



*SQUARE LAKE CONSERVANCY
COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN*

ABSTRACT
To protect and preserve the water, forests, habitat, and quietude of Square Lake and its surrounding watershed.

Square Lake Conservancy: Community Action Plan

Presented By:

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President, Square Lake Association

Co-Director, Square Lake Conservancy

July 21, 2023

Our Future's Up to Us.

Protecting Priceless Gems -
Square Lake and Wilder Forest

Confidentiality Statement

This document is shared with you on a confidential basis, as a trusted member of our *Square Lake Conservancy*. It contains confidential and proprietary strategic planning information, and is shared with you on a need-to-know basis. It must not be shared or forwarded to anyone, without advanced email approval from Sarah Godsave, Angie Hong, Angel Samolytz, or Jim Seidl.

Thank you in advance for respecting our request for, and expectation of, *Square Lake Conservancy Community Action Plan* confidentiality.

Table of Contents

Square Lake Conservancy: Community Action Plan	1
Confidentiality Statement	1
Table of Contents	2
Chapter 1 - The Premise: Protect and Preserve	4
A) Current Assessment	4
B) Reference Documents	5
Chapter 2 - Stage Set	6
A) Natural Resource Risk-Profile	6
B) Square Lake Conservancy Mission	6
Chapter 3 - A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words	7
A) Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action	7
B) Wilder Forest Map Interpretation	7
• Map 1 - Wilder Parcel and Buffers	7
• Map 2 - Wilder Parcels and LWLP Prioritization	7
• Map 3 - Wilder Parcels NWI and Buffer	8
• Map 4 - Wilder Parcels Working Land and Corridors	8
Chapter 4 - Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership & Wilder Forest	9
A) MCYP/Damascus Profile	9
B) MCYP Fundraising Flyer	10
C) What Recreation Activities Will Be Provided at the Camp?	12
D) Related Commentary	13
E) Articles referencing MCYP's Extreme Youth Camp Plans	13
F) Wilder Foundation Conditional Use Permits (CUP)	14
G) Wilder Foundation and MCYP CUPs	14
H) May Township Response	14
I) Bill Voedisch Thought Leadership	15
J) MLT & Wilder Forest	15
K) Square Lake Permanent Conservation Easement	16
L) Wilder Foundation History	16
Chapter 5 - Square Lake Conservancy Guiding Principles	17
Chapter 6 - Our Conservancy Goal	18
Chapter 7 - Why You	19
Chapter 8 - The Challenge	20
Chapter 9 - Targeted Community Outcomes	21
Chapter 10 – Action Plan Strategies	22
A) Mission Accomplishment	22
B) Fundraising	22
C) Advocacy	22
D) Strategic Bridge-Building	22
E) Legal Advocacy	22
F) Conservancy Committees	23

G) Square Lake Conservancy Petition	24
H) Minnesota Attorney General Complaint - River Grove Parents	24
Chapter 11 - Here's what you can do today	26
A) Interim Strategy	26
B) Document Library	26
C) Square Lake Conservation Fund	26
D) Presentation Templates	26
E) Volunteers Needed	27
F) Environmental Research	27
Chapter 12 - Taglines & Talking Points	29
Chapter 13 - Quotable Quotes	30
Acknowledgments	36

Chapter 1 - The Premise: *Protect and Preserve*

Square Lake, located in Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota, near the St. Croix River Valley, is a unique 203-acre natural resource, with the best, most pristine, water quality in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Wilder Forest, including East Boot Lake, Mays Lake, Clear Lake, Terrapin Lake, is a unique 600-acre natural resource, recognized as “**one of the largest and most ecologically significant remaining unprotected natural areas in the Twin Cities metropolitan area**”. Wilder Forest and adjacent Warner Nature Center are listed as one of the highest priority locations for permanent land protection in Washington County, including Loon and Blanding turtle nesting sites, both protected species.

Two uniquely pristine and priceless natural resources to be treasured and protected.

The *Square Lake Conservancy Community Action Plan* is intended to provide Square Lake Association members, parents of River Grove School students, and May Township community leaders and residents, with salient information on the stewardship and legal advocacy strategies that the *Square Lake Conservancy* co-directors are advancing in support of Square Lake and Wilder Forest lakes and woodland, conservation stewardship, and natural resource preservation.

A) Current Assessment

- 1) Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership (MCYP) has an active Purchase Agreement with Wilder Foundation for acquisition of the 600- acre Wilder Forest, conditional on CUP and permit approval - according to MCYP President Tim Healy.
- 2) MCYP hopes to develop a year-round camp, managed by Ohio-based Damascus Catholic Mission, including ongoing week-long overnight “Extreme Faith” and “High Adventure” camp experiences for youth – a 4x increase in usage intensity per person compared to use by recently displaced tenant, River Grove School, with over twice as many people: 9x increase overall.
- 3) MCYP’s conditional use permit (CUP) application was returned as incomplete in late 2022.
- 4) The purchase process is proceeding, including recent site inspections, and school lease termination, according to public statements from MCYP.
- 5) MCYP’s undisclosed plan to overcome town objections may involve threatened RLUIPA litigation, according to informed observers.
- 6) MCYP has been clearly told that they cannot develop in and around the lakes of Wilder Forest, but have been convening private meetings to further assess lake access, including Square Lake - as water sports are a key component of their program.
- 7) MCYP has directly stated to SLA members that they have no plans to use Square Lake for their camp’s lake activities. MCYP has also stated to May Township residents that Square Lake would not be their “main venue for lake activities.”
- 8) References to “extreme” youth camp experiences, in prior versions of the Damascus website and promotional literature, have recently been tempered and replaced with “High Adventure” descriptive references.

B) Reference Documents

- 1) See *MCYP Quotes*, dated 12/23/22: [MYCP Quotes, Comments & Contradictions](#).
- 2) See also:
 - a) [Wilder Forest conveys land to Nature Center - 10-03-2014](#)
 - b) [Wilder Forest land, home to River Grove school, to become Catholic summer camp - 09-21-2022](#).
 - c) [Donors identify property near Stillwater for Catholic youth camp - 09-23-2022](#)
 - d) [Wilder foundation land sale leaves uncertain future for Stillwater area elementary school - 10-22-2022](#)
 - e) [May Township moratorium means long-sought Wilder Forest land deal is off table - 11-30-2022](#)
 - f) [Sister leads the way for younger brother - 12-19-2013](#)

Chapter 2 - Stage Set

The Square Lake Association (SLA) is a four-decade old, non-profit, community-based, Board-led, home-owners organization, committed to natural resource preservation, conservation, stewardship, and community collaboration. Our mission is to protect and preserve Square Lake and the surrounding watershed for future generations by working together with homeowners, Lake users, community and government leaders, and Association sponsors. We exist to educate and increase awareness of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and other water clarity threats; conduct and share water science information, research and data; ensure compliance with government rules and regulations impacting Square Lake and surrounding watershed; and advocate and implement conservation best practices. We approach our mission proactively but with ongoing care, commitment, respect, and kindness.

The *Square Lake Conservancy* is a committed, community-based group of conservation stewards, committed to Square Lake and Wilder Forest natural resource preservation.

As beneficial lake and woodland users, we owe it to future generations to *protect and preserve* Square Lake and Wilder Forest's pristine natural beauty, clarity, and balance.

A) Natural Resource Risk-Profile

The natural character of the Town of May and the government of the Town of May are seriously threatened by MCYP's pending acquisition of Wilder Forest, and stated plans for a year-round Youth Camp.

