

Wisconsin Wetlands

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As a statewide organization, Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) must make strategic decisions about where, when, and how we get involved in local on-the-ground projects. Our involvement in a project in the Fancy Creek watershed in the Driftless Area started when landowner Marilyn Houck (pictured here with (from left) Mr. Peabody, Wally, and Lena) reached out to us about her wetlands. Since Marilyn's call, her neighbors and local agencies have joined the team working to develop and implement solutions for challenges in their watershed. Read more about Marilyn, her property, and how WWA's newest place-based project came to be on pages 4-6.



EMILY BUCK



Have you entered the *Swampstakes*?

Have you heard about Wisconsin Wetlands Association's *Swampstakes*? Learn more about this sweepstakes with a wetland twist and about the grand prize—a lovingly restored 1941 Old Town wood canvas canoe—on page 3.



STAFF

Tracy Hames
Executive Director

Katie Beilfuss
Outreach Programs Director

Emily Buck
*Communications
& Events Manager*

Samantha Foster
Member Services Assistant

Jake Lakowski
Office Manager

Kyle Magyera
*Local Government
Outreach Specialist*

Erin O'Brien
Policy Programs Director

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Geospatial Analyst

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214 N. Hamilton St. #201
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 250-9971

Inset cover and
backpage photos:
Joshua Mayer and
Jon Bradley

From the Director

Working toward a big vision, one project at a time



Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) is a statewide organization with a grand vision of a day when our state's wetlands are healthy and plentiful and support ecological and societal needs. That vision also includes citizens who care for, appreciate, and interact with these natural resources. In a state where we've already lost half of our original wetlands (five million acres!) and where so many of our remaining wetlands are in poor conditions, reversing this damage truly requires a grand vision.

If you pay attention to our newsletter articles, blog posts, and other communications, you've heard about all the ways we're working toward making our grand vision a reality. Our work involves helping promote the science needed to support protection, restoration, and long-term care of our wetlands. It involves helping others understand what wetlands are, why they're important, and how they can work to protect and care for them. It involves working with communities to find ways they can use wetlands to solve their water-related issues. It involves helping develop the policies, programs, and funding resources needed to increase wetland conservation throughout the state.

And very importantly, it involves helping make wetland protection and conservation an essential part of how communities and landowners address the water-related problems they are facing at the statewide scale needed to meet our vision. As we often say, wetlands aren't the only things we need to fix our water-related problems, but we can't fix these problems without wetlands.

So, if our vision is to get wetland conservation moving throughout the state at the immense scale needed to address our statewide needs, why is WWA involved in some small-scale, placed-based projects? That's a good question. Let's break it out.

The goals of our place-based work are similar to the goals of our advocacy work. With a very small staff working statewide (only nine of us!), we can't effectively be involved in every issue or effort across Wisconsin. So, when we consider getting involved in a relatively small-scale wetland issue or partnership effort, we weigh the statewide implications of our involvement. In other words, is our involvement in this project or partnership *essential* to moving us effectively toward our grand vision? Does our participation bring an element that cannot be provided by any other partner? And can the results of this effort be exported into other communities and watersheds across Wisconsin?

We are currently involved in three place-based partnership projects in the watersheds of the Marengo River, Little Plover River, and Fancy Creek. Each of these pilot projects is helping address specific statewide wetland conservation needs that are essential for movement toward our grand vision. You'll read about WWA member Marilyn Houck and the diverse Fancy Creek partnership in this newsletter (pages 4-6).

Our placed-based partnership work is designed to show others what can happen when communities work together to address the challenges they face. They also allow us to connect deeply with the people associated with these wetlands. And, as we also often say, we can't effectively work for wetlands if we don't frequently interact with wetlands. These projects help keep mud on our boots and dirt under our fingernails. Thanks for your support that helps keep us grounded in what we're really working for.

Have you entered the Swampstakes?

Have you heard about Wisconsin Wetlands Association's *Swampstakes*? It's a great opportunity to encourage more people to become members of the Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) and to provide opportunities for current WWA members like you to help spread the word about wetlands.

The *Swampstakes* grand prize: a vintage Old Town wood canvas canoe painstakingly restored by WWA Vice Chair Jim Ruwaldt. And wow, is this canoe ever *gorgeous*.

The 18-foot vessel is a 1941 Old Town OTCA model AA, the top of Old Town's line that year. The canoe's original serial number is still visible on the stem, and this enabled Jim to obtain the original build sheets to guide his restoration. The canoe is built with traditional wood and canvas construction in which canvas is laid over a framework of lightweight cedar planks and ribs.

Learn more about this beautiful canoe—the grand prize of this year's *Swampstakes*—in a collection of videos we made of Jim and the canoe at wisconsinwetlands.org/swampstakes.

If you want to win this canoe, check out the many opportunities you have to enter the *Swampstakes* drawing. The more you do, the better your odds of winning! Visit wisconsinwetlands.org/swampstakes to learn more. No purchase or donation necessary to enter.

