

Steward to Caretaker

By Teghan Grulkowski

What a crazy four years it has been. I graduated high school knowing two things; I wanted to explore environmental science and I wanted to get the heck out of Winona. *Environmental Studies with an Emphasis in Policy and Planning*, my Bemidji State University transcript read. I'll leave out the grimy details of my very average freshman year, no direction, just trying to pass. It wasn't until my sophomore year that I half-jokingly applied for the Stewards of the Wilderness (free vacation? Yes please). The following August, I found myself living the most influential week of my 20-year life. The Steward's first morning was spent listening to Anishinaabe history and creation stories. I hadn't heard anything like that despite going to a university surrounded by the three largest reservations in Minnesota. In the following days, we had the chance to be a part of an offering ceremony performed by Don Jones, a First Nations elder. It makes me a little emotional typing this out, but wow, the impact those two events had on me (I'm sure many of you can agree it's already easy to feel an overflow of emotion and a higher level of feeling on Mallard). The ceremony was beautiful and healing in a way I can't even describe; it gave such a bright and uplifting energy to the island. Yet later we hosted more elders and heard their stories of being taken from their families and forced to assimilate in residential schools, around the same time my grandparents spent their childhoods in suburbia. The pit in my stomach still sits. Both held completely different places in my heart and mind; the gap of knowledge between them felt enormous. It was then that I made it my path to learn.

My college credits started to include indigenous knowledge courses at our American Indian Resource Center on campus. I walked with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women March. I attended speaking events, including one with Winona LaDuke. Eventually, I added Indigenous Sustainability to my minors, thanks to my week on Mallard Island. I was lucky enough to have a school with programs like Niizhoo Gwayakochigewin that provided internships that emphasized both western and indigenous teachings. I had the opportunity to intern under Kate Hagsten with Leech Lake Reservation's Division of Resource Management working with plants. It was a great summer of bee and fern surveys, flower pressing, and floating through patches of wild rice. From there I struggled with online schooling as COVID had completely shut down our campus. It was a very long and dark fall semester that ended with the click of a submission button late on a lonely and silent Tuesday night. It was an underwhelming and depressing ending to three and a half years of hard work to conclude in my rental house basement bedroom.

At this point in many young graduates' lives, job hunting would be the next thing on the agenda. Only problem was, no one was expanding their already at home work force. I spent the first couple months of 2021 feeling pretty hopeless, pretty relatable I'd say. It took Erika Bailey-Johnson, a professor at Bemidji State University, sending me a 'group' email of sorts to apply for to get me out of my unproductive funk. It was called the Emerging Environmental Leaders, an Environmental Quality Board

In the Words of Ernest Oberholzter:

"The horizontal sun of early morning seems not to be shining on the tree trunks but clinging there in soft patches."

Excerpted from an American Forests magazine article written in the early 1930's

selected group of young adults to meet with state leaders and discuss youth concerns on climate. It sounded like an opportunity high above my abilities, but I figured it couldn't hurt. After all, it was open to any Minnesotan ages 18-24, how would I even get in? A lot of the questions revolved around environmental justice, surprisingly relevant to my time spent on Leech Lake Reservation where they are exposed to so many environmental injustices. Long story short, I was selected as one of sixteen out of over 100 applicants. The reason I was selected? My time spent learning and appreciating Minnesota indigenous culture.

Time and time again this part of my life has given me so many growth and learning opportunities. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful for the people, places, and experiences that have made my 22 years so rich.

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Teghan Grulkowski,
Participant, Stewards of the Wilderness
Mallard Island Caretaker-in-Training

Dear Readers,

One constant that we can count on in Minnesota is the that our seasons change. I always marvel at the beauty of the fall colors and the cooler air that ushers in the fall season, especially after a hot, dry, smoky summer.

Change also happens at the Ober Foundation. We have had a change in our officers - we welcome our interim Board Chair George Glazier and our interim Board Secretary Nance Kunkel! As a baby, George was carried across Mallard Island in Ober's arms; not many people can say that. George has now stepped up to lead the foundation board to give back. Nance has been a long-time caretaker on Mallard, has been on the board since 2018 and is the editor of our foundation newsletter!

