



# News & Views



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## Sugar Creek project awaits Stewardship OK

The major addition to our Sugar Creek Bluff project near Ferryville is ready to proceed pending approval of a Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program grant by the State Legislature's Joint Finance Committee.

MVC needs the \$432,188 grant to complete the purchase of 144 acres adjacent to our 276-acre Sugar Creek State Natural Area in Crawford County.

Other contributions toward the \$532,800 purchase price include a \$50,000 grant from the Paul E. Stry Foundation, \$5,000 from Whitetails Unlimited, and a \$10,000 anonymous challenge grant that was met by other contributors.

The funding of the project demonstrates the utility of the Stewardship program in leveraging other

sources of funds to provide conservation lands for public use.

The status of the Stewardship program is uncertain because of Gov. Scott Walker's 2015-17 budget proposal that would freeze funding for the

*Anonymous \$10,000 challenge grant put fund raising over the top!*

program for 13 years. The pending grant would come from already allocated funds. All grants of more than \$250,000, however, must have Joint Finance approval. As of early April, the committee had not considered it. Neither had it decided whether to include the

governor's proposed Stewardship funding freeze in the 2015-17 budget.

Completion of the Sugar Creek Bluff project will increase public land for hunting, hiking, snowshoeing and fishing on Sugar Creek, a Class I trout stream.

And it will provide habitat for the state threatened acadian flycatcher, cerulean warbler, and red-shouldered hawk.

MVC has a total of 5,858.15 acres conserved through the Stewardship Fund. Sugar Creek Bluff was the first land purchase made by MVC after our land trust was founded in 1997.

*For information on discussing Stewardship fundings in the budget with your legislators, visit the Gathering Waters Conservancy website: [www.gatheringwaters.org](http://www.gatheringwaters.org).*

## Three words link MVC to couple's legacy gift

by Adam Putz

Local. Bluffland. Conservation. These three words sprang to mind for Eric Thompson and Mary Graziano when asked what they think of when they think about Mississippi Valley Conservancy. Local bluffland conservation is also one of the more significant things that MVC does. And it's been doing that very thing from the start.

But that's hardly news to Eric and Mary. They've also been part of MVC from the start, becoming members in December 1997 and joining the Landowner Registry Program just two years later. Now they want to ensure that, like the land MVC protects,



Eric Thompson and Mary Graziano, long-time MVC members, have included MVC in their estate plan.

the organization lasts into perpetuity. When they drew up their will recently, the question arose for the first time, Eric recalled, of who they might want to bequeath a portion of their estate to. Both feel very strongly that, as lifelong learners and lovers of the land, MVC would help to share these interests with the people of the Driftless Area. As Mary put it, they both want to share and support the "good work" of MVC as an organization that not only protects land, but

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also works to inspire a land ethic for the future. Eric agreed, adding that they also hope their example will encourage others to answer the call to stewardship. For both Eric and Mary, stewardship extends beyond their bequest to MVC.

Eric and Mary have used small-scale prescribed burns to restore the native prairie on their property. And no patch is too small. A small hillside right next to their house was burned as part of their project. Over the years, they've also reforested what was once largely featureless pastureland into the mixed hardwood forest through which they now regularly hike and snowshoe.

### About the *Stewardship Circle*



The Stewardship Circle is a very special group who have made a lasting commitment to land protection through a variety of estate-

planning tools, including bequests in a will or trust, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, IRA designations or gifts of life insurance. Please consider joining this dedicated group of conservationists today. Contact Carol Abrahamzon, executive director, (608) 784-3606 x4

### Have you checked out these website features?

@

[mississippivalleyconservancy.org](http://mississippivalleyconservancy.org)

- Twenty maps and/or brochures of MVC's nature preserves open to the public. (Click **Recreation Land.**)

- Answers to common questions about conservation easements. (Click **Land Conservation/Conservation Easements.**)

## New faces for MVC on board, staff

### New board members (three-year terms)

#### Rick W. Lange

- Retired in 2013 after 34-year career with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Driftless Area.

- Lives in Prairie du Chien.

- Volunteers with organizations and landowners doing prescribed burning and invasive species control.
- Active in hunting, fishing and conservation organizations, including MVC.



#### Rob Tyser

- Member of the Biology Dept. at UW-La Crosse

- Plans to retire in May, but will retain an active emeritus association with the department, the River Studies Center and environmental groups on campus.

