

Mississippi Valley
CONSERVANCY

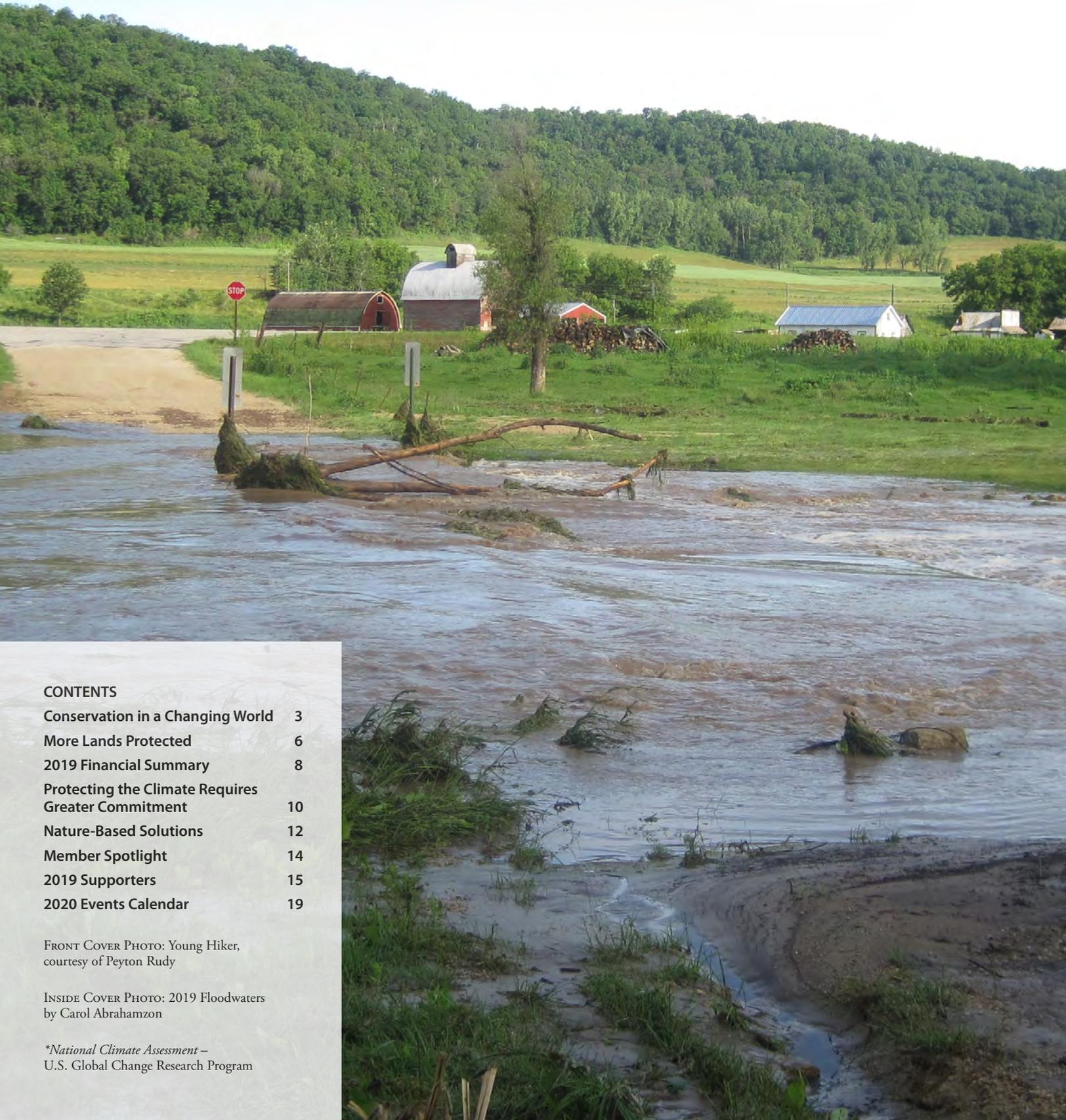
The Land Solution



2019 Annual Report

There's no denying that things are changing.

