

Community Connections

An ear to the ground

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Up North

by Paul Gruchow

from *Minnesota: Images of Home*

A Photographic Essay by Jim Brandenburg, self-published in 1990 by The Blandin Foundation for their fiftieth anniversary.

We occupy the center of a continent in which the classic lines of tension have run from east to west, but our own sights have long been set on the north. We are the North Star State. Our state bird is the loon, our flower the showy lady slipper, our tree the red pine—all denizens of the north. The state muffin is blueberry, a fruit of northern glades. We have adopted the mythology of Paul Bunyan, the North Woods giant. Our contribution to the American diet is wild rice, a grass of northern lakes and streams. Barbara Flanagan, journalist and historian of Minneapolis, claims that our gift to architecture is the ice fishing house. Our most famous mammal is the timber wolf, our most notorious resident the mosquito, that torment of the north. The culture that has most visibly shaped us is the northern European. Our prevailing winds are from the northwest.

Every summer we recapitulate the springtime migrations of the birds. We pack our cars and head north to the lake. There are thousands of lakes, but each of us lays personal claim to a particular one, and that one is The Lake. At The Lake is The Cabin. It might be a trailer house or an old log shack or a tarpaper shanty or a twelve-bedroom mansion, but if there is shoreline nearby and if it lies north, then it is The Cabin.



The Project always waits at The Cabin. A proper Minnesotan would never admit to two weeks without a purpose, even if they happen to be the two weeks of annual vacation. The boathouse needs painting, or the roof needs patching, or the porch needs shoring up, or Mother has gotten a septic tank for her birthday and it needs installing. The Project is high on the agenda. But it would not do to rush into anything so serious. It must be suitably pondered, adequately discussed, sufficiently planned.

In the meantime, a cup of coffee must be drunk on The Rock in the morning sun; there is musty linen to be aired; there is wood to be chopped and split and stacked; a nap beckons. The barbecue needs to be fired up; the Scrabble championship must be defended; the evening concert of the loons commands our attention; the moonlight demands a midnight ride upon the waters. There are icy baths to be plunged into, blueberries to be picked, pine cones to be gathered for the Christmas wreath. Pine logs crackle and spit in the fireplace; their blue and yellow and orange flames must be contemplated. There are marshmallows to roast; corn begs to be popped. It is time to tempt the walleyes, which are never biting The Way They Used To.

One morning, there is an argument about what day of the week it is, and then you know that it is time to head south again. You have one last cup of coffee on The Rock, pack the car and lock up The Cabin, pledge to finish The Project next year, leave behind The Lake, pass through Town and turn toward home. Your heart, however, remains Up North, where our star forever shines. ☪

the
minnesota
project

working for
strong local economies,
vibrant communities, and
a healthy environment

Dear Readers,

Can it be spring if there is still snow covering half of my garden? Can we feature Paul Gruchow's words on the cover of this issue if he is no longer alive in our midst? These questions cause my ears to ring louder than usual this morning, as I write this letter to you all. The answer, I suppose, is yes.

In the summer of 1991, I read Paul Gruchow's *Necessity of Empty Places*, and I was so inspired by his writing that I found his address and wrote him a personal letter. He answered it! Maybe it was based on that brief correspondence or maybe not, but when *Community Connections* dedicated itself to publishing earth-centered stories on its cover, I asked Paul for a story. He went right to work and graced us with the essay, *Bread and Culture*, which set a high standard for our cover stories or essays since our first issue in fall of 1992.

Now his fresh and honest voice has been lost to us. I mourn the fact that new thoughts, new ideas or social issues cannot be filtered through that mind of Paul's. We need his perspective now more than ever, yet the most we can do is look backwards for it, which of course we will do. He has left us a trail of gems. For instance, find *Grassroots: The Universe of Home* (Milkweed Editions, 1995) if you want a weekend of reading about bread, prairie landscapes, social policy or snails with faces.

And his passing brings to my memory the death of our good friend, Ken Taylor, founder of the Minnesota Food Association who died in January of 1995. How we have needed Ken this past decade and how often I've wondered what he would say about a particular issue or event. The most we can do after such losses is to challenge ourselves to be the best we can be—to be the changes we want to see on the Earth or in our communities—and to sharpen our own voices so that the quieting echoes of the lost ones will not be so apparent.

