**Milwaukee is currently experiencing a remarkable surge in developmental progress, but what are the environmental implications?**

**Author Martin Hintz sits down with Howard Aprill, vice president of the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy, to find out.**

**BY MARTIN HINTZ PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HAAS**

Howard Aprill, a Wehr Nature Center naturalist, conducts environmental education and interpretation programs with Milwaukee County Parks. He received his degree in environmental studies at Michigan State University and has also worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, with UPR Extension and at Bernall National Park and Preserve in Alaska. When he has time to spare, Aprill studies the rare Butler’s garter snake, whose Wisconsin habitat is threatened by developers.

Aprill is currently vice president of the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy (MALC), a volunteer conservation group. Among its projects are protection of Carity Prairie, Fitzsimmons Woods and Sidney Woodlands Preserve.

**M: Greater Milwaukee is going through a period of growth and development, but what implications are there if open spaces and clean water are not protected?**

**HA:** There are no do-overs in land preservation. Once an open or green space has been developed, rarely is there a going back. As a result, the clock is ticking when it comes to preserving our significant natural areas.

There is a growing body of research and evidence that shows a strong correlation between people’s access to green spaces and quality of life. In addition, they add tremendously to the economic value of communities.

**M: What can citizens do to protect the county’s remaining open spaces?**

**HA:** Get involved. Let elected officials know what you value. They can’t read minds. As a citizen you have to be vocal.

Despite being heavily urbanized and losing 93.9 percent of its natural vegetation and nearly all its prairie and oak savanna, Milwaukee County still holds many hidden gems. These secrets showcase scenery, diversified plant life and a wealth of animals. Properties under the protective wing of the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy (MALC) include:

**MALC partnered with developer Bill Carity to preserve a 23-acre rare prairie remnant and restore a sedge meadow complex in Franklin.**

**Fitzsimmons Woods comprises approximately 43 acres, with 19 acres owned by Milwaukee County. The wetlands and natural drainageways in the woods are headwaters of Oak Creek and the Root River.**

**Sidney Woodlands Preserve is small, spreading over just 3.76 acres in Glendale. It is a natural buffer separating homes from railroad tracks and nearby factories. Yet this parcel has been extensively studied by naturalists since 1984. As a result, 136 native plant species have been identified, and despite nearby roads, there is space for quiet reflection. Only a few feet from the property, allowing visitors to get up close and personal to the beech, red and white oak, sedge and even sarsaparilla.**

— Martin Hintz