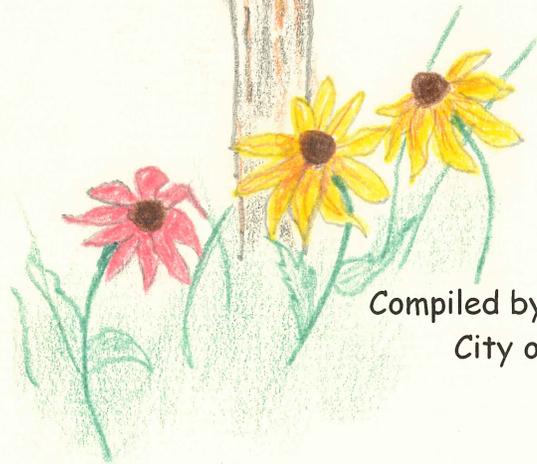




History  
of  
**Sunfish Lake Park**  
City Park of Lake Elmo, Minnesota  
(Washington County)

September 23, 2011  
(Autumnal Equinox)

Compiled by Judith (Moris) Blackford, Member  
City of Lake Elmo Parks Commission





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ATTACHMENTS



- Attachment A—1974 Park Bond Fact Packet
- Attachment B—Biking Ban Ordinance Fact Packet
- Attachment C—Water Tower/Maintenance Facility Stoppage
- Attachment D—Minnesota Land Trust
- Attachment E—Guest Column on Sunfish Lake Park's Wild Treasures by Judith Blackford Published in The Lake Elmo Leader



Get to Know the Author—Judith (Moris) Blackford

### Sunfish—the Beginning

In 1974, the City of Lake Elmo Village Council, Planning Commission, and Park Advisory Board distributed a fact packet (Attachment A) to residents of the City describing a proposed \$725,000 (equivalent to perhaps \$5,000,000 today) Park Bond Budget. The elected and appointed City officials were proposing and seeking community financial support to purchase and preserve undeveloped farmland and private open space for City park use.

The Lake Elmo Park Advisory Board members finding this parkland and working with landowners were Don Dau, David Morgan, Jess Mottaz, Mike Johnson, Ruthmary Logue, Ed Nielsen, and Diane Trudeau. Others mentioned in this fact packet were the City of Lake Elmo Village Council—Mayor Maynard Eder, Councilmen (Robert) Bruce Abercrombie, Calvin Brookman, Lloyd Shervheim, and Francis Pott, and William Lundquist, Chair of the Planning/Zoning Commission. The Parks proposed and purchased through the passage of this Park Bond were Sunfish Lake Park, Demontreville Park, Reid Park, and Tablyn Park.

Most of the land selected for purchase had not been farmed and was not tillable due to woods, steep slopes and wetlands. The largest area of contiguous land was Sunfish Lake Park. At the time, some of the most desirable land was being considered for early housing development by Orrin Thompson Homes. The City packet mentions this as being a strong impetus to pass the bond before these potential park lands were lost forever.

This land purchased by the City for park use was sold at a substantial discount below the assessed valuations. The threat of seizing the lands by eminent domain was expressed by the City. Farm couples expressed their desires for preserving the land and for desired park usages (Appendix C). The bond issue presented to the taxpayers listed preservation of natural wilderness, hiking trails, nature areas, and cross-country skiing for Sunfish Park's woods. By selling the lands which became Sunfish Lake Park at a discounted cost to the City of Lake Elmo for its citizens, landowners Lehart and Frances Friedrich, Mervin and May Nippoldt, William (Percy) Collopy, Everett and Evelyn Beaubien, William Sander, and Edward and Laverne Whitman lost opportunities for greater/later private-party offers. The sacrifice and generosity of all landowners was highly valued and contributed to the passage of the 1974 Park Bond Referendum.



Joseph and Charlotte Moris, Jr. were another farm couple presented with the City's interest in purchasing a contiguous northern section of woods of the current Sunfish woods. In 1973, Michael J. Scanlan with the MN Chapter of The Nature Conservancy performed an inspection and report (Attachment B) of their woods, compiling an extensive catalogue of the flora and fauna. The report called these woods the best upland forest in the County with species of red maple, wild lily-of-the valley, bracken, and pyrola. Mr. Scanlan classified the soils as Edith sand and the topography as irregular. His report stated that the Moris family had preserved the land to date, and because of the irregularity of the topography and vulnerable sand, it should not be allowed that it be sold for parkland, but kept and used for only very occasional observation. In a May 21, 1990, report/catalogue (Attachment B) of this Moris contiguous woods, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) called it a high-quality, native forest, with recorded sightings of Blanding's turtles and a Red-shouldered hawk in nearby woods, which were probably also in this woods, and therefore in Sunfish.

