



Plum property protected thanks to YOU and our trusted conservation partners

Nobody said it would be easy, but, after twenty-five years of your support for conserving land and water, building team and partnerships, and strengthening our land protection strategy, we have undertaken a major new project in Crawford County. It's the **Plum Creek Conservation Area**.

Known by local birders, anglers, and hunters as a "canyon" rich with fish and wildlife, the 1,611-acre property is located along the west bank of the meandering Kickapoo River and both banks of Plum Creek, a Class I trout stream. The land is adjacent to the DNR's 1,927-acre Kickapoo Wildlife Area-Wauzeka Unit that includes the 635-acre Kickapoo Wild Woods State Natural Area, forming a huge protected corridor for wildlife

With its diverse native habitats and water resources, along with the neighboring protected lands, this property stands out within The Nature Conservancy's *Resilient and Connected Lands* analysis, which identifies a network of lands and

migration corridors across the United States that are best able to support plants and animals in a changing climate.

Funding for acquisition of the property was the missing link, and we weren't the only party interested in buying. Fortunately, the seller didn't want to see the land divided, and that made the Conservancy the right buyer.

Then, in April 2022, the impossible happened. The acquisition was funded with a major gift from an anonymous supporter, and in close collaboration with The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin (TNC), and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI-DNR). *Continued on page 3*

Plum Creek Conservation Area photo by Samuel Li

A message from Carol

Feeling optimistic about a strong future

Spring is a time of rebirth. The land is shaking off the last snowflakes, stretching its limbs and waking up. Despite the chilly temperatures, perennial plants push through the rich, damp forest soils, tree buds fatten and burst from their branches, and farm pastures transform from the bleak brownness of winter to a bright spring green rich with fresh nutrients for sheep, goats, horses, and cattle.

If you're like me, you got a little jump on spring by gently dropping seeds into little pots, pushing a marking label in, sprinkling them with water, and setting them on a sunny windowsill. Every morning I optimistically check each pot, waiting for the emergence of this summer's food.

In some ways I look at Mississippi Valley Conservancy in the same manner. We are in the midst of celebrating our 25-year anniversary. Twenty-five years of protecting prairies for our bees and butterflies; stately oaks, hickories, and cottonwoods for birds, insects, and other wildlife; clean water for fish, frogs, turtles, and our communities. Twenty-five years of planting trees, cutting buckthorn, pulling garlic mustard, and laying restorative fire on the land. And twenty-five years of spreading love for the land through community hikes, work with school children, and storytelling.

We're now on the cusp of rebirth; optimism for another season of protecting the land we all love and rely upon for our food, recreation, relaxation, rejuvenation, and inner peace. We're stretching our limbs wide and working on some amazing land protection projects. I'm optimistic for a strong future because of you. You have been the catalyst for all of the work, and I know I can count on you to continue to volunteer, support, and offer advice for the next twenty-five years. Thank you for making it all possible.

Together in conservation,

Carol Abrahamzon

Carol Abrahamzon,
Executive Director





Land uses at the Plum Creek Conservation Area include row cropping and cattle ranching. We, along with project partners, will be gathering data from the site to identify the most effective opportunities to restore the land. Restoration activities will incorporate agricultural practices aimed at maximizing benefits to wildlife habitat and climate resilience. A comprehensive and long-term land management plan will be developed to prioritize the conservation goals and define the strategies to achieve them. The photos on this page (from top left to lower right) show examples of some of the challenges to be addressed, including soil erosion from tilled fields impacted by heavy rains, row cropping on steep slopes, and streambank erosion.

Much work to be done *Continued on page 3*

Over the coming year, we will work closely with our partners at TNC and the Savanna Institute to develop a long-range plan and vision for the site in order to achieve conservation goals that include healthy habitats, water quality protection, and resilience to climate change.

Those portions of the protected land that were previously open to the public for hunting, fishing, paddling, and other low-impact recreation will remain open to the public for those uses.

