

Dear readers:

We would like to expand the breadth of our writings to include a more in-depth look at topics that are important to those of us living, visiting, and treasuring our northern Wisconsin woods and waters. We have noticed an interest in learning more about various topics and feel it warranted that we take a deeper dive into those of particular interest to our readership. We invite you to write to us here at FOECLA and let us know what it is that YOU would like to know more about. We will research that topic, tap into our regional experts, and provide information on a regular basis in the form of a DYK article (Did You Know?).

Our initial focus in the series will be on the timely topic of Oak Wilt. I invite you to review the information on Oak Wilt provided by Lee Wiesner on page 3 of our February 2022 Newsletter (click [here](#) to view the newsletter). Below is a firsthand account of the destruction that can be wrought by Oak Wilt, provided by Jim Bakken. This is an important topic right now as the potential for Oak Wilt will be fast upon us in the spring and we all need to understand how to identify the disease, and most importantly, do our part in helping to prevent its spread. I hope you find this informative!

Please write and let us know of any topics of interest for future articles, and if you are a subject expert or would like to be, we would welcome your ideas and submissions as well.

Thank you for your continued interest and support.
Anne Torrey

SAVE THE DATE! Andrew Wilcox, Forester with the Department of Natural Resources, will present information and answer questions about **Oak Wilt** at our annual meeting: 9 am, Saturday, July 16th, Barnes Town Hall. Invite your neighbors to attend. **All are welcome!**



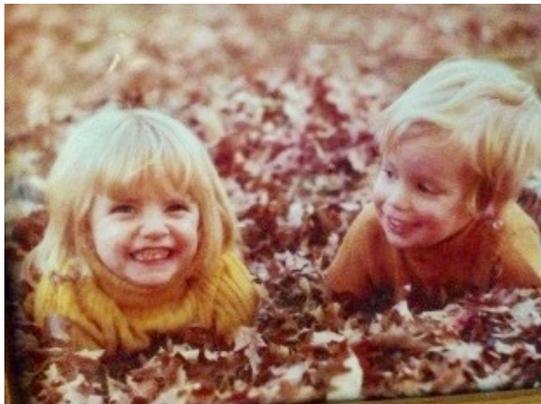
Did You Know?

April 2022

"The Last Red Oak"

Jim Bakken (Upper Eau Claire Lake)

It was the fall of 1974. We were looking for land to build a home near the Eau Claire area. As fate would have it, even though we were looking for vacant land, my wife ran across a nine-acre parcel on a dead-end road with a house already built on it. She thought it might be something we should look at so on a warm sunny fall afternoon we drove to the house, vacant at the time, to check it out. The russet colored rough-sawn siding ranch was nestled off the road in a stand of mostly red oak. The circular



dirt driveway was covered with waves of fallen oak leaves so we had to be careful to stay on the drive. We took a walk around the house to check it out. Almost fifty years later I clearly recall the rustle of the oak leaves that had fallen from the century-old red oaks surrounding the house; fall was in the air. We fell in love with the property so we made an offer and by the end of the year we had an agreement to purchase the property.

We moved into the new home with our two pre-school-age children in the winter of 1975. We

enjoyed being surrounded by woods and wildlife, including raking, raking, and raking oak leaves every fall. Our kids had the most fun playing and hiding in the mountains of leaves. I had lots of blisters from the raking, but it was a wonderful family time every fall!

Shortly before 1980, an adjacent parcel was purchased and the new owner soon began to build a home. Many oak trees had to be removed in the process. Not long after the home was started, mature oak trees surrounding the new home withered and died; it was obvious something unusual was going on with the trees. Oak wilt was the culprit; the disease was new to us. We hoped that it would stay put and not affect our yard and woods. Wow, was I wrong in my hope. Slowly the disease spread, killing a few oaks each year. It was relentless. When the red oaks caught oak wilt, they never recovered. Wilting leaves falling to the ground, first from the top of the trees, were the telltale sign the trees were infected.

We learned that the disease traveled through root grafts so we attempted to isolate some of the more desirable oaks, to no avail. The disease would seem to stop, but when the hot summer months came, and water was scarce in the sandy soil, we would discover green and brown leaves on the ground, signaling that oak wilt was active. Over the years we have planted a variety of trees (maple, walnut, ash, birch, pine and spruce, and even some fast-growing hybrid willows) to regenerate the woods, but it is taking years to recover from the devastation of oak wilt.



The loss of the many century-old red oaks has been quite an emotional experience and it took time and much consternation before accepting the fact that oak wilt would eventually take most of the red oaks. Removing the dead trees was very laborious. We found that if we held off cutting white oaks (they were far less numerous than red oaks) that had been infected, they would come back to life the next spring; some of them are still living today.

Most of the red oaks in our yard had succumbed to oak wilt twenty or so years ago. To our delight, we had one last red oak that had somehow survived the disease; it stood tall inside our circular driveway and served as a home for many birds and squirrels. One afternoon last July, while cutting grass I noticed a few familiar green/brown oak leaves on the ground under that tree. I am sad to report the death of the last red oak.

Mission: To protect, preserve and improve the environmental and aesthetic qualities of the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed including the lakes, rivers, shorelands, wetlands, forests and attendant wildlife resources.

BAYFIELD AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES, WI

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