



## **Great Lake Gatherings** **Questions and Answers**

with

**Michael Strigel, Executive Director,  
Gathering Waters Conservancy**

**1. Q: What are the Great Lake Gatherings and the intended purpose of these events?**

**A:** The Great Lake Gatherings are intended to spark conversations about local and regional land and water conservation. The land trusts of the Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance, with support from Gathering Waters Conservancy and the Joyce Foundation, are hosting open forums this fall in four Wisconsin communities: Green Bay, Sheboygan, Mequon and Milwaukee. We hope to encourage new, creative partnerships to protect the places important to the great quality of life in the Lake Michigan Basin.

Many people share a common love for the natural treasures in the Lake Michigan basin. The Great Lake Gatherings will introduce participants to new partners who are working to protect that treasure in our shared back yard. We will connect local land trusts with community leadership—key businesses, elected officials, civic organizations and involved citizens.

Land trusts play an important role in preserving and improving the ecological, economic and human health in the area. One goal of the Gatherings is to encourage community leaders to look to their land trusts as a resource.

**2. Q: What is a land trust?**

**A:** A land trust is a private, not-for-profit organization that protects land for future generations. They are citizen-run organizations dedicated to protecting trails, parks, nature preserves, access to rivers and streams, working lands and wild places. Some are large organizations working internationally, such as The Nature Conservancy, while others work regionally or locally. Land trusts of all sizes are run by people who understand that natural resources are essential to the health of our communities.

Land trusts are the fastest growing conservation movement in the United States. There are several land trusts working in Wisconsin's Lake Michigan basin such as the River Revitalization Foundation which is keeping natural lands thriving in downtown Milwaukee and the Glacial Lakes Conservancy in Sheboygan that is working to keep land available for agriculture.

**3. Q: What is the Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance?**

**A:** The Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance (LMSA) is a collaborative group of land trusts working to protect land and water resources in Wisconsin's Lake Michigan Basin. LMSA was formed in 2003 and has already undertaken strategic conservation planning for the Lake Michigan watershed and identified eighteen priority conservation sites in the Basin that will be the focus of further conservation work.

Gathering Waters was instrumental in establishing LMSA and continues to work with Alliance members in their conservation and communication efforts.

**4. Q: What is Gathering Waters Conservancy and the main goals of your organization?**

**A:** Gathering Waters Conservancy (GWC) was founded in 1994 with the goal of establishing a statewide network of local land trusts in Wisconsin. At Gathering Waters we believe the state's land

trusts are critical protectors of the places that make Wisconsin special. Through direct assistance, policy advocacy and statewide outreach efforts, we strive to make Wisconsin land trusts stronger.

To date, more than 50 land trusts work in Wisconsin. Their memberships include over 45,000 individuals and families; they have protected more than 200,000 acres for today's and future generations.

**5. Q: What will actually happen at the Great Lake Gathering events?**

**A:** We hope there will be productive conversation about each community's conservation priorities. We expect the Gatherings will attract each community's local policy makers, business leaders, economic development organizations, land owners, civic organizations and citizens. There will be keynote speakers and panel discussions that will focus on specific local conservation issues. For instance, in Green Bay we will hear from the land trust about how they helped the city keep the Baird Creek Parkway available for public recreation. Participants will talk about what measures might help conserve other important lands in their area.

We hope the discussions will develop a sense of optimism, creativity and collaboration among many different groups interested in the future of their shared land and water resources. We believe that by introducing people who are working to protect those treasures to each other, we can inspire innovative conservation projects in the region.

We will also provide attendees with a "toolkit" of information, contacts and resources to inspire them to collaborate and implement new projects in their own backyard..

**6. Q: Who will attend the Great Lake Gatherings?**

**A:** We expect attendees will include a wide range of people who share a common interest in protecting their community's important natural resources. We will invite community leaders, local policy makers, elected officials, business owners, economic development experts, land owners, community organization representatives and citizens.

**7. Q: Why are the Gatherings being held in Green Bay, Sheboygan, Milwaukee and Mequon?**

**A:** LMSA recently identified 18 priority areas in the Lake Michigan basin where natural lands and wildlife habitat face challenges from increasing development pressures. Some of those priority areas are in or near these four communities. The land trusts in these four areas can help their communities strategize ways to protect local recreation lands, waterways and farmland, and to influence long-term economic development planning.

**8. Q: What is the connection between business and conservation – why will businesses be active participants in the Gatherings?**

**A:** Business owners recognize that the health and appeal of life in the region attracts a strong workforce and customer base. Many businesses are actively contributing to their employee's quality of life through strong environmental stewardship. Land trusts are community institutions working to preserve and improve quality of life. We're excited to connect corporate citizens with their land trusts to incubate productive partnerships to protect the places that make this region special.

**9. Q: Are there specific long-term economic benefits that can be realized in these areas of Wisconsin by community leaders and citizens working together on land and water conservation issues?**

**A:** Yes, according to a recent Brookings Institute report, by working together we could create an aggregate economic benefit to our region of approximately \$30 to \$50 billion in increased revenue and economic impact.

**(NOTE: See FACT Sheet with more specific information from this report)**

**10. Q: What position does Gathering Waters Conservancy and Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance take on the Great Lakes Compact and why is it so important to Wisconsin?**

**A:** Our two organizations believe the Great Lakes Compact is critical for the long term health of the Great Lakes. The Compact, enacted by all states bordering the Great Lakes, is a multi-state agreement to plan for the welfare of the water resources of the basin. The fate of the region and our state is tightly tied to the fate of the Great Lakes. The long-term economic, health and quality of life benefits for the people of Wisconsin are enormous. The Compact acknowledges that protection of this vast basin has to be a cooperative venture. Our land trusts are powerful community resources and protectors of water quality; to maximize the value of their work they need the large-scale, multi-state cooperation the Compact promises.

**11. Q: What is the Great Lakes Regional Collaborative Strategy (GLRCS) and how does it relate to the Gatherings?**

**A:** The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy (GLRCS) is a comprehensive plan to modernize sewage treatment, clean-up polluted harbors, restore wetlands, and prevent unwanted, new species from invading the lakes. By focusing on protecting land and water resources for future generations, the Gatherings represent one of the key elements of the GLRCS.

**12. Q: What are the most important points you hope community leaders and policy makers will take away from the Great Lake Gatherings?**

**A:** We hope community leaders and policy-makers will view the Gatherings as an opportunity to listen to the concerns of their constituents and fellow citizens. We also hope the Gatherings encourage elected officials to formulate and promote ordinances and legislation that support the environmental health of the basin. We would like to see our law-makers leave a legacy that will protect their local land and water resources, foster responsible economic development and build environmentally-focused communities.

**13. Q: What are the most important points that you want the general public to take away from the Great Lake Gatherings?**

**A:** We want people to leave the Gatherings invigorated by new connections. We want to connect citizens, their land trusts, their policy makers, neighbors, local businesses and other community leaders all of whom share the same proverbial back yard. The Gatherings will inspire action among people with a common interest in the health of their community's natural resources. We believe these new connections will generate ways to protect the places that attract wildlife, families, visitors and businesses to the region and make Wisconsin special.