Enjoy this spring *Connections*. You'll hear some old voices and some new ones in this issue. We hope that our particular mix of commentary, stories, and poetry will be a gift of good reading some quiet afternoon. Share your voice with us too and send poems or stories. Oh, and please subscribe—it makes a difference.

Cordially,

Beth Waterhouse
Editor since 1992

Director's Viewpoint

by Diane Jensen

Twenty-five years old. The Minnesota Project is a quarter century old and growing, maturing into an organization of which we can all be proud.

Your support has allowed The Minnesota Project to work from three offices—St. Paul, Canton, and now New Ulm—as we work to build strong local economies, vibrant rural communities and a healthy Minnesota environment.

Your support has expanded our staff to nine talented members and several consultants that are shaping agriculture policy, renewable energy development, access to local food, and community growth.

Your support and input have pushed us to consciously define the way we work to include the best of our fellow organizations, the best of business entrepreneurs, the best and brightest of government and of course real people in real communities who know best what the problems are and who are closest to the solutions.

We are working to find ways to include you, our readers, our supporters, in public dialogues that give rise to creative action. Read our website. Contribute your stories, ideas, and poems to *Community Connections*, sign up for our action email network on the Web. Decisions are made by those who participate: We participate when you can't, but we want to make it easier to help you participate when you can.

We are people driven and ultimately concerned about things local: community as a place, civic entrepreneurship, a healthy environment, and economic diversity.

We are twenty-five and we're going to celebrate. Please join us! We are scheduling an event in October and ideas are swirling. A barn dance? A local foods feast? Our board is exuberantly planning. If you have ideas call us. Watch for the date on our website!

Diane

Community Connections

An ear to the ground

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The Heartland Food Initiative

Bringing High Quality Minnesota Foods to Minnesota Tables

by Karen Lehman, Minnesota Project staff

Is it possible to eat locally in Minnesota in February? Chefs prove that it is! In early February, Chef Paul Lynch of Fire Lake Grillhouse convened chefs from Restaurant Alma, Goodfellows, La Belle Vie, Solera and Vincent's in a benefit for the James Beard House in New York City.

While chefs from all over the country raise funds for this culinary center, (founded by Julia Child to honor James Beard, the father of American cuisine) this was a meal with a difference. The chefs and farmers who created an outstanding seven course meal did something many Minnesotans don't believe possible in the middle of winter—they crafted their courses with fresh high quality foods, 80% of which came from Minnesota.

Here in the depth of the Minnesota winter were handmade butters in the Old World European style, flavorful hazelnut oil with the same health benefits as olive oil, grass-fed bison, rabbit, wild rice, artisan cheeses, and wild herring.

The marvelous particularity of our local foods and efforts that encourage them are making Minnesota a richer and more exciting place to live in the rhythms of the seasons. At present, most consumers learn about such local-food efforts through direct relationships. You might know young people raising



vegetables in the Youth Farm and Market Project, you might worship at a church that distributes products from the Whole Farm Coop, or you may have personal connections with farmers who sell custom-processed beef, lamb or pork.

More Minnesotans deserve easy access to good, fresh local foods year-round, and the true impact of all of these efforts needs to be more

visible. Perhaps it is time to name what we do in a way that not only raises the profile of local food efforts in Minnesota, but helps unite these efforts in a common purpose? At the James Beard dinner, Chef Paul Lynch and the Minnesota Project announced a call for a *Heartland Food Initiative* that could unite the efforts of chefs, farmers, food processors, food distributors, grocery retailers, nonprofit organizations, and public institutions to: increase the availability of high quality sustainably-produced local foods, expand consumer awareness of the value and quality of these foods, and generate pride in Minnesota cuisine.

By announcing an initiative, we hope to create a space. To be used, that space now needs to be defined. In the coming months, the Minnesota Project will seek partners to convene a series of conversations about the value of promoting a regional food identity for Minnesota and western Wisconsin. Maybe it will help to link all kinds of existing efforts under a set of understandable goals. Hopefully, it will help new people participate.

At the James Beard Dinner and exemplified by Paul Lynch, we witnessed the energy that people have to bring fresh local foods to Minnesota tables. Let's build on that energy and harness it to make this a region known for its food. ☞

Local Food Initiatives

The success of the James Beard dinner highlighted what is happening all over Minnesota as creative people find ways to grace Minnesota tables with local foods. The initiatives have become almost too many to name: farmers in the **Southeast Food Network** in southeast Minnesota provide meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables to area retailers and restaurants, while farmers associated with **Pride of the Prairie** in West Central Minnesota provide food to the **University of Minnesota Morris campus**. The **Midwest Food Alliance** certifies sustainably-produced foods for retail and food service markets and partnered with the **Minnesota Farmers Union** and local chefs to highlight local sustainable foods at the **Minnesota State Fair**. The **Local Foods Working Group**, convened by the **Minnesota Project**, links sustainable farmers with **Sysco Corporation** to increase availability of sustainably-produced local foods to Minnesota restaurants. The **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**, the **University of Minnesota**, and nonprofits such as the **Land Stewardship Project** provide marketing support and technical assistance for sustainable farmers, and have been instrumental in promoting local food networks. Meanwhile, farmers' markets from St. Paul to Plainview are crowded with faithful buyers committed to finding the freshest foods possible. ☞



New Beginnings in the Energy Program

by Mark Lindquist,
New Ulm, Minnesota

A classic spring theme is new beginnings, so it was not surprising that as Minnesota Project's newest staff person, I was asked to write this article about our energy program.

Some years back I'd been deeply involved in the issues surrounding the emerging wind energy industry in southwest Minnesota. From 1998 until this winter, however, career changes took me away from those issues. Now I can see that this time away has given me a chance to really appreciate the progress we have made in Minnesota.

In 1996, I worked on a wind energy conference in Pipestone, Minnesota. Wind energy development was bursting out as a new industry in southwest Minnesota. Community leaders and landowners were electrified by the potential for economic development. NSP had been ordered

the big question was how much development potential actually existed.

Some of the most interesting conversations that I had the day of that conference were in the bar after the conference closed. Wind advocates often talked about the huge potential for wind development in Minnesota—billions of dollars of capital investment—but this was a chance to talk frankly with a few wind industry insiders from California. I clearly remember one stating that he doubted that our state's wind development would go beyond that of the very best locations on Buffalo Ridge. He doubted that all of the 425 MW minimally required of NSP would even be built in Minnesota.

How much has changed! Not only did NSP—now Xcel Energy—develop all 425 MW of wind in the state, they were obligated to build a second 400 MW of wind. Wind is being developed for other utilities both on and off the Buffalo Ridge. Great River Energy has a contract for a 100 MW wind farm near Trimont, Minnesota. An entrepreneur from Owatonna now has just over 55 MW installed near Dodge Center.

Many things are fueling the progress, wind's improving cost competitiveness, the willingness of some



Mark Lindquist, new energy policy staff person at the Minnesota Project, notes major strides in our state's wind power development since 1996.

effectively, will keep the momentum strong.

Much progress has been made in the last decade and even in the last five years. Yet there continue to be challenges. *Community Connections* outlined many of those challenges in the last issue. More is needed. That is clear, but we are positioned to make it happen. It requires dogged attention to the policies being developed and debated in St. Paul. It requires diligent care and feed of the coalitions working for public policies that create the opportunities for clean, renewable energy development in rural Minnesota. It also requires providing support to the communities and entrepreneurs trying to develop on the ground projects. Minnesota Project, along with our partners in the Sustainable Energy for Economic Development coalition, continues to define a bright vision of the future. But vision without action is just daydreaming. We continue to do the work needed to bring the vision to action. ☞

Mark Lindquist works out of his home in New Ulm, Minnesota, as Energy Policy Specialist for the Minnesota Project. He has a master's degree in public policy from the U of M with a focus on energy policy, and he has worked on regional natural resources and economic development planning in southern Minnesota for the last ten years. We welcome Mark to the staff!

***“But vision without action is just daydreaming.
We continue to do the work needed to bring the
vision to action.”***

to develop an additional 400 megawatts of wind power capacity—beyond the 25 MW they had in the ground already.

