

Our Commitment to Land Conservation

Gathering Waters' Board of Directors and staff, in consultation with Wisconsin's Land Trust Council, approved this strategic plan in 2018 aimed at taking Gathering Waters to a new level of leadership and impact over the next five years. While our mission remains unchanged—we help land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special—our true objective is focused on the land. In short, the long-term impact that we seek to achieve is **lasting land conservation that meets community and ecological needs throughout Wisconsin.**

Realizing this long-term impact will require certain conditions—what we're calling the **Essentials of Land Conservation in Wisconsin**—be created or sustained. These conditions capture key people, resources, tools, and systems necessary for our success, including:

- *Strong, sustainable land trusts* committed to meeting standards of practice and providing leadership in promoting and sustaining land conservation
- *Durable and effective legal tools* that provide landowners with opportunities and options for lasting land conservation
- *Funding and other resources* sufficient for land acquisition and management
- *Integrated networks* of organizations and individuals leveraging resources, expertise, