

# Conserved

Upper Mississippi River Valley

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“Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children.

Let us turn to them and say, “This you inherit; guard it well, for it is far more precious than money and once destroyed, nature’s beauty cannot be repurchased at any price.”

— Ansel Adams

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The Mississippi Valley Conservancy's goal is to balance a growing, prosperous community with a healthy, diverse environment. To succeed at a critical moment in history, the enthusiasm and support of the whole community is needed.

# The Upper Mississippi River Blufflands— The Heart of America

Just as Mark Twain observed more than a century ago, each bend in the river reveals another striking juxtaposition of working and natural lands. The 24,000 square mile Driftless Area was bypassed by the last wave of continental glaciers, resulting in a steep and rugged landscape – often in sharp contrast to flatter land just miles away. The land's diverse topography, soils, and plant communities harbor many globally-imperiled natural communities, demonstrating amazing contrast—from hot-dry sites with prickly pear cactus and “goat” prairies to Ice Age holdovers like Pleistocene snails on algific talus slopes.

Here, prairie, oak savanna, wetlands and deciduous forests remain part of a mosaic of farms, suburban and urban areas. Here, the once free-flowing and meandering Mississippi River has been modified – but never completely tamed. Rather, as Congress declared in 1986, the Upper Mississippi River is both a nationally significant ecosystem and commercial navigation system.

This special place is designated as highest priority for the Wildlife Action Plans of the four states of the Upper Mississippi, though birds long-ago “designated” it as a major transcontinental migratory flyway. Strong local public-partnerships led by an alliance of area land trusts work with conservation-minded landowners and active communities to protect these natural resources for their own sake – and for their economic, health, aesthetic and other human benefits. These partners work cooperatively to achieve “a state of harmony between men and land” as sought by the great conservationist and Wisconsin native, Aldo Leopold.

The river floodplain along MVC's territory was declared the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1924 – another gift to the future from the hard work of citizen conservationists along with public and private agencies. This 240,000-acre refuge, which runs for 261 miles along the river valley, provides habitat for 40% of America's waterfowl, more than 300 bird species and 260 species of fish. With more than 500 access points and harbors, the river is a recreational resource to more than 3 million people annually (more than Yellowstone), supporting a \$6.6 billion annual recreation and tourism economy. Just recently the Upper Mississippi River was designated a RAMSAR wetlands of global significance.

We, as an American people have both been shaped by this river and its blufflands, and we have shaped it as well. There is an important story to be told about the interrelationship between this mighty river and people and this Midwestern landscape. This landscape is here for all of us to enjoy, on foot, on bicycles, by auto, train and boat. There is a story around every bend.

It is the story of people taking care of the places they love.

*This article was authored jointly by the members of the Blufflands Alliance. Special thanks to Dan McGuinness and Mark Ackelson.*

“Along the Upper Mississippi every hour brings something new. There are crowds of odd islands, bluffs, prairies, hills, woods and villages—everything one could desire to amuse the children.”

– Mark Twain, 1886 interview

# Conserved

This magazine is published by Mississippi Valley Conservancy, a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Since 1997, more than 16,000 acres of blufflands, wetlands, and streams in nine counties have been dedicated to conservation through ownership, conservation easements and a landowner registry program.

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“It means a great deal to put a piece of land aside, never to be developed. It is one legacy I can leave behind.”

— **Jim Theler, La Crosse, Wisconsin**

*Dr. Theler permanently protected 48 acres on the Bad Axe River with a conservation easement in 2011.*

# No Place Like Home

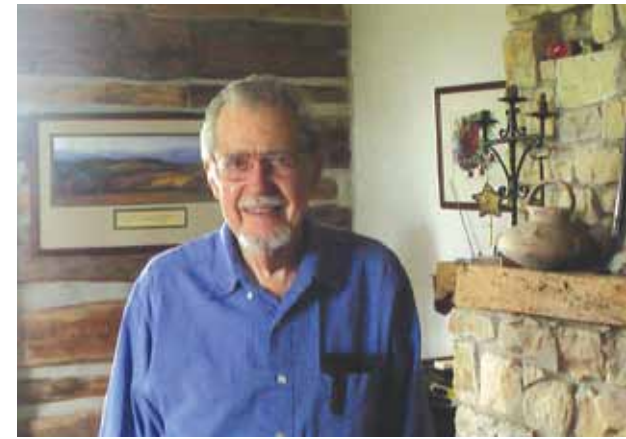
By Dave Skoloda

For Many Reasons, Landowners Are Protecting the Places They Love



## Laura Coglan

Laura Coglan has permanently protected her 63-acre "Bobolink Farm Preserve" near Blue River in the Wisconsin River valley. Coglan, who grew up on a farm that later was developed for housing, said, "It seems living space for animals, birds and plants will always be pushed aside to make more room for people... I couldn't let that happen to this beautiful and unique little corner of Wisconsin, and you never can know what may happen years down the line."



## Ben Logan

Author Ben Logan bought back and protected the Crawford County farm where he grew up and subsequently wrote about in *The Land Remembers*. The reasons he gave for placing a conservation easement on the farm with Mississippi Valley Conservancy were, as one might expect from such a thoughtful writer, quite philosophical: "Sometimes I call it the urbanization trap. We're too far from intimacy with the land to know what it's saying to us," he said in an interview recorded in 2008. Asked why he wrote *The Land Remembers*, he said:



**"I realized at some point that the people of the land were not represented.... And I began to write with more of a sense of responsibility. We were taking land for granted, and all of this began to be tied together into a carelessness we'd been living with and a need to get people to recognize that land has a voice. You know, people, animals—all of this is linked together."**

*Other landowners who have protected southwest Wisconsin properties have been philosophical as well, in ways as distinctive as the properties they've protected. Here are just some of the reasons they gave when easements were signed over the last 15 years.*



## Stanley A. Ledebuhr

Stanley A. Ledebuhr, a retired Winona teacher, donated a 20-acre bluff directly across the river from Winona. Ledebuhr stipulated that the land should be open for public use. And he wanted it named "Angel Bluff," a tribute to his late wife.

## James & Janice Brady

James and Janice Brady donated a conservation easement on 425 acres of their farm in Trempealeau County, near the lower Black River. The Brady's "Pine Point Farm" is a registered historic farm with the State of Wisconsin. Developers had proposed buying their farm and turning it into a golf course with adjacent homes. They protected it instead.

**"Jim and I could see in each other's eyes what we wanted to do. It gives me chills every time I think of it," says Jan.**

In this photo, U.S. Representative Ron Kind recognizes the Bradys for their vision.



## Loran Nordgren

Loran Nordgren and his children Loran Jr., Erik, Carl, and Lauren Nordgren-DuBois donated a 348-acre conservation easement on their Bad Axe River valley property. Asked about his interest in protecting the land, Loran quoted author Willa Cather:

**"People come and people go, but the land is here forever. Those who love it and care for it and understand it are those who own it for a little while."**

## Bonnie Wideman

Bonnie Wideman, who donated a conservation easement on her 160-acre organic farm in Crawford County, said:

**"Even if my children are not interested in continuing the farming tradition here, even if they sell the land, the gift will go on. It can continue to be working farmland, but also the wildlife habitat and native features of the land will continue to be enjoyed by future owners."**





## Tom Boston

Tom Boston owns property with trout fishing access on the Bad Axe River, where he's taken on extensive wildlife habitat improvement and stream bank stabilization projects in recent years. These have improved trout habitat on both the Bad Axe River and Hornby Creek, which are listed as trout waters in the State of Wisconsin fishing guide. To permanently protect this special place, Tom donated a conservation easement. In the photo above, Tom and former MVC employee Abbie Church hold a photo of his land.

## Dr. Robert & Lori Wallock

Dr. Robert (Bob) and Lori Wallock donated an easement on 346 acres sharing a mile of common boundary with the 1400-acre DNR Bell Center Unit, for a total protected acreage of 1700 acres just south of Gays Mills. **Asked about the reason for protecting the land, Bob replied, "...just to keep the land as it is. I don't want it ever changing."**



## Jim & Phylis Munsch

Jim and Phylis Munsch placed an easement on their 98-acre Vernon County organic beef farm overlooking Coon Valley. Jim said **"I am concerned about the loss of agricultural land in the U.S., especially land lost to residential and commercial development. Farmland is one thing you cannot manufacture. As an individual and a landowner, there's something I can do to stop that trend and Phylis and I have a strong commitment to do just that."**



## The Babson Family

The Babson family, owners for many years of the Chicago-based Surge milking machine business that was part of the modernization of dairy farming, protected 1,118 acres on the Kickapoo River north of Viola in Vernon County. Jean Babson said her late husband, James Babson, who served as president of Babson Brothers Company, bought farms in the area some 35 years ago and consolidated them into a grazing operation. According to Jean,

**"James Babson had vision, had a love of the land. The whole place meant a lot to (him)... It's such a beloved part of the country that meant so much to me and (my husband), and it's nice to know it's going to be in good hands."**

Pictured at left: Steve and Cindy (right) with their mother, Jean, in 2009 at Kings Point Farm in Vernon County. Other siblings are Nick of Montana, Nina, who lives in New Zealand, and Henry, who operated the farm.



## Fredrick & Lou Anna Domann

Fredrick and Lou Anna Domann placed an easement on their 108-acre property near Platteville in Grant County. Fredrick Domann said:

**"My first motivation (to protect the land) was after I had planted 5,100 trees on the property. I didn't want someone to destroy them to build a mansion or a residential subdivision on that beautiful river bluff... I can't think of a better way to protect the land than with a conservation easement. If your kids or grandkids promise not to destroy the land, that promise is only good for a lifetime. The easement is a way to make that permanent." Lou Anna added, "We don't own the land, we only lease it from the next generations."**

Above, Fredrick and Lou Anna are shown above with their son, Rick, and daughter, Katie.

## Jim & Joyce Czajkowski

Jim and Joyce Czajkowski of Wauzeka donated a conservation easement on their 80 acres in southern Crawford County, seven miles west of Wauzeka and five miles northwest of the Wisconsin River.

**The Czajkowskis say they value open space and wildlife habitat and want to be good stewards of the land.**

*Whatever reasons landowners expressed, conservation easements have been written to incorporate and respect them. For its part, Mississippi Valley Conservancy has taken on the responsibility to see that those reasons are respected and, if necessary, enforced in the years to come. Like the land, the easement remembers.*



# FEAT ADVENTURE



Filmmaker Neil Rettig

## ADVENTURE

Two Artists Launch Projects To Experience, Interpret and Protect the Mississippi River Blufflands

By Joseph E. Orso



Artist Sara Lubinski

In other times and other cultures, traditional stories helped wed the individual imagination with the web of life. A tree was a relative, not lumber. A spider was a teacher, not a pest. Reverence for the natural world was a response to being alive, not a spiritual ideal of the privileged.

While our culture's stories traditionally arise from the market more than nature, art that invites us into relationship with the living world has always existed as a minor narrative. We have always had Thoreaus, Muirs, Carsons and Shivas among us – and we still do. Sara Lubinski, a landscape painter, is one such person.

Recently, 62-year-old Lubinski began a journey documenting and painting various conserved landscapes of the upper Mississippi River blufflands. Through the project, she seeks to connect people and nature while raising awareness about land trusts.

"The reason I started this project is because I strongly believe in the conservation organizations and what they do," said Lubinski, who lives with her husband in a two-room cabin in Brownsville, Minn. "The way our society is today is not sustainable. We demand too much of natural resources and material things...and we can't maintain that. Conservation recognizes that we need natural landscapes, that we need to protect the earth."

The stories Lubinski tells with her paintings are layered in the mystery of nature. She is drawn to dawn, dusk and moonlight, she said, when she feels the harmony of nature most strongly. "My paintings are a little soft," she said. "The edges aren't hard and crisp, and I'm trying to make it more amorphous and malleable and mysterious to express that feeling that I have about the mystery of nature."

The public can follow Lubinski through 2014 at [ExploreWithMe.net](http://ExploreWithMe.net), where they will find reflections, photographs, drawings and paintings of what she encounters on her journey through conserved landscapes.

Of course, as conservationists well know, the story of humanity and nature today is incomplete without telling about the habitats and species being lost.

Neil Rettig, an award-winning wildlife cinematographer who has filmed rare and endangered species for National Geographic, PBS and BBC, has seen this loss up close. Currently he is working on a project about the Philippine Eagle, of which there are about 200 in existence.

"It just saddens me to have a hands-on experience with these animals and know that in 20 years they might be gone," said Rettig, who lives with his wife outside Prairie du Chien, Wis., where the two intend to put their 162 acres in a trust with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. "We have to get away from pure entertainment and into using films and photographs as a tool for conservation."

Rettig said that too often when people see wildlife films, they come away with a sense that everything is fine when the reality is that the film-makers had to shoot around a lot of humanmade obstacles to capture the lush images of wildlife.

In the future, 61-year-old Rettig said, he would love to do a film about how animals face a daunting gauntlet of human-made obstacles, from automobile traffic to barbed wire fences to oil slicks to windows.

"It's a critical time," he said. "Politically this country is drifting closer to deregulating laws that protect the environment and that's scary to me...The more people who get on the bandwagon to do what they can to be good stewards of the land will just make everything better for the future, for our kids, for everybody else down the road."



## Sara Lubinski River Sojourn: A Painter's Portfolio Of the Mississippi River Blufflands

During summer 2012, Sara Lubinski began a two-year sojourn into the upper Mississippi River blufflands, hiking goat prairies, following cold water creeks, seeking Mississippi River bluff top views and investigating algific talus slopes and the life they support. With charcoal, pencil, and homemade walnut ink she is drawing what she sees, recording broad panoramas and the diverse, detailed life forms that sustain themselves in these places.

Sara develops oil paintings from field drawings in her Brownsville, Minnesota studio. In 2014, more than fifty works will be exhibited with working drawings, artist notes, artifacts and information about land trusts. The exhibit opens at Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, then moves to the Bell Museum of Natural History in St. Paul, Cascade Meadow Environmental Science Center in Rochester, and perhaps other locations.

Sara draws on a lifetime in art and a career as a botanist whose work focused on the nature of the Mississippi River and many of our national parks. The beauty of these landscapes catalyzed her transition to full-time work at the easel.

To follow Sara's current adventure, *River Sojourn: A Painter's Portfolio of the Mississippi River Blufflands*, read her blog: [ExploreWithMe.net](http://ExploreWithMe.net). View her portfolio at: [SaraLubinski.com](http://SaraLubinski.com).

# GREAT

# ADVENTURE



## Neil Rettig Using Photography To Convince Humanity To Cherish, Save and Respect the Natural World

During a career filming for National Geographic, BBC, PBS and others, Neil has traveled the world filming in some of the most remote habitats on the planet, including a stint in the Arctic and years in tropical rainforests from New Guinea to Congo to remote areas of the Amazon.

Neil is considered one of the world's top raptor cinematographers, renowned for an ability to follow birds in flight and understand their behavior. His career began when, at age 23, he

became obsessed with the rare Harpy Eagle and headed an expedition to Central America to capture the first moving images of the bird. He is an accomplished technical climber, scuba diver, Master Falconer, and a pioneer in developing tracking systems for moving a camera through space in the vertical worlds of tropical forests.

Neil has always focused on education and conservation of wild places and the animals he films. In recent years, his attention has turned closer to

home, producing a series of award winning films on the Mississippi River and documenting the effects of the Gulf oil spill on migrating birds and their habitats.

To see Neil's work and learn more about his current projects, check out [NeilRettigProductions.com](http://NeilRettigProductions.com).



# Getting Kids Outdoors

By Timothy S. Jacobson



■ Students from La Crosse pull together, making a game of "Tug-a-suckle"—removing invasive honeysuckle from the La Crosse bluffs.

One of my favorite summer activities as a kid was raising caterpillars of monarch butterflies with their yellow, black and white stripes.

A friend and I pounded nail holes through the steel lids of peanut butter jars, filled them with milkweed leaves, and put dozens of caterpillars in these glass and steel "barns." Every day, we diligently supplied fresh leaves to our larval herd. After our charges constructed emerald chrysalises on the jar lids, we fastened the lids into the crooks of branches in a row of lilac bushes next to the house.



Eventually, we witnessed a miracle when the chrysalises turned black and orange and butterflies emerged and pumped up beautiful orange sails to carry them on the winds for their long migration across the continent.

This activity provided abundant lessons in biology and geography. These happenings imbued us with a sense of awe and respect for the majesty and mystery of life, and it tickled our interest in science.

Too often now, kids miss out on these backyard miracles in favor of hundreds of TV channels and exchanging text messages with friends.

It is more important than ever that we engage kids in the exploration of our natural world.



■ Area teachers are using conserved lands as outdoor classrooms.

In his book "Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder," Richard Louv highlights the fact that children have become increasingly disconnected from the natural world. At the same time, "a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature—in positive ways." He argues that the "health of the earth is at stake" if we fail to reduce this deficit of interaction with nature. "How the young respond to nature, and how they raise their own children, will shape the configurations and conditions of our cities, homes—our daily lives."

With thousands of acres of nature preserves across nine counties in southwestern Wisconsin, Mississippi Valley Conservancy is uniquely positioned to provide special places for kids to enjoy and experience the huge diversity of lessons that await those on a quest of nature discovery.

Please join us in connecting kids with nature!



## Grateful

On a spring morning in 2010, students from Western Technical College's At-Risk High School met Mississippi Valley Conservancy staff at Miller Bluff to cut invasive honeysuckle. One girl arrived late, was assured by outreach coordinator Kathy Frise that it wasn't a problem, and she went to work. At the end of the day, while the group was hiking out of the woods, that young woman made a point of thanking Kathy. "I was having a terrible morning," she said, "and almost didn't come. But I'm so glad I did! I feel enlightened, and I need to be outside more often."

# It Started With a Handful of Citizens

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONSERVANCY



Jim Fowler, longtime supporter and former board member, takes a break during a work day at Sugar Creek Bluff in 1999. Sugar Creek Bluff was the first property purchased by MVC.



Board members Betty Heuslein and Gretchen Skoloda hike on Sugar Creek Bluff sometime in 1999.



Craig Thompson leads an early morning bird hike on the grassland near Holmen that would later become New Amsterdam Grasslands. From left, Thompson, Ron Benjamin with son Dan, Philip Gelatt, Gretchen Benjamin, Maureen Kinney, Beth Moore, Gretchen Skoloda (partly hidden) and Tom Brindley. All except Ron and Dan were early board members of the organization.

By David Skoloda

### “These things take time.”

That’s what those of us who started the Mississippi Valley Conservancy 15 years ago often said as we learned the patience required to build an enduring institution for land preservation where none had existed before.

Land protection is a slow, careful process, and so were the steps to starting the organization.

Some of the founders had gathered on our deck on a sunny June day in 1995. Rose-breasted grosbeaks serenaded us as we



were important. After the meeting, we invited The Nature Conservancy to look at

a bluffland property as a possible project. The TNC official who came from Madison said after walking the property that it was certainly worth preserving, but it wasn’t in a TNC priority area. She suggested we start our own land trust.

So, eventually, we did.

Another year went by before the following group met at the La Crosse South Side Library: Craig and Mary Thompson, Maureen Kinney, Charles Lee, Peg Zappen, Barbara Frank, Pat Wilson, Fred Leshner, Ann Korschgen, Gretchen Benjamin and Dave and Gretchen Skoloda. This group continued meeting and, with the addition of Beth Moore, became the first board of directors in 1997 of a new nonprofit land trust. Atty. Maureen Kinney, working pro bono as she has for the organization since it started, filed the papers. The first officers were: Dave Skoloda, president; Craig Thompson, vice president; Maureen Kinney, secretary, and Pat Wilson, treasurer.

Early on, we established ties with the Blufflands Alliance and received startup

grants from the Iowa Natural Heritage and the Stry Foundations – the first of many key grants from Stry. The Blufflands Alliance required a three-year work plan that helped us to focus our early efforts. The Alliance and the McKnight Foundation that provides its funding, continue to be a key part of our success. We also had early support and advice from Gathering Waters, the state support group for land trusts. Our paid membership had reached 200 by April 1998. In October 1998 we hired our first executive director, Cynthia Olmstead, and established an office in La Crosse.

Our first project, The La Crosse River Conservancy, was announced in 1999 – a cooperative effort with Gundersen Lutheran, Western Technical College, the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and several private landowners to preserve the wetlands along the La Crosse River behind the Valley View Mall area. Our first land purchase came later in 1999 when we signed an option to purchase 77 acres of

Sugar Creek Bluff near Ferryville. After that purchase was completed, extensive volunteer and staff labor restored the goat prairie on the bluff, a model for what would be accomplished on other sites acquired since then.

So that summarizes the early years of the conservancy. Other articles will demonstrate the progress we’ve made together. You could see in the list of current board and volunteers that many of the early members are still active in MVC – loyal to each other, the organization and, most importantly, loyal to the land. One of those early members and volunteers eventually became our executive director – Tim Jacobson, who left his position as president of a local law firm to lead MVC in 2006.

It’s a sense of loyalty to the land that allows us to maintain a high membership retention rate even as we approach 1,700 members. We’ve protected more than 14,000 acres, including some 900 acres of the bluffs above the City of La Crosse, but there is much more to be accomplished. We have dozens of requests from landowners for help in protecting their lands – projects that will continue to build protections for the landscape that inspires all of us.

Oh, and what about the property that we discussed with the Nature Conservancy so long ago? The 240-acre bluff land is now permanently protected by a conservation easement thanks to George Kerckhove, who purchased the land after our early interest in it and became a member of the MVC board. He is now serving as MVC president, and although he has since sold the bluffland property, it remains protected under the enduring terms of the easement.

**In time, all the efforts we make add up.**

## MVC’S MISSION, TODAY’S PRESSING ISSUES

Mississippi Valley Conservancy protects biodiversity and restores native ecosystems, including some of the rarest natural communities in the world. Only 1/100th of one percent of Wisconsin’s



original oak savanna still exists; and only about one percent of prairie survives today. These fire-dependent communities have been devastated by a combination of poorly-planned residential and commercial development, agricultural practices that often involve plowing up every semi-flat acre, eliminating wildfire from the landscape, and widespread

introduction of invasive plant species from Asia and Europe.

Now, exploitive business interests are expanding old threats to the landscape. Frac sand mining literally explodes across this area, with about 60 mines, 32 sand processing plants either operating or being built, and 20 more proposed mines as of 2012 – more than double the 41 mines or plants counted six months earlier. Massive new power line corridors threaten all of us with the prospect of widespread scenic blight and damage to wildlife habitat.

We still have an opportunity to save the most precious parts of our landscape. MVC’s mission is to protect native and

working landscapes that enrich our communities through private, voluntary action, for the health and well-being of current and future generations. MVC’s conservation work protects the ability of local people to produce food in a sustainable way, helps ensure our quality of life by protecting scenic beauty and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, and enhances the long-term financial stability of our communities by making them attractive and enjoyable places to live.

Your support for permanent, voluntary land protection through Mississippi Valley Conservancy is the most lasting and precious legacy you can leave, and it will benefit millions over time.



# 15 YEARS 15 PIVOTAL PROJECTS

Hunters, hikers, birdwatchers and those who enjoy scenic drives have learned in recent years that, as development sprawls into the countryside, we can't take this beauty, open space and wild lands for granted. The Mississippi Valley Conservancy conserves the special places of this region that may otherwise be lost. Our goal is to help strike a balance between a growing, prosperous community, and a healthy, diverse environment.

## 1 Bad Axe River Valley Protection of Timeless Treasures

Completion of a conservation easement by Dr. James Theler on his 48-acre North Fork Bad Axe River property brought total permanently conserved acreage along the Bad Axe to over 1,244.

The Theler property shares a boundary with MVC's Eagle Eye State Natural Area, part of the nationally registered Cade Archaeological District. The 70-acre Eagle Eye property includes effigy mounds and habitation sites from ancient cultures dating back 13,000 years. The purchase was made in partnership with The Archaeological Conservancy, a national organization, and Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, with assistance from the local Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center. As part of extensive Bad Axe land protection work, MVC entered into additional conservation easements with Bill and Heidi Bender, Thomas Boston, Ursula Cjepek, and Loran Nordgren.

## 2 Borah Creek Preserving a Pristine Prairie

This 138-acre prairie in Grant County was acquired by Mississippi Valley Conservancy in 2009 in partnership with Driftless Area Land Conservancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The never-plowed prairie was saved from a landowner's plan to convert it to ag land. MVC subsequently donated the land to The Prairie Enthusiasts as long-term land managers. Negotiations for the property, complicated by soaring commodity and land prices, were among the most difficult ever conducted by MVC. But the quality of the prairie, including the largest habitat in the state for the federally threatened/state endangered prairie bush clover, made succeeding in the negotiations a must.

## 3 Brady Conservation Easement Land Now Joined; Let No One Put Asunder

Jim and Jan Brady donated an easement on their 425-acre farm at the end of 2006, the first MVC project in Trempealeau County and in MVC's Lower Black River Valley Priority Area. The easement includes white pine relics, springs and coldwater trout streams. The large property was assembled as a result of Bradys purchasing six separate tracts. Over the years, they completed numerous soil and water conservation projects on their land.

At one point, Bradys were approached by a realtor who told them they could chop the land into pieces; sell off hunting land and 10-acre lots for mansions. "Just the idea of tearing apart something we had spent our lives building was not really appealing to us. We talked about it and concluded that we had to find a way to protect it. Mississippi Valley Conservancy was the perfect way to do it."



## 4 Chase Creek An Ecosystem Frozen in Time

A rare Wisconsin Ice Age relic was saved when MVC purchased 98 acres along the Mississippi River in Grant County. For the first time in the entire State of Wisconsin, an algific talus slope has been permanently protected. An algific talus slope is an ecosystem frozen in time—a plant and animal community remnant from the Ice Age that is maintained through a rare geological formation, a system of sinkholes and subterranean ice caves that vent cold air all summer through rock fissures on the side of a bluff. Also in the project plan is bargain purchase of easements on 620 acres of scenic Mississippi River bluffs and a valley with a high-quality trout stream between the small towns of Bagley and Glen Haven.

## 5 Greshik Conservation Easement Guaranteed Grandeur

In 2011, the Greshik family, Buffalo County farmers for three generations, placed a conservation easement on their scenic 404-acre farm. “The property, which runs for about a mile along the bluffs north of Fountain City, boasts a view of idyllic wilderness on all sides,” according to a front-page article in the Winona Daily News. From a bench dedicated to the memory of Joseph J. Greshik (1941-2009), one has a panoramic 20-mile view of the valley, north toward Wabasha and south to Winona across the vast channel-cut green of the backwaters and the broad sweep of the main Mississippi channel.

## 6 Hastert Conservation Easement Rare Landscape and Species Preserved

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Dennis Hastert and his wife, Jean Hastert, donated a conservation easement on land that features a panoramic bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, ancient Indian mounds and rare species of snake and snail. The 403-acre property is located about five miles north of Prairie du Chien and includes some 200 acres of woodlands, cliffs and native dry prairies. Prairie is considered globally rare by the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan and today persists on south or west-facing ridge top knobs on the property. These areas are home to the state special concern Prairie Ringneck Snake, cliff goldenrod and Canada yew.

Dennis Hastert said that there is no place on the property without a beautiful view. “Jean and I grew up in flat farm country, and this landscape is so special and unique.” Jean added, “No matter how many times we see it, it is still beautiful. Every time you turn around it takes your breath away.”

## 7 Haugen Conservation Easement Preserving a Tradition

“Like sturdy oaks and maples, bachelor brothers Ernest and Joseph Haugen are rooted in the Vernon County soil,” reported Dairy Star in August 2011. Their 160-acre ridgetop farm above Coon Valley had been home to Joseph all of his 86 years, and nearly as long to his

90-year-old brother, Ernest, who passed away in November. Thanks to a conservation easement with Mississippi Valley Conservancy, the land will remain a working farm much the way it is now, unsullied by development. In particular, Haugens did not want the conservation structures that were installed during the 1930s ripped out. Their father, Johan, bought the farm in 1925, and he was one of the first in the nation to sign up with the government’s soil conservation program that got its start in the Coon Creek watershed.

## 8 Holland Sand Prairie A Township and MVC Join Forces

This project was made possible by the substantial contributions by a key individual and a township. Jim Fowler, an MVC board member at the time, provided the Conservancy with a no-interest bridge loan to enable the group to buy the prairie. Town of Holland citizens voted to tax themselves and contribute nearly \$300,000 to the purchase. This was the first project known in the state where a small town did this in support of a land conservation project. The Prairie, located only a few miles from MVC’s New Amsterdam Grasslands, is a key remnant of the once-vast Prairie La Crosse on the Mississippi River Terrace created more than 20,000 years ago during the last ice age.

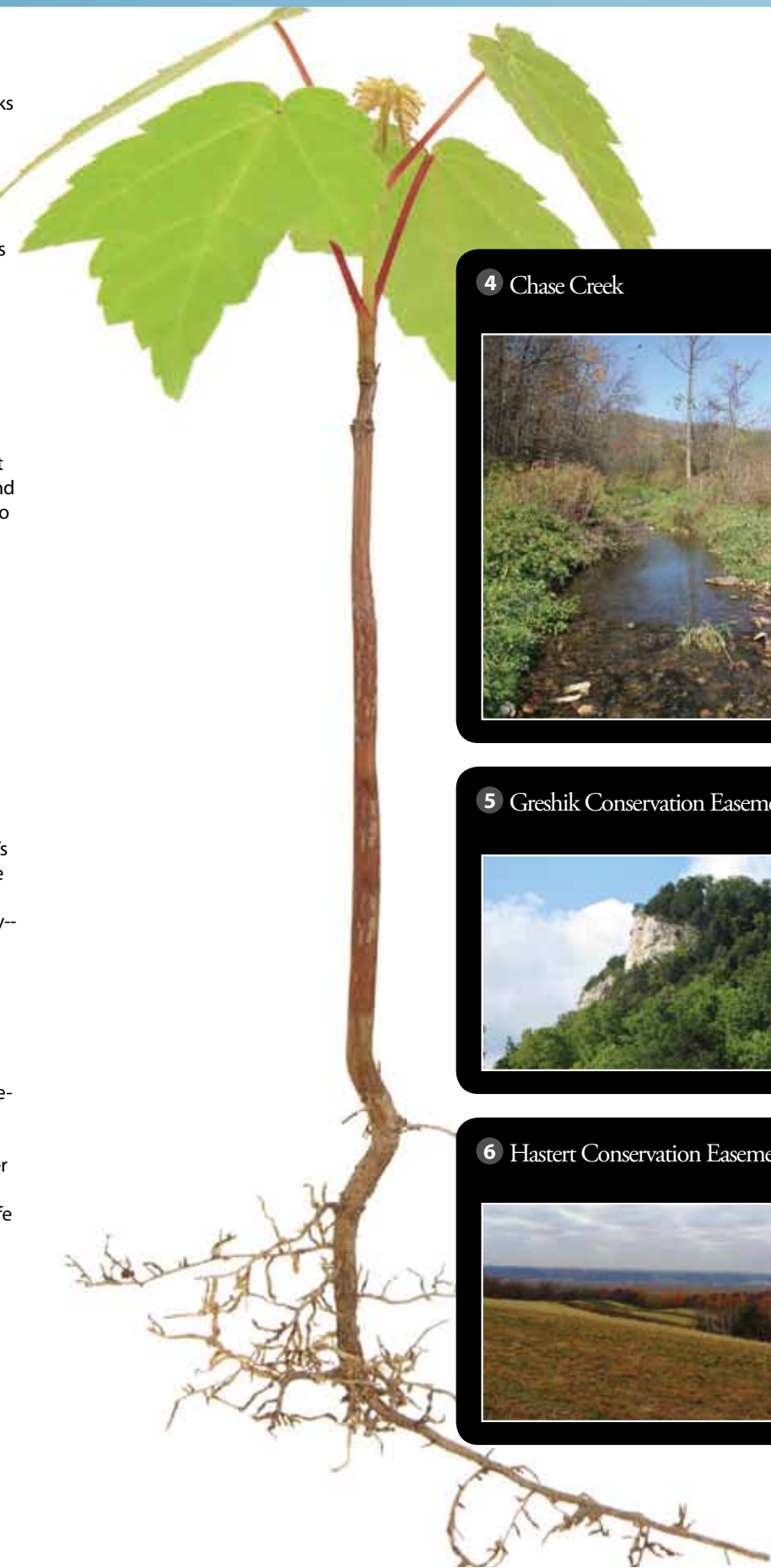
## 9 Kube Conservation Easement MVC’s Largest

Al and Carol Kube placed conservation easements on their 756-acre farm in 2007. Their property was the first MVC project in Buffalo County. Protected lands include high quality wildlife habitat. Carol Kube said, “It’s a relief to know and a comfort that it’s going to be preserved and others can enjoy what we are, because it’s so important. And I hope children will be able to get some education and to be able to enjoy things that they can’t in the city—just enjoy it like we have.”

## 10 La Crosse & Onalaska Conservation Collaborations

**La Crosse River Conservancy** MVC’s program with the City of La Crosse has protected nearly 1,000 scenic acres in the eight-mile-long project area above the city. Land and development rights acquired by MVC under this program exceed \$5 million in value, which includes substantial donations of land value from a number of landowners. The program has created a fantastic recreational resource for residents and visitors and helps maintain quality of life in the community.

**La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program** MVC’s partnership with the City of La Crosse in its Bluffland Protection Program has protected nearly 1,000 acres in the eight-mile-long project area above the city. Since 2002, the La Crosse City Council has appropriated \$1,724,639 for the Program. The Conservancy leverages this funding through grants from the DNR’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and private fundraising from



4 Chase Creek



7 Haugen Conservation Easement



8 Holland Sand Prairie



5 Greshik Conservation Easement



9 Kube Conservation Easement



6 Hastert Conservation Easement



10 LaCrosse & Onalaska Conservation Collaborations (LaCrosse Bluffs)



### 11 MacGregor Conservation Easement



## 15 YEARS, 15 PIVOTAL PROJECTS *Continued*

local foundations and donors. Thus far, the Conservancy has received eleven Stewardship grants for the program totaling \$1,748,987. Land and development rights acquired by MVC under this program exceed \$5 million in value.

**Onalaska** MVC Natural Lands Protection Program – In 2009, MVC completed its first purchase, Savannah Oaks, under a program with the City of Onalaska. This was followed a year later when MVC bought the adjacent Elmwood bluff property. These properties, one in Greens Coulee and the other just behind it, will be added to the city's Greenway.

### 11 MacGregor Conservation Easement Fulfilling a Promise to the Trees

The 350-acre MacGregor property includes prairie, old-growth forest and oak savanna areas, as well as rare plants, perhaps unlike any other privately owned land in southwest Wisconsin, such as the orchid October ladies-tresses.

"There's a great peace of mind to know that after all these years the land will be protected," Helen MacGregor said. "I made a promise to my trees and my land that they'd always be protected. We're keeping that promise."

Helen and her husband David are pleased with owning a slice of rural Wisconsin. Helen explained, "Emerson said that when he bought his land, he didn't realize he'd be buying sunrises and sunsets and night skies and birds. Until you live on the land, you have so much there that you didn't expect to enjoy. It's been such a wonderful thing for us to have all of those things."

### 12 New Amsterdam Grasslands Habitat for Rare Birds Saved from Development

Protection of this critically important habitat for grassland-nesting birds was made possible by the substantial contribution of a key individual, Philip Gelatt. He obtained the land through his business in a land swap, commenced restoration, and then sold it to MVC in a deal in which he donated about half the value. New Amsterdam Grasslands is located only a few miles from the Holland Sand Prairie, a key remnant of the once-vast Prairie La Crosse on the Mississippi River Terrace created more than 20,000 years ago during the last ice age.

### 13 Seldom Seen Farm Immortalized in a Book; Protected by the Conservancy

Ben Logan published his book *The Land Remembers: The Story of a Farm and Its People* in 1975. The book recounts the life of the farm and his family in the 1930s. By granting a conservation easement to MVC, Logan ensured that the tillable land of the 103-acre farm located near Gays Mills and Mt. Sterling will remain as farmland in accordance with his wishes. The farm also includes restored prairie, oak woodlands and small springs. The State Historical Society lists Logan among the great Wisconsin authors who have created a sense of place through their love of the land, also including John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Gaylord Nelson and Sigurd Olson.

### 14 Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area A Growing Nucleus of Conservation

The purchase of a 113-acre bluff in 1999 was both the Conservancy's first land purchase and creation of a State Natural Area. The site includes a scenic bluff and a trout stream south of Ferryville. Volunteers and staff have restored the ecologically significant dry prairie that is part of the view from the Great River Road. Additional purchases in 2007, 2008, and 2009 expanded the preserve to 276 acres, including an additional stretch of trout stream and more of the globally rare dry prairie habitat.

### 15 Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area & Kings Point Farm

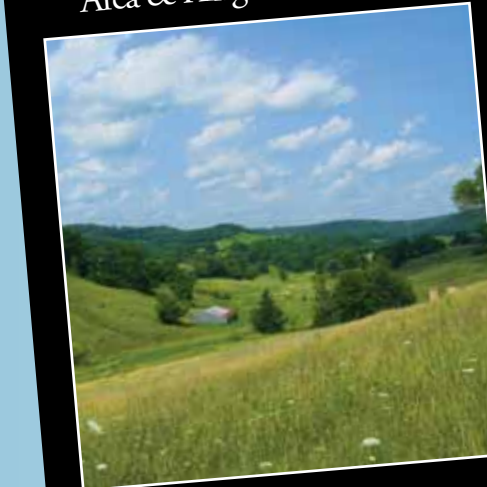
A 153-acre parcel along the Kickapoo River was the Conservancy's first nature preserve in its Kickapoo River Valley Priority Area. It's also the first land MVC protected that has a federally threatened species, the beautiful northern monkshood wildflower, which grows on the cool rock cliffs along the river.

In 2009, the project grew dramatically the Babson family donated Kings Point Farm, more than 1,100 acres that adjoin the original Tunnelville tract. It is by far the largest gift of land to MVC to date. The land donation enabled the Conservancy to leverage significant amounts of additional grant funding through the State Stewardship Program for the protection of even more land.

### 14 Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area



### 15 Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area & Kings Point Farm



Naming key land conservation projects in the 15 years since Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC) was founded is like picking a favorite child: It's tough to do because they're all precious and important, especially to the families who donated land or easements on their properties. A number of projects are included because they were the first of a kind, or because of their unusual scope or nature.

**The easement granted by Ben Logan on his farm near Gays Mills** is a highlight because of the cultural significance of his land, immortalized in his book *The Land Remembers*. **Several very large farm easements** demonstrate to farm families how their properties can be preserved and remain in agriculture use. **A cluster of projects on the Bad Axe River** has made a significant contribution to the protection of that trout stream. **A 1,000-acre donation of land on the Kickapoo River** marked a dramatic growth of MVC's work in the Kickapoo Valley. **The Sugar Creek Bluff project, MVC's first purchase,** shows how conservation can grow around a core project. **The Holland Sand Prairie was the first purchase by MVC with more than a \$1 million price tag,** and nearby New Amsterdam Grasslands brought in the largest Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program grant in western Wisconsin – nearly \$1 million. **One of the more recent acquisitions for the first time in Wisconsin protected an algal talus slope,** an ice-age relic of the Mississippi bluffs. Another dramatic bluff property nearby, the Cassville Bluffs State Natural Area, was the first MVC project in Grant County. **MVC's earliest conservation effort, the La Crosse River Conservancy, remains as a splendid example of cooperation** among municipalities, organizations and private landowners. Similarly our joint efforts with the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska are models for other land trusts and communities to follow in making land conservation a civic virtue.

“One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.”

– Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

# Protecting the Web of Life

By Timothy S. Jacobson

## With Our Help, Unique Ecosystems Spring Back to Life

A person not trained in plant identification can look out upon a vast expanse of “nature” and not realize that a large portion, and sometimes a majority, of the vegetation may consist of non-native and invasive species.

In addition, invasive plants like wild parsnip, which can burn one’s skin; garlic mustard; honeysuckle; buckthorn and Japanese barberry can take over the forest floor and roadside vistas. The non-native emerald ash borer, a tiny insect, threatens an estimated 717 million ash trees in Wisconsin.

At the same time non-native, invasive plants and insects have become prevalent, other changes to our landscape wrought by agriculture and urbanization have squeezed and shattered our high-quality, native natural communities into tiny fragments. For example, Wisconsin’s oak savannas have been reduced to less than 1/100th of one percent of their acreage prior to Euro-American settlement.

The fragmentation of habitats and the takeover by invasive species harm wildlife populations and disrupt the balance of nature. Take our avian friends, for instance. Both forest interior birds and grassland nesting birds struggle to find suitable places to reproduce. Birds may also suffer from a poorer diet when a virtual monoculture of invasive plants takes over.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy’s ecological restoration work, such as removing invasive plant species and restoring native natural communities like prairies, savannas, wetlands and forests, is a hugely important, and daunting, effort to return some semblance of balance to our precious bluffland landscape.



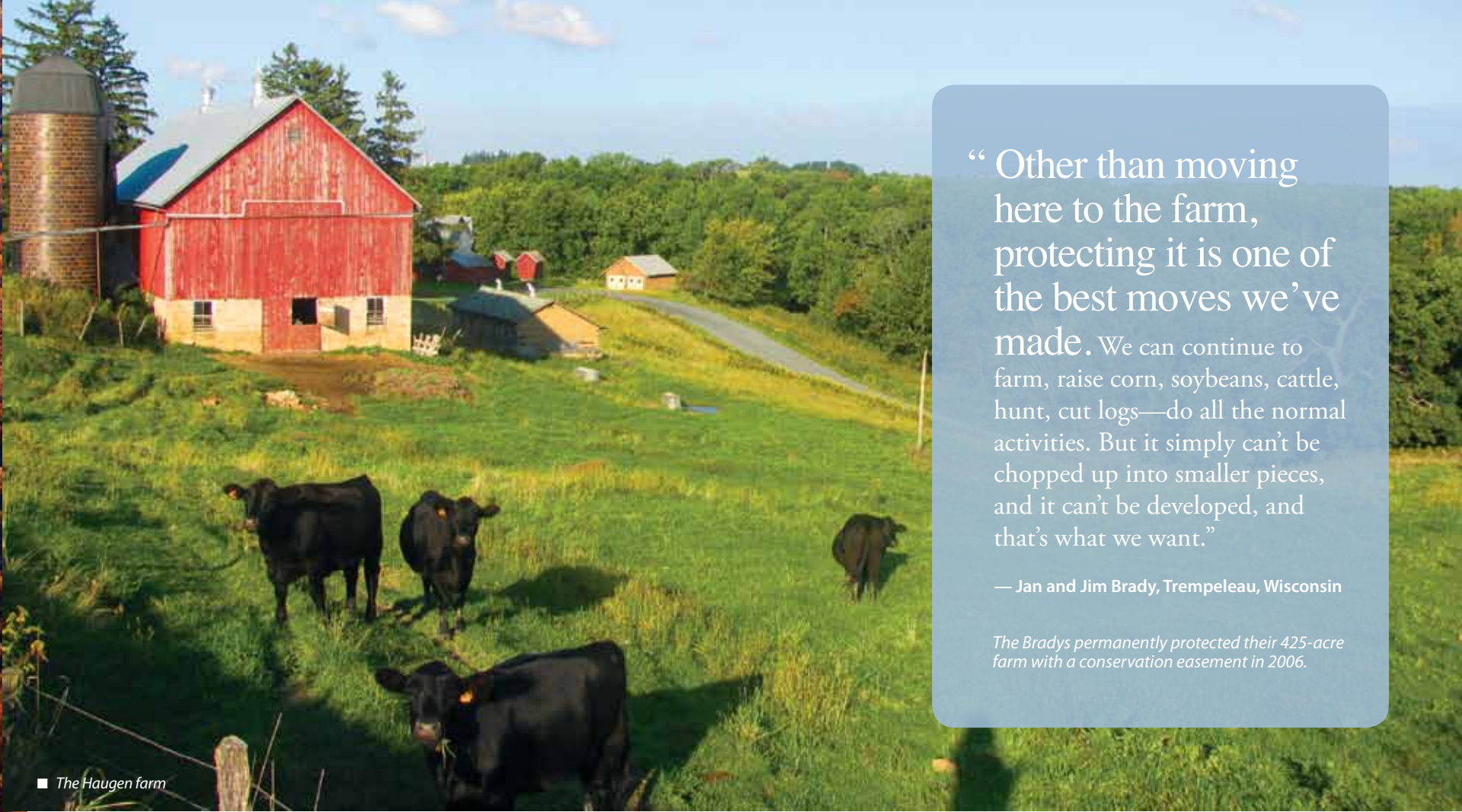
■ Prairie needs fire to exist. Burning removes old growth, controls invasive and woody plant species, puts nutrients back into the soil, and promotes growth of grasses and other native prairie plants. The result is better wildlife habitat, stronger native plant communities, and more forage for animals.

The New Amsterdam Grasslands, a Conservancy property in La Crosse County, is burned regularly for these reasons. At left, Kelli Bartholomew, former Mississippi Valley Conservancy/Fish & Wildlife Service employee and Wisconsin DNR personnel manage a controlled burn at the grasslands.

■ Ornithologists use banding as a technique to track wild birds, such as this yellow-rumped warbler, which passes through Wisconsin in the spring but may winter as far south as Panama. Through banding, we can learn about their migration, longevity, mortality and populations.

Tom Rhorer

Tom Rhorer



■ The Haugen farm

“Other than moving here to the farm, protecting it is one of the best moves we’ve made. We can continue to farm, raise corn, soybeans, cattle, hunt, cut logs—do all the normal activities. But it simply can’t be chopped up into smaller pieces, and it can’t be developed, and that’s what we want.”

— Jan and Jim Brady, Trempeleau, Wisconsin

*The Bradys permanently protected their 425-acre farm with a conservation easement in 2006.*

# Conserving Farmland

## Protects our Health and Quality of Life

Southwestern Wisconsin is home to globally-imperiled native natural communities and beautiful places to recreate outdoors. It’s special for other reasons, too: It’s the birthplace of the modern soil conservation movement and a source for nutritious, locally-produced food.

Unfortunately, total Wisconsin farmland loss between 1990 and 2002 was 888,000 acres, or five percent of the 17.6 million acres of land in farms reported in 1990. The state was fourth in the nation in prime farmland converted to other uses from 2002 to 2007 with 61,800 acres. And each year, two million acres are lost to development nationwide.

Why is that a big deal? Because Wisconsin farms provide wholesome food that benefits all of us. In addition, Wisconsin’s farms and agricultural businesses generate \$59.16 billion in economic activity and provide jobs for 353,991 people, according to a recent study conducted by University of Wisconsin-Extension based on data for 2007.

MVC’s conservation easements, which constitute about three-fourths of MVC’s projects, keep land in private ownership and keep much of it available for agriculture. At the same time, conservation easements promote sustainable farming and logging practices. As a result, prime soils are maintained, our food supply is bolstered, rivers are kept clean, and wildlife habitat is protected.

By limiting fragmentation of a rural landscape that provides our food and generates tens of billions of dollars each year in Wisconsin, land trusts like Mississippi Valley Conservancy are helping ensure the viability of the state’s economy and protecting quality of life for generations to come.

The modern soil conservation movement got its start in southwest Wisconsin’s Coon Creek Watershed during the 1930s and ‘40s, with the involvement of Aldo Leopold.

Joseph Haugen and his 90-year-old brother Ernest, who passed away in 2011, farmed in that watershed their entire lives, and did not want the conservation structures that were installed 80 years ago to be ripped out by some future owner of the farm. Their father, Johan, bought the farm in 1925, and he was one of the first in the nation to enroll in the government’s soil conservation program.

Knowing the Haugens’ wishes, neighbors Jim and Phylis Munsch told them about the opportunity to protect their land with an MVC conservation easement. The Munsch’s, who own an organic beef farm, had already put an easement on their farm to keep it a farm forever. In 2010, Joseph and Ernest did the same so the land cannot be divided or changed.



■ Jim Munsch, left, talks with Ernest Haugen (center, now deceased) and Joseph Haugen (right).

# Conservation Strengthens Local Economies

Undeveloped spaces not only protect wildlife habitat and enhance quality of life for people, but make good business sense, too

By Timothy S. Jacobson, Executive Director  
Mississippi Valley Conservancy



Robert J. Hurt

Some people believe that land set aside for conservation purposes is a drag on the economy. This is a prevalent and unfortunate misunderstanding. President Theodore Roosevelt once said:

*“There is nothing more practical than the preservation of beauty and the preservation of anything that appeals to the higher emotions of mankind. I believe we are past the stage of national existence when we could look on complacently at the individual who skinned the land and was content for the sake of three year’s profit for himself to leave a desert for the children of those who were to inherit the soil.”*

Unfortunately, it seems that Teddy Roosevelt may have been overly optimistic in assuming that America was past the stage of wantonly exploiting natural resources to our long-term detriment.

