Stronger Together

From the Chair & Executive Director

After 20 years of working with you and Wisconsin’s land trusts we’re just as inspired as our founders must have been when they came together in 1994 to launch Gathering Waters. They envisioned an organization to grow Wisconsin’s 12-member land trust community by providing training, solution-oriented advocacy, and a collective voice to share the story of land trust power and potential. Today, Wisconsin’s more than 50 land trusts are working in every Wisconsin community and have permanently protected more than 300,000 acres of our most special places.

Although the number of acres is impressive and important, it’s just a number. What means more are the ways that those acres are making a measurable difference for the people of Wisconsin. Land trusts are doing far more than simply protecting land.

- Wisconsin land trusts and the places they protect help create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars annually through tourism, outdoor recreation, forestry, and agriculture;
- Communities have cleaner air and water maintained by the natural filtering provided by protected wetlands and forests;
- As the climate changes, protected lands provide important habitat and migration corridors for Wisconsin’s plants and animals; and
- Land trusts provide accessible outdoor places and programs where both urban and rural populations can connect to the magic and beauty of the natural world.

After 20 years, we recognize and celebrate how far we’ve come together in pursuit of the founders’ vision. Yet we know the journey is only beginning. And, as we look to challenges and victories that surely face us in the next 20 years we know that we are stronger, together.
“Gathering Waters is a crucial technical assistance and mutual advocacy organization for all of Wisconsin’s 50 land trusts. We are all more efficient and more effective because of GW’s outstanding training, direct assistance, and public policy efforts on our behalf.”

– Bryan Pierce, Executive Director, Northwoods Land Trust
Land trusts do far more than protect land. The following story and video teasers demonstrate just some of the ways land trusts are touching lives in Wisconsin!

Community Asset, Local Treasure

The Erikson Conservation Area is nestled between the Pecatonica River and the Village of Argyle, beckoning visitors and students from the adjacent Village Park and K-12 schools to explore its wetlands, remnant prairie, 100-year-old bur oak grove, river, sloughs, and woods. It has been an important part of the community’s identity for as long as anyone can remember. As local resident Neale Tollakson describes, “This property was one of my first introductions to nature. I’ve been coming out here for probably around 50 years. I’m not tired of it yet.”

When land owners Alex and Mary Erikson decided to sell this 220-acre property, the community was deeply concerned. As local resident John Soper describes, “This property came up for sale and I thought, uh oh, are we going to have that access to it that we had before?” Luckily the Eriksons were on the same page. “Seeing this land protected so that it will inspire kids and the Argyle community has always been a dream of Alex’s,” Mary explains. And in order to make that dream a reality, the Eriksons sold the property to their local land trust for half the market value. It was a good move.

Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC), the land trust for southwest Wisconsin, believes that to truly fulfill their mission, the places they protect need to be “located near people, scalable to children, inviting and a way of really engaging people that may not otherwise be engaged in the enjoyment of the outdoors and

“We couldn’t have done this without the Knowles Nelson Stewardship grant. You know, it pays for fifty percent of the appraised value of the property and that was significant. So, without the Stewardship funding the deal wouldn’t have gone through.”

– Dave Clutter, Executive Director, Driftless Area Land Conservancy
“During school it kinda feels cooped up and when we get to get outside, it’s like you’re free.”
– Taylor Mathys, Argyle student

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in natural resources,” said Executive Director, Dave Clutter. And their treatment of the Erickson Conservation Area is a testimony to this belief.

Since the property became a permanent part of the Argyle community through DALC’s leadership and protection, the land trust and the community have worked together to truly make the most of all it has to offer. As Clutter explains, “The community support for this project has been heartwarming. It is clear that this place has touched the lives of many people already.” The Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin funded a kiosk and boardwalk to facilitate public access to the land, and DALC has “been working hand-in-hand with the school and developing curriculum and using this property as an outdoor laboratory.” Additionally, an anonymous foundation is funding the purchase of binoculars, a computer, and a spotting scope for the school’s environmental education activities.

And the students are loving it. “It’s just better to be outside because you get more fresh air and there’s just more to do,” declares high school student, Kaylie Berget. Her friend Taylor Mathys adds, “During school it kinda feels cooped up and when we get to get outside, it’s like you’re free.”

Now, thanks to the generosity of the landowners, the vision of the local land trust, the encouragement of local champions, and the support of several funders, this special place will continue to enrich the lives of those around it, forever. Echoing the sentiment of fellow community members, Tollakson says “It’s a great comfort to me to know that it’s going to continue to be here for future generations.”
Enhancing the Lives of Urban Youth

Milwaukee’s urban rivers land trust, the River Revitalization Foundation, provides opportunities for area high school students and graduates to gain exposure to the natural world and gain job experience as part of the city’s Earn & Learn Community Work Experience Program. For many participants, it’s their first real interaction with the outdoors. They learn to identify plants, remove non-native species, plant natives, and lead guided hikes on trails they have cared for. There is a daily connection with the outdoors, fostering excitement about the city’s green spaces while doing work that benefits the entire community.

“The work that we do is important because we need nature, more than we need basically everything else. People don’t understand that, you know, as much as they think they need technology and everything. But, nature’s been here and it’s going to be here after we’re gone. So, that’s why we need to keep it up.”
– Alisakah Bishop, Earn & Learn program participant

“I work with generally about 10 kids every summer and it’s the most amazing thing to watch kids transform, not seeing anything outdoors, not experiencing anything in nature—to getting out on the water, canoeing for the first time ever and really getting out there, getting their hands dirty and asking questions about what things are.”
– Tanya Bueter, River Revitalization Foundation.

