Lasting Land Conservation in Uncertain Times

If ever there was a time for Wisconsin’s land trusts and the conservation community to work together with a common purpose, this is it. Many of our top priorities at the state and federal levels—Wisconsin’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and public land ownership—face grave threats, and we need your support and involvement.

The strength of the land trust community derives from deep connections at the local level, with communities, landowners, and concerned citizens across Wisconsin. When we work together as an alliance—harnessing this grassroots support—we truly can effect change.

Our collective advocacy efforts have long been focused on building broad bi-partisan support for conservation, and this work is perhaps more important than ever. Please help defend our shared conservation priorities, and invest in lasting land conservation in Wisconsin.

In this edition of Crosscurrents, we provide 6 ways for you to get involved in public policy advocacy, and we share stories about the local, on-the-ground impact of the Stewardship Program and GLRI. We also introduce new members of our team, share highlights from our annual Land Trust Retreat, and request nominations for our annual Land Conservation Leadership Awards.

Thanks for all you do to help protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

Roy Thilly
Board Chair

Mike Carlson
Executive Director
Welcome our two new staff members!

Chris Danou joined the team in January 2017. As our new Government Relations Director, Chris advocates for state and federal funding and policies that support land conservation in Wisconsin. He develops and implements legislative strategies; works with grassroots and grasstops advocates; and collaborates with partner organizations to achieve these initiatives. He has a diverse professional background that includes eight years of service as a State Representative. Chris enjoys hunting (especially wing shooting and waterfowling), fishing, canoeing, kayaking and stand up paddle boarding. He also enjoys attending his sons’ lacrosse games with his wife of 21 years, Kate.

Melissa Hunter came on board in February 2017 as our new Program Assistant. She manages our office, assists with fundraising and outreach work, and provides support to the rest of our staff. Melissa comes to Gathering Waters from the Kettle Moraine Land Trust, where she did similar work while learning about the inner-workings of land trusts and why they are so valuable to Wisconsin. She is passionate about land conservation and enjoys exploring Wisconsin’s many unique natural areas. In her free time you can find her hiking, camping with her husband, Ryan, and—when there is snow on the ground, snowboarding.

To learn about the rest of our staff, visit gatheringwaters.org/staff

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

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www.gatheringwaters.org

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Learn more about the Council at: gatheringwaters.org/council
THE KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM IS INTEGRAL TO A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR WISCONSIN

The 2017 state budget process is underway.
You can help protect the Stewardship Program.

IT’S AN INVESTMENT...
The Stewardship Program invests in clean water and natural resources, which support jobs and provide wild places for all of us to fish, hunt, and explore close to home.

IT’S AN ECONOMIC ENGINE...
The Stewardship Program directly supports Wisconsin’s $20 billion forestry industry and $12 billion outdoor recreation industry—including our $4 billion hunting and fishing industries.

IT’S AFFORDABLE...
The annual cost for the Stewardship Program is less than 0.3% of the total state budget. That means that the Stewardship Program costs each Wisconsin resident less than a fishing license or state park sticker each year.

See page 12 to learn how to help...

Watch a short video to see how the timber industry, our public schools, and urban communities have made the Stewardship Program’s investment pay off. Watch it today at gatheringwaters.org/video
Everyone Loves a Waterfall

*Story contributed by Ian Shackleford*

Waterfalls provide inspiration to get outside—to take a hike with a prize at the end. A prize you can hear and see, and even feel. I’m very lucky to have a waterfall near my home. After my wife and I first visited, I remember thinking, “Wow, there’s a waterfall right here at the edge of town!”

We treasure the falls. We take our children, friends, and other family hiking and snowshoeing along the trail—or just swing by the falls—as often as possible. Others in the area frequent this special place as well; they hike to the falls and fish in the creek. There’s even a “geocache” hidden near the falls!

One day, I saw a “For Sale” sign on the way to the falls. I was concerned, to say the least. The property, owned by Don and Nancy Siebert, had been open to the public for nearly 60 years. Would the next owners allow the same access? The future of this place and our relationship with it suddenly became uncertain. But with this uncertainty, I saw opportunity; with the property for sale, might there be a way to secure public access forever?

Thankfully, I met Bryan Pierce, Executive Director of Northwoods Land Trust (NWLT). Bryan visited the property with me and invited me to speak to his board of directors about the falls. I was so grateful to find this local organization, dedicated to conservation in my area. Their board and staff were very professional. They knew the tools, the options, and agreed to take on the Interstate Falls project.

The biggest obstacle was securing funding to purchase the property. NWLT applied for a grant through Wisconsin’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program just before the Governor proposed a freeze to this funding source in early 2015. Fortunately, organizations like Gathering Waters helped ensure that the Legislature understood the value of the Stewardship Program and, in the end, this critical program was saved, providing NWLT with half the funding needed to protect Interstate Falls. These state funds were matched by generous family foundations and individual donors who wanted to help and to provide a legacy for future generations.