It was a busy summer on Mallard Island. Michael Reid, Treasurer and Facilities Committee Chair, organized and led the rebuilding of the tool shed on Mallard Island. The rebuilt shed is really a sight to behold! It took two carpentry work weeks to accomplish this very important project. We are so grateful to all of the volunteers who shared their talent and time! Our foundation is powered by volunteers and donations from our supporters. For all of that, we are deeply grateful.

Other important repairs were done during the carpentry work weeks including removing and replacing the gutters on the Wannigan, and reglazing the windows and replacing more of the siding on the Big House. The upkeep of the aging buildings and the stonework on and around Mallard Island takes time and money, but the preservation of this special place is well worth it!

Another new development on Mallard - we hosted some campers from Camp Kooch in the teaching lodge. They were able to experience Indigenous led teaching by Pebaam (Dennis) Jones, one of our Board members. We also hosted a drum group from Red Lake in the Drum Room. They drummed and sang many songs. It was an experience that was beautiful, moving and unforgettable.

I had the distinct pleasure of spending a few days in July with Jean E. Kelly on Mallard. I interviewed her about her memories of Ober, Mallard Island, and about her Mom Gene Ritchie Monahan, whom Artist's house was built for. Jean E.'s husband Charlie called her a few times during our visit to check in. So, I was saddened to hear on August 10 that Charlie had passed away the day before. Charlie was a very important part of the Ober Foundation family and we are in deep gratitude for his leadership and strong support over the years, including his time as Board Chair. He will be missed!

Our summer programming was wonderful and varied – weeks on Reflection, Individual Projects, Anishinaabe Ceremony and Transcriptions, Sustainability and Mentors, Stewards of the Wilderness, Women in Sustainable Ag, and Oberholtzer Presents! The one theme that ran through almost every week was cultural programming and specifically Anishinaabe cultural programming. The impact statements we received from our program participants were very positive on this cultural programming.

So, although change happens, some things do stay the same. We at the foundation are still here preserving and sharing Ober's legacy and we could not do that without you - our donors and volunteers. Thank you for your ongoing support of Ober's legacy!

Lastly, let's stay in touch! Please go to www.eober.org, hover over the Contact tab, and select email sign up. This will give you an opportunity to let us know how you want to hear from us; you can subscribe to the publications and/or information you prefer to receive and how you receive it – paper or electronic. Thank you for taking a moment to do this!

I hope to see you at our Fall Gathering on October 30. Please register on our website. Wishing you all a wonderful rest of the year.

Miigwech,

Rebecca



Charlie and Jean E. Kelly
Photo from the Oberholtzer Collection

Letter from the President:

Greetings to Ernest C. Oberholtzer's extended family! I am humbled and excited to begin my journey as Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation Interim President and Board Chairman.

My earliest experience with Ober and Mallard began in the mid 1960s when my mother Jean E. brought me to Rainy Lake to meet my Grandparents, George and Genevieve "Gene" Ritchie Monahan and Ober. My Grandfather as a youngster helped Ober carry packs on his canoe trips and was put to work on Mallard at every opportunity. Ober had been George's best man at their wedding and was Jean E.'s Godfather.



During the 1970s and early 1980s as a teenager, I worked on Mallard as one of the original "caretakers" providing firewood, laundry service, food shopping, kerosene for the lamps, gasoline and boat transportation supporting my Grandmother and her volunteer group's early archival work. I hauled tar paper and roll roofing for work crews who would appear spontaneously with each emergency call for help for holes in roofs, sagging floors and building supports. At that early age with boundless energy, I was introduced to the rigors of brush clearing under the intense tutelage and watchful eye of Mr. Ted Hall.

In the interim years my love for all things Ober centered on the source of much of his inspiration, the intense wilderness experience. In 1988, I was a member of Robin Monahan's crew for six-weeks traversing the part of Ober and Billy McGee's 1912 expedition from Reindeer Lake, Ontario to Churchill Manitoba, including a week on Hudson Bay. The intensity of life in a canoe inspired me to lead my own trip with friends two years later along an eight-week route traveled by the Canadian geologist, cartographer, and explorer J.B. Tyrell in the late 1800s; from Lac Brochet, Ontario via the Kazan River to Baker Lake, Northwest Territories.