Fauna/flora sightings—by Judith (Moris) Blackford. My home is within the contiguous woods north of Sunfish. I've studied nature through weekly walks in Sunfish through every season for 30 years. The sightings were in Sunfish and our contiguous woods abutting Sunfish's north border.

Fauna—Sunfish is home/haven to many creatures. Mammals: Deer, Coyote, Red/Gray Fox, Raccoon, Badger, Woodchuck, Muskrat, Northern River Otter, Mink, Weasel, Striped Skunk, Flying/Grey/Fox/Red Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk, Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, Opossum and smaller animals.

Amphibians: Spring Peeper/Wood/Chorus/Leopard/Gray & Green Tree Frog, Tiger Salamander, American Toad, Painted/Snapping Turtle, Garter Snake.

Butterflies: Monarch, Viceroy, Mourning Cloak, Eastern Blue, Red Admiral, Common Sulphur, Cabbage White, Red-Spotted Purple, Common Banded Skipper, Question Mark, Comma, Painted Lady, Meadow Fritillary, Common Wood Nymph, Tiger Swallowtail, and Spicebush Swallowtail. Birds: Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey, Ring-necked Pheasant, Barred/Grey/Screech owls, Red-tailed/Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawks, Pileated/Hairy/Downy/Red-headed/Golden-fronted/Northern Flicker Woodpeckers, Cardinal, Blue Jay, Crow, Eastern Blue Bird, Junco, White/Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Mourning Dove, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Redstart, American Robin, Baltimore Oriole,





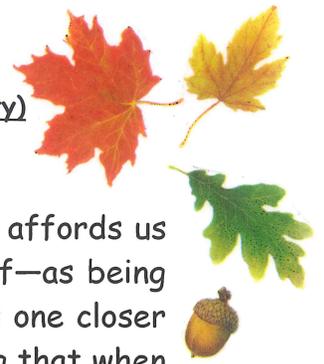
American Goldfinch, Whippoorwill, Red-winged Blackbird, Barn Swallow, Western Meadowlark, Bobolink, Killdeer, Cedar Waxwing, House Wren, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood Pee-wee, Black-capped Chickadee, House Finch, Common Redpoll, Rufous-sided Towhee, Wood Thrush, and many warblers. Water birds: Wood/Bufflehead and Mallard Ducks, Canadian Geese, Loon, Great Egret, Belted Kingfisher, and Great Blue Heron. A pair of Bald Eagles has nested on various shores of Sunfish Lake since 1990.

(In 2009-2011, the following birds, in addition to those I mentioned above, were seen/heard by Linda Kellar, who has led Audubon groups on birding tours in Sunfish Lake Park: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Kingbird, Great-crested/Least/Acadian/Alder Flycatcher, Tree/Barn Swallow, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Swainson's Thrush, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated/Red-eyed/Warbling Vireo, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Brown-headed Cowbird, Dickcissel, Northern Waterthrush, Savannah/Vesper/Chipping/Song/Clay-colored/White-throated/Lincoln's Sparrow, Black and White/Hooded/Yellow-rumped/Palm/Yellow/Chestnut-sided/Tennessee/Bay-breasted Warbler, and Orchard Oriole. A dead Great Horned Owl was also seen.)

Trees/shrubs—Paper Birch, Bur/White/Red Oak, Sugar/Black Maple, Black Cherry, Elm, Mountain Ash, Cottonwood, Cedar, Basswood, Aspen, Poplar, Black Walnut, and American Plum are some trees. Sumac, Bush Honeysuckle, Bayberry, Blackberry, Black Raspberry, Gooseberry, Dogwood, Prickly Ash and Bittersweet are some shrubs. I saw Hazelnut in the 1960's. My family has owned this land since 1958. Buckthorn was brought to America as an ornamental. It is now the most prolific, undesirable invasive in Sunfish's woods and other woodlands. Oak Wilt and Dutch Elm disease have taken many trees. Emerald Ash Borer currently challenges trees.

Flowers/Herbs—Wild Geranium, Blue Flag Iris, Bloodroot, Large-flowered/Sessile-leaved Bellwort, False Wild Lily-of-the-Valley, Interrupted fern (other ferns as well), Greater Solomon's Seal, Common Blue/Yellow Violet, Canada/Wood/Rue Anemone, Wild Bergamot, Western Spiderwort, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Columbine, Hepatica, Wild Blue Phlox, Mullein, Milkweed, Canada Goldenrod, Tufted Vetch, Wild Strawberry and Ginseng. Yellow Lady-slipper, an orchid found growing in the contiguous woods of Sunfish 50 years ago, still grows in contiguous private woodland gardens.