NWLT purchased and ensured the lawful protection of this place. The land trust then gifted the property to the Town of Kimball and is partnering with them to increase public accessibility. I keep in touch with Bryan and the other folks at NWLT, helping when I can and serving as an advocate for their projects. I am very grateful; my community and I will cherish our waterfall as a protected, accessible local treasure, forever.

**Why Stewardship Matters:**

Over 7,000 people living in the area continue to have access to a beloved trail, waterfall, 2,500 feet of frontage on the Montreal River, and ¼ mile of a Class 1 brook trout stream.

Local tourism benefits from having a scenic attraction close to town, by the major intersection of US Hwy 51 and US Hwy 2.

Living near parks and green spaces has been shown to boost mental well-being and reduce stress.

“I want to be involved with projects like this again. Here and there, I see similar opportunities: other waterfalls, undeveloped lakes, and Lake Superior shoreline. Having a local land trust to work with, like the Northwoods Land Trust, I know that many of these places will be preserved and open to the public for my children to enjoy in the future.”

— Ian Shackelford

*Photo by Mike Ivey*
THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE IS IMPORTANT TO OUR HEALTH AND VITALITY

It takes a lot of effort to protect and restore the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) provides critical funds to many partner organizations and programs that clean up and reduce pollution, prevent invasive species from ruining our waters, and keep our Great Lakes healthy. The President’s federal budget threatens to eliminate GLRI. You can help.

HEALTHY GREAT LAKES ARE:

- **A vital source of drinking water.** Nearly 40 million people in the region, including more than 1.6 million Wisconsinites, rely on them for their water.

- **An economic driver.** More than 1.5 million U.S. jobs are directly connected to the Great Lakes, generating $62 billion in wages annually. Lakeshore communities along Lakes Michigan and Superior in Wisconsin generate $252 million in revenue annually because tourism and other industries thrive on the shores of healthy, clean lakes.

- **A smart investment.** Every dollar spent through GLRI, brings in $2 of long-term economic gains.

THE LOSS OF GLRI WOULD BE DEVASTATING...

Without funding for programs that protect and restore our Great Lakes, we would be risking one of Wisconsin’s greatest assets.

See page 12 to learn how to help...
Return of a Lost Child

The Frog Bay area is an ecologically exceptional stretch of forest and shoreline located along Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin. It features rare and endangered plants, pristine boreal forest, and a rich abundance of wildlife. Historically important to the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, it’s an area where they once harvested wild rice and much more. Then, under private ownership for over a century, it was inaccessible to the tribe and everyone else.

When the property’s most recent owners, the late Dave and Marjorie Johnson, began to contemplate the future of this special place and decided they’d like to ensure its preservation and protection forever, a friend and neighbor put them in touch with their local land trust, Bayfield Regional Conservancy (BRC).

First, BRC reached out to the Red Cliff Tribe to see if they would be interested in owning and stewarding this place that was once theirs—and of course, they were. But financing the purchase of this land was a major obstacle for them. The Johnsons did not have the means to donate the entire parcel, and neither the tribe nor the land trust could afford to purchase the land outright.

Luckily, BRC was able to help the Tribe secure the needed funds through a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program (a program funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) and a few other sources. Bryan Bainbridge, Chairman of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, compares the reunion between this place and the Tribe as “the return of a lost child.”

And with the return of this place to the Tribe, it became a gift to us all, as the Frog Bay Tribal National Park. “We’ve had people from all over the world to come visit,” Bainbridge says proudly. And this place is more than a new destination spot; it’s an ecological treasure that plays an important role in protecting the water quality of Lake Superior and we will all benefit from this special place for generations to come.

The Impact of GLRI:

The project opened the area to the public and increased public access to Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands.

It provides the public with beaches, scenic vistas, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, and skiing.

It’s an ecological treasure that plays an important role in protecting the water quality of Lake Superior.

“It’s open to the public. We invite people here to witness the beauty and use it as an educational tool. We’ve had people from all over the world come to visit it. It’s part of our history, part of our culture, to be stewards of the land.”

– Bryan Bainbridge, Chairman, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Stewardship Project Location:
Bayfield County

Land Trust Project Leader:
Bayfield Regional Conservancy

http://www.brcland.org

Photo by Grandon Harris

“In addition to offering public beaches, scenic vistas, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, and skiing, this incredible place is an ecological treasure that plays an important role in protecting the water quality of Lake Superior.”
Inspiring, interactive, informative, empowering, and fun are some of the ways participants in this year’s Wisconsin Land Trust Retreat described their experiences. This annual event is an unparalleled opportunity for learning and networking among land trust professionals, volunteers, and industry experts from around the state.

One hundred people from 39 organizations attended the February Retreat at the UW-Madison Arboretum.

Participants learned a little about the rich history of the Arboretum, and enjoyed a walk in the footsteps of Aldo Leopold, who was instrumental in the ecological restoration of the Arboretum in the 1930’s.

