***“BRC Conserves Spider Lake Waterfront”***

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Michael and Margaret O’Sullivan bought their first property on Spider Lake near Hayward in Sawyer County in 1975 and, as Michael put it, *“over the years, our whole family has come to absolutely treasure our little corner of the Northwoods.”*

So much so that now they have taken steps to protect some of it forever. The O’Sullivans have donated a conservation easement on eight acres of mostly forested land that abuts their lakeside home, guaranteeing it will never be developed. In addition to keeping the protected property as a buffer against development, the easement is meant to preserve the land as wildlife habitat and help protect the water quality of Spider Lake and surrounding waters.

And, as the first conservation easement established on the Spider Chain of Lakes, Michael O’Sullivan said, it may inspire other owners to consider the benefits of such permanent protections for their own property. While his neighbors are not yet aware of the easement, he expects they will be receptive to the O’Sullivans’ efforts to protect against increased development. *“God willing, we plan to have all of our neighbors over sometime next summer and make the announcement personally to them. My hope is that they will all be as enthusiastic as we are,”* says O’Sullivan.

The easement will be held by the Bayfield Regional Conservancy, a land trust that works with property owners to protect air, water and land within 4 counties of Northwestern Wisconsin. Conservation easements are perpetual legal agreements between property owners and land trusts or similar bodies in which the owner places restrictions to protect the natural values of the land. Restrictions can vary, allowing uses desired by the owner while prohibiting unwanted development. The owner retains all rights of ownership while the land trust monitors compliance with the restrictions going forward.

O’Sullivan said he and his wife began considering the benefits of conservation a few years ago after learning about its benefits from a friend on their local lake association. Having watched the value of lake property increase so dramatically in recent years, O’Sullivan had concluded that the next push for development would come on backlots such as his, which had already been subdivided into 4 lots by the previous owner, each with its own legal access to Spider Lake.

*“It seemed a shame to us that it could be crowded with new development,” he said. “Protecting this land was important to us. Margaret and I talked about it a lot before we decided this is what we wanted to do.”*

The easement will prohibit development by the O’Sullivans and any future owners of the property, but does allow owners to continue to use the property for any purposes consistent with protecting the land’s conservation values. O’Sullivan said the financial investment in obtaining the easement will be easily offset by the permanent benefits of protecting the property. And if their decision inspires neighbors to take similar actions, he said, it will have been even more worth the effort.

*“It’s small,” he said. “It’s a small easement, but strategically it’s significant.”* Erika Lang, the conservation director for Bayfield Regional Conservancy, agrees: ***“Hopefully, Michael and Margaret’s vision acts as a catalyst among other area landowners, and results in more landowners making good stewardship decisions for their properties and surrounding areas. Shoreland protection is especially important to protect wildlife habitat and water quality, and property values. Setting up conservation easements is one of the best tools to protect these values that we all cherish.”***

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