participate in further discussion about how to proceed. You can register on our web site at [www.for-wild.org/2006Annual](http://www.for-wild.org/2006Annual).

If you want to learn more about "dropping your tools," see [www.acij.uts.edu.au/archives/profprac/Dropyourtools.pdf](http://www.acij.uts.edu.au/archives/profprac/Dropyourtools.pdf).