People—Sunfish Lake Park is a critical haven for people. Nature affords us that escape to the wilderness—that tonic that Thoreau spoke of—as being essential to man’s well-being. Communing with a wild deer brings one closer to our original place in nature, and it deeply resonates in our being that when we are in nature we are home. Perfumes of seasonal flowers and autumn stews of fallen leaves are nature’s aromatherapy. The wind whistling through pines, tambourining coins of aspen leaves, and frog, bird, and cricket choruses are nature’s meditative music. A pallet of golden aspen and crimson maples against autumn’s canvas of azure sky is nature’s masterpiece. Skiing or snow-shoeing on new snow under low-hanging, snow-cloaked branches creates an enveloping embrace of quiet, pristine beauty—a forever memory. The laughter of families sledding together carries on the wind to skiers. Introducing a child to nature’s wonders is a priceless gift. Being teacher and classroom, nature inspires orchestral music, paintings, poetry and many scientific inventions. Nature’s sensory and recreational gifts and solitude refresh mind, body and spirit—free, natural, holistic medicine!

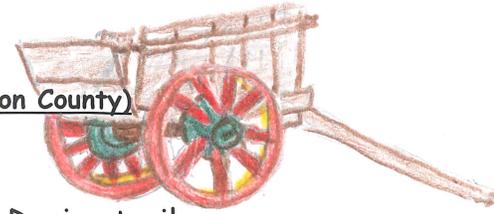
Geology—The glacial history of these lands clearly leaves clues in the sandy/gravelly soils, the ridges and carved hollows, and the area’s glacial lakes/ponds—Sunfish Lake, Berschen’s Pond, Lake Elmo, Lake Jane, Lake Olsen, and Lake Demontreville. Some glacial rocks/boulders left on these lands are quartz, chert, agate, jasper, calcite, basalt, porphyry, rhyolite, granite, gneiss, slate, sandstone, conglomerate, shale, and limestone.



Sunfish—some chronicling of history

May, 1975—The Washington County Bulletin reported the Lake Elmo Park Board planted 5,000 trees in Sunfish Lake Park. They used Ed Nielsen’s Ford tractor. Dave Morgan and Sue Dunn were on the Park Board at this time. Vicki Nielsen provided lunch for this tree planting.

July, 1975—An article appeared in The (Oakdale/Lake Elmo) Review. Steve Kopesky, owner of North Country Inc (a cross- country ski shop) approached the Lake Elmo Park Advisory Committee seeking to lay out trails in Sunfish Lake Park. Mr. Kopesky indicated the design would include laying out trails, blazing/bulldozing them, cleaning out brush, laying straw in areas where there is little ground cover (in the fall), and dragging the trail after each heavy snowfall and spring cleanup for summer use by hikers. A 3M pilot/plane was hired to take the aerial photos, which were used to build the trail system to attract cross country skiers, hikers, and snowshoers.



David Morgan (a Park Commissioner) laid out the trails. During trail design placement, he found an old trail that was either an old settler or old farm wagon trail. It became part of the trail system, and was named Morgan Trail. This historic trail runs along the south border of Sunfish (overlooking City Park Pond). A bench sits along this trail. Steve Kopesky bulldozed trails.

Nov., 1975—The Review reported the Council authorized \$2,000 to rough in a split entry and exit road.

May, 1976—The Washington County Bulletin noted the cost savings to the City through its many volunteer efforts in the City parks. 5,000 trees were planted at Sunfish Park. The park is being developed as a "natural" area for cross country skiing, hiking, picnicking, and snowshoeing. The trees included pines, ash, maples, and walnut.

Feb., 1977—St. Paul Dispatch covered the intent of Lake Elmo to purchase the Washington County Landfill of 110-acres to add to Sunfish Park with the stipulation that the land remain in public use. The article mentions the County's desire to retain access to the property to access monitoring of methane gas and wells. Only 35 acres of this 110-acre parcel were used in the landfill operation. The landfill operated for about six years. Fran Pott, Fire Chief, wanted the land for a fire station, and Parks received the remainder. Fran Pott made this purchase happen!

Original 1978 map showed an expansion of ski trails with the Lake Elmo Jaycees helping brush the trails.

1980—The Valley Branch Watershed District oversaw pumping of Lake Jane (where homeowners' properties were being threatened by high lake levels because these homes had been built below historical high water levels) into Sunfish and into City Park Pond within Sunfish. Many over 100-year-old trees were killed, but many homes/citizens were helped.

The trails that were initially put in were widened at this time by Dan Olinger. Wider trails made winter ski trail grooming easier, but wider trails invited new, not-intended usages like mountain biking. These usages started the erosion, and a series of meetings took place beginning in 1992, which culminated in the ordinance banning mountain biking and similar cycles within Sunfish Lake Park. Restorative measures were undertaken on recommendation from the Soil Erosion Agency to help prevent further erosion, water bars were placed to divert water runoff off of hills, but these have largely been rendered useless because they fill up with organic