See Mary Divine's 11/29/22 article: [Debate continues over future of proposed Catholic youth camp on Wilder Forest land.](#)

B) *Square Lake Conservancy* Mission

To advocate for a better, community-supported, conservation-centric, outcome for Wilder Forest including optimal natural resource protection for Square Lake, and Wilder Forest's East Boot Lake, Mays Lake, Clear Lake, Terrapin Lake, and its surrounding watershed – recognized as **one of the largest and most ecologically significant remaining unprotected natural areas in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.**

Chapter 3 - A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

Please take flight, and prepare to be dazzled:

A) Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action

One of the initial deliverables of our *Conservancy* collaboration is a *Call to Action* PowerPoint that River Grove School parent, and Washington Conservation District Water Education Senior Specialist [Angie Hong](#), and I recently completed, that will be used to advance *Conservancy* community education, awareness, and fund-raising.

Angie and I are pleased to share the resulting *Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action*, dated 6/30. To open and enter, please click this link: [Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action - Narration](#).

Then simply click the audio button at top left of the opening screen, and slide the button on the right side of the screen to advance the presentation.

Here are two additional versions, just in case they are needed for future presentations. The first with no music or narration, and the second with music only. Content within each is the same:

- 1) [Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action](#)
- 2) [Square Lake Conservancy Call to Action - Music](#)
- 3) [Wilder Forest Lakes Video](#)

SLA legal counsel has reviewed and approved our *Call to Action* presentation launch, which will be described in further detail in upcoming updates, to include media, May Township, strategic allies, and community outreach.

Commendations to Angie Hong for her artistry in creating this masterful presentation, and to Rande Knapmiller for filming and editing the beautifully orchestrated drone video!

B) Wilder Forest Map Interpretation

- [Map 1 - Wilder Parcel and Buffers](#)

The first map shows all Wilder-owned parcels, with a 300 ft buffer drawn in around all of the lakes. To be most protective of the lakes, there should be no development, vegetation clearing, trail making, or similar impacts within these buffer areas.

- [Map 2 - Wilder Parcels and LWLP Prioritization](#)

The second map is additionally shaded to show high quality natural resources that should ideally be protected from impacts as well. As you'll note, once the buffers and priority natural areas are

both accounted for, there are only a couple of places where new development or activities could happen - within the current footprint of River Grove School campus, along the entry roadway to RGS/Big River Farms, and on the farmlands to the north and east.

- [Map 3 - Wilder Parcels NWI and Buffer](#)

The third map shows wetlands.

- [Map 4 - Wilder Parcels Working Land and Corridors](#)

The fourth map takes into consideration high quality farmland that would ideally be maintained for food production into the long-term future. If the Township likes the idea of supporting local food and farmers, and planning ahead for food security in the case of war/natural disasters, placing this parcel in some form of an easement should be considered.

Chapter 4 - Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership & Wilder Forest

According to Damascus' co-founder and executive director Dan DeMatte,

“The goal is to buy about 200 acres on a usable lake this year within a two-hour drive of the Twin Cities and build a 25,000-square-foot lodge that holds 1,000 people, cabins for 350-400 people and a retreat center...The facility would allow year-round parish and archdiocesan retreats, and activities for schools, such as environmental learning and science retreats.”

The facility will be named the Minnesota Damascus Catholic Mission Campus. Extreme Faith Camp will become Catholic Youth Summer Camp.

John O’Sullivan, youth minister at St. Michael in St. Michael, founded Extreme Faith Camp 20 years ago as a week-long summer camp experience for Catholic middle school students. It is not a formal organization, but rather a parish-run collaborative camp organized by O’Sullivan and several other parish youth ministers as part of their youth ministry responsibilities.

Extreme Faith and Damascus summer camps are similar in many ways, O’Sullivan has said, from being sacramentally focused to using high adventure activities such as high rope courses and zip lines. Other activities range from entertainment to daily Mass, confession and eucharistic adoration.”

[Extreme Faith Camp part of extremely big plans - 05-20-2021](#) – *The Catholic Spirit*.

A) MCYP/Damascus Profile

MCYP is a newly formed non-profit commercial business organization. Ohio-based Damascus will be MCYP’s operations manager at Wilder Forest, under an as yet undisclosed operating agreement.

MCYP leadership, advisors, and supporting network, include.

- 1) Tim Healy: [Tim Healy's LinkedIn](#)
- 2) Helen Healy: [Sister leads the way for younger brother](#)
- 3) Bishop Andrew Cozzens (Helen Healy’s brother): [Andrew Cozzens](#)
- 4) Pat Regan: [Star Tribune Article Owner of MN School Bus Company](#) and [Premier Banks Board of Directors](#)
- 5) [Damascus Catholic Mission](#)
- 6) [Net Ministries](#)

All MCYP communications obtained by River Grove School parents and SLA Board members over the past year, consistently indicate that the envisioned MCYP Camp activities and lakes’ usage will be modeled after the Damascus Extreme (now High Adventure) Faith Camps, including their prior Trout Lake Camp (two summers ago) in northern Minnesota. Examples of the operational nature of these Extreme Camps are highlighted and further described in the text, video, and photo presentations viewable via the following links:

- 1) [Extreme Faith Camp](#)
- 2) [Trout Lake Camps](#)
- 3) [Catholic Youth Summer Camp](#)
- 4) [High Adventure Camp Activities](#)

B) MCYP Fundraising Flyer

Here is the link to a new MCYP flyer, recently sourced: [MCYP Fundraising Flyer - 6-20-23](#).

The website where the flyer was found indicates the pamphlet was published to the site about a month ago. We're speculating that July may be MCYP's media consultant's campaign launch, and that they've been waiting for River Grove School to move before beginning their fundraising campaign.

It's also very telling as to what MCYP's emerging strategy is. Interesting that they use "preserve and protect" along with many other conservation terms. Their apparent plan to purchase, renovate and operate under the existing Wilder CUP seems to be gaining momentum.

In response, former State Legislator, and current Director of McVay Youth Partnership at Hamline University, [Jane Krentz](#) submitted two letters to the May Township Board of Supervisors on June 30, and July 5, attached below for reference.

We were informed that the Town Board was unaware of the MCYP Fundraising flyer, prior to receiving Jane's letter.

There was no July 6 agenda notice for the Town Board to address Jane's request for guidance. However, as we've learned in the past, comments and questions that are not scheduled for discussion are sometimes raised impromptu at the meeting, and that's what happened. Feedback from meeting attendees included the following:

"There was a brief discussion (unplanned) at our last meeting and a board member simply noted that an email had been received."

"The only response they [the Township] plan is to prepare an information letter that gives the current status of the Wilder property sale that they will send to anyone that inquires."

We understand the Country Messenger has requested a copy of Jane's two letters, which follow:

From: Jane Krentz <jane.krentz@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 5, 2023 2:28 PM
To: Bobbi Hummel <bobbi@townofmay.org>
Cc: baymoon31@gmail.com; john pazlar <johnpazlar.townofmay@gmail.com>;
nsparks@nacplanning.com; drolf@townofmay.org; david@johnsonturner.com
Subject: Deeply concerned about MCYP Fundraising Appeal

Hello, Bobbi,

In response to your earlier question, I've been informed that this is the website from which we sourced the MCYP Fundraising flyer: <https://www.calameo.com/read/00739532844278cff9fe3>.

We found it on 6/20/23 with a simple google search for "Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership." You can view it in full screen mode on the website for clearer viewing. There is no download option unfortunately but we did grab screenshots and created a PDF. It's not totally clear but better than the small screen. The document is linked here for your convenience: [MCYP Fundraising Flyer - 6-20-23](#).

The website indicated the pamphlet was published to the site 13 days prior to 6/20, on approximately 6/7.

As stated in my original email, those of us who have read the flyer are increasingly concerned that MCYP is proceeding as if their CUP and building permit applications have been - or will be – approved by the Township, under the misguided assumption that the 1992 and 2017 Wilder CUPs will protect them from filing a new CUP, and building permits, all of which we know is inaccurate.