Each of these actions gains you an entry in the Swampstakes:

- Become a new member by giving \$30 or more.
- Renew your current membership.
- Become a Wetland GEM® by signing up to make a recurring monthly gift.
- Recruit a new member who gives \$30 or more.
- Make a legacy gift.
- And more! See all the details at wisconsinwetlands.org/swampstakes.



EMILY BUCK



EMILY BUCK

The canoe's thwarts and inwale are mahogany, and the outwale, stem, and deck are white ash. Jim maintained the trademark diamond-shaped bolts as well as the period-appropriate Old Town decal.



Mark your calendars! 2023 Wetland Science Conference

The idiom says the third time's the charm. We're sure hoping that's true for our hosting of the Wetland Science Conference in Stevens Point, Wisconsin!

We moved the 2021 and 2022 conference (both of which we'd planned to hold in Stevens Point) online in response to the pandemic, but we plan to be in person at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center in Stevens Point February 21-23, 2023.

Mark your calendars and look forward to three days of sharing, learning, networking, and fun.



How one landowner is inspiring her community to care for wetlands

Marilyn Houck, pictured here with two of her dogs, Mr. Peabody (left) and Lena, has always been curious about the wetlands on her property, but didn't know how to improve them.

For years, Marilyn Houck and her late husband Kent would pass by the wetlands on their land and wonder what they could be doing to care for them.

Marilyn owns farmland near Richland Center along Fancy Creek, a tributary of the nearby Pine River. Back in the early 20th century, people began ditching the creek to drain the adjacent land for farming. Today, because of this ditching, water from the stream doesn't interact with the floodplain anymore. Instead, when big rains and floods come, water laden with sediments and nutrients races through the ditch like a fire hose.

On Marilyn's property, the historic channel is still visible in some places (even more so in aerial images), and the floodplain in these areas is filled with sedges and other beautiful wetland vegetation. But Marilyn didn't know how to care for these wetlands or how to make them healthier. One day, she was listening to the "Larry Meiller Show" on Wisconsin Public Radio's Ideas Network when she heard two women talking about wetlands. Those women were Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) staff Katie Beilfuss and Erin O'Brien.

So, Marilyn gave WWA a call and asked us for some advice. When WWA Executive Director Tracy Hames saw her

property, he immediately saw the potential for watershed-scale hydrologic restoration. The historic floodplains are still intact and the stream just needed to be redirected to the historic natural channel. The project definitely would require some hard work and investment, but the critical features were there.

Since that first phone call, the project has grown to include multiple state and local agencies—and the project area has grown too. With Marilyn's help, WWA and Robert Pearson of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation have met with Marilyn's neighbors about the project to hear their concerns and explore possibilities for addressing them. These neighbors now want to be involved to improve the health of their land and watershed.

This is how our place-based projects grow. They start with a seed—like the initiative and curiosity of Marilyn and her late husband—and grow as more neighbors see what's going on, like it, and want their land to be part of it.

As the project area continues to grow and the partners develop plans, Marilyn is looking at how to protect the health of her property into the future. Working with Mississippi Valley Conservancy, Marilyn is putting a conservation easement on the floodplain and much of her property—

In this satellite view, you can see the linear ditch (highlighted in green) that follows the road on the right, as well as the winding original channel (highlighted in blue).

As you can see in the photo below of project team members, the banks of the ditch on Marilyn's property are very high, making it difficult for water to interact with the floodplain. Instead, high water rushes downstream, further eroding the channel.

including considerations for long-term management—so that the restoration work being planned will be protected for generations to come.

WWA gets calls from many curious landowners and concerned community members about wetlands. Since we are a small staff, we can't visit each one in person or facilitate a restoration project. So why did we get involved in this project? Why this property?

The ditching at Marilyn's property is common throughout the Driftless area and so are the associated flooding and infrastructure issues. Policymakers and landowners in the Driftless area are looking for ways to slow the flow of water and reduce flood damages. By demonstrating cost-effective ways to reconnect the floodplains on Marilyn's property, we can have a wider impact on how people approach wetland and wetland restoration throughout the Driftless Area.

Marilyn's property is also a catalyst for action because she is a fixture in her community, beloved by many. A comment we hear time and again from partners and neighbors: "We're doing this for Marilyn. And the dogs." We are fortunate that she was listening to the radio that day and gave us a call—and so is her watershed.



The historic, winding channel of Fancy Creek is still visible on Marilyn Houck's property.

How WWA facilitates a place-based project

BOB PEARSON

Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) is committed to helping landowners understand, appreciate, and manage their wetlands. This is important because, in Wisconsin, about 75% of the 5 million wetland acres that remain are privately owned. The stewardship of Wisconsin's wetlands depends greatly on private landowners like Marilyn Houck who take the initiative to learn and work toward a healthier wetland landscape.

At Fancy Creek, channelization has resulted in a ditch corridor with flashy flows, erosion, non-point source pollution, and concerns about declining fish & wildlife habitat. Resulting floodplain disconnection has also disrupted flows to adjacent wetlands, reducing water storage functions.

The problems and solutions to situations like the one in Fancy Creek are complex and require more than any one landowner, organization, or agency can offer. This is why collaborating with partners is essential to expand the base of knowledge, grow interest, and obtain commitments to work toward restoration.