Fast-forward thirty years on a speeding locomotive blur of university life, the Army; Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Germany; marriage, kids, moving every two years; it all suddenly fell silent in 2016 as my career came to a screeching end. In the ensuing silence, I felt the voice and pull of the North woods again. I was drawn back to Mallard in 2017 in service again, this time to the Oberholtzer Foundation, its board members, volunteers, supporters and friends.

And now, I look forward to the future during these challenging times as the foundation helps preserve Ober's legacy and drives forward important initiatives described in his writings, embodied by the foundation Mission and Vision. It is an exciting time for us as we engage with and bring on board young people, our Anishinaabe neighbors and all peoples with a love of the earth who inhabit Rainy Lake and beyond. As always, our foundation is supported by our volunteers' generous gifts of their time, talent and treasure, for which we are grateful.

George Glazier
Interim Board President



Board of Trustees, September 2021
Peggy Anne Smith, not pictured, attended virtually
Photo by Elaine Thrune

*The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation fosters Ober's legacy and North Woods island home as a source of inspiration, renewal, and connection to Indigenous Peoples, kindred spirits, and the natural world.
Gi-bezhig-oomin*

Board of Trustees:

- George Glazier, Devens, MA, Interim President
- Dave Rolloff, Sacramento, CA, Vice-President
- Michael Reid, St. Paul, MN, Treasurer
- Nance Kunkel, Hines, MN, Interim Secretary
- Bill Forsyth, Minneapolis, MN
- Pebaamibines Jones, Minneapolis, MN
- Shannon King, Fort Frances, Ontario
- Ward Merrill, International Falls, MN
- Peggy Anne Smith, Thunder Bay, Ontario
- Diane Tessari, Excelsior, MN
- Keir Johnson, Davenport, IA

Autumnal Exchange

Watching light and shadow this past week,
Pausing now and then to see a particular leaf,
A contrast of conifer constancy and deciduous delirium,
I discovered how the lost hours of summer sun slip away.

Every birch, popple, maple, dogwood, tag elder, sumac, grass
And late-blooming flower captures those minutes of sun each day,
Condensing light into the color of choice, in such intensity
That the days begin to shrink.

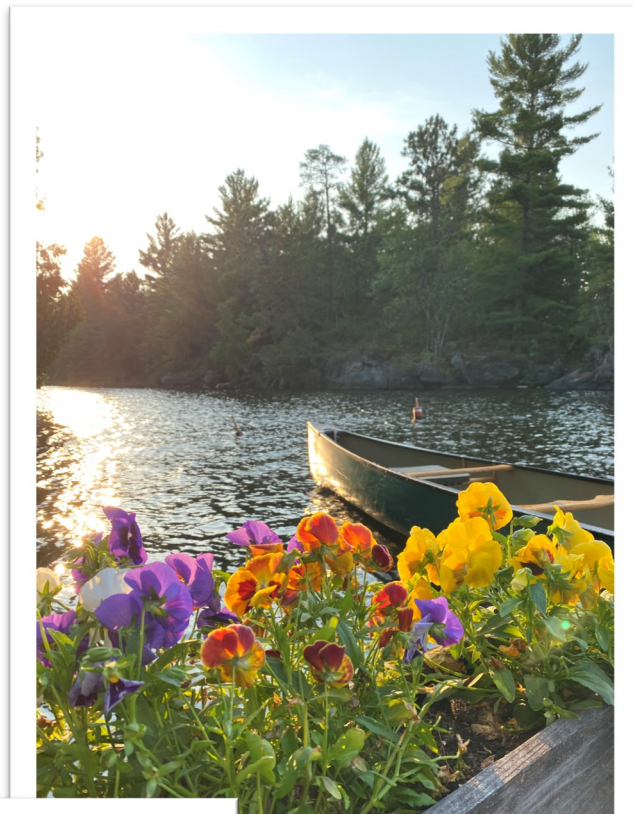
The leaves of compacted sunlight fall to the ground
And are aspirated by the conifers, fungus, and microbes
Who package it all in mists and crystals.