Craig Thompson of the WI-DNR, which has been working to find ways to conserve the land since the 1980s, said, "It's been a long time. I'm really glad to see the Conservancy and TNC succeed in the conservation of the land." He notes the need to move with some haste to restore the land because of the importance of the area to migrating birds and the rapid decline of their numbers 'on our watch.' "There is broad agreement among conservation practitioners that we have about a decade to set a course for the future of our planet for its inhabitants, human and otherwise," said Thompson.

You made this amazing project happen! Without your support for land and water conservation in Wisconsin's Driftless Area, the future of this land would look very different. We're planning an anniversary celebration with tours of Plum Creek Conservation Area later this year. Watch for details coming soon.



Restoration for climate: **Boscobel Bluffs**

by Levi Plath

The landscape of Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area includes unique wind-blown features, rare dry prairie habitat, and oak savanna and oak woodlands. These rare natural habitats store carbon, protect water quality, and are home to a number of endangered and threatened plant and wildlife species. Shown below are recent tornado damage (top left), heavy equipment used for initial tornado clean-up (bottom left), and some of the wildflowers that will soon be in bloom.

After years of work to restore the beautiful and beneficial prairies of the 389-acre Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area, a tornado blew through last summer and caused much damage to other parts of the nature preserve.

We are grateful for the many volunteers who turned out to help clean up the tornado damage that included downed trees, damaged fences, and debris from nearby properties. There is still more work to be done. We will contract with a local logging company to help with removing some of the damaged trees in summer 2022.

More volunteer opportunities to help with habitat restoration will soon be offered. To be notified of volunteer activities, please sign up on our website at <https://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/volunteer> and tell us about your preferred volunteer activities and locations.

Things may get more messy before they get better, as we will likely need some heavy equipment to remove some of the fallen trees. For this reason and for your safety, **we have closed the hiking trail** at Boscobel Bluffs for 2022.



A place for everyone:

Summertime fun!

You're always welcome at the thirty nature preserves you've protected. We also invite you to connect with nature through guided activities and events. Get details at: www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/events



Become a citizen scientist!

With the Driftless Area Bioblitz, you'll learn to use iNaturalist to record the plant and animal species of Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Together with our partners at Strive2Thrive Coulee Region, UW-La Crosse Biology Department, and WisCorps, we invite nature

lovers of all ages to get involved in discovering the diverse natural communities found here. This fun-filled discovery program includes loads of events plus things you can do in your own backyard.

Take the Challenge!

2022-2023 Trail Trek Challenge is a fun and easy way to get moving and rediscover the natural wonders of Wisconsin's Driftless Area. If you think you've seen the nature preserves before, think again. There's always something new to see as the seasons change. You can also engage young hikers with *Find Nature's Treasures* – a different nature hunt at every trail!



Volunteer at Savanna Oaks!

We're moving the Naturehood Connections toolbox to Savanna Oaks for the summer so anyone can learn to be a land steward and help the prairies and savanna to thrive. We'll have informal training sessions for people to learn what's in the box and what needs to be done. There are fun activities in the toolbox for younger helpers, too.



guided hikes for all

May 7

World Migratory Bird Day Walk
Sugar Creek Bluff in Ferryville

June 4

Wildflowers of Savanna Oaks
Savanna Oaks in Onalaska

July 16

Driftless Geology Hike
La Crosse Blufflands North – Mathy

driftless area bioblitz

April 30

Naturally Spring
Villa St. Joseph

May 22

World Migratory Bird Day Walk
Sugar Creek Bluff in Ferryville

July 23

Moth Mania
Villa St. Joseph

July 24

Bugs in the Garden
Discovery Room at Myrick Park Center

Aug 14

Pollinator Plants
WisCorps Pollinator Gardens at Myrick Park Center

more things to do

Trail Trek Challenge

The year-round hike/walk challenge that you can do where and when it works best for you.