This was a new beginning for the region—a whole new industry to help fill in behind the farming and farm services economy that seemed to shrink with every commodity price cycle.

But the excitement about wind was tempered with realism. There were issues of fair property taxation, questions about how many jobs would really be created, and concerns about the fairest way to pay landowners for access to the wind. Most importantly,

Minnesota utility customers to individually purchase “Green Power” at a price premium, hard work by entrepreneurs, and supportive public policies. The State's Renewable Energy Objective calling on all utilities to supply 10% of retail sales with renewable energy, if implemented



Our Common Vision around Power and Energy

by Nancy Adams, LeRoy, Minnesota

I've been thinking a lot lately about two words—energy and power. I'm fascinated by the different meanings these words have individually and when you put them together.

I started thinking about them as I was driving home from a community meeting. As part of the CERTs project (Clean Energy Resource Teams) we were talking about power companies, power providers, and the fact that power in the form of electricity comes into our homes through power lines connected to a power plant and a power grid.

Then I started thinking about the power the big oil companies and big energy companies have in Washington, and the power that executives in their power suits at power lunches have to determine our nation's energy policy.

That got me thinking about energy. I thought about the creative energy and talents each of us has to do and experience and accomplish wondrous things. I thought about what energizes us—the things we love and care about passionately. I thought about the collective energy that happens



Crab Apple Trees

I'm tempted to say these trees belong to me,
take credit for blossoms that gather sunrise
like stained glass windows,
because eighteen springs ago
I dug holes for a couple scrawny seedlings,
spread their roots in a bed of manure,
watered them, supported them with stakes and twine
until the saplings could stand alone in the wind.

But now, the flowering crabs in my yard,
like grown children, have business of their own,
bumblebees to feed,
and a treeful of small sour balloons to inflate
by the time autumnal flocks, robins and cedar waxwings,
come to them for sustenance.

My reward is in the way my eyes
gorge on brilliant blossoms,
the sweet aroma my nose inhales,
a rich dessert in a restaurant for the senses.

✉ Larry Schug,
Avon, Minnesota

in a synergy when people who care passionately join forces to work for a common purpose. And I thought about how powerful that is and how we the people can take power over our destinies by coming together and working together. Let's use our creative energies to design a clean energy future for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. ✉

Nancy Adams is the Steering Committee chair of the Southeast/South Central Clean Energy Resource Team. The Clean Energy Resource Team project is designed to give Minnesota citizens a greater voice in energy planning and to connect them with the technical resources needed to develop community-scale renewable energy and conservation projects. Stakeholder teams have formed in each of six Greater Minnesota regions. The project has multiple project partners, including The Minnesota Project. For more information on CERTs, contact Lola Schoenrich at lschoenrich@mnproject.org or 651-645-6159, extension 4.

Breaking Through

Battling a blight of blisters, broken
by the artificial brightness of a bureaucracy
unaware of its own blindsightedness

A blemished bulb lies buried
beneath a blanket of black dirt
Struggling for room to breathe

Breech, bruising the base of her backbone
but no longer embedded in a bath of bloodshed
She painstakingly breaks through the heavy topsoil

Bursting into new light, bewildered!
Beholding a breathtaking beatific vision
of a bountiful bleeding heart blossoming nearby

Blessed and buoyed by such authentic brilliance
the new bud continues birthing her own beauty
Contributing color
to a spring banquet already begun.

✉ Sandy Bot-Miller
St. Cloud, Minnesota

Our thanks to Sandy Bot-Miller, for her first poem in Connections. She is an instructor in the Education Dept. at the College of St. Benedict /St. John's University. Sandy is also mother of three children and a visual artist, mainly working with fibers and oil pastels. Here she plays skillfully with the letter "b."

Conservation Security Program Rules Under Fire

12,000 Comments Support Law, Not Draft Rules

As you know from reading about the efforts of the Minnesota Project over the past five years, we'd been waiting with high hopes for the Conservation Security Program rules to emerge so that this innovative new program could begin working on farmlands nationwide.

To say we were disappointed in the Bush Administration's proposed rules would be a massive understatement. After completing an analysis of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposal, we went to work developing key points for comments.