- Since 2009 has monitored bird populations in MVC's New Amsterdam Grasslands.
- Is a founding member of Coulee Partners for Sustainability and serves on the Sustainable La Crosse Commission.



#### Tim Johnson, MD

- Mayo Clinic Health System physician.
- Serves on the Viterbo University Board of Trustees

- Has converted former farmland to prairie on land he owns near Austin, Minn.



#### Michael O'Brien, MD

- Since 1988, has worked for Mayo Clinic Health System as an internal medicine physician, now in hospital



medicine and serves on the MCHS board.

- Participates in burns with the Prairie Enthusiasts and work days with MVC.
- Advocates for the continued cooperation between MCHS and MVC.

### Other board news ...

Leaving the board due to term limits after serving two three-year terms are: Jon Rigden, Bob Fisher, Jim Brady, Chuck Lee and Keith Valiquette. Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins also leaves the board after serving one three-year term.

**Linda Seubert** has joined the executive committee as secretary, succeeding Bob Fisher. **Warren Loveland** succeeds Rigden as vice president.

### New on the staff

**Levi Plath**, land manager

- Previously worked for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources out of Sauk Rapids, Minn.
- Has a BS in ecology and field biology with a wildlife emphasis from St. Cloud State University. Studied abroad at Southern Cross University in Australia in 2008 where he conducted a wildlife survey of the Richmond Range National Park and suggested implications for management of a variety of endangered and threatened species.



**Adam Putz**, conservation assistant

- Assists with land protection projects, membership and other tasks. Joined the staff in October 2014.

- Says his work "as teacher and writer in diverse academic settings has helped him to develop skills in research, grant development, and public speaking that will benefit Mississippi Valley Conservancy."
- Received a PhD in English from the University of Warwick in May 2013.



## Events

- April 18** - Linked to the Land Earth Fair Hike – La Crosse Blufflands -Beck Tract, Miller Bluff
- April 26** -- Earth Fair Celebration – Myrick Park – La Crosse
- May 2** -- Holland Sand Prairie “Open House”
- May 9** -- Linked to the Land “International Migratory Bird Hike”– Sugar Creek Bluff – Ferryville
- May 16** -- Challenge Academy Workday – Savanna Oaks in Onalaska
- May 22** -- Pasture Walk at Rod Ofte's Liberty Farm
- May 30** -- Linked to the Land “Migratory Bird Hike” – Cardinal Bluff in De Soto

- June 6** -- Seasons in the Coulee Region “Spring Hike” – Holland Sand Prairie in Holmen
  - June 6** -- Volunteer Workday – Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area – Ferryville
  - June 12** -- Mississippi River Bluff Prairie Hike – Cassville Bluff State Natural Area, Grant County
  - June 13** -- Linked to the Land Hike – Eagle Eye State Natural Area near Newton
- Check the website <http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/GetInvolved/HikesEvents.aspx> for more detailed information.

### Members cite challenges, strengths

Mississippi Valley Conservancy’s annual Member Meeting March 28 included meeting all of the staff and learning about land projects completed as well as those coming up.

Chuck Lee arranged round-table discussions by members, facilitated by board members. Members were interested in learning more about how we could connect with young people. Suggestions ranged from social media and getting *Mysteries of the Driftless* into more schools, to increasing intergenerational involvement. Members felt MVC’s strength lies in its professional staff but felt we have challenges with consumerism, politics and population growth.

All of the discussions have been summarized and in the coming months staff and board members will take a look at how to address areas of concern and act on suggestions presented by the members.

Thank you to everyone who attended, helped with the meeting and brought treats!

-- Carol Abrahamzon, executive director

## Volunteer of the Year



Sue Knopf was honored as MVC Volunteer of the Year at the annual membership meeting in March. Sue spent more than a year hiking and mapping the trails on MVC protected properties that are open to the public. She created beautiful brochures that give a history of the property, depict points of interest, and clearly show the hiking trails on a map of the property. The brochures are available at the MVC office or on our website.

## Contributions help save our beautiful lands

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**Please return this form & your donation to:**  
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### Here’s my extra donation in the amount of:

- \$50.00  \$250.00
- \$75.00  \$500.00
- \$100.00  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a 501c(3) Non-Profit Organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by law.

**YES, Please accept my extra gift to support saving western Wisconsin’s Scenic Areas!**



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