Heavy-rain events have risen 37 percent in the Midwest since the 1950s, and the magnitude of river floods is steadily increasing.* If these trends become the new normal, Wisconsin's Driftless Area may be changed forever.



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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Young Hiker,
courtesy of Peyton Rudy

INSIDE COVER PHOTO: 2019 Floodwaters
by Carol Abrahamzon

**National Climate Assessment* –
U.S. Global Change Research Program

Conservation in a changing world

A message from
Carol Abrahamzon,
Executive Director

I want to share with you something I've been thinking about more and more. This past summer, the farm I live on with my husband was surrounded by water. The roads were washed out, the fields submerged. Streambanks eroded. Fields were filled with rubble from streambeds – making it difficult to plow and plant.

Yet we were lucky compared to neighbors and many in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin and throughout the Midwest.

We recognize that climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face as a society, and we have an ethical responsibility to address it.

Extreme weather caused massive flooding, deep cut erosion, and ruined farm crops. Thousands of acres were submerged, with countless loss of life for wildlife and farm animals. Community members' lives have been upended, compounding farm stress and accelerating farm bankruptcies – the highest since 2011.

It's been heart wrenching.

Then, this past fall, The National Audubon Society released a sobering report noting that two-thirds of our North American birds are now at risk of extinction within the next 50 to 80 years due to climate change. That follows another report documenting the loss of three billion birds in the last 50 years due, in large part, to loss of habitat and pesticides.

I don't know about you, but for me, this can feel overwhelming.

I've raised my family here. My ties to the land and the community run deep. I love this place, and it's agonizing to watch it face a future of more extreme weather, loss of farms and habitat, and community stress.

Yet I have found that I'm not alone. Almost everyone I talk to sees the impact of climate change and wants to take action.

And so, just as we have in the past, Mississippi Valley Conservancy is stepping up to the plate, in partnership with you, to make the changes we need to conserve the lands, waters, and communities we love. We recognize that climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face as a society, and we have an ethical responsibility to address it. It has to be addressed with a long-term vision, leadership and imagination.

Addressing climate change must become part of our commitment to conserve land for generations. We know it means rethinking how we approach long-term conservation, and there's good news.

Our response must be twofold: protecting land that pulls carbon from the atmosphere and reducing our fossil fuel consumption and emissions.

Research from The Nature Conservancy has documented that if we act soon, natural climate solutions – the forests, prairies, and farmland that we already have right here in the Driftless Area – can help absorb up to 21% of atmospheric carbon dioxide (one of the gases causing the overheating of our planet) if they are managed to do so.

These landscapes function as “carbon sinks” that trap excess atmospheric carbon dioxide to help meet our climate goals.

We have an opportunity to work with farmers and community members to conserve healthy woodlands and manage farmlands to absorb carbon and become more resilient. With your continued support, we'll protect our sweeping prairies filled with deep-rooted grasses that sequester carbon from the atmosphere and explore how renewable energy can help pollinators and enhance farm viability.

People in our community are asking for our help, and because of you, we will be able to do just that. We're at a critical juncture and we must position ourselves as both protectors of priority lands, waters, and habitat and as problem-solvers in helping meet renewable energy and energy conservation needs.

I feel optimistic about conservation and our communities in the Driftless Area. The realities of climate change can feel overwhelming and isolating. There's no doubt about that. But it's people like you who give me, and all of us who care, the courage to face them with the compassion and creativity needed to address the urgent call to action. It's something we can do together. Thank you.

Together in conservation,



Carol Abrahamzon,
Executive Director



You're blazing the trail to climate protection.

Thanks to you, we are already protecting our climate with nature-based solutions that include conservation and management of forests, prairies, and farmland. Together, we can go further.



