



Instead of warehouses or apartments, developer to build wetlands on 400 acres in Pleasant Prairie

Jul 29, 2021

Story by Milwaukee Business Journal



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July 29, 2021

PLEASANT PRAIRIE — With an eye toward possible future development, a Kenosha-based company In Kenosha County where most developers are turning farmland into massive warehouses or large apartment communities, Bear Real Estate Group will instead convert 398 acres into a commercial wetland bank.

That means when other developers are looking to fill wetlands for their projects, they can pay Bear for a credit from the wetlands it's creating in Pleasant Prairie to satisfy government requirements. S.R. Mills, CEO of Kenosha-based Bear Real Estate, said the property was wetlands 200 years ago before being converted into farms.

"We're firm believers we, too, need to do our part to ensure the area has proper water quality and quantity controls for storm water," Mills said. "There's nothing better to help the environment on that front than large swaths of wetlands."

To turn farms back into natural areas, Bear will disable underground clay drain tiles that were engineered to keep the water levels down, kill off invasive species of plants and reseed with native plants.

Bear would hold and conserve that restored land. Under an agreement through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, it would sell credits to other public and private organizations seeking government approval to fill wetlands for construction projects in other areas.

"If a wetland is disturbed in southeastern Wisconsin, it doesn't make ecological sense to buy credits up in Baraboo," Mills said. "We want to make sure the offset happens in that same watershed."

The wetland bank is south of 91st Street on the west side of Sheridan Road.



Pleasant Prairie's Plan Commission on Monday approved a rezoning for the wetland bank. With that approval, Bear Real Estate may be ready to start selling credits from the bank by this fall.

Current environmental regulations would not prohibit Bear from trying to develop buildings on about 223 acres of the 398-acre site, according to a village staff report. There have been past proposals for the property including subdivisions or a golf course, for example. Bear Real Estate controls another 140 acres in the area, but located outside of the wetland bank that could be developed. The company has developed housing, hotels and commercial properties in the region and beyond.

"Historically, there has been a shortage of wetland mitigation banks in southeastern Wisconsin, partly because of the economics where it is very expensive, land is expensive," Mills said.