To be raising money in our community and beyond on these misguided and factually incorrect assumptions is clearly wrong, and must be stopped.

Thanks in advance for informing Township residents of when and how the Town Board of Supervisors plans to address our concerns, and what we as a community can do in response before it's too late.

Respectfully,

Jane Krentz
612-581-6978
janeKrentz@gmail.com

From: Jane Krentz <janeKrentz@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 30, 2023 10:25 AM
To: bobbi@townofmay.org; john pazlar <johnpazlar.townofmay@gmail.com>; baymoon31@gmail.com; drolf@townofmay.org
Cc: david@johnsonturner.com; nsparks@nacplanning.com
Subject: Deeply concerned about MCYP Fundraising Appeal

Dear Town Board members Pazlar, Magner and Rolf,

I am writing because I was horrified to recently learn of a new fundraising effort by MCYP premised on the development of a mega-camp on the Wilder site. This is the **WRONG** plan for this pristine location. It flies in the face of the key May Township Comprehensive Plan provision: *"The Conservancy District is established for the purpose of providing for the preservation, protection and management of environmentally sensitive lands."*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60abde2e92ddb4336093a415/t/6494aad2a758317b925dbb16/1687464659517/MCYP+Fundraising+Flyer+-+6-20-23.pdf>

I don't have an insider's perspective on the status of the purchase agreement, but I understand the agreement hasn't been finalized yet. In light of this blatant fundraising blitz based on developing a camp that clearly doesn't fit the use of the land as protected by the conservancy zone, I would appreciate hearing how the Board was planning to respond to the plans described in the fundraising flyer. Will this be on the agenda at the supervisor's meeting next week?

I have lived on Square Lake and raised my family here for over 4 decades. I deeply appreciate the commitment of the May Town Board over the years to maintain the rural nature of May Township, and to preserve and protect the natural beauty of the land and water. Your vision to create the conservancy zone is consistent with values I hold dear. My father always loved the quote "A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.". Caring for future generations and protecting our

environment are more important now than ever, as our resources are being depleted and, once destroyed, can never be restored to their original nature.

I wrote to the Town Board last fall when I learned that the MCYP was planning to purchase land from Wilder for a purpose that is **completely incongruent** with the conservancy zone that was created well before MCYP approached Wilder. I attended and spoke at the relevant hearings of the Planning Commission as well as the subsequent Board meetings.

Please understand. I do not oppose church camps in general. I attended church camp when I was young. I have many amazing memories of those experiences. However, our camps were simple...we slept in tents, swam in the lake, went canoeing and enjoyed roasting marshmallows over a campfire. My experience didn't remotely approach the scope of the proposed MCYP activities. Our group size was usually about 25-40 youth, not the 250-500 youth - or more - per week that MCYP has projected it will need for its commercial enterprise.

Please let me know what I can do to be supportive of your efforts to keep Square Lake, and the lakes of Wilder Forest, pristine, quiet, preserved, and protected.

Thank you for your service to the community.

Sincerely,
Jane Krentz - 612-581-6978

C) What Recreation Activities Will Be Provided at the Camp?

From the CYCS website: <https://cysc.com/about/camp-life/land-air-water/>

Land Adventure

Paintball

Our immersive woods course creates moments of intense paintball competition for groups of up to 50 at one time!

Archery Tag

It's like dodgeball. And paintball. And archery. Smashed together.

Ultimate Capture the Flag

Wear your team colors proudly as you fight for paint and glory.

Air Adventure

High Ropes

Our massive ropes course can accommodate up to 45 campers at once.

Giant Swings

We are serious about these swings...

Vertical Playpen

An amazing spider web meets a climbing wall in this ropes and ladders version of a climbing tower.

Climbing Wall

A 48-foot, State of the art – “real rock” feel climbing wall. The wall features four tiers of difficulty.

Water Adventure

The Blobs

You jump without a care in the world from our divine mercy tower onto an inflatable pillow. And launch the unsuspecting camper at the other end skyward!

Dual Zip Lines

Race to the finish along two side-by-side 1000 ft ziplines, skimming the surface of the beautiful Lake Joy.

Beach, Boating, Ga-ga ball, Fishing, and More

Lasting friendships and community are formed in challenging and engaging environments

D) Related Commentary

Lake-centric youth activities are a central component of MCYP's Extreme Camp plans - on the Wilder Forest lakes, and on Square Lake - despite what MCYP's Tim Healy has stated.

River Grove School's Executive Director Drew Goodson shared an email from a River Grove School board member, dated March 16, 2023, referencing recent feedback that MCYP's Tim Healy received from Mike Isensee, of the [Carnelian Marine on St Croix Watershed District](#).

"I just got done with a meeting with Mike Isensee from the Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District (CMSCWD) and learned that MCYP has been meeting with local leaders from the watershed district, county, and DNR in regards to their future plans for the Wilder Forest property. Tim Healy shared their prospective plans for use of and alterations to Mays and Clear Lakes. Mike informed him that most, if not all, proposed activities would be prohibited by state and county shoreland rules and noted that the two lakes are categorized under the highest level of protection, with 800-ft set-back requirements for vegetation clearing and construction. It appears, however, that Tim also had a group meeting with members of the CMSCWD board and other local community leaders that Mike was not in attendance at. Mike has proposed a follow-up meeting with the appropriate administrative staff people from the watershed district, county, and DNR and hopes to convey the rules and protections in place for the property. "

As stated by Drew Goodson, *"I feel this will push them back to Square Lake, despite Mr. Healy's current story, and as Jessica Hansen [River Grove Board Chair] will tell you, water activities are still key components of their plan."*

Despite Tim Healy's prior statements, there does not appear to be any new or emerging plan for MCYP to submit a new CUP, after their first CUP was returned by the Township in late 2022 as incomplete. MCYP appears to be confident that the prior Wilder CUPs, that apparently run with the land, are sufficient for MCYP's planned Extreme Camp activities, traffic, construction, etc.

We do not know, at this time, how MCYP expects to circumvent the Township's Conservation District authority, other than their threat of RLUIPA litigation. The [Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act \(RLUIPA\)](#) is a federal law that, among other things, protects religious institutions from unduly burdensome or discriminatory land use regulations.

Mr. Healy is now informing selected constituencies that MCYP will need to use all 600 acres of Wilder Forest for their Extreme Camp's activities because of "expected noise concerns". Previously, Mr. Healy stated to SLA executive leadership on 11/3/22 that they intend to utilize "11 to 12% of the entire property" - another example of MCYP's continuously changing story-line since hiring a public relations consultant.

E) Articles referencing MCYP's Extreme Youth Camp Plans

- 1) [Extreme Faith Camp Part of Extremely Big Plans.](#)
- 2) [Wilder Forest land, home to River Grove school, to become Catholic summer camp.](#)

- 3) [Catholic Youth Summer Camp 3 Years Ago](#). A video sourced from the Catholic Youth Partnership Facebook page, promoting their youth camps, and focusing on extreme recreational activities in the forests and lakes where they host their camps.

F) Wilder Foundation Conditional Use Permits (CUP)

Wilder Foundation's Open Letter dated September 28, 2022, addressing the timing of the respective offers received for Wilder Forest:

[An Open Letter Regarding the Proposed Sale of Property in Marine on St. Croix](#)

For background, see Mary Divine's September 27, 2022 article:

[An Open Letter Regarding the Proposed Sale of Property in Marine on St. Croix](#)

In this article, Wilder notes the deal will close in 9 to 12 months. Wilder Board Chairwoman Judy Kishel states "*Should our efforts with Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership not result in a successful closing, we would be open to discussions with Manitou Fund and others who may be interested in purchasing the property...*"

G) Wilder Foundation and MCYP CUPs

For further background on the 1992-93 and 2017 Wilder CUP, May Township Board meeting minutes - from 1992, 1993, and 2017 - are linked here for reference: [May Township Agendas/Minutes](#)

A careful review of the 1992/2017 Wilder CUPs reveals that they will have minimal leverageable value to a new purchaser of Wilder Forest, as any change in usage from Wilder's Master Plan will require CUP amendment and subsequent Township approval, which will be aggressively contested by our *Conservancy*, and supportive conservationists. For reference: [Wilder Forest CUPs - 1992 and 2017](#).