## There are numerous economic benefits to land conservation:

- Conserved land acts as a multi-billion-dollar generator of economic activity year-after-year in Wisconsin as a result of opportunities for hiking, trout fishing, cross-country skiing, hunting, camping, bicycling, and sustainable timber harvest and farming
- Conserved land and parks boost land values and property taxes
- Studies demonstrate increased residential property values
- Conserved areas boost local economies by attracting businesses and residents
- Good parks and conservation areas encourage economic development
- Conservation is a money-saving alternative to sprawling residential and commercial development

Wisconsin’s natural resources and other attractions generate \$12 billion per year in tourism revenue coming into the state, create nearly 300,000 fulltime jobs and generate \$2 billion of annual tax revenue. Wisconsin’s farms and agricultural businesses generate \$59.16 billion in economic activity and provide jobs for 353,991 people, according to a recent study conducted by University of Wisconsin-Extension based on data from 2007.

By protecting the landscape that generates more than \$70 billion each year in Wisconsin, land trusts are helping ensure the viability of Wisconsin’s economy for generations to come. It’s not about quick bucks and exploiting resources—it’s about sustainability and the long haul.

Conserving the best parts of our landscape not only protects wildlife habitat and enhances quality of life for people, but it makes good business sense, too.

Tami Woods, director of catering for the Radisson Hotel in La Crosse, sees the tangible value of protecting the scenic beauty of the landscape. She said, “Every workday, I talk to people from around the country and around the world who comment favorably on the natural beauty of the La Crosse area.”

Tami’s comments have been echoed by Dr. Jeff Thompson, local hospital CEO, who said, “The mission of Gundersen [Lutheran] is to improve the health of our communities. MVC is focusing on the health of the environment, and that is critical to the long term health of our communities...” MVC has directly assisted large, local employers in recruiting key employees, including doctors,





■ Marbled orbweaver spider



■ Here and at far left, prairie flowers bloom at Borah Creek.



Photos this page: Tom Riborek

■ Luna moth at Tunnelville State Natural Area

## Conservation Strengthens Our Economy *Continued*

who want to move to an area with quality outdoor recreational opportunities.

According to a publication of the La Crosse Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau, "Each year, La Crosse attracts more than *one million visitors*, as people from *across the globe* are attracted by the natural beauty and recreational opportunities offered by the upper Mississippi River area..." The positive economic impact of these visitors for the local economy is nothing short of phenomenal.

Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York's Central Park, was one of the first people to suggest that parks or conservation areas could be paid for from increasing tax revenues that result from rising land values adjacent to the protected lands. In the ensuing 150 years since the design of Central Park, more than 30 studies have demonstrated a positive effect of creating nature preserves or park areas, including boosting overall property values. Municipalities often can generate more money in property taxes when there are good parks and nature preserves than when little or no such "green space" exists.

The positive economic effect of conservation areas on property values becomes readily apparent when we see real estate developers and realtors market housing lots next to MVC nature preserves. Inevitably, advertisements for such lot sales tout the benefits of the conservation areas for the scenic beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Attracting new and growing businesses is easier in communities possessing natural beauty and places for people to recreate outdoors. Businesses often select a location with a high quality of life in order to compete for the highly trained, in-demand workers.

According to a report by The Trust for Public Land, people used to believe that a decrease in environmental quality was one trade-off for economic growth, but in our modern economy, business leaders recognize that *a good environment is ranked as the most important amenity in attracting high-technology workers*—more than housing, cost of living, and good schools. This desirable trait has been termed "quality of place."

Larry Kirch, Director of Planning for the City of La Crosse, explained, "The scenic beauty and the economy go hand in hand, and sometimes they get played off against each other. But I think more and more people are thinking it's not an either-or situation—that you can have a great quality of life. You can have a cared-for natural environment. It is an economic driver. I think we

pride ourselves on living in a beautiful area and protecting what we have here."

**John Crompton, a planning and open space researcher, asserts that "quality of life is not only important in relocation, expansion, or initiation decisions, it is also important in employee retention and has an economic bottom line. . . . If a community commits to a long-term, comprehensive plan to enhance the factors that it can control that positively influence the quality of life, it is likely to have an advantage over other places when recruiting and retaining business."**

Some may think that economic benefits of conservation, if they exist at all, must be immeasurably small. This line of thinking has been strongly contradicted by the data. For example, according to a report from The Trust for Public Land, economists determined that in 2007 the Philadelphia park system provided the city with revenue of \$23.3 million, municipal savings of \$16 million, resident savings of \$1.15 billion, and a collective increase of resident wealth of \$729 million. These figures included more than \$1.08 billion in what economists call "direct-use value" of parks, including sporting activities, walking, picnicking, and other park visitation. People like and benefit from "green space" and conserved areas in a major way.

It's not merely urban-area parks and conservation that result in large economic benefits. A 2008 study by Trout Unlimited concluded that trout anglers alone annually contribute more than \$1 billion to the economy in the Driftless Area of the upper Mississippi River valley. If one added the economic impact of hunters and other types of anglers, the value undoubtedly would be several billion dollars each year.

Also, Conservation is a great money-saving alternative to sprawling development. Although a big surprise to most people, studies repeatedly have shown that residential development may cost communities more money than they stand to gain in real estate taxes and that conserving land may make more economic sense over the long term. This also was the conclusion of a study conducted by Karl Green, UW-Extension agent, in the Town of Holland in La Crosse County.

## Conservation Strengthens Our Economy *Continued*

To put the importance of local land conservation into historical perspective, a 1909 article in the "La Crosse Leader-Press" lamented an apparent commercial plan for Grandad Bluff which "might result in this grand old hill being denuded of its trees and vegetation and its majestic brow scarred and hacked by the quarryman's pick." The article further stated that had J. W. Losey lived a few years longer, "he would have undoubtedly devised ways and means of acquiring Grandad and the adjoining bluffs before this. It was his life's ambition . . . to give to the city of La Crosse in some way title to those hills, and in course of time to see them laid out in beautiful parks." This vision from our city's leaders a century ago is still being carried out today.

The high quality of life for people in southwestern Wisconsin as a result of splendid natural resources is very apparent, both for locals and for people who visit for work or pleasure. For example, La Crosse received national recognition as one of the "best green cities in America" and as being in the top 15 "best places to live" in the whole country, as ranked by "Country Home" magazine.

**When it comes to issues of making choices about land use—choices that result in consequences felt for decades and centuries—it is critically important to think long term rather than focusing solely on immediate economic issues.**

If we exploit natural resources for a quick buck today, we might kill the "goose that lays the golden egg" and deprive ourselves and future generations of substantial economic and other benefits.

Conserving the beautiful bluffs, prairies, trout streams, and other natural areas in southwestern Wisconsin makes good business sense and helps provide a high quality of life. In today's uncertain world, it is more important than ever to recognize the sound investment of land conservation that will continue to pay big dividends for generations to come.



Robert J. Hurt

**“When you’re rescuing land, you’re also rescuing people.**

You’re seeing a world you otherwise wouldn’t see. This is all tied together: the value of land, the value of the relationship of people with the land, the willingness to fight for the land. And here’s that basic theme again: responsibility. Nothing quite equals behavior that takes care of the land. You know, 50 acres here, 50 acres there--it adds up to something important.”

— Ben Logan, Gays Mills, Wisconsin

*In 2008, Mr. Logan permanently protected the 103 acre farm where he grew up.*

# Conserving Land, Trout & the Human Spirit

## Notes From a Fisherman's Journal

BY RICK KYTE



I've been thinking recently about Sigurd Olson's claim that "the conservation of waters, forests, soils, and wildlife are all involved with the conservation of the human spirit," and of his quoting, in explanation of that claim, a remark by Harvey Broome, one of the cofounders of the Wilderness Society: "Without wilderness, we will eventually lose the capacity to understand America."

I take Olson's message to be that without wilderness we are lost, and that in conserving wilderness we find ourselves.

Most people in America think of wilderness as being "out west," mountainous regions with millions of acres in Montana, or Alberta, or Alaska—places where a person can get lost. But I don't think wilderness is found only in places where one can lose direction, but any place where it is possible to lose one's heart. Places where the beauty and intransigence of the world surprise us, take our breath away, places where we see the world as it is and not as we've made it.

Looking back over my journals I find the majority of my wilderness experiences do not happen on annual adventures to the western mountains, but closer to home, on and about the streams of the Driftless Region.

May, 27, 2007

Hornby Creek (air 70° - water 59°)

Caught: 15 brown trout, 3 brook trout (8"-16")

Tan caddis/Cahill spinner

I stand facing a limestone cliff, one hundred feet high, imperceptibly carved over six million years by the stream that flows around my legs. A brook trout flashes by, as insubstantial as the water that has cut this rock face, and which, even now, is shaping me, carrying away my silt and leaving my heart exposed.

In his book *Jerusalem Creek*, Ted Leeson notes that less than one-millionth of the world's surface water flows in rivers, and of that, less than one-millionth of one percent flows in trout streams, and of that perhaps one-thousandth flows in spring creeks. The Driftless Region of Southwest Wisconsin, Southeast Minnesota and Northeast Iowa contains more than 600 spring creeks. Vernon and Crawford counties have 108 spring creeks designated as trout streams that flow a total distance 450 miles. Those of us who call this area "home" are privileged to live in an ecological marvel. You can search the world over and discover that there really is no place like home.

Fishing spring creeks suits those who prefer the delightful to the sublime. You can't delight in a lake or a river, but you can delight in a stream. It's partly a matter of size, but also a matter of approach. Mountain rivers require stamina and perseverance, but a stream demands patience, humility and reverence.