Somewhere around Embarrass, Minnesota, there is a
Cosmic warp that moves it all back to the sun
On about March 22nd.

This I believe.
If you can join me in this belief,
I know we are in love with this surprising Earth.

I hope I have a long life, or failing
that,
That I cycle like the sunlight
In this autumnal exchange.

Don D. Maronde
2002



Wish List 2021

Sung to the refrain, “All I want for Mallard is...”

From time-to-time, we reach out and ask for your help. We are currently in need of two items:

iPad or Mac Book Air for use on Mallard to access our archives database on Xcel, which was recently upgraded and improved. This will enable our visitors to quickly sort for materials of interest and will help us with archive inventory work.

Pontoon trailer – for our work pontoon. Needs to be road worthy to get to Mallard. Would help extend the life of our work pontoon, which we use a lot!

If you or someone you know may be able to donate one of these items to the Foundation, please contact Rebecca at 651-867-4649. Thank you!!

Stewards of the Wilderness
Photo by Mary Swalla Holmes



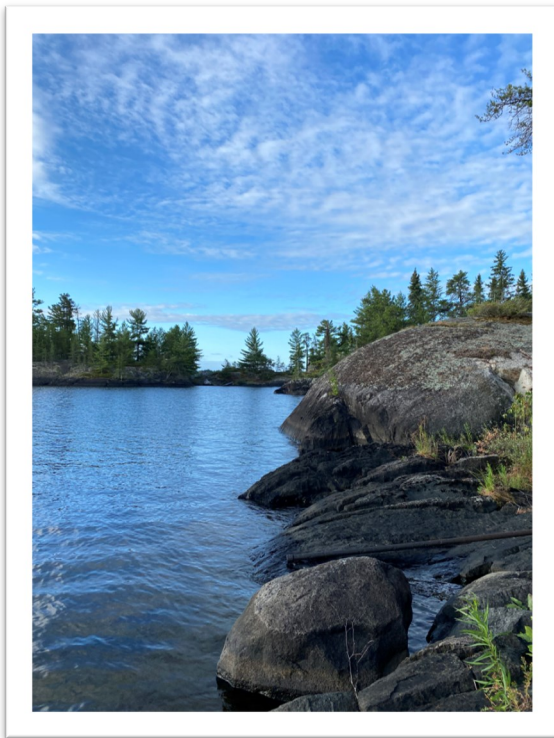
Archives Week volunteers

Photo by David Rolloff



Gardening Week volunteers

Photo by NMK



Many Thanks To All of Our Summer Volunteers

2021 Caretakers:

Jennie Ross
 Nance Kunkel
 Barb Draper
 Mark Granlund
 Kel Sassi
 Mary Swalla Holmes
 Beth Waterhouse
 Daniel Anderson
 Elaine Thrune
 Laura Pawlacyk
 Jane Lund
 Danielle Sosin
 Clay Gustafson
 Teghan Grulkowski

2021 Work Week Volunteers:

Randy and Robin Hilfer
 Wyman Weinbeck
 Troy Nordaune
 Michael Reid
 Eric Rundell
 Alan and Amy Boelke
 Craig Fernholz
 Gary and Gayla Olson
 Tom and Barb Balcom
 Carol Inderieden
 Tom McCann
 David Rolloff

Tim Gerlach
 Doug Kelly
 Sherry Rovig
 Mairi Campbell Doerr
 Lucy Schneeman
 Bob Norbie
 Anneliese Stuit
 Amy Nakamura
 Richard Paper
 Julie Markel
 Nancy Haarmeyer
 Inga Haugen



(Teghan continued from page 1)

There is a constant need to expand for me and gain more and more knowledge and relationships. Again, Mallard continues to open doors for me. This past June I spent my first week on Mallard as Caretaker rather than guest. What a week. It really is quite different being on the island with a set of responsibilities (might have to do with being the youngest by 20 years, too). Elaine and Rebecca trained me in on necessary chores that keep Mallard the way it is. Goodness is there a lot! But all the while, I discovered an aspect of the island I had never imagined. Mallard and I got to know each other that much more, like she trusted me enough to allow me to take care of her. You get to watch first timers fall in love just like you had that one summer. There was a new sense of gratitude as I started noticing all the aches and pains she had from caring for group after group, year after year, all while standing proud and opening her wings to welcome us back. This role of Caretaker finally gave me what I'd been missing since stepping onto that dock, a way to heal and maintain Mallard like she has done for me.

