

# Conservation Showcase

## For love of the land:

Family donates easement, uses conservation assistance to create wildlife haven

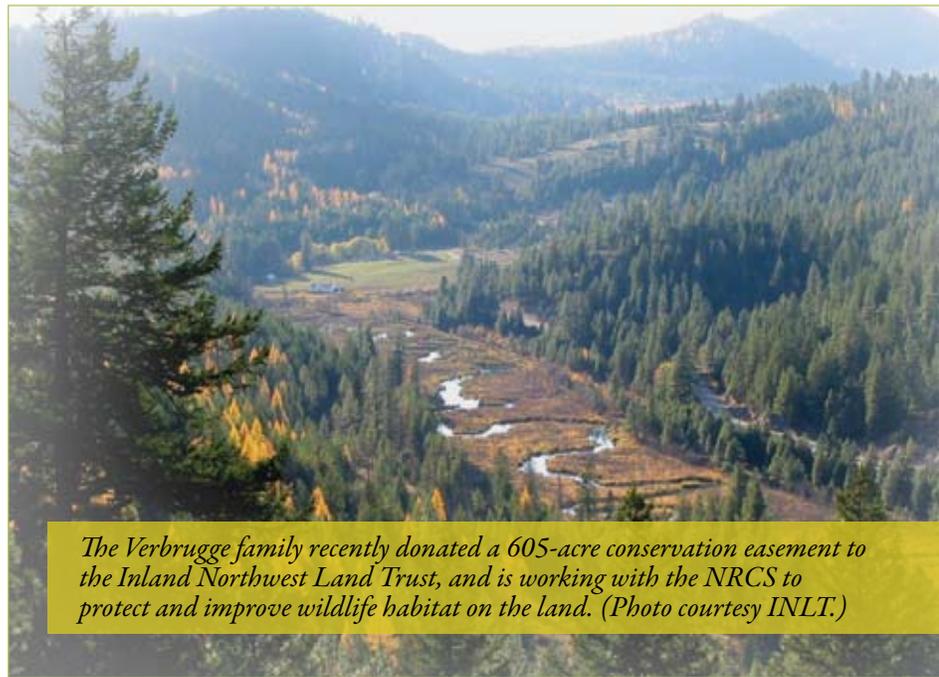
The Verbrugge family couldn't bear the thought of having their bucolic land near Newport, Washington carved up into five-acre plots and sold for home construction.

They wanted to leave a legacy that would protect their picturesque property in the Scotia Valley from succumbing to the rampant development that has consumed an increasing number of acres throughout eastern Washington. In addition, they wanted to create a permanent haven of habitat for the land's residents, which include moose, elk, bear, and cougar as well as a wide variety of birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

To make their vision an enduring one, Betty Verbrugge and her son Gary recently donated a permanent conservation easement – all 605 acres – to Inland Northwest Land Trust (INLT). The

easement prevents subdivision, but the family continues to own and manage the land, which includes harvesting timber as well as farming and limited grazing.

As part of their effort to improve wildlife habitat on their working land,



*The Verbrugge family recently donated a 605-acre conservation easement to the Inland Northwest Land Trust, and is working with the NRCS to protect and improve wildlife habitat on the land. (Photo courtesy INLT.)*

the Verbrugge family is also working with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Pend Oreille Conservation District to restore critical wetlands, which make up some 15 acres along the Little Spokane River. Through

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the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), three small fish passage barriers on a west branch tributary of the Little Spokane River will also be removed, which will allow fish to reach natural spawning areas.

In the forested acres on the property, volunteers recently installed 54 bird boxes and two raptor perch poles that were

*To improve wildlife habitat, volunteers from the Inland Northwest Land Trust have installed bird boxes and raptor poles throughout the property.*



also financed, in part, through EQIP.

NRCS Resource Conservationist Mark Simpson says additional work, focusing on forest health, is also planned. “We plan to address many acres of forested land through pre-commercial thinning and slash treatment – as well as some pruning,” he says. “Reforestation and site preparation are planned for clear-cuts that took place prior to Gary managing the land, and ‘rolling dips’ will be installed on the forest access road to minimize erosion,” NRCS’ Simpson says.