See also: [CUP Application MN Catholic Youth Partnership](#).

MCYP/Wilder Foundation apparently have a different impression.

H) May Township Response

In advance of the May Township Board of Supervisors hearing on 11/29/22, the following presentations were made:

- 1) Adversarial letter from Wilder's legal counsel critical of May Township's appropriately transparent and professional planning process: ([Taft Letter](#))
- 2) Response from SLA's counsel that confirms the Town's rightful control of land usage in the town: ([Stinson Letter](#))
- 3) Proposed land use by the buyer that is wholly incompatible with the character of the area and the requirements of Conservancy District lands: Chisago County Press ([Sunrise Lake site of retreat camp plan](#)).
- 4) Square Lake Association's conservation mission, presented in the attached letter to the Township Board, dated 11/28/22 ([Letter to Board 11/28/22](#)).

Square Lake Association's strategic objectives at the 11/29/22 Town Board meeting were successfully achieved - to delete "youth camps" and "overnight stays" from the Conservancy District provision in the new May Township Comprehensive Plan. However, the battle is not yet over. See: [Purchase of Wilder Forest land offers "one of a kind opportunity" for land conservation.](#)

I) Bill Voedisch Thought Leadership

Selected commentary from former, multi-decade, May Township Board of Supervisors Chair, Bill Voedisch - a champion of River Grove School - and strongly opposed to the Wilder Forest sale to MCYP, as expounded in the following opinion pieces:

- 1) 5/7/23:
[Will an overnight youth camp violate May Township's conservancy ordinance?](#)
- 2) 12/4/22:
[Marine resident weigh in on situation at Wilder Forest](#)
- 3) 11/15/22:
[Why the Planner's proposed Conservancy Zone ordinance language should not be used.](#)
- 4) 11/6/22:
[Loss of another school](#)
- 5) 10/27/22:
[MEGA-camp at Wilder is wrong for May Township. Wilder's neighbors and Conservancy Zone.](#)
- 6) Publication Date TBD:

Bill has prepared a new Opinion Letter to be published by the *County Messenger*. Here's a pre-publication draft for your review: [Bill Voedisch Opinion Letter – June 20, 2023.](#)

According to Bill, the next iteration of the MCYP CUP application must be evaluated on the basis of:

- 1) The following key May Township Comprehensive Plan provision: *"The Conservancy District is established for the purpose of providing for the preservation, protection and management of environmentally sensitive lands.*
- 2) The past seven CUP applications in the Conservancy District that have been evaluated against this language; it was because of the low impact of those operations that past Town Boards approved those applications; and that despite receiving CUP approvals, no approved CUP applicant ever built anything impactful to the environment.
- 3) MCYP's plan - if their CUP is approved and issued – is to impact the Wilder lands with a major development project, constituting in a short period of time, the largest single construction project in May Township history. See Bill's 11/15/22 letter linked above for further expansion of his "environmental impact" argument.

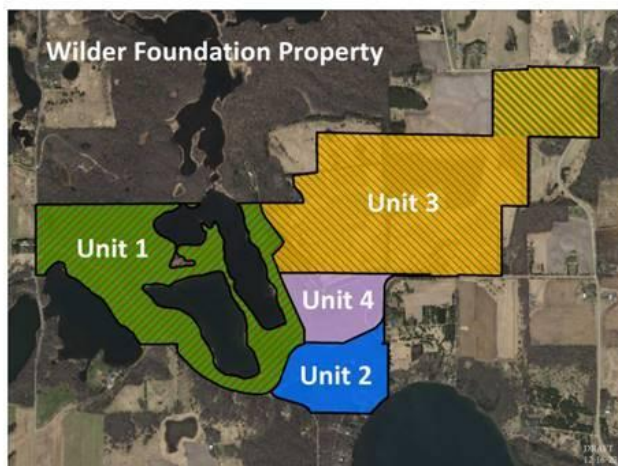
J) MLT & Wilder Forest

Minnesota Land Trust's Wayne Ostlie: [Minnesota Land Trust Staff Directory](#) has kindly informed our SLA Board of the following:

- 1) MLT has participated in three prior attempts to acquire Wilder Forest. The first with Manitou Fund, and Washington County, in 2018 - that envisioned a combining of Warner Nature Center and Wilder Forest, in which the Permanent Conservation Easement (PCE) component was advanced to 98% completion, before unidentified factors caused the parties to withdraw their offer. The second with Manitou Fund and Washington County in 2019. And most recently, the Science Museum, and Washington County, in 2021. We know from public news articles the reason the Science Museum walked-away from their deal table in 2021-22, was the regrettably timed May Township Comprehensive Plan-related moratorium coupled with Wilder's decision not to renew their Letter of Intent with the three parties.
- 2) The prior unsuccessful Permanent Conservation Easement efforts in which Washington County was involved, were designed with Wilder acreage generally apportioned as follows: MLT's focus was on the lakes and forest acreage to the west of the Wilder campus buildings, and Washington County's (WC) focus was on the agricultural acreage to the east and lands adjacent to Square Lake. MLT does not have funding to acquire an easement over agricultural lands; Washington County's funding enabled them to step into protection of these lands. The sunsetting of development and ag rights are often the biggest drivers of easement value.
- 3) Wilder Foundation's most recent appraisal for Wilder Forest came in at \$10.9M, according to multiple sources, which elicited the \$11M Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership (MCYP) offer that was accepted by Wilder. The appraisal MLT commissioned in July, 2018 elicited an appraised valuation of \$6.5M, which further highlights the exponential growth in lake and forest property values in May Township over the past 4 years. We've sourced other examples of 30 to 50% increases in lake and forest property valuation appraisals in May Township, that further support the dramatic 4-year Wilder Forest valuation increase.

K) Square Lake Permanent Conservation Easement

As highlighted in the graphic below, the Unit 2 parcel of Wilder Forest, located on the northwest corner of Square Lake is approximately 55 acres in size. Our *Square Lake Conservancy* is highly motivated to work with MLT and the future owner of Wilder Forest to create a Unit 2 PCE.



L) Wilder Foundation History

Thanks to Angie Hong's research, the following historical overview of Wilder Foundation is shared, in the hope of gaining a better collective understanding of the Foundation's past, present and future: [Toward a Critical History: Wilder Foundation - 1/2020](#).

Chapter 5 - *Square Lake Conservancy* Guiding Principles

Proponents of the camp are proposing a place where underprivileged kids from an urban environment can escape their day-to-day reality, and enjoy the educational and restorative benefits of time in the woods and lakes communing with nature.

These, as such, are not nefarious objectives.

The overall intent of the folks proposing to use Wilder Forest for a large youth camp is conceptually a good one.

The issue here is not the threat of “outsiders” attempting to ruin God's creation with no justification or rational purpose, but rather a narrower but very important question of whether such an undertaking must threaten one of the most pristine and unspoiled areas remaining in the metropolitan area.

The inherent, but solvable problem lies with the proposed location, not the idea of getting disadvantaged youth out into the natural world.

The Damascus youth camp experience is not free. This is a commercial enterprise. In 2022, the cost of the High Adventure experience ranged from \$520 to \$570 per child per week, in multiple camps across the country.

Key question: What would be a good resolution that would allow the various interested parties to achieve or at least approach their goals? Is there a preferable alternative - one that is preferable, not just because it is not intrusive to the concerned homeowners?