When the Department announced it would hold ten national listening sessions, we coordinated with colleagues in the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture to get hundreds of farmers, conservationists and others to attend these meetings. We let the Administration know that their proposals to limit the Conservation Security Program to specific watersheds and to a narrow group of farmers would not be acceptable.

Minnesota Project staff testified at the national session in Des Moines, Iowa, on February 11 and again at the session in Madison, Wisconsin, on February 26.

Said the *High Plains Journal*: "It may have been a first for agriculture. The livestock producers sided with the environmentalists; organic farmers and conservationists agreed with the commodity groups and row crop farmers joined forces with small family farms. This unusual group of bedfellows might have made history when they stood together behind one common goal—to give the USDA an earful about the proposed rules for the Conservation Security Program (CSP)."

"Everybody in agriculture is united on this issue. We all believe the rules should more accurately reflect the needs of farm families and the language of the original law," said Dan Brutsche, a farmer from Coon Rapids, Iowa.

Myron Just, a consultant on the Minnesota Project agriculture team, was probably speaking for many of us when he commented, "The reality of the rule doesn't support the rhetoric," in reference to the glossy presentation that the USDA made on the rules at the session in Madison.

By the end of January, the Minnesota Project had partnered with the office of Bill Hunt, the Minnesota State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and also with Senator Mark Dayton's office, to co-sponsor seven public listening sessions in Minnesota. At these sessions we were able to show where the rule fell short of the law. We highly commend Mr. Hunt for taking this extra initiative so that folks

this important conservation program, we helped trigger a flood of critical mail. The day before the comment period closed on March 2, Loni Kemp and Mike McGrath met with a top U.S. Department of Agriculture official in Washington and were informed that over 12,000 comments on the rules had been received nationwide.

Most importantly, as officials continue work in Washington, they are learning that farmers and environmentalists do care about conservation incentives for private working farms. They are also learning that we expect the U.S. Department of Agriculture to write rules that truly reflect the intent of the law we all worked so hard to bring to fruition back in 2002.

The Minnesota Project staff have already begun working with top Natural Resources Conservation Service officials in Washington to help them rewrite the rules. This summer the Minnesota Project will again be in a lead role as we present a symposium on the Conservation Security Program

"...we expect the U.S. Department of Agriculture to write rules that truly reflect the intent of the law we all worked so hard to bring to fruition back in 2002."

throughout both rural and urban Minnesota had the opportunity to hear the whole story about the proposed rules and tell the Administration how to improve the rules.

In early February, The Minnesota Project published an edition of the *Whole Farm Planner* that highlighted major points where the rules diverged from the law, to assist readers in writing comments.

With a brief 60 days to educate, motivate, and generate comments on

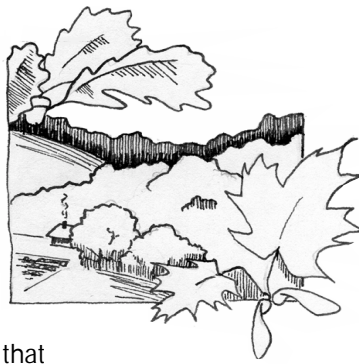
at the 2004 Soil and Water Conservation Society's 2004 Annual Conference to be held in St. Paul on Tuesday, July 27. It will be the first such symposium on this important conservation program. If you're interested, go to www.swcs.org for conference details. Join us. ☞

Keep an eye on the Minnesota Project web page for up-to-date information on the Conservation Security Program: www.mnproject.org/csp.



View from the Woods

by Loni Kemp



action, where our words are gradually making a difference in the consciousness of decision-makers, agri-business interests, and the public. The

Invisible Opposition

I peered at my precious seedlings on the lighted shelves in the basement as a wave of frustration washed over me. Each pepper seed lay on top of the soil, its papery coat empty. Other seedlings were nipped off just above the soil, their new leaves, so promising only yesterday, were simply gone. After all the work of ordering, planting, labeling and watering, to fail at the starting of seeds is more than annoying—it feels personal.