MORE LAND PROTECTED

101
acres

More than 190 species of birds have used the wooded ridges and draws of Lennie and Maria Lichter's woodland property in Monroe County during the past 43 years. Lennie's careful records also list 150 species of wildflowers and 33 mammal species seen there. Thanks to the Lichters, their land will continue to serve its natural community, and the rest of the planet, far into the future.



97
acres

The Milwaukee couple that has permanently conserved this ridgetop property in Vernon County has learned more than they ever imagined from the experience of owning and caring for their land. They've learned a great deal from the organic farmer who rents their fields and the conservation workshops they've attended. Most satisfying is sharing their love for the land with their visiting grandchildren.

150
acres

As witnesses to encroaching development and the damaging effects of severe weather in recent years, Gene and Patti Amsrud knew the thriving natural community on their Vernon County land needed protection. Their property is exceptionally diverse, with large, mature open-grown oak and shagbark hickory throughout. Such oak woodland is now considered critically imperiled in Wisconsin.



74
acres

A generous landowner has protected 74 acres adjacent to another 51 conserved acres –

both along the banks of the La Crosse River, near West Salem. The resulting 125 acres of protected land offer farm fields and water protection for an area that has little remaining undeveloped land. A forested hill on the newly protected land includes large bur oaks and an understory that includes bluestem and prairie spiderwort.



120
acres

When Mark Hein protected his land adjacent to his parents' protected land, 480 acres

became a permanently protected corridor in the Beaver Creek watershed of Trempealeau County. The property includes prime farmland plus intact oak woodland habitat for blue-winged warblers, ruffed grouse, fishers, bobcats, and black bears. Mark and Anne-Marie Hein are leading by example with a land ethic that will be passed on to their children (left).

6
acres

Much improved access to our Apple Valley Bluff nature preserve is now available, thanks

to a second gift of land from Robert Graw and Thomas Johnson, owners of T & D II Real Estate Investments, LLC. Their first gift was the land that constitutes the original 20-acre nature preserve. Popular for hiking, hunting, and bird watching, the land also offers wildlife habitat and storm water protection for the Town of Onalaska.



More protected land means increasing responsibilities.

Every protected property requires an investment of scientific, legal, and administrative resources to assess, document, and monitor the health of the land. Fundraising and education efforts require time and resources to create awareness among landowners and keep the community engaged.

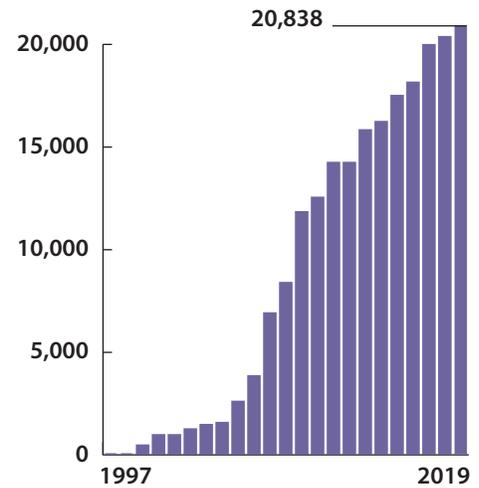
Your support makes it all possible.

Expense Allocation



Land Protected since 1997

20,838 acres and growing!



FY 2018–19 Expense Allocation

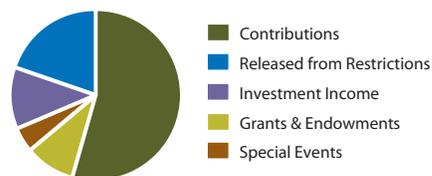
Total Expenses \$640,593



Land Protection	\$ 239,282
Land Management	159,488
Outreach & Education	154,116
Core Mission Support	87,707
Total Expenses	\$ 640,593

FY 2018–19 Fundraising & Revenue

Total Revenue \$1,024,477 (unrestricted)



Investment Income	\$ 118,383
Special Events	48,374
Grants & Endowments	96,550
Contributions	560,182
Released from Restrictions	200,988
Total Revenue	\$ 1,024,477

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is committed to strong fiscal health. The financial summary above is based on the complete financial audit that was conducted by Wegner CPAs. Their full report is available on our website or by contacting us at 608-784-3606.

