

Land Trust sues town to recover taxes on clubhouse

Written by Carol Pmeday
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It claims entire Forest Beach Nature Preserve should be tax exempt

The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust has sued the Town of Belgium to recover \$6,551.80 in taxes it paid in 2009 for property it claims should be tax exempt.

The Land Trust is seeking reimbursement of the taxes, interest and attorney and court costs in the lawsuit filed May 5 in Ozaukee County Circuit Court.

The Land Trust, which purchased the former Squires Country Club on Nov. 19, 2008, to create the Forest Beach Nature Preserve, was assessed taxes on the clubhouse and five acres of land. The remaining 111 acres were declared tax exempt by Grota Appraisals of Menomonee Falls.

The assessor and town have denied the Land Trust's appeals to have the assessment changed and taxes reimbursed.

The Land Trust has not received its assessment for 2010, said Shawn Graff, executive director of the Land Trust.

"Had we been assured we would not be taxed in the future, we would not have filed the lawsuit," Graff said. "But we have to protect ourselves going forward. We're a small organization that depends on volunteers, and \$6,000 is a lot of money to us. That's a summer intern or repairs to the building."

Graff said the building is used only for training, educational programs and events by other nonprofit conservation-minded organizations.

"We have received no revenue from the building whatsoever," he said.

Town officials and assessor Michael Grota could not be reached for comment.