What the future holds for me as of now? I have no idea, who does at 22? There are people who continue to visit since the 80's, I'm a '99! To me all that shows is how timeless Mallard is, and I hope others my age find their way there just like I did. One thing I know for sure - Mallard will be my constant, my friend I owe so much to. My title for now is Caretaker, for now...



Camp Kooch attendees in the Teaching Lodge with Pebaamibines
Photo by J.R. Verkamp



Teghan and guest cleaning freshly caught fish

At the head of an island evening,
just above the channel inlet's glassy surface,
hovered a roiling swarm of white gnats.
How clear the view would be, I thought,
if they were not here to confuse the balance.

Early the next morning, I went back.
Now the white cloud had settled into
black dimpled patterns of circles and streaks
resting on the water.

Every now and then, a mutinous few
skittered off and away
from the main composition,
creating tiny wavelet tracks and micro water tufts,
that stretched to catch the sunlight,
and weave its gleeful sparkles into joy.

Catherine McKee

Letter from the Treasurer

One thing you can say about this year is we are certainly connected as a human race. At least we think we are, as we zoom into another meeting with friends or associates trying to regain or begin new relationships. Although this is the best we can do, considering our circumstances, it pales in comparison to the power of face-to-face or hand-in-hand on a long walk or a paddle across a lovely body of water.

It is there we discover that the natural world already knows how to be connected without tech; trees and many other species quietly exchanging nourishment and support, enduring droughts and fire, rebuilding again and again. What an amazing support system it has, while we still struggle to figure it out.

Anishinaabe traditions have always understood this natural connection, as I believe Ober did and we as an organization have tried to embrace in our mission. Another year of transition has taught us that as hard as we try, we think we are in control; the reality is we're just fooling ourselves. Ober was about understanding how to make those connections in supportive ways that contribute to our well-being as well as the health of what surrounds us.

As part of tradition, our support has always come through our spectacular volunteers who not only get things done but enjoy the relationships they build. It also has come through those that want to be sure we maintain our mission and find ways to give, knowing it promotes those relationships and programs that are there to make connections and nurture passions. New leaders emerge from your support and Mallard and its protective neighbor islands couldn't be a better place to make that happen.

As we look forward, we again face new challenges to keep our programs and facilities supported, whether a stone bridge or wall slowly collapsing, yet another building needing some TLC, or an outreach program in the community, your donations sustain us and impact many lives positively.

We look forward to letting you know what we have in store as we grow our organization and further exemplify the rich history and values of Ober. Stay tuned!

Michael Reid
Treasurer



Some of the many volunteers who worked on the tool shed, with Michael Reid front and center!!

Completed tool shed, September 2021

Photo by NMK



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For more information, visit

www.eober.org



MALLARD ISLAND

Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation
12697 N. 177th St.
Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047



Join Us

THE OBER
FOUNDATION
FALL
GATHERING

OCTOBER 30 2021
2:00 - 4:30

WARGO NATURE
CENTER
7701 MAIN ST
LINO LAKES, MN 55038



Limited space available - Please go to our website at www.eober.org and to the event link on right side of menu, click on it, and then click on "Register" and indicate whether in person or virtual. Thank you! If you register for virtual attendance, you will receive a link.

Anishinaabe ceremony starts at 2:30 CST. Entertainment includes music by Prudence Johnson, Dan Chouinard, and storytelling by Kevin Kling! Event will include a silent auction, Mallard inspired art to view, time to visit with friends on the patio and more. Masks will be available at the front table.

Please call Rebecca at 651-867-4649 if you need any help registering or if you have questions.

Design and photos by Tanya Piatz-Sandberg