You're connecting people with the land.

Diverse experiences offer new doorways to community health and conservation. Gardening, foraging, stargazing, forest bathing, and citizen science were just some of the free public opportunities you helped us offer this year. These connections create care for the land.



Protecting the climate requires greater commitment.

This year we've formed a Climate Change Workgroup that includes Conservancy staff, board members, and other Conservancy members. This group first had to answer two key questions:

How can we help natural communities be resilient and thus able to accommodate climate change?

How can our conserved lands be used to attack the primary cause of climate change (human-generated carbon emissions)?

Our protected properties include natural lands and farmlands – both are needed to combat climate change!

Our workgroup acknowledges that climate change will impact most of our practices and policies, therefore we have established a new board-approved climate strategy. These are key components of our *Strategies to Address Climate Change*:

- Update the criteria we use to evaluate new land for protection. Increase weight given to lands with riparian/wetland areas, high topographic diversity, or adjacency to other conserved lands. Each of these factors will help plants and animals as they move to more climatically suitable areas. Powerful tools provided by The Nature Conservancy can help us to make these determinations.
- Encourage landowners establishing new conservation easements to plant buffer zones adjacent to streams. This would minimize erosion into streams from massive rainfall events that are increasingly common.
- Include language in new easements that allows diversified farming practices to include the addition of structures for renewable energy collection. For example, land used for sheep pasture is compatible with arrays of above-ground solar panels. This allows farmers to generate additional income by renting land for solar collection.
- Encourage land management practices, such as reforestation and grassland restoration, that capture and store large amounts of carbon in the soil and in plant biomass.

On a related note, political will may be building to incentivize “regenerative farming” practices, whereby traditional farming methods are supplemented with practices that capture and store carbon in soils. Our protected properties include natural lands and farmlands – both are needed to combat climate change!

A strategy update from Rob Tyser, Conservancy Board Chair



You're building resilience with habitat restoration.

Your support made it possible for us to restore 225 acres of wildlife habitat with the help of 90 interns and volunteers in 2019. This work provides us all with clean air and water, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration – a healthier future for our communities, tomorrow and far into the future.





A model of collective sustainability at Sinsinawa Mound

By Kelly Sultzbach of UW-La Crosse



Sinsinawa Mound Collaborative Farm is an organic education farm in Grant County that feeds multiple communities as it grows new farmers.

Photos courtesy of Kelly Sultzbach

Grappaling with the challenges of climate change can be overwhelming. How can one begin to think globally and act locally? What does it mean to enact “systems change” in community organizations and envision new collectives? One model we might learn from is encompassed in 452 acres at Sinsinawa Mound. This place has been home to the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters since 1874, yet contemporary leaders of the Meskwaki, Ho Chunk, and other tribes have gathered there to honor the land’s indigenous history, too. On my own recent visit, Sister Christin Tomy and Land Stewardship Director Ronald Lindblom were my guides, explaining a variety of land-use initiatives that bring together cooperative farming, grazing, solar power, oak savanna restoration, old growth forest planning, and the involvement of several different neighborhood communities.

Despite all the activity, Sinsinawa is a peaceful place. The sound of lawnmowers has been replaced with the soft swish of over 120 native species of prairie grasses and wildflowers. So far, one-third of the 42 acres of lawn has been transformed from a carbon emitter to a natural carbon sink, all while reducing the price tag, too, as prairie maintenance is one-tenth the cost of lawn upkeep.

