

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**LAND CONSERVATIONISTS GATHER TO LEARN FROM PEERS**

More than 35 conservationists from land trusts around the state will gather for a fun and educational weekend in La Crosse at the 9th Annual Wisconsin Land Trust Retreat on June 6 and 7. Attendees -- who represent fifteen different Wisconsin land trusts -- will learn about topics from innovative outreach ideas to conservation easement management.

Every year, Gathering Waters Conservancy hosts the Land Trust Retreat -- the only statewide meeting of its kind -- in a different region of the state, giving participants a great chance to network with peers and tour some of the areas stunning protected lands.

“The private land conservation movement nationwide is growing exponentially and Wisconsin’s land trust community is right in step with that growth,” said Mike Strigel, Executive Director of Gathering Waters Conservancy. “This retreat -- bringing together land trust leaders from around the state -- leverages the energy and creativity which is driving conservation of our special places in Wisconsin.”

The Mississippi Valley Conservancy, a land trust working in and around La Crosse for 10 years, will take Retreat participants on tours of their premier land protection projects -- the Holland Sand Prairie and a La Crosse Bluffland property. Visitors will learn about the unique partnership the Mississippi Valley Conservancy has with the City of La Crosse in the form of the La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program.

This year’s Retreat will also feature the workshop *Deepening Community Connections through Questing*. Guest speaker Steve Glazer of the Vermont-based non-profit Vital Communities directs the award-winning Valley Quest program, which features treasure hunts to tell the stories of the natural and human history of our special places. Workshop participants will create a quest for a property protected by the Mississippi Valley Conservancy to share its natural and cultural treasures with the La Crosse community.

This year’s Retreat was possible thanks to support from Philip Gelatt, the WI Department of Natural Resources, Wal-Mart, Dairyland Power Cooperative, and the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

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*Gathering Waters Conservancy was founded in 1994 with the goal of establishing a statewide network of local land trusts -- citizen-run organizations, dedicated to protecting trails, parks, nature preserves, access to rivers and streams, working lands and wild places. To date, Wisconsin’s 50 land trusts have a combined membership of 45,000 individuals and families and have protected over 200,000 acres for the benefit of current and future generations.*