April 17, 2003

North Fork of the Bad Axe (air 40° - water 44°)

Caught: 14 brook trout (6"-10")

#20 BWO parachute/#14 pass lake wet fly fished downstream

Cold, sunny, and still. With every cast the shadow of the line moves across the face of the water and the fish scatter, fearful of aerial predators. Fishing improves when I approach on my hands and knees, or maybe I am improved. At any rate, it seems to me that brook trout deserve such supplication—their faint blue halos a mark of holiness.

In 1958 John Brasch of the Wisconsin Conservation Department, noting the poor soil management in the area watersheds, observed that it is "likely that trout stream fishing in the Coulee Region may practically disappear in the future." But much has been done to conserve those watersheds since then.

Numerous organizations are collaborating to protect the precious habitat of this region. An example is the Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Restoration Effort, established with acknowledgment that spring creek ecosystems are home not only to trout, but also to

Thanks to the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, and the generous people who have donated their land or granted conservation easements, there are now more places to lose one's heart than there have been for a long time, including recently protected portions of the North Fork of the Bad Axe, the Blue River, the Kickapoo, Hornby Creek, Bishops Branch, Leitner Creek, Chase Creek, and Sugar Creek. Not only are there more streams to explore; the streams are in better condition than at any time since the area was settled.



■ Rick Kyte and son Evan ply the waters for trout.

### Conserving Land, Trout & the Human Spirit... *Continued*

many species considered to be threatened or at-risk, such as the Blanchard's Cricket Frog, the Four-toed Salamander, the Pickerel Frog, the Wood Turtle, the Northern Prairie Skink, the Redside Dace, the Louisiana Waterthrush, the Solitary Sandpiper, the Northern Long-eared Bat, and the Wing Snaggletooth (whatever that is). Conserving a trout stream conserves an ecosystem for countless creatures. That is what makes fishing the region's spring creeks so amazing. There is so much going on that it's easy to forget about the trout.

March 21, 2008  
Bishops Branch (air 60°- water 42°)  
Caught: 11 brown trout (6"-14")  
#16 CDC caddis/#18 black bead head dropper

Changing tippet in a riffle, I hear a splash upstream. I lift my head and see something flopping on the water. It looks like a trout, but it stays on the surface in the middle of a deep pool. My first thought: a miracle! But what kind of divine humorist would cause a

fish to walk on the water? It begins moving toward me, shimmering and flashing in the sunlight, steadily closer, until it's just a few yards upstream. Then I notice a little dark point sticking up behind the fish, and as it comes closer the dark point becomes a nose, and the nose is attached to a head, and the head to a long sleek body. It's a mink, swimming downstream, right past my legs, then disappearing with its lunch into a hole in the bank.

When I first started fly fishing for trout, I thought it would be a peaceful, relaxing activity. I didn't realize it meant crawling around in the mud and rocks, falling into freezing water, piercing my ear with a #12 hook, and climbing trees to recover the last Hendrickson pattern in my box. I didn't realize it would require sustained attention to things like the structure of riffle, run, and pool, the intensity and direction of light, wind, current patterns, seams, and eddies. But most importantly, I didn't realize it would require attention to the health of the

streams: water temperature, oxygen content, insect life, and erosion.

Over the years I've discovered that attention is a form of contemplation, and that peace comes from having something



worth paying attention to, so worth paying attention to that you

forget yourself. Or maybe it's that the self expands beyond what's possible to grasp, to whatever it is you fall in love with.

In my youth, I always wanted to catch a bigger fish, to take it home and show it off. Now I just want to be assured that the fish are still there. I want to hold them, see them healthy and vibrant, feel their vitality at my fingertips, and then let them go. I want to know that the most beautiful, fragile, and wondrous things in the world are still present in my absence.

*Rick Kyte, director of the D. B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership at Viterbo University, is former president of the Coulee Region Chapter of Trout Unlimited. His column on The Ethical Life appears in the La Crosse Tribune.*

# Q. What is a land trust?

**A.** Land trusts work with citizens to protect the places they love. As private, nonprofit organizations they facilitate land transactions that protect land for natural, recreational, scenic, historic or agricultural reasons. Landowners legally define how their land can be used, no matter who owns it in the future. Land trusts also buy and accept donated properties outright, and they enforce agreements to make sure the land is protected forever.

### Separating Property Ownership and Development Rights

The legal document that ensures private property will be used in a certain way forever is called a conservation easement. Essentially, it separates ownership rights from development rights. Landowners maintain ownership

and use of the property and can sell it or pass it to heirs. The easement simply restricts use of the land per the owner's restrictions. Landowners decide exactly what those restrictions will be, in agreement with the land trust. A landowner might decide, for example, to keep working land in agriculture, limit development to one residence of a particular size, or leave a wild place undeveloped.

Conservation easements have become one of the most commonly used land conservation tools in the country. Seventeen hundred land trusts with more than 100,000 volunteers and 5 million members have conserved 37 million acres of land in America - an area roughly the size of all the New England states combined.

### Tax Advantages

In addition to the satisfaction landowners get from knowing their land is protected forever, there are three potential tax advantages: income tax deduction; estate tax benefit; and possibly a reduction in property taxes. A perpetual conservation easement donated to a qualified conservation organization can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable gift if given "exclusively for conservation purposes." By removing or decreasing a property's development potential, a conservation easement may also result in the reduction of property taxes in some states, and in estate tax benefits for the landowner and heirs.

## A Growing Movement

Saving land has given America the chance to know itself again. When we look into the mirror of our national identity, we can now see farms, urban gardens, historic sites, mountains and rivers—not just strip malls, bulldozers and traffic jams. Through land conservation, people are gaining the opportunity to taste what it is like to be authentically human: children rolling in the grass of an urban park; a grandfather teaching his granddaughter the quiet art of fishing; a fifth-generation farmer growing vegetables on his family's homestead—nourishing his community with both fresh food and a farm stand where neighbors gather. We set out to save land, but, in the end, we build community, preserve beauty and instill hope.

Land trusts are making these everyday miracles happen, despite the recession of the recent decade and big cuts to government funding.

2010 National Land Trust Census, Land Trust Alliance



## Key Findings: 2010 National Land Census

- Total acres conserved by state, local and national land trusts grew to 47 million as of year-end 2010—an increase of about 10 million acres since 2005 and 23 million since 2000.
- The number of active land trusts has leveled off at 1,723. This includes 1,699 state and local groups and 24 national land trusts.
- The number of active land trust volunteers increased by 70% since 2005, while the number of paid staff and contractors increased by 19%.
- On average, a land trust with a strategic conservation plan guiding land or easement acquisition conserves twice as many acres as a land trust without such a plan.
- From 2005 to 2010, state and local land trusts more than doubled the amount of funding dedicated to monitoring, stewardship and legal defense. They also nearly tripled their operating endowments.



In 2012, Mississippi Valley Conservancy was awarded accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Committee, becoming one of only four land trusts in Wisconsin to receive the recognition. The group began the accreditation process in 2007.

*"We're pleased to be recognized nationally for meeting quality land trust standards," said Tim Jacobson, Executive Director. "We owe it to landowners we work with and other supporters to go through this process. It demonstrates that many steps have been taken to ensure the highest quality of land conservation."*

*The Conservancy was named Wisconsin Land Trust of the Year in 2008, and received the Regional Archaeology Award from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center in 2011. This latter recognizes those who have brought heightened awareness to archaeology and site conservation in the region.*



# What do you mean?

## A Glossary of Land Trust Terms

### Annual Site Visit (Monitoring):

The conservation organization visits the site of an easement each year to be sure the terms of the agreement are being upheld.

**Bargain Sale:** A sale of property or development rights to a charitable conservation organization or municipality at less than fair market value. The difference between the fair market value and the bargain sale price is a charitable donation that may reduce the donor's income or capital gains taxes.

**Bequest:** A gift of money, real property, or conservation easement in a person's will which can secure conservation of property and take property value out of calculation for estate tax.

**Conservation Easement:** A voluntary agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or municipality that protects the land from development. The landowner retains ownership and the rights to sell it or pass it to heirs. If donated for conservation purposes, an easement is a tax-deductible charitable gift and may substantially reduce estate taxes.

### Conservation Based

**Development:** A development plan for a property that frequently incorporates the use of conservation easements and

permits landowners to undertake a specified and limited amount of future building or development that does not interfere with the land's conservation value.

**Conservation Values:** Wildlife habitat, open space, historic, or recreational resources. For example, land may have a high conservation value if it contains habitat for endangered species or if it has open space in a highly developed area.

**Ecosystem:** All of the factors that allow a healthy environment to function; the complex relationships among an area's resources, habitats and residents. An ecosystem may include people, wildlife, fish, trees, water and several other living and non-living elements.

**Fee Simple Donation:** Transfer of a property by deeding it directly to a charitable organization for conservation or other purposes. Tax benefits may apply to the donor.

**Gift by Devise:** A gift of land through a person's will.

**In Perpetuity:** Always; forever. Conservation easement enabling legislation specifically provides for the perpetual nature of conservation easements, whereas other encumbrances on real estate may be of limited duration.

**Land Donation:** An outright donation of land to a municipality or a qualified conservation organization permanently protects land from development, provides the donor with a charitable gift income tax deduction and a reduction in estate taxes.

### Limited Development

**Conservation Plan:** This is the subdivision of land on a reduced-density basis that provides income to the landowner while protecting the natural resources of the land. Voluntary reduced density provides a charitable gift that can offset capital gains tax and may expedite the municipality's approval process. At the same time, infrastructure costs of the development are reduced.

### Purchase of Development Rights

**(PDR):** A landowner voluntarily agrees to sell all, or a portion of, the development rights on farmland to a municipality. The landowner retains the right to farm, sell, and pass the land to heirs. The sale provides cash to the landowner, reduces estate taxes, but may be subject to capital gains tax.