Abundant gardens – which were being weeded by fellow Conservancy supporter Sara Mooney when I was there – provide the sisters with over twenty varieties of organically grown foods, but they aren’t the only ones who benefit. Five acres are devoted to helping low-resourced farmers in the area learn organic farming skills and sell their food via CSAs or to local restaurants and markets. The Dubuque Rescue Mission grows food for their daily meal program at Sinsinawa, and there are garden plots for nearby apartment-dwellers too. As Sister Christin tells me, food is a “tangible way to get people to see the benefits of caring for the Earth.” On another 250 acres, there is a new greenhouse, a leased dairy, and pastures where cows named by local children include “Rocket,” “Button,” and now two named after Sinsinawa’s main organizing team, “Christin” and “Ronald.”

The nonhuman community is a lively part of the Sinsinawa collective. Monarchs, birds, and bur oak saplings are also benefactors of new sustainable strategies involving forested landscapes. 110 acres of towering trees are being protected in hopes of achieving old-growth status. In other areas bright flashes of orange monarch wings dart among the bright yellow of brown-eyed Susans, and Lindblom points out a newly cleared oak savanna, dappled with bur oaks, and nurturing several new saplings underfoot. Over a hill, a stand of metal solar panels faces the sun. The panels rely on grazing sheep to keep them free from the shadows of long grasses. This is a thriving more-than-human network.

As we discuss the synergy of inter-relationships at Sinsinawa, both Lindblom and Sister Christin add another component to what makes Sinsinawa so special: a sense of mission and purpose. Lindblom quotes E.O. Wilson, explaining that an ecologist must “think like a poet and work like a bookkeeper.” (*Letters to a Young Scientist*, 2013). Sister Christin points to two influential guides. One is the Pope’s 2015 environmental encyclical: “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” and the other is a book titled *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2013) which states, “Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal.”

Now, thanks to member support, Mississippi Valley Conservancy will be adding its expertise to the collaboration of humans, plants, and animals at Sinsinawa Mound. By finalizing a new conservation easement, we join the statements above to our own collective mission that “In this time of rapid climate change” we will “continue our service to help landowners and communities protect their land from development and restore its resilience and biodiversity.” I felt a renewed sense of resolve and hope seeing so many forms of partnership greening, grazing, and growing at Sinsinawa Mound.



Audubon surveys have confirmed 101 bird species at Sinsinawa, and Land Manager Robert Lindblom (above) is hopeful they will soon attract the bell-weather bird for old growth forests, cerulian warblers. The farm’s small flock of sheep keep the solar array free from undergrowth that could block sunlight (below).



Volunteers for Life



Barbara and Don Frank have supported the Conservancy in countless ways since its inception. The land they donated is part of La Crosse's beautiful scenery and habitat.

Barbara and Don Frank came to their love of the natural world from different directions. Barbara grew up at the edge of La Crosse, at the foot of the bluffs; Don grew up in Chicago. Barbara first learned about preserving nature from her mother. “Mother taught us to love and respect nature,” Barbara said. “She took us hiking, didn’t let us pick all the wildflowers, and helped us carry snakes out of the garden with a hoe.” Early on Don grew to share Barbara’s love of the natural environment. “I grew up in the city. Saving land just made sense to me,” Don said.

Barbara is a founding board member of Mississippi Valley Conservancy; both have served multiple board terms and continue to volunteer and provide support. Barb and Don donated six acres of Barb’s home place, one of the first pieces of land acquired by the Conservancy. About land conservation and protection, Don said, “We can save places – but we have to be far sighted and especially recognize valuable places that are vulnerable.”

Both have long been committed to serving the community through support of the environment, the arts, and health care. “It’s easy to jump on these wagons,” said Barbara. “Or help pull them.”

Photo courtesy of Drake Hokanson

ANOTHER WAY TO PROTECT LAND

Organize a crew from your business, church, or club to volunteer for a day.

With protected land in nine counties, there are many locations where you and your team can get outdoors for a day of habitat restoration that’s good for you, your organization, your community, and the planet. This crew of Altra Financial employees put in a great day of community service at New Amsterdam Grasslands in October of 2019. Learn more about volunteering on our website under *Get Involved*.