For example, Mike Isensee of CMSCWD recently said that Dunrovin Christian Brothers Retreat in Marine on St. Croix has been struggling financially for years. He thought that Tim Healy should have considered approaching them about buying the property (<https://www.dunrovin.org>.)

The proposed Wilder Forest camp as proposed by its supporters is not nefarious. The instinct of the "big camp" people to help the kids is positive, not negative.

It's their choice of venue that is unfortunate and questionable. The proposed location in a pristine area is a poor use of resources. Alternatives must be sought.

Hopefully, we can all do something to change that.

Chapter 6 - Our *Conservancy* Goal

Educate, engage, and then seek commitment from relevant community members and stakeholders to ensure the preservation, protection, and unique value of the Square Lake and Wilder Forest ecological jewels.

“Community” comprises Square Lake Association (SLA) membership, May Township and Washington County government leaders, River Grove School children, parents, and other neighbors, and the visiting public.

Chapter 7 - Why You

As a resident or stakeholder familiar with the great and many benefits, and unique value, of Square Lake and its surrounding environment – including Wilder Forest and Warner Nature Center - you likely have a very personal and financial connection to this extraordinary natural asset. You're therefore encouraged to lend your support to our efforts to *protect and preserve*.

Chapter 8 - The Challenge

While Square Lake is neither square, rectangular, nor oval, it's a 203-acre exception to the over-used, overrun majority of Minnesota lakes that have been invaded by dangerous, unwanted pollutants and aquatic invasive species that inevitably follow in the wake of careless, unprotected over-users.

Without proactive, focused attention and action, these highly aggressive alien trespassers can rapidly transform pristine lakes into unattractive, inhospitable and dangerous swamp-like environments.

While Wilder Forest is neither wild nor a public park, it's a 600-acre preserve of pristine lakes, woodland, agriculture, and habitat, that contains undeveloped land and lakes in "pre-settlement condition".

Protecting and retaining the fragile balance of nature in the Square Lake and Wilder Forest ecosystem is our collective environmental *Conservancy* challenge.

Chapter 9 - Targeted Community Outcomes

The community outcomes that our *Conservancy* is pursuing, include:

- 1) **For Wilder Foundation:** A community-supported, conservation-centric, Conservation District compliant, River Grove School-supporting purchaser who meets Wilder Foundation's financial objectives for the sale.
- 2) **For River Grove School:** Relocation of the elementary school to the adjacent Warner Nature Center, within the next two years after planned building construction is completed; and coverage of construction and septic system costs for the new River Grove facility at the new site.
- 3) **For Square Lake Association:** Permanent Conservation Easement for the 55 acres of Wilder Forest adjacent to Square Lake – a key desired outcome for SLA.
- 4) **For May Township:** Unanimous community support. An end to the controversy. Conservation - instead of a youth entertainment camp that could be sited elsewhere – taking community priority and precedence.
- 5) **For the Lakes, Forest, and Wildlife:** Permanent protection and preservation of Wilder Forest, in its current pristine state - including optimal natural resource protection for Square Lake, East Boot Lake, Mays Lake, Clear Lake, Terrapin Lake, Wilder Forest, its surrounding watershed and agricultural land.

Chapter 10 – Action Plan Strategies

The *Conservancy's* Community Action Plan includes the following multi-party strategies:

A) Mission Accomplishment

To achieve the mission of our *Square Lake Conservancy (Conservancy)* – by inspiring volunteerism, raising awareness, advancing education and thought leadership, and calling for appropriate actions and decisions.

B) Fundraising

To invest in our collective future by donating to the *Square Lake Conservation Fund*, at: [Square Lake Conservation Go Fund Me](#).

- 1) To advise the community on legal options and applicable law.
- 2) To develop strategies to protect our community and Township from incompatible ambitions of property developers who benefit from Township resources, while residing and paying taxes elsewhere.
- 3) To ensure that our stewardship efforts are appropriate and legally sound.

C) Advocacy

To engage with the Township government - clearly and constructively expressing our opposition to development in the Conservancy District - including Wilder Forest – in ways that will negatively impact the character of May Township, contrary to our recently updated Comprehensive Plan, including:

- 1) Letter writing to Board of Supervisor and Planning Commission members.
- 2) By attending and actively engaging at Board of Supervisor and Planning Commission meetings.

D) Strategic Bridge-Building

To further strengthen SLA strategic partnering bridges with Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates (MLR) at <http://www.mnlakesandrivers.org/>; Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) at <https://www.maisrc.umn.edu/>; Washington County; Minnesota DNR; Washington Conservation District (MNWCD) at www.mnwcd.org; and Carnelian Marine on St Croix Watershed District (CMSCWD) at www.cmscwd.org.

E) Legal Advocacy

The legal strategies that our *Conservancy* is advancing to *protect and preserve* Square Lake and Wilder Forest natural resources, and the surrounding watershed, include:

Environmental Impact. Development and presentation of legal and scientific arguments describing the negative impact of the potential MCYP sale to the environment.

Before & After Usage. Compilation and presentation of comparative facts and metrics that define the difference between proposed MCYP CUP use, and prior River Grove School use, including traffic, infrastructure, building plans, operations, recreational versus educational use; commercial versus non-profit enterprise issues; retreat use; etc.

1992 and 2017 Wilder CUP Assessment. How large, and under what sizing and activity specifications, could an overnight residential camp operation in a May Township Conservancy District be permitted, under the existing Wilder CUP?

Property Valuation Impact. Research, analysis, and presentation of real estate-based assessments and arguments underscoring the impact of the sale on Square Lake property valuations.

F) Conservancy Committees

Thanks to those among us who've invested significant time and talents to actively participate in our *Conservancy's* path forward planning. Others who've expressed interest are encouraged to join one or more of the following Committees:

- 1) **Promotional Design:** Co-led by Sarah, Angie, and Angel, for flyers, PowerPoint presentations, website graphics, signage, and social media outreach – including drafting creative messaging sound-bites and talking points.
- 2) **Environmental Impact Research:** Led by Lynn, to further prepare SLA's legal counsel for environmental impact advocacy, in advance of MCYP's permit and/or CUP applications with May Township. To further inform you of ongoing SLA *Wilder Lakes Environmental Impact Research*, here's a confidential overview of work-in-progress prepared by SLA Officer Lynn Mecum: [Wilder Lakes Environmental Research – 12/20/22 to 5/3/23](#)
- 3) **Community Outreach:** Co-led by Jane, Alicia, Sarah, and Angel, to ensure that SLA and RGS attendance and participation at future Planning Commission and Town Board hearings are active and overwhelming; and to bridge-build with local/regional conservation advocates and thought leaders - and conservation-based civic organizations.
- 4) **Fundraising:** Led by me, to help target conservation-minded philanthropists, and kindred spirit donors, to contribute to our [Square Lake Conservation Fund](#).
- 5) **Website Communications:** Co-led by Matt, Angel, and me, for drafting advocacy blog posts on [RGS' public website](#); and SLA's educational website's *Square Roots Blog*, viewable via the following link and password: URL: www.squarelake.org - and PW: squarelake2021.
- 6) **Media Relations:** Co-led by Bayard, Greg, and me, to source journalists and professional writers to help create and publish *Conservancy* research and thought-leadership stories - to further advance our conservation and natural resource preservation mission; and to help us source donations for our *Square Lake Conservation Fund* from a broader constituency.
- 7) **Board of Supervisors Candidate Search:** Co-led by Ted, John, Alicia, and Mark, to source one or more qualified candidates to run for the next Town Board position opening – to ensure optimal representation of RGS and SLA interests going forward – as we believe MCYP is doing to advance their interests. Whoever we source and select, will receive full campaign support, including fundraising and social media management and outreach.