Sessions covered a wide range of topics including advocating for land conservation, navigating the complexities of land deals, funding permanent land protection through water quality programs, planned giving, and exploring the connection between healthy people and a healthy environment.
We were excited to have students join us from the Land Conservation Society, a UW-Stevens Point group that promotes land trusts and assists landowners with land management activities while developing skills and experience for careers in conservation.

Attendees highlighted the opportunity to network during sessions, over lunch, and at a special reception at Madison Central Library, co-hosted with Natural Heritage Land Trust, Madison Audubon Society, and the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

A special thanks to the sponsors who made this event possible:

**Presenting Sponsors**
- American Transmission Company
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“I will go back with many new ideas, renewed energy and direction, and wonderful stories from old and new friends to tell our board and supporters. Congratulations to all who worked so hard to bring our community together!”

– Karen Yancey,
Geneva Lake Conservancy

Photo by Ideal Impressions
SAVE THE DATE

Back by popular demand! Gathering Waters’ Land Conservation Leadership Awards Celebration is returning to Madison. In 2016 we traveled around the state, presenting awards at local events. This year, we are happy to announce that the presentation of awards will take place on September 21, in Madison. We hope to see you there for an evening of great food and celebration, in honor of some of Wisconsin’s most inspirational conservation leaders.

Nominate a Conservation Leader

If you know an individual, policy maker, land trust, or other group that has exhibited leadership in protecting the places that make Wisconsin special, we encourage you to nominate them for a Land Conservation Leadership Award.

Categories include:

- Land Trust of the Year
- Conservationist of the Year
- Policy Maker of the Year
- Land Legacy Award
- Rod Nilsestuen Award for Working Lands Preservation
- Award with a Harold “Bud” Jordahl Distinction

To learn more about award categories, nomination submission, past award winners, or the event in general, visit gatheringwaters.org/awards.

Nominations due June 2, 2017

This much loved event offers a silent auction, excellent food, drinks, and great company.
Meet Ron Endres, last year’s Conservationist of the Year

Ron is a private landowner and champion of native area-restoration in Dane County. In addition to being a model steward of his and many of his neighbors’ lands, Ron is also an incredibly active volunteer with numerous area-organizations. But what truly makes him special is far more unique. From July through December, Ron works almost every day collecting, drying and processing native forb and grass seeds to provide them free-of-charge, to local non-profits and private landowners.

Ron’s land stewardship activities are truly inspirational. He has worked over the last 26 years to reconstruct a 21-acre prairie and spends much of his time maintaining the land, adding to its species diversity and fighting back invasive species. He helps many of his neighbors as well, burning their prairies, treating their invasives, and restoring their land.

Ron is also an invaluable volunteer for many area organizations such as Dane County Parks, The Prairie Enthusiasts, The Ice Age Trail Alliance, Holy Wisdom Monastery, Swamplovers, and many others. He leads school kids and adult volunteers, serves on a board, is a chain saw team member, leads prairie plantings and burns, as well as seed collection and processing.

It is, however, what Ron does in addition to these stewardship and volunteer activities that makes him so unique. From July through December, Ron works almost every day collecting, drying and processing native forb and grass seeds—providing hundreds of pounds and more than 100 species of seed, free of charge, to nonprofits and private landowners each year. Ron’s seeds have ended up in restorations all over the county. His unwavering commitment to native habitat restoration is why we were thrilled to honor him with the prestigious Conservationist of the Year award in 2016.

“I had the pleasure of meeting Ron at the Earth Day conference hosted by UW’s Nelson Institute this last spring. We were having lunch and I think my jaw dropped to the table when he (modestly) explained the extent of the work he’s doing to help with restoration in Wisconsin. I am so glad to see he is the Conservationist of the Year award recipient. It is a well-deserved honor for a kind, generous, and all-around great guy.”

— Emily Meier, Madison, WI
6 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS

If accessibility to public lands and waters in Wisconsin and the health of the Great Lakes are important to you, take action today.

AMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA
Tweet, post on Facebook, and share your perspective on the Stewardship Program, the Great Lakes, and our shared public lands. Post Instagram photos of your favorite outdoor places and connect them to Stewardship and/or GRLI.

CONTACT STATE & FEDERAL LEGISLATORS
Call, write personal letters, or visit. Tell your state reps why protecting Wisconsin’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is so important. Consider contacting members of the powerful Joint Finance Committee.

Let your members of Congress know why you care about the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other vital federal conservation programs.

SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR
Share your thoughts with the daily and weekly newspapers in your area, then write positive comments about it if it’s posted online.

STAY CONNECTED
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DONATE
Your gift to Gathering Waters increases the impact you make on these issues by empowering us to do more. Visit gatheringwaters.org/give

STAY INFORMED
Be able to put the value of these state and federal programs in context. Learn more about how the benefits outweigh the costs at gatheringwaters.org/benefits

VISIT GATHERINGWATERS.ORG/ACTION FOR EASY ACCESS TO LEGISLATORS’ CONTACT INFO, LETTER TEMPLATES, INFO ON THE VALUE OF PROTECTING OUR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS, AND MORE.