What happened to my seedlings? I went into problem solving mode. It couldn't be rot or dead seeds because that would leave mushy seeds under the soil. The cat is too big and we have never had mice. Could it be something in the compost, like sowbugs or earwigs? Do they suck out seeds and graze on leaves?

I was baffled. Books, web sites and expert friends could give me no help. In the words of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, "Who *are* those guys" getting my seedlings?

This same baffled feeling often pervades discussions of the Conservation Security Program.

Over and over we spring into action to secure funding and rules to launch the program, having already won it as the law of the land in the Farm Bill two years ago. The House zeroes funding, the Office of Management and Budget shreds the rules, the USDA drags its feet, and Congress caps the entitlement funding then restores it. Recently the Senate Budget

committee tried to zero it out for 2005 but was stopped by an amendment that passed 16–6.

And on it goes. For each battle we mobilize support to snatch victory from the jaws of an invisible opponent.

Yet no one is *openly* against this new program. For once, we have apparent unity of purpose between sustainable agriculture, environmental, farm, commodity, and conservation groups. A recent poll showed that the Conservation Security Program has higher name recognition among farmers than any other program—more even than the popular Conser-

vation Reserve Program is a powerful change agent that is bound to engender backlash simply because of its power to change the status quo.

Rewarding stewardship instead of commodity production is a profound concept shift. Being open to all farmers, using a holistic conservation approach, putting a modest limit on how much money any one farm can collect no matter how big—these are important changes whose time has come.

For once, we have apparent unity of purpose between sustainable agriculture, environmental, farm, commodity, and conservation groups. No one is against the Conservation Security Program.

vation Reserve Program, which has been around for nearly two decades.

No one is against it. So who *are* those guys?

Is it the Bush Administration itself? The President and his Secretary of Agriculture, as well as the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, publicly tout their commitment to conservation. They say that the Conservation Security Program represents the dawning of a new day for conservation.

I believe that in this tortuous public policy process, a momentous dialogue is taking place. It is democracy in

Late last summer, after I forgot all about the seedling marauders, we did discover mice in the basement.

The obvious cause of that problem had been "invisible" to me because it was "impossible."

Maybe history will someday reveal a powerful force working silently behind the scenes to gut the Conservation Security Program. But more likely the inertia of vested interests will finally be overcome by the patient, persistent support of legions of farmers and citizens who know it is the right direction for our nation's farm policy. ☞

STAFF IN PRINT

The Role of Biodiversity Conservation in the Transition to Rural Sustainability

Loni Kemp's essay on *A New Agricultural Policy for the United States*, co authored with Dr Dennis Keeney of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, leads off this 340 page hardcover book edited by Steve Light. (It was reviewed in the Autumn 2003 issue of *Community*

Connections.) The book presents interdisciplinary advances in theory and practice pertaining to rural sustainability. It sets forth an action research agenda and policy prescriptions to support biodiversity conservation in rural areas of Europe and North America, with special emphasis on the new countries admitted to the European Union. Published as Volume 41 in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Science and Technology Policy Series, it can be ordered at www.iospress.nl for \$116.



Go on-line & Get involved

www.mnproject.org

Be proactive, get involved. It is easy.

Go to our website and sign up to

Take Action. You will receive email Action Alerts to help keep you informed and involved!

Clean Energy Resource Teams' website is up and running!

www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org

The Clean Energy Resource Teams were started to help communities across Minnesota take charge of their energy future.

Driven by a vision of smaller, more local and cleaner power plants that can spur local economic development, develop our energy independence and create cleaner energy sources.

Photo & Art Contest

If you have pictures or drawings, enter them into our photo and art contest! To mark our Anniversary we are looking for vital rural images from the dark room or the pen or brush. Entry due date is July 15th. Winners will win cash prizes and the photos and art work will grace our website and publications in the future. See our website for more details. Submit entries or questions to Diane Jensen at the St. Paul office.

A PROUD MEMBER OF



Workplace giving for the quality of your life. Contact us for more information about this workplace giving option.

Thank You!

The Minnesota Project bestows a hearty thank-you to those who have donated to our organization recently. Your generosity helps us connect people with policy to nurture collaborations that build strong local economies, vibrant communities and a healthy environment.

Gifts from \$100 to \$1000

Nancy L. Adams
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