If anyone listed prefers an alternative role or responsibility, simply email Jim Seidl and the Committee assignments will be adjusted accordingly.

Thanks in advance to Committee leaders and members for your creative thinking and planning. Our collective success depends on the actions we take, and the time we all devote.

G) Square Lake Conservancy Petition

Taxpayer and voter metrics matter, especially in local Township decision-making.

The Conservancy is therefore considering the idea of drafting and distributing a Petition demanding that the Township enforce the spirit and text of the Conservation District regulations, along the following lines - to be refined by the Community Outreach and Promotional Design Committees, if the idea is pursued:

We trust the Township will enforce the following key May Township Comprehensive Plan provision:

"The Conservancy District is established for the purpose of providing for the preservation, protection and management of environmentally sensitive lands."

The past seven CUP applications in the Conservancy District have been evaluated against this language. It was because of the low impact of those operations that past Town Boards approved those applications, and that despite receiving CUP approvals, no approved CUP applicant ever built anything impactful to the environment.

Based upon available public information, MCYP's plan is to impact the Wilder Forest and Square Lake adjacent lands with a major development project, constituting in a short period of time, the largest single construction project in May Township history.

While we have yet to see MCYP's revised CUP, or construction permit applications, Damascus' cofounder and executive director Dan DeMatte, has previously stated, "The goal is to buy about 200 acres on a usable lake this year within a two-hour drive of the Twin Cities and build a 25,000-square-foot lodge that holds 1,000 people, cabins for 350-400 people and a retreat center..." ([Extreme Faith Camp part of extremely big plans - 05-20-2021](#) – The Catholic Spirit)."

We owe it to our kids, future generations of children, and the wildlife that grace us daily - to keep Square Lake, and the lakes of Wilder Forest, pristine, quiet, preserved, and protected.

Therefore, we the undersigned, petition the May Township Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to:

- 1) TBD..."

Once drafted, we would sign it, and recruit volunteers to go door-to-door requesting signatures.

H) Minnesota Attorney General Complaint - River Grove Parents

In late 2022, a number of River Grove School parents reached out to the Minnesota AG's Office about Wilder Foundation's impending decision to not renew River Grove School's lease.

Linked below are examples of a letter sent by a River Grove parent, and a response that another parent received from the AG's office.

[MN Attorney General Letter - Wilder Complaint - 10-31-2022](#)

[MN AG Nonprofit-Charity Complaint Form Attachment 7-13-2022](#)

[State Senator Karin Housley](#) was also contacted by River Grove parents about the pending Wilder Forest sale, and lease termination.

Going forward, *Square Lake Conservancy* Co-Directors are considering a new outreach to Senator Housley, and the AG's Office, possibly with the assistance of former AG's [Lori Swanson](#) and Mike Hatch, for whom we have great respect.

Chapter 11 - Here's what you can do today

A) Interim Strategy

As we await MCYP and Wilder Foundation to submit a new Conditional Use Permit (CUP), and/or construction permit applications:

- 1) Our *Conservancy's* interim strategy is to encourage Wilder to not renew the Purchase Agreement.
- 2) Once the term of the existing Purchase Agreement ends, other "viable purchasers" will be permitted to approach Wilder, at no legal jeopardy.

All parties have been informed that a conservation-centric outcome is of paramount importance to our *Conservancy*, and that Wilder Foundation will obtain full SLA, River Grove School, *Conservancy*, and community support if they exercise the Purchase Agreement option to withdraw from the pending sale.

B) Document Library

We've centralized key legal and scientific research, and advocacy presentations, in a virtual Document Library, for easy online access: [Wilder Document Library](#)

In that folder, a file ([SLA Advocacy Group Document and Link Library.xlsx](#)) provides an index.

We are seeking volunteer assistance to help Ted Nesse manage the Document Library, including:

- 1) Creating an expanded document index – to improve search functionality.
- 2) Sourcing new documents for Library inclusion.
- 3) Cross-checking to ensure all linked documents in this Action Plan are uploaded to the Library.

C) Square Lake Conservation Fund

Your investment today in the future of Square Lake and Wilder Forest, will help ensure for future generations the pristine beauty and water clarity that we've enjoyed for decades as Square Lake homeowners, while preserving the value of property holdings.

Your donation, large or small, via GoFundMe ([Square Lake Conservation Go Fund Me](#)) or check, will help us achieve our Board-led strategic priorities in 2023-24.

Additionally, your referral of prospective donors and benefactors for fundraising outreach (individuals, supportive foundations, environmental organizations), will help us spread targeted costs among a larger universe of contributors.

Our goal at this time is \$85,000.

D) Presentation Templates

Here is our initial collection of presentation templates for *Conservancy* re-purposing:

- 1) Minnesota Land Trust and Washington County's [TFG LCCMR Presentation - 6-25-2019](#).
- 2) SLA's *Protecting Our Gem* PowerPoint: [Protecting Our Gem Square Lake](#).
- 3) SLA's website's <https://www.squarelake.org/photo-gallery>, viewable via the following link and password: URL: www.squarelake.org - and PW: squarelake2021.

Any photo on the SLA website can be repurposed for *SL Conservancy* presentations.

Permission has also been granted to re-use all photos in the two presentations above.

E) Volunteers Needed

Thanks for your continuing support of our volunteer-based *protect & preserve* conservation and natural resource stewardship initiatives - on behalf of Wilder Forest lakes and woodland, River Grove School, and Square Lake.

Here's how you can help us ensure our *Conservancy* outreach and effectiveness are optimized:

- 1) Please declare your interest in helping us achieve our goals.
- 2) Please talk to friends and neighbors about our shared desire to *preserve and protect*.
- 4) Please let us know of any observations, insights, and research you have, to help us continuously improve our Action Plan.
- 5) Join a *Conservancy* Committee.
- 6) Donate to our *Conservation Fund*.
- 7) Attend Planning Commission and Town Board meetings.
- 8) Ask about letter-writing opportunities.

F) Environmental Research

As part of her ongoing environmental research, our friend, SLA Officer, and *Conservancy* member Lynn Mecum has recently sourced three historical Wilder Forest documents from naturalist Dick Oehlenschlager links included with summaries below:

[Camp Wilder Part 1](#): There are 7 categories within this booklet, each prepared by different individuals or organizations. The beginning of the booklet, Biological Resources, was prepared by Dick in 1980.

[Camp Wilder Part II](#): This booklet contains programs, site plans, and services for Camp Wilder. This was a report presented to The Washington County Planning Commission, also prepared by Dick, in 1980.

[The Ferns of Wilder Forest](#): A compilation by Dick of the 13 fern types in Wilder Forest, from 1988.

Dick has kindly approved our copying, scanning, and creating cloud links to the documents, so we can all have access. Dick is also willing to provide lists of the plants (some 400 species), mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies he compiled when he worked at Wilder from 1978 to 1986.

To inform you of ongoing SLA *Wilder Lakes Environmental Impact Research* - and to further prepare SLA's legal counsel for environmental impact advocacy, in advance of MCYP's permit and/or CUP applications with May Township - here's a confidential overview of work-in-progress prepared by SLA Officer Lynn Mecum: [Wilder Lakes Environmental Research – 12/20/22 to 5/3/23](#).

Chapter 12 - Taglines & Talking Points

The Promotional Design Committee is seeking creative taglines and talking points to integrate in signage, presentations, and promotion of our Conservancy mission.

Please send your ideas to Sarah Godsave and Jim Seidl. Please don't be shy. Creative messaging sound-bytes are essential for successful messaging.