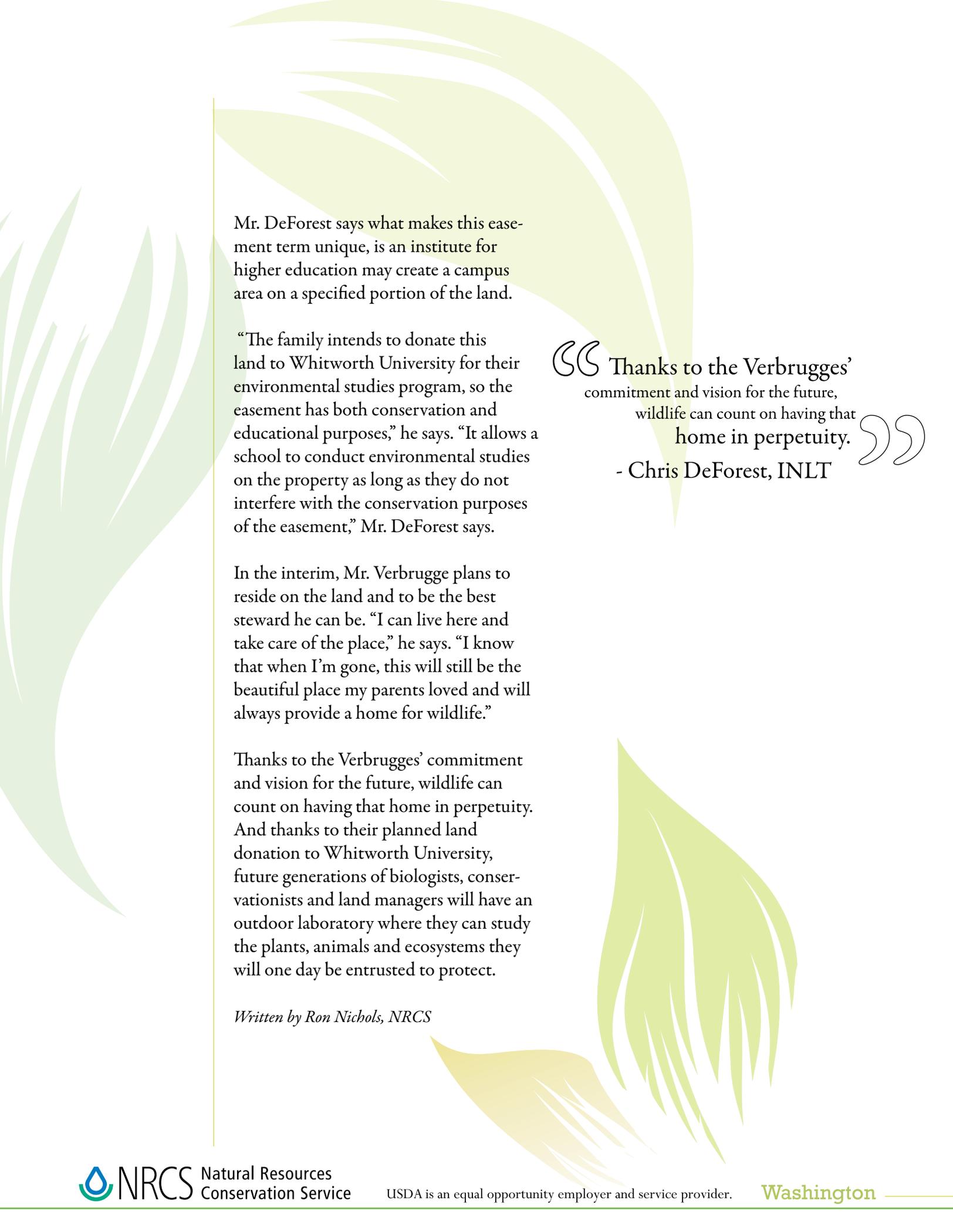


Future plans include planting a variety of native trees and shrubs in the meadow along the valley floor to provide food and shelter for wildlife. Through EQIP, more than 9600 trees and shrubs are planned for planting in the meadow area.

“This part of the EQIP plan is by far the most important thing to me,” Mr. Verbrugge says. “I really want to restore native habit for the wildlife and I am very excited to be able to do this. (NRCS’) Mark Simpson was really the one who first had the idea for this and it would not be possible without the help of the EQIP program and Pend Oreille Conservation District,” he says.

According to Chris DeForest, INLT executive director, the conservation easement assures the land will be retained forever in its relatively natural, scenic, and undeveloped condition - providing open space, wildlife habitat, scenic views, and watershed protection in perpetuity.

“It’s big and it’s beautiful. It’s got a long stretch of the Little Spokane and tributaries on it,” Mr. DeForest says. “And thanks to the technical and financial assistance provided through NRCS’ conservation programs, the Verbrugge family has been able to make substantive improvements to the land that will further protect and enhance its natural resources.”



Mr. DeForest says what makes this easement term unique, is an institute for higher education may create a campus area on a specified portion of the land.

“The family intends to donate this land to Whitworth University for their environmental studies program, so the easement has both conservation and educational purposes,” he says. “It allows a school to conduct environmental studies on the property as long as they do not interfere with the conservation purposes of the easement,” Mr. DeForest says.

In the interim, Mr. Verbrugge plans to reside on the land and to be the best steward he can be. “I can live here and take care of the place,” he says. “I know that when I’m gone, this will still be the beautiful place my parents loved and will always provide a home for wildlife.”

Thanks to the Verbrugges’ commitment and vision for the future, wildlife can count on having that home in perpetuity. And thanks to their planned land donation to Whitworth University, future generations of biologists, conservationists and land managers will have an outdoor laboratory where they can study the plants, animals and ecosystems they will one day be entrusted to protect.

*Written by Ron Nichols, NRCS*

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