Protecting Land and Jobs

Conservation and working forests can go hand-in-hand when it comes to protecting jobs, wildlife, and habitat while providing clean air, water, and beautiful places to enjoy. The Conservation Fund’s Brule-St. Croix Legacy Forest in northwest Wisconsin is a great example. This protected place is 67,285 acres of working forest that provides more than a thousand Wisconsin jobs and brings in $34.1 million through employment, timber sales, and taxes each year. To top it off, the Forest provides critical habitat for several threatened and endangered species while area residents enjoy hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, and tons of other activities on the land.

“It’s important to keep the integrity of our private working forest land base for jobs, but also the protection and recreation that comes about from these lands.”
– Tom Duffus, The Conservation Fund

“My grandpa started back in nineteen-fifty-something, I believe…. He’s still working today. He’s 81 years old, and he still works with me every day.”
– Matt Kurilla, Kurilla Forest Products

“When this easement was placed on the property, to me it meant a lot in that our kids have that gift, that this will be preserved and enjoyed, just as I am [enjoying it] today.”
– Annie Maina, Steigerwaldt Land Services

“I love to bow hunt, rifle hunt out on the property. I mean, its great recreational use for everyone.” – Mike Love, Steigerwaldt Land Services.
20 Years is a Name Changer

Wisconsin’s landscapes—miles of beach, soaring bluffs, acres of ancient forest—were shaped by the world’s largest freshwater ecosystem, the mighty Mississippi, and the last great glacial retreat. In short, Wisconsin is defined by water. And, “gathering of the waters” is an interpretation of Wisconsin’s meaning. So in 1994, when it came time to choose a name for a new organization that would work to protect land statewide, our founders sought to poetically reference the special place in which we would work. And so, Gathering Waters Conservancy was born.

As our 20-year milestone approached, we took a critical look at the way this organization has evolved for and with Wisconsin’s land trusts. While Gathering Waters has entered the vocabulary of many conservationists across Wisconsin and even the country, “Conservancy” was a misnomer, since we do not directly protect land. And, while poetic, Gathering Waters alone left room for confusion over our role.

So today, we announce a small change with major significance. Gathering Waters: Wisconsin’s Alliance for Land Trusts, exists to help land trusts, landowners and, communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

The new name doesn’t change anything we do, but we hope it better captures who we are and opens the door to more connections to the people who care about the places that make Wisconsin special.

We hope you like it as much as we do!

“As far as I can tell, Gathering Waters runs the strongest state program in the country...Thanks for blazing the way.”
– Andy Loza, Pennsylvania Land Trust Association

Gathering Waters founders celebrating our 15th anniversary in 2009 (left to right): Bud Jordahl, Rob Chambers, Jean Meanwell, Bill O’ Connor, and Geoff Maclay
Land Trust Members

They make it happen – the on-the-ground professionals, volunteers, and impassioned conservationists working to protect the best of Wisconsin. Support of Gathering Waters accelerates, enhances, and sustains their work.

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Tall Pines Conservancy
Waukesha County Land Conservancy
West Wisconsin Land Trust

Balance Sheet

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<th>Assets</th>
<th>FY 2014</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>$282,504</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unconditional promises to give</td>
<td>68,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and other</td>
<td>17,886</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>172,572</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Assets</td>
<td>541,462</td>
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| Liabilities                                | 13,878  |
| Restricted net assets                      | 105,050 |

| Unrestricted Net Assets                    | $422,534|

Revenue and Expenses

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<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>FY 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grants and contracts</td>
<td>$411,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions from individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions from land trusts</td>
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<td>Special events</td>
<td>32,546</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income and other</td>
<td>30,186</td>
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<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>$632,400</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Land trust services</td>
<td>$198,548</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education and outreach</td>
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<td>Policy and government relations</td>
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<td>Management and general</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership and Fundraising</td>
<td>66,602</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Expenses</td>
<td>$624,913</td>
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Gathering Waters extends our deepest thanks to everyone that made a contribution in our 2014 fiscal year. You are our inspiration and the driving force that makes our work possible. Together, we’re protecting Wisconsin’s special places for future generations.

Please know that every gift you send is valued and directly benefits our work, so we’ve worked hard to ensure the accuracy of this list of FY2014 donors (July 1, 2013–June 30, 2014).

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“Land conservation in Wisconsin is predominantly a grassroots undertaking. This is both a blessing and a curse. It empowers landowners and other conservationists. It also means that there will always be a need for statewide leadership of, and guidance for land trusts. Gathering Waters meets this need, and Pat and I hope it always will be there to do that.”

– Dana Chabot

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Gathering Waters’ mission is to help land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special.
Food for the Soul:

Offerings from Your Local Land Trust

Are you looking for a great place to explore with your family?

Or an opportunity to volunteer for an organization doing valuable work in your community? How about a fun event where you can meet new people in your area, enjoy local foods, view local art inspired by nature, or learn about the plants and animals found in your backyard?

These sorts of opportunities and more are made available by Wisconsin’s land trusts year round.

To find events in your area, visit www.gatheringwaters.org. While you’re there, join our email list to receive updates on conservation news and events.