Here are some examples, to hopefully turn your creative lights on:

- 1) **Bees, Birds & Bears – Not Buses.**
- 2) **Keep Wilder Forest *Wild*.**
- 3) In Conservation Districts: **Empower Education.** Depower Recreation.
- 4) **Animals, Lakes & Forests Have Inherent, Indefeasible, Generational Legal Rights Too.**
- 5) **May Township Taxpayers: Environmental Learning Yes! Environmental Degradation No!**
- 6) **Protect & Preserve Pristine.**
- 7) **Community Consensus: Education and Ecology in Conservation Districts. Recreation Elsewhere.**

Chapter 13 - Quotable Quotes

Stories, articles, and presentations in support of the Conservancy mission, may use the following attributed quotes:

Jim Seidl, Square Lake Association President & Square Lake Conservancy Co-Founder:

“As a Square Lake property owner since 1988, there is no conservation and natural resource issue of greater importance to me, and the Association I serve, than the long-term preservation and protection of Square Lake and the surrounding watershed, including retaining the pristine natural, undeveloped beauty of Wilder Forest.”

“Following a series of three multi-hour meetings, between Square Lake Association (SLA) and Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership (MYCP), during which time SLA applied best efforts to bridge-build, MCYP leaders repeatedly changed projected camper and traffic counts; refused to specify or share camp-related strategic and business plans; were unwilling to identify board members, business organization details; funding sources; Square Lake beach-front plans and Wilder Forest lake-use plans; did not know what a “Permanent Conservation Easement” is, and why SLA is interested in a PCE for the 55 acres of Wilder bordering Square Lake; and threatened to litigate if anyone gets in their way.”

Bill Voedisch, former May Township Board Chairman:

“We owned land in May in 1983 but did not build until 1988. In about 1985 we attended a board meeting at Withrow School which was packed. The topic was going from a 10-acre density to a 5-acre density. We knew nothing about the Township but we knew this was a terrible idea so we attended, and spoke against the change. The Town Board backed off.

I consider this [the MYCP/Damascus-operated Camp] the biggest threat to the Township in our 34 years of living here.”

“The underlying requirement of the Conservancy Zone is “the protection, preservation and management of environmentally sensitive lands.” Wilder obeyed this as did all of their prior renters: Mn Food Association, Concordia Language Villages, and River Grove School. The Camp will destroy environmentally sensitive lands.”

*“These aren't just environmentally sensitive lands, **these lands and waters that are pristine, what is called “pre-settlement” condition.** What we have with Wilder (and Warner) is a very large piece (600 acres, 1440 if you count Warner) that is unique in the metro area.”*

“All past uses were educational. The mega-Camp is recreational - entertainment ...”

“At [a reported] 500 campers a day, this is well over twice the River Grove student count. The campers are 24-hour users, not 6-hour users, but each camper brings more than 4 times the impact of a River Grove student. They consume 3 meals a day and take a shower. The septic system would need to be mammoth.”

“The school serves 220 students, 75% of whom are from May Township and its surrounding communities. The camp serves no one from our broader community.”

*“All of these [recreational and entertainment] uses show no caring or respect ... for the Township and Wilder's neighbors, who have approved (the Town) and supported (the Town and Wilder's neighbors) Wilder and their renters, **for 66 years.**”*

“These aren't just environmentally sensitive lands, these lands and waters are pristine, what is called “pre-settlement” condition. What we have with Wilder Forest, and Warner Nature Center, is a very large piece (600 acres with Wilder, 1440 with Warner included) that is unique in the metro area.”

“The underlying requirement of the Conservancy Zone is “the protection, preservation and management of environmentally sensitive lands.” Wilder obeyed this as did all of their prior renters, including Minnesota Food Association, Concordia Language Villages, and River Grove School. The Camp will destroy environmentally sensitive lands – including intrusive trails throughout the undeveloped property; fishing, swimming, boating; tree-line jumping, activities on and around the pristine, undisturbed lakes; increased gravel road traffic and congestion; and 24-hour per-day Camp users seeking play and entertainment.”

“It's time for Wilder to do the right thing and sell their land to the Manitou Fund. River Grove School will be preserved and the lands and waters protected, long into the future.”

Anne Bancroft, Conservationist:

[Polar explorer Ann Bancroft protects St. Croix Valley property](#)

“One of the easiest decisions I've ever made was to put this land in a conservation easement to conserve it forever so that future generations can benefit. It would be a tragedy if this land were developed. I hope this inspires other Minnesotans to do this with their property. I couldn't have done this alone. It was wonderful to work with the Minnesota Land Trust and Washington County,” Bancroft said.

“County residents care a lot about protecting the county's surface waters, aquifers, natural features and wildlife. Once again, we see a landowner lead the way in assuring identified high-quality areas and corridors connecting them are permanently protected for current and future generations. The county applauds their effort and the legacy this is leaving,” said Washington County Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1.

John Pazlar, Former Town Board Supervisor Chair - who represented residents of May Township for over 23 years:

“I've never seen Township residents as passionate or engaged about a topic as they have been regarding the possibility of a newly formed business opening and operating a recreational youth camp in Wilder Forest, including beachfront activities on Square Lake.”

Alicia Blanchard, SLA Board Officer:

“Square Lake is a unique 203-acre natural resource located in May Township, Minnesota, adjacent to Wilder Forest and Warner Nature Center, a collection of pristine lakes and undeveloped forest to be treasured and protected.

“The Square Lake Association (SLA) is a four-decade old, non-profit, community-based, Board-led, home-owners organization, committed to natural resource preservation, conservation, stewardship, and community collaboration. Our mission is to protect and preserve Square Lake and the surrounding watershed for future generations by working together with homeowners, Lake users, community and government leaders, and Association sponsors. We exist to educate and increase awareness of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and other water clarity threats; conduct and share water science information, research and data; ensure compliance with government rules and regulations impacting the Lake and Watershed; and advocate and implement conservation best practices. We approach our mission proactively but with ongoing care, commitment, respect, and kindness.”

“The Association does not discriminate in its activities, practices, or decisions based on race, creed, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law.”

“As beneficial Lake users, we owe it to future generations to protect and preserve the Lake’s pristine natural beauty, clarity, and balance.”

Mark Diessner, SLA Board Officer:

“If the Township Board applies the conservation-centric spirit and intent of Conservation Districts in May Township, the preferred outcome will be:

- 1) A new offer from a community-supported, conservation-centric, Conservation District compliant, River Grove School-supporting, purchaser.*
- 2) River Grove School’s relocation to the adjacent Warner Nature Center, within the next two years after planned building construction is completed.*
- 3) All construction costs for the new River Grove facility at the new site, as well as a new septic system at Wilder, if needed on an interim basis, to be covered by conservation-centric purchaser.*
- 4) Permanent Conservation Easement for the 55 acres of Wilder Forest adjacent to Square Lake – a key desired outcome for Square Lake Association.*
- 5) Unanimous community support.*
- 6) An end to the controversy.*
- 7) Conservation - instead of an entertainment-focused youth camp - taking priority for Square Lake and Wilder Forest, consistent with the spirit and substance of both the new and old May Township Comprehensive Plan.*
- 8) Wilder Forest permanently protected and preserved in its current pristine, pre-settlement, state.*

It’s time for the Wilder Foundation to do the right thing and sell their land to the conservation-centric Manitou Fund. As the community-supported new owner of Wilder Forest, the School will be preserved, the students’ education optimized, and the lands and waters permanently protected.”

Ted Nesse, SLA member:

“The prospective buyer of Wilder Forest will hopefully recognize the total absence of community support for the sale and planned year-round “Extreme Faith” Camp uses; make a business-like assessment of the transaction; exercise their option to withdraw from the purchase agreement; and allow Wilder to sell the property to another community-aligned party in a faster, lower-risk, non-controversial transaction of equal financial benefit to Wilder.