**Alphabet Soup:** No, this is not a conservation term. But if you're involved in land protection, be prepared to deal with an intimidating list of acronyms like "CRP" (Conservation Reserve Program), "MFL" (Managed Forest Land Program), "LIP" (Landowner Incentive Program), and "WHIP" (Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program). These are state or federal programs that provide either funding or tax breaks for various types of conservation actions. Note that these programs are all temporary measures that can supplement the effect of, but do not replace the need for, permanent land protection with land trusts.

Tom Rhoier



FEATURE

### Poke around.

Breaking from a snowshoe hike at Cade Archeological District, one dad watches over little ones who want a look at the Bad Axe River. This Mississippi Valley Conservancy property protects unique features from an ancient Native American culture and Ice Age plants and animals.



### Catch a fish.

Big fish stories rule the day where coldwater streams flow in nearly every bluffland coulee. Throw in a line near home, or have a new adventure exploring streams on conserved lands.

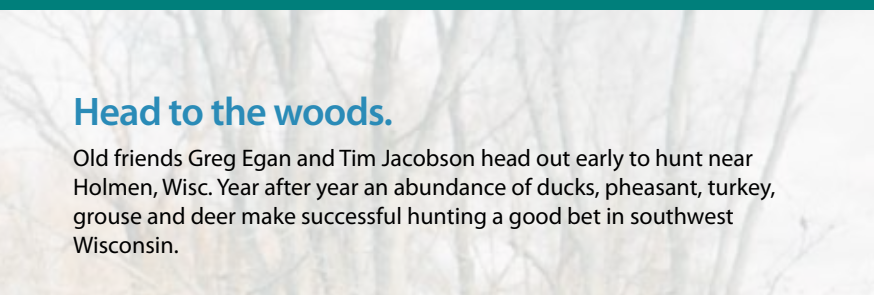


### Take a walk.

At Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, even a chilly winter stroll has its charms. Original log, frame and stone buildings crafted by mid-19th century immigrants invite a peek. Poplar Creek winds through the grounds and miles of hiking trails are available.

# Get Outside & Play

Southwest Wisconsin...  
*Simple Pleasures, Close To Home*



### Head to the woods.

Old friends Greg Egan and Tim Jacobson head out early to hunt near Holmen, Wisc. Year after year an abundance of ducks, pheasant, turkey, grouse and deer make successful hunting a good bet in southwest Wisconsin.



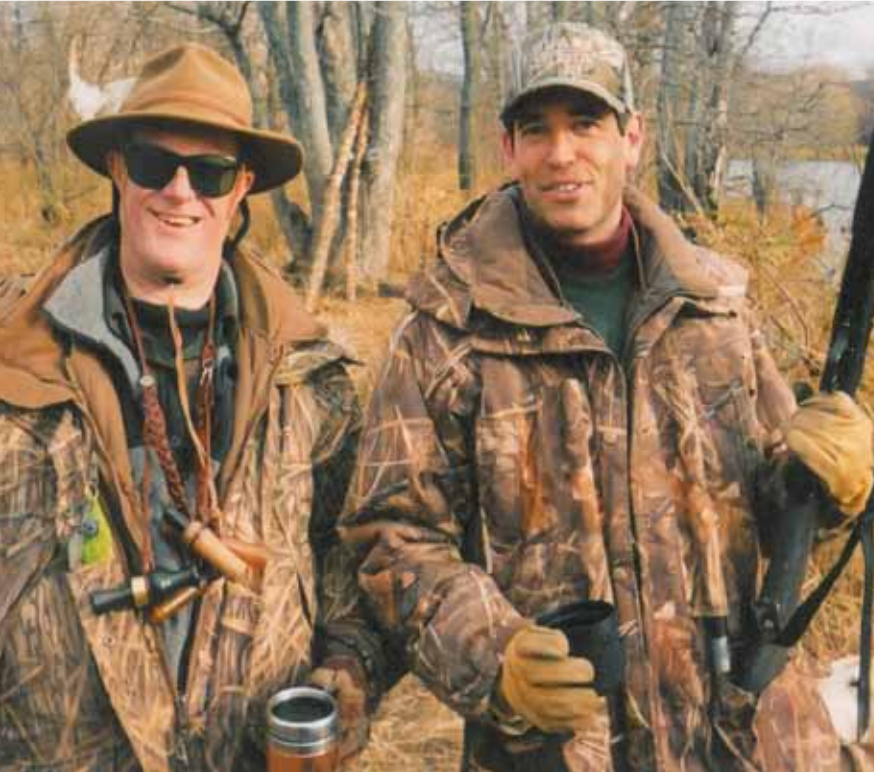
### Picnic in the sand.

On the Black River, friends Chuck Sterbis, Theresa Sterbis and Jennifer Johnson break from paddling to share supper. Campsites are available along all area rivers and you can camp anywhere on Mississippi backwater islands.



### Discover amazing birds.

The Mississippi River flyway is a migratory path for thousands of birds each spring and fall. Look for trumpeter swans, warblers, coots, songbirds, bluebirds, geese, pelicans and many species of ducks.



### Share a big moment.

Mother and son reel in a catch during Kids Trout Derby at Trout Fest, held every summer in Coon Valley, Wisc.

### Explore by water.

On Mississippi River backwaters and area rivers, you'll see things from the water that you won't see on foot. Rent a kayak or canoe from a local outfitter and get in the flow!





# now is the time

Be Part Of a Movement Of People Who Are Protecting Special Places

## Become a Member of Mississippi Valley Conservancy

Join nearly two thousand others working to protect the landscape of the blufflands region.

To join, call 608-784-3606 or send a check to Mississippi Valley Conservancy at the address below.

Gifts above and beyond membership are incredibly important and can be made in many ways:

### Cash Gift

Most gifts to Mississippi Valley Conservancy are made by check. These are generally deductible up to 50% of adjusted gross income, if you itemize.

### Gift of Stock

A donation of stock that has been owned more than one year and has increased in value can be donated. You avoid capital gains taxes, and your charitable contribution deduction equals the full market value of the stock.

### Gift of Land

Landowners who give this way do so for several reasons: to ensure their land is conserved for future generations, to provide a lasting memorial, to obtain a charitable tax deduction, and to avoid capital gains taxes. This deduction requires an independent, qualified appraisal.

### Conservation Easement

To retain ownership of a property and also ensure it remains in its natural condition, consider a conservation easement. You will be able to use your land in ways compatible with natural area conservation while prohibiting development on the property forever, regardless of who owns the land. If you're interested in this option, contact us at 608.784.3606, Extension 2.

### Bequest

One of the easiest ways to give is through your will. You can name Mississippi Valley Conservancy, Inc. as the direct beneficiary of specific assets, a portion of your estate, or of your

### Membership Levels

\$1,000+	BLUFFLAND GUARDIAN
\$500	CONSERVATOR
\$250	PROTECTOR
\$100	PRESERVER
\$50	STEWARD
\$30	SUPPORTER

residual estate after payment of other bequests. These are completely free of federal estate tax and can offer substantial estate tax savings. There is no limit to the amount you may leave to MVC or other charities through your will.

*Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a charitable 501(c)(3) organization, and your contribution is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Charitable giving may offer substantial tax advantages. We will provide additional information, but we recommend that you talk with your personal tax advisor about your specific situation.*

Mississippi Valley Conservancy, Inc.  
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P.O. Box 2611  
La Crosse, WI 54602-2611  
Phone (608) 784-3606  
Fax (608) 784-0257  
info@MississippiValleyConservancy.org

MississippiValleyConservancy.org

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is dedicated to the conservation of native landscapes and working farms in nine counties of southwestern Wisconsin. This conservation work is possible only because of the support of individual members.



# Invitation

FROM PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## People Choosing to Protect the Most Precious Places

The rugged scenery of the Upper Mississippi, a region alternatively named the Driftless Area or Paleozoic Plateau, is known for its steep, rocky bluffs, the start of the largest river system in North America, and world-class coldwater trout streams. The steep topography comes from having been left untouched by massive continental glaciers that scoured and flattened surrounding areas over the course of a million years.

These features of the terrain result in tremendous opportunities for outdoor recreation and create a natural environment with high biodiversity and some of the rarest habitats on Earth.

This natural wonderland has been subjected to new threats that are no less potent than continental glaciers, including poorly planned development, an explosion of invasive species, and the absence of fire that maintained prairie and oak savanna ecosystems for millennia. With global climate change and loss of natural habitat and farmland in other regions, protection of the bluffland region landscape takes on greater importance.

Nonprofit land trusts like Mississippi Valley Conservancy protect the most precious places of our landscape--jewels of nature--for people to enjoy today and for countless future generations. The Conservancy has opened up about 4,000 acres of land for both public recreation and wildlife habitat protection. In addition, the land trust has conserved 10,000 acres of privately-owned land with conservation easements to protect scenic beauty, habitat and working farms. Furthermore, MVC engages in active ecological restoration of imperiled natural communities. All of this is done, not through regulation, but through the voluntary actions of landowners who dream of having their grandchildren enjoying the land just as they do today.

We invite you to support the important conservation work of Mississippi Valley Conservancy. You can do this in multiple ways: become a member, volunteer for the organization, or contact the Conservancy to find out how to protect and restore land.

Community-based nonprofit land trusts like Mississippi Valley Conservancy offer the best hope for providing lasting protection for the places that make this area desirable for recreation and wildlife, especially with the support of people like you. Join us, and make a real and substantial difference in conservation of the natural environment!

George Kerkhove  
President of the Board, MVC

Tim Jacobson  
Executive Director, MVC

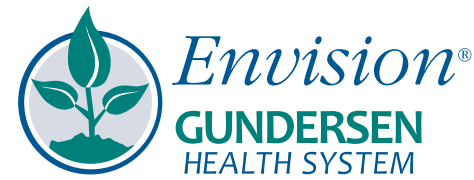
# We're helping change the way...

Energy management

Waste management

Recycling

Sustainable design



[gundluth.org/green](http://gundluth.org/green)