Thanks to *YOU*, amazing things are happening.

MEMBERS OF 2019

\$10,000 & Above

Anonymous
David Bange
Roy Campbell and Ellen Ullsvik
Cornell University
Phyllis Dempsey Bequest
c/o Trust Point
Jim Fowler
Barbara and Donald Frank
Sue Anne Gelatt Foundation
c/o Trust Point
John C. Bock Foundation
Johns, Flaherty & Collins, SC
Anonymous
Pete and Anne Joria
Maureen Kinney
La Crosse Community Foundation
Warren and Denise Loveland
National Wild Turkey Federation
The Paul E. Stry Foundation
The PMG Foundation, Inc.
c/o Trust Point
Nick and Yonok Zeller

\$5,000 - \$9,999

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Gene and Patricia Amsrud
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J.F. Brennan
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Elizabeth Campbell
Gelatt-Gephart Foundation, Inc.
Bruce Harvey and Nancy Ettenheim
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Organic Valley
Radisson Hotel
Rosalie "Roz" Schnick
Robert and Judith Thompson
Dr. David and Betty Van Dyke
WLAX/WEUX Fox 25-48
Xcel Energy

\$1,000 - \$4,999

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American Transmission Company
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The Brookby Foundation
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Ursula Cejpek
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James and Joyce Czajkowski
Dahl Automotive
Dairyland Power Cooperative
Mary and Leland Drangstveit
Tim and Sue Durtsche
EarthShare
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Jay and Diane Fernholz
Joan Filla
First Supply LLC
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Fowler & Hammer, Inc.
Franciscan Sisters of
Perpetual Adoration
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Dr. Mark and Anne-Marie Hein
Edwin and Nancy Hill
Drake Hokanson and Carol Kratz
Larry Homstad
Joe and Deb Hooymann
Kirk Jacobson and Donna Pittman
Tim and Regina Johnson
George and Carmeen Johnston
Tom and Annemarie Kasper
John and Sangeetha Kelly
George and Sharon Kerckhove
Kenneth and Deneen Kickbusch
Sue Knopf
Ralph Knudson and
Nancy Heerens-Knudson
Barbara and Joseph Kruse
Clyde Kuennen
John and Louise Leary
Jean and Mark Ledman
Chuck and Linda Lee
Richard and Dorothy Lenard
Tom Lukens and Pam Saunders
Mike and Carol Mader
Richard Meloy
Michael and Susan Mosling
Natural Resources Foundation
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Marilyn Nieckarz
Loran Nordgren
Mike and Sylvia O'Brien
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\$500 - \$999

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Tom and Cindy Rhorer
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Gerard Rugowski and Jayne Stokke
Jack and Judy Rusch
Dennis and Sharon Ryan
Jed and Melanie Schaller
Robert and Carol Schmidt
Paul and Joan Schoenfeld
Jeri Sebo
John Shillinglaw

Michael Sigman and Kelly Krieg-Sigman
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David and Gretchen Skoloda
Nancy Steinhoff
Carol and Phil Toberman
Rev. Allan and Carla Townsend
Jonathan and Debera Uy
Mary Veldey
Steve Ventura and Margaret Krome
Viroqua Area Foundation
Wegner CPAs
Katie Wine
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\$250 - \$499

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Erin and Colin Belby
Ruthann Benson
Laurence and Catherine Berg
Michael Brown
Pauline Buckland
Jac and Susan Bulk
Kristi and Frank Cadwell
Castle La Crosse
Rebecca Christoffel and Andrew Williams
Abbie Church
Tom Clafin
Tom and Mary Jo Clark
Roland Cline and Mary Papenfuss
Matthew and Marilee Cole
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Juliet Eyers
Annette Friedewald
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Larry and Carol Meyer
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Larry Lebiecki and Anita Evans
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Fred Lintelmann
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Randy and Rita Magno
Dick and Julie McGarry
Anonymous
John Monson
Sonya Newenhouse and Cecil Wright



We are grateful for a bequest of land from the Albert Miller Trust that will provide access to a new property, still in planning, for wildlife habitat protection and public education and recreation.