The community’s overwhelming absence of support for the sale has been informed by the following:

- 1) A heavy-handed, threatening letter from Wilder’s counsel seeking to interfere with the Town of May’s transparent and professional planning process: ([Taft Letter](#)).*
- 2) A thoughtful legal response that confirms the Town’s rightful control of land usage in the town: ([Stinson Letter](#)).*

- 3) *A proposed land use by the buyer that is wholly incompatible with the character of the area and the requirements of conservancy district lands: Chisago County Press ([Sunrise Lake site of retreat camp plan](#)).*

Is the disposition of this Wilder asset being conducted in accordance with the Wilder Foundation's fiduciary responsibility, or is some other opaque agenda at play?

As Wilder's across-the-street neighbor with a strong personal interest to maintain the character of the area where I've chosen to make my home, I encourage Wilder's management to stop the accelerating controversy and conclude the land sale in a way that honors Wilder's conservation and community-aligned legacy in May Township."

Lynn Mecum, SLA Board Officer:

"Wilder Forest's Terrapin, Clear and Mays lakes are designated by the DNR as "Natural Environmental Lakes" and are specified to be preserved. Natural Environmental Lakes are not development lakes and should remain as they are. This is not just a May Township designation, the DNR classifies these lakes as such. As you walk toward these lakes your feet sink as you approach a mud-bottom lake.

Adjacent Warner Nature Center, owned by Manitou Fund, is considered a "Site of High Biological Significance" by the Minnesota Biological Survey, and "Regional Site of Outstanding Significance" by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. During a 2007 Bioblitz, citizen scientists identified and catalogued over 1,300 species of plants, animals, and fungus on site, including seven plants that had never been documented before in Washington County. Nature Center staff and volunteers have also banded and collected data on 45,000 migratory birds over the past 52 years.

*The area including Square Lake, East Boot Lake, Mays Lake, Clear Lake, Terrapin Lake, Wilder Forest, and its surrounding watershed, are recognized as "**One of the largest and most ecologically significant remaining unprotected natural areas in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.**", and Wilder Forest and Warner Nature Center are also listed as one of the highest priority locations for permanent land protection in Washington County, including Loon and Blanding turtle nesting sites, both protected species.*

Hidden within the Warner and Wilder woods are three of the most pristine shallow lakes in this part of the state – Terrapin, Clear and Mays Lakes. The protected landscape also helps to ensure that a steady supply of clean, clear groundwater flows to nearby Square Lake."

Mona Nesse, SLA member:

"I'm aware that Wilder has threatened to sue the town regarding our Comprehensive Plan updates.

It's important to me that the character of our area not be subjected to changes that will decrease my enjoyment of the area and the value of my property.

The integrity of our definition of Conservancy Districts in our Comprehensive Plan is important, and needs to define enforceable limits on usage that are consistent with the purpose of Conservancy Districts.

I expect the Town Board to defend our planning process and the objectives of our Comprehensive Plan with all appropriate and available resources so that our community is not irrevocably altered and damaged."

Travis Lamb, SLA member and RGS parent:

“All past Wilder Forest uses were educational. The “Extreme Faith” Camp is recreational/entertainment. Educational use is compatible with the Comprehensive Plan. Recreation/entertainment use is not.

At a reported 500 campers a day, this is well over twice the River Grove student count. The campers are 24-hour users, not 6-hour users, but each camper brings more than 4 times the impact of a River Grove student. They consume 3 meals a day and take a shower. The septic system would need to be mammoth.

River Grove School, which has been evicted by Wilder as part of this sale, serves 220 students, 75% of whom are from May Township and its surrounding communities. The MCYP Camp at a reported 500 campers per day, serves no one from our broader community.

The proposed recreational and entertainment uses of the MCYP/Damascus Camp indicate no care, empathy, or respect for the Township and Square Lake neighbors, who have collectively supported Wilder and their tenants, for the past 66 years.”

Jane Krentz, SLA member and former State Legislator:

“I have lived on Square Lake for over four decades. My father-in-law first bought a cabin on the lake when he returned from World War II, so the Krentz family has owned property on the lake for many years. I am out of town on a much-delayed vacation with my daughter and family, so I am unable to attend the May Town Board meeting on Tuesday morning. However, I was present at the Planning Commission meeting last month, and the subsequent Town Board meeting earlier this month. I know you've heard all the arguments by now. I offered my own comments at both meetings, to add to the chorus of deeply concerned citizens.

As our elected leaders, you have valiantly protected the rural nature of our community and the absolute treasure that is Square Lake and the surrounding lands. My neighbors and I thank you for that. Future generations will thank you for that.

Please don't let an outside entity destroy what we all value. *Once the pristine waters are sullied, they won't return to their pre-development condition. Once the quiet lands are trampled, they won't be restored. You can't put a price tag on nature.*

As a former teacher, and a parent and grandparent, I dearly love children and believe in providing opportunities for them to enjoy the outdoors. But this mega-camp proposal is in no way consistent with the scope or manner of usage that May Town originally granted to Wilder Foundation. And it's certainly not consistent with the goal to protect this rare and valued land and water from overuse/abuse. You recognized that, and your efforts to create a conservancy district were initiated well before Wilder was approached by the extreme camp group.

For all the reasons we've shared, for all the reasons you know to be true, please don't let this travesty occur on your watch.

Thank you for your service to the residents of May Township.”

Anne Hovland, SLA member:

“These lands and waters are pristine, what is called “pre-settlement” condition. The Wilder Foundation deserves great credit for its remarkable stewardship over many years and through the tenancy of multiple leasers, all of whom have been committed to the Forest's preservation and protection, honoring important boundaries in favor of the environment while pursuing their educational missions.

My neighbors and I believe the best intentions of the Wilder Foundation are clearly focused on your mission "to promote the social welfare of persons resident or located in the greater St. Paul metropolitan area by all appropriate means". We believe ongoing preservation and protection of the Wilder Forest aligns with your mission and can be accomplished through a sale of the property that will continue this path.

We of May Township are encouraging you to see our community activism and commitment to conservation as the kind of locally inspired, volunteer driven effort that guides your work elsewhere. We also respectfully submit that an appropriate buyer is ready to acquire the Forest and thus provide critical revenue for the Foundation's most urgent priorities without sacrificing an irreplaceable asset.

We urge you to reconsider the sale of Wilder Forest for a recreational camp. The proposed intensity of activity and usage will irrevocably damage the land and waters, deprive wildlife of critical habitat, and negatively impact our rural community. There is a better course."

Rick Markwardt, SLA member:

"Our family has owned property within a stone's throw of the Wilder Forest since 1954. We strongly lament the deterioration in the relationship between neighbors and the Wilder organization over those years. In the early days it was a mutually cordial and welcoming climate. Neighbors were welcomed to Wilder events and to use the lakes and trails on the property and did so with respect for the opportunities. As staff changed over the years, the privileges gradually withdrawn until the day the "No Trespassing" signs appeared and local staff became a guard. It was presented as a protection of the environmental integrity of the property, but now you are about to attempt to sell the land to a commercial, recreational company whose proposed plans would completely and permanently destroy the environmental integrity of this rare property and is furthermore in violation of the township comprehensive plan.

Wilder has received other offers of equal or greater price that will commit to meeting the May township Comprehensive plan. I plead with you to rethink this action and cancel this sale."

Acknowledgments

In closing, thanks for considering our *Square Lake Conservancy* Call to Action.

Going forward, we welcome suggestions you may have to advance our *Conservancy* mission, improve our messaging, and expand our voice and community outreach.

We very much hope to hear from you by [emailing us here](#).

With hope, gratitude, and commitment,

***Square Lake Conservancy* Co-Directors:**

Alicia Blanchard, SLA Secretary
Mark Diessner, SLA Vice President
Sarah Godsave, RGS Parent
Angela Hong, RGS Parent
Lynn Mecum, SLA Treasurer
Angel Samolytz, SLA Member
Jim Seidl, SLA President