The thread of collaboration runs strong at Fancy Creek. Field visits that WWA facilitated early on helped share first-hand understanding of the degraded conditions and resulting problems at Fancy Creek. More important, the field visits allowed a diverse audience to envision benefits that could result from restoration work. Fancy Creek discussions now are led by the Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, who is a vital partner in facilitating this project.

Fancy Creek is truly a community-led effort that began with Marilyn Houck and now extends to a wide array of town, municipal, and county government offices, state programs,



JENNIFER WESTERN HAUSER

WWA has led multiple field visits to Marilyn's property to show partners the ditch, floodplain, and historic channel.

federal agencies, conservation organizations, and even the Headwaters Program at the University of Wisconsin Madison and Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Wisconsin Platteville.

With all this exciting work happening only in the last year, WWA is eager to continue helping build the collaboration and encourage conversations around what lies next for Fancy Creek.

Looking for wetland support in your community?

If you are a wetland landowner looking to better manage your wetland, check out Wisconsin Wetlands Association's suite of web pages for landowners. There, you'll find links to many resources to help wetland landowners care for their land. You'll also find our *My Healthy Wetland* handbook, which includes information, tips, and strategies for wetland management. Visit [wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/handbook](https://www.wisconsinwetlands.org/for-landowners/handbook) to order your copy. We can provide advice and refer landowners to experts over the phone, and, on occasion, meet on-site with landowners who are WWA members.

Recent funding: Helping to improve the health of wetlands across the state

As efforts by Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) to advance a statewide wetlands conservation agenda continue to grow, so too does our need for financial support. Member contributions, event fees, and sponsorships help us maintain core programming such as our Wetland Science Conference, government relations work, and communications efforts, but we rely on grants to cover special projects and place-based work. Here's a short list of recent awards that have helped accelerate these efforts.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) (via US Environmental Protection Agency): \$293,879

Establishing wetlands as an agricultural management practice in Wisconsin



This three-year project will incorporate policy analysis, training, and other coordination aimed at improving eligibility of hydrologic restoration practices for state cost-share dollars and providing trainings to agricultural engineers and county land conservation departments to accelerate implementation of wetland practices.



Association of State Floodplain Managers via the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): \$150,000



Understanding wetland ecosystem benefits and variability of Wisconsin's coastal watersheds

This two-year project builds on WWA's Natural Flood Management (NFM) work in the Marengo River Watershed. WWA is part of a team that will construct a watershed-scale model to quantify how wetland and floodplain restoration projects reduce flood flows and velocities and develop a benefits-costs-analysis method for NFM approaches that are compliant with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The Brico Fund: \$50,000

Increasing state investments in wetlands as a climate adaptation strategy



THE BRICO FUND

This 1-year award will support efforts to encourage Wisconsin Department of Transportation's involvement in WWA's NFM work, expand collaborations with regional DATCP engineers, and support planning for an NFM pilot project in the Driftless Region.

WWA submits comments on draft EIS for Enbridge Line 5 re-route

Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) submitted comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) about the proposed relocation of Enbridge Line 5 in northern Wisconsin. The project seeks to reroute 41 miles of a new oil pipeline through Ashland and Iron Counties and would traverse 183 waterways and 534 wetlands.

Our comments are grounded in our ongoing work in the Lake Superior Basin to assess degraded hydrologic conditions, which are exacerbating erosion and flooding hazards and causing damage to roads and culverts.

To stay tuned, visit the WDNR webpage on this project at [tinyurl.com/wdnrEnbridge](https://www.tinyurl.com/wdnrEnbridge), which will be updated as WDNR works toward considering the comments submitted on the draft EIS in preparation of a final EIS.

Read the comments WWA submitted here: [wisconsinwetlands.org/enbridge2022](https://www.wisconsinwetlands.org/enbridge2022).



**Wisconsin
Wetlands
ASSOCIATION**

214 N. Hamilton St. #201
Madison, WI 53703

Helping people care for wetlands



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Educating new audiences about the importance of watershed-scale restoration



With climate change predictions forecasting bigger and more frequent storms, managing stormwater to prevent damages and poor water quality is becoming increasingly important across Wisconsin and the region.

In a new article in *Wisconsin Lawyer* magazine, the official magazine of the State Bar of Wisconsin distributed monthly to lawyers and policymakers across the state, we're reaching a new audience about the importance of wetland restoration on a watershed scale.

The article, co-written by environmental attorney Paul Kent with Wisconsin Wetlands Association's Erin O'Brien and Tracy Hames and entitled *The challenge of Wisconsin's water abundance: Managing stormwater in a watershed context*, takes an in-depth look at how wetland restoration is key to communities looking to manage their stormwater and how policy makers can help these communities. This article on the evolution of stormwater regulations is the featured article of the May 2022 issue of *Wisconsin Lawyer*.

Read this in-depth look at how we can realize more effective stormwater management in our state in the May issue of *Wisconsin Lawyer* magazine at tinyurl.com/StormwaterWI.