Jim and Ruth Nissen
Mandy Nogle
James and Donna Omernik
Florence L Overgard
Paul and Cindy Patros
Becky Post and Dave Maddocks
Steve Prosser
Brian Ramsey
Jim Ringstrom
Jane Schley
Dr. Charles and Judy Shepard
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\$100 - \$249

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Nola Larson
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Lynne Leuthe
Thomas and Margaret Ley
Claude and Carolyn Lindeman
Peter Linnert
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Ronald Luethe
Helen MacGregor
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Ellen Martell
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Jerome Mooney Photography, LLC
Beth Moore
Ursula Muehllehner
Paul Mueller
Teresa Mueller
Jan and John Munson
Darla Myszka
Neil and Linda Nelson
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Dale and Connie Norris
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Rachel Novy
Alex and Jill O'Brien
Marcie and Mike O'Connor
Allan Ohm
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Love the Bluffs 2019
Habitat restoration took place over 15 days in the La Crosse Blufflands with more than 175 volunteers from UW-L, Viterbo University, Western Technical College, Conservancy supporters, and partner organizations.



Volunteer crew photo courtesy of Pat Wilson.

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Make a tax-free distribution from your IRA.

If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your traditional or Roth IRA to Mississippi Valley Conservancy. You can donate up to \$100,000 each year without incurring income tax on your withdrawal – it's an efficient way to protect land, air, and water. For more information, call Carol Abrahamzon today at 608-784-3606 x 4.

Stewardship Circle

The Stewardship Circle is made up of a special group of land conservancy supporters who have made a lasting commitment to land protection through a variety of estate-planning tools. These include bequests in a will or trust, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, IRA designations, or gifts of life insurance.

Please consider joining this dedicated group of conservationists today by making Mississippi Valley Conservancy a part of your legacy plan.



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On behalf of the next generation of conservationists, we thank our Stewardship Circle of supporters.

Photo courtesy of Peyton Rudy



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Mark your calendar for outdoor fun in 2020!

You're invited to all of these family-friendly walks, hikes, and outdoor activities. Get to know the land you've helped to protect.

LINKED TO THE LAND HIKE SERIES

Learn something new at every one of these outdoor events on the lands you've protected.

February 15	Valentine's Snowshoe Hike	La Crosse River Conservancy, La Crosse
April 26	Trail Trek Challenge & Marsh Walk	Earth Fair, Myrick Park, La Crosse
May 9	Migratory Bird Walk	Sugar Creek Bluff, Ferryville
June 6	Prairie Awakening Walk	Holland Sand Prairie, Holmen
July 11	Kickapoo Caverns Tour I	Kickapoo Caverns, Wauzeka
August 8	Kickapoo Caverns Tour II	Kickapoo Caverns, Wauzeka
September 12	Land Trust Days Climate Hike	Sinsinawa Mound, Grant County
October 10	Foraging Hike	Greens Coulee, Onalaska
November 14	Archaeology Walk & Talk	Little Bluff, Trempealeau

SPECIAL EVENTS

March 28	Annual Member Gathering	Gundersen Integrated Center for Education
November 13	Fall Fundraiser	Radisson Hotel La Crosse

**To receive updates and reminders, be sure to sign up for our newsletter at the bottom of our website at www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org. "Like" us on Facebook for more updates before, during, and after events.*

Photo courtesy of Drake Hokanson



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Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy has permanently conserved 20,838 acres of blufflands, prairies, wetlands, and streams in and around the Mississippi, Kickapoo, and Wisconsin Rivers since its founding in 1997. Over 5,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.

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“You are never too small to make a difference.”

~ Greta Thunberg

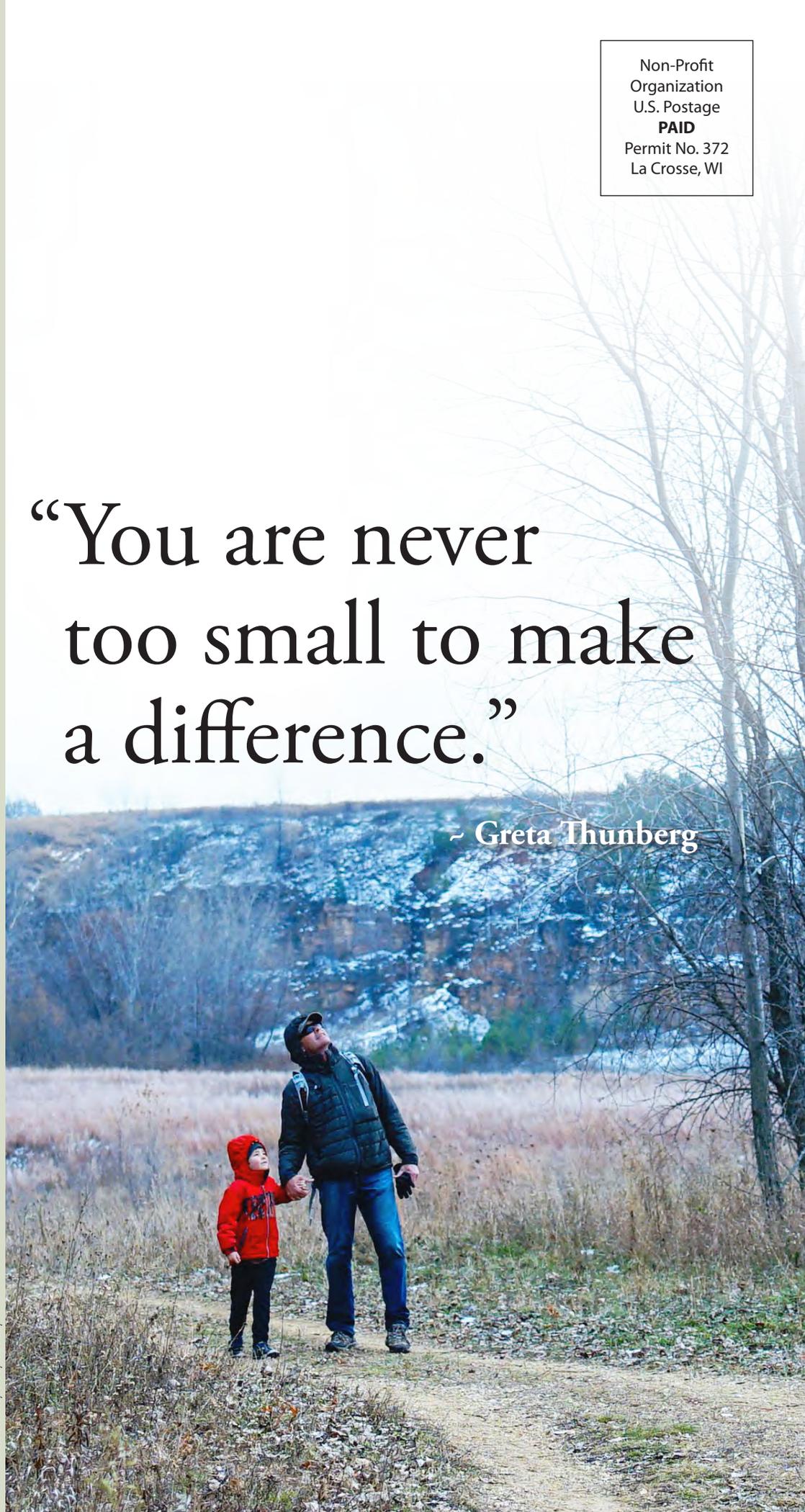


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