Find Nature's Treasures

A treasure hunt on every nature preserve

Naturehood Connections

Volunteering for all ages at Savanna Oaks in Onalaska

Monarch Watch

Plant your own "Monarch Waystation" for monarch butterflies in the area

Learn more about these events and activities at www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org



Farmland forever

Many farm families put generations of stewardship into conserving their soil and water. When it comes time to retire, they don't want to see their land subdivided and developed. Karen and Bud Hanson chose a conservation easement to ensure the future of their farmland for the benefit of all.

In a time when more than 2,000 acres of U.S. agricultural land are converted every day to nonagricultural use and small farms are being swallowed up by conglomerate farms, one farm couple's long-range planning bucks those trends. Karen Hanson has lived on the Hanson family farm since marrying Bud Hanson in 1981. Bud's father was born on the farm in the 1890s, and together they farmed and cared for the land. Today, five years since Bud's passing, Karen manages the farm while working to ensure its conservation. She recently entered into a conservation agreement with the Conservancy.

The Hansons' 261-acre farm consists of scenic wooded bluffs and rolling organic farmland within the Middle Trempealeau River watershed. The property includes pastures and farmland with rich, productive soils for farming, diverse habitats for wildlife, and numerous water resources.

“Many aspects of farming have changed over the years,” said Karen Hanson, “but we’ve worked hard to maintain the health of the farm – the richness of the soil and the natural areas for wildlife.”

Bud Hanson and his father raised a variety of livestock on the farm in addition to corn, hay, and small grains. They did it without chemical inputs, and Karen and Bud chose to keep it that way. To manage the farm while also working off the farm, they sold the livestock and certified the land for organic production.

Today, part of the farmland is rented for summer grazing and part is rented for organic crops produced along contours of the land for the prevention of soil erosion.

Thanks to the Hansons, and with your support, this farmland will continue to support the agriculture economy and the water and wildlife of Trempealeau County.

Karen Hanson still lives in the farmhouse that has been modernized since her inlaws, Jens and Anna, built it in the 1890s. Conserving the land was a priority for Karen and her late husband Bud.



More ways to help.

Plum Creek Stewardship Endowment

Thanks to our partners at The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin and a gift from a generous couple, an endowment of \$250,000 has been established to help fulfill the conservation goals of the Plum Creek Conservation Area.

As we begin our next 25 years of land protection, we're asking you to help match that endowment to ensure the successful restoration and ongoing stewardship of the Plum Creek Conservation Area for the benefit of the people and wildlife that depend upon it, including the yellow-billed cuckoo (above).

Our online donation page includes a place where you can designate a special gift for the Plum Creek Stewardship Endowment. Or contact Carol Abrahamzon for more information at: carol@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

Plum Creek Conservation Area photo by Samuel Li. Yellow-billed cuckoo photo by Bruce Bartel.



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The Stewardship Circle Bequest Challenge

The Stewardship Circle is a special group of land conservancy supporters who have made a lasting commitment to land protection through a variety of estate planning tools. Right now you have an amazing opportunity to expand the work of protecting, caring for, and restoring our unique and beautiful Driftless Area for the benefit of everyone. When you make a planned gift, \$1,000 will be donated to Mississippi Valley Conservancy in your honor from the Stewardship Circle Bequest Challenge Grant. Details are on our website at www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/ways-give





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Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, nonprofit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy has permanently conserved 23,929 acres of blufflands, prairies, wetlands, streams, and farmlands in and around the Mississippi, Kickapoo, and Wisconsin Rivers since its founding in 1997. Over 7,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.

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Save the driftless for them

Protecting the land, water, wildlife, and climate are the best things we can do for those who will inherit this place – future farmers, future families, future stewards of the land – and all the wildlife that was here before us. There’s much more work to be done to protect and restore the land for resilience to climate change. We invite you to visit our website to learn how you can help.

Whether you’re an artist or an arborist, a photographer or a philosopher, a teacher or a truck mechanic, there are many ways for you to help *save the driftless for them*.

mississippivalleyconservancy.org/ways-give