



Enjoy the peace of the trail, the music of the birds, the colors of the trees, breathe the crispy air, and be grateful for this treasure in our backyard.

### President's Message



The Friends of McGilvray Road Annual Meeting was held September 15 at Drugan's. It was a great response from members

and a delicious meal shared. The organization remains strong thanks to the hard work of all the volunteers and the financial stability of the donors. Thank you for your ongoing support to enjoy the beauty along McGilvray Road. Paul Napieral, our DNR contact, announced that proposed funds have been approved for getting bids to fix the two major washouts between Bridges 5 and 6. If you have been on the trail lately you have seen the changes making the trail easier and safer for the walkers.



### Autumn's Majesty



Patricia L. Cisco

Sun with his artistic touch,  
streaks skies of blue with rosy blush,  
trimming Oak and Maple too,  
crimson reds with yellow hue.

Birch and Hemlock, purple and gold,  
apples, pumpkins bright and bold,  
burns by day and cools by night,  
cloaking trees in fiery might.

Wispy winds and tumbling leaves,  
cypress scents within the breeze,  
starry eyes and harvest moon,  
sets the stage for crickets' tune.

As spiders spin their tapestry  
and crickets sing in symphony,  
their final song of destiny,  
it's clear for all the world to see,  
Autumn's vibrant majesty!

Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/autumns-majesty>





**WDNR Updates – Fall 2022**  
**Repair of Trail Section Between Bridges 5&6 – Timeline Writeup**  
Background

The project goal was to repair two sections of the McGilvray Road trail that were repeatedly washed out by high water events. Most recently, flooding in 2018 caused significant damage to the trail section between Bridges 5&6. The project proposal called for excavating two washout areas and installing shaped spillways. These two spillways (300 feet total) would be constructed to allow water to pass over them in future flooding events which would limit damage to other sections of the trail. The spillways were designed to be lined with nonwoven geotextile fabric and have rigid geocell matrix installed. The geocell matrix would be filled with 1” crushed gravel. The two project sites would be top dressed with soil and



seeded with a clover/fescue mix. Along with the two spillways, approximately 100 feet of a low-water sandy ford around Bridge 6 would be repaired. The ford would be improved to allow equipment access around Bridge 6 for future trail projects. This trail project was originally proposed in 2014 but due to project alterations it was re-proposed in early 2021. WDNR staffing shortages and approval delays slowed the completion of this project until the fall of 2022.

Late August 2022

WDNR Wildlife Biologist – Paul Napierala was notified the Bridges 5&6 trail section repair project was approved and moving forward. Bids from local contractors were collected with the project goal to have all repair work completed by November 19, 2022.

September 2022

After a handful of workdays, the WNR La Crosse Wildlife Management staff cleared the two-mile-long highway 35 access trail to allow equipment to get to the McGilvray Road trail project sites.



October 2022

Luke Deml with Landcare LLC was the winning bidder for the trail repair project and work commenced on October 10, 2022. To start the project, the Highway 35 access trail was widened and patched up. Once that was completed, the ford improvements around Bridge 6 were completed. This allowed equipment and materials to be easily hauled to the two

project sites on the McGilvray Road trail.

On October 21, 2022, the repair project was completed, and distributed areas seeded down. In total, Landcare LLC spent just over two weeks completing his contract and improving the trail. The improved trail will allow a variety of different public land users to have a better outdoor recreation experience. Additionally, the WDNR now has improved management access to the McGilvray Road trail from Bridge 6 going east which will help with future trail improvement projects.



*The following article was written by Lorraine Hanson (1913-1996), founding member of the Friends of McGilvray Road. Additionally, her husband's family were some of the early pioneers of these bottoms and prairie land area we now call Van Loon Wildlife Preserve, McGilvray Road and Amsterdam Prairie. Historic documents such as this bring to life for today's generation the life style, work ethic and determination of the early settlers of this area.*

## **The Black River Bottoms** by Lorraine Hanson - 1980

In pioneer days over 100 years ago the Black River Bottoms were more or less a free-for all area. The farmers from both sides of the river would pasture cattle there by letting them run free as there were scarcely any fences. The various herds were headed by "bell cows" with a variety of bells and these was the means of identification for the owners.

It was the task of the teenage youngsters of the pioneer farmers to find their respective herds and bring them home in the evening when the weather was pleasant and the herd readily found the task was easy. However, when the weather was stormy with lightning flashing and thunder rolling and darkness coming on and no familiar clanging of the family cow bell to be heard it sometimes caused young hearts to quake with fear. There were times also when the Black River overflowed its banks and the rising water made necessary the fording of creeks and streams, making these sojourns positively dangerous. However, there were no tragic incidents in connection with this feature of pioneer life on the Prairie.

In relating these matters we should mention the old "Ferry Road" which entered the Black River bottomland by way of a gully just south of the present James Anderson farm (formerly Merly Martin Nelson) and terminated about 2 miles west from where the river was crossed by way of the McGilvray ferry. This ferry was named after its operator, Mr. Alex McGilvray, a Scotsman whose home was on the west side of the river or Trempealeau Prairie.



The ferry was the only means of transportation across the river from 1854-1892. Because this was the logging era, the ferry was interrupted from three to seven months of the year by log jams. Because of this inconvenience the two counties began to consider bridges and a turnpike to replace the ferry. Finally in 1892 a steel bridge was built across the main channel on the far west side. The other bridges were wooden. At one time there were ten bridges but over the years these were eliminated. The highway was called McGilvray Road but often referred to as the seven bridges road. La Crosse County built the road and it was many years later that Trempealeau County finally reimbursed La Crosse County for part of the cost of the seventh bridge and the west approach.

Both counties appreciated the convenience of the new turnpike, however, it proved a costly road to maintain, especially in the spring if there was flooding. After the serious flood of 1895, the counties decided all the wooden bridges should be replaced with steel ones. The main bridge (#7) was repaired and between 1905 and 1908 five steel bowstring arch bridges were in place and designed by Charles Horton (La Crosse) and erected by the La Crosse Steel and Bridge Company. In 1910, the only wooden bridge was built a King Post. This was dismantled in 1986. The bowstring bridges and the King Post bridge were entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.



Before the first bridges were built, 75 freeholders from the Town of Holland petitioned the county asking that the turnpike not be a town road. The county consented to making it a county trunk, a decision they regretted many times later. In 1914, the county tried for the third time to revert the McGilvray Road to the sole control of the Town of Holland. However, the town board called a special meeting, hired an attorney and adopted a resolution denying the right of the county to revert the road to the township. So the county of La Crosse was

forced to maintain the road until 1927 when it became a state highway and thereafter known as highway #93. In July of 1940 the state of Wisconsin abandoned the highway and for the next 10 years the Town of Holland maintained the road, hiring L. G. Arnold to dismantle the seventh (main) bridge in 1951, thereby ending its history as a thoroughfare. By this time a new route two miles south was begun and dedicated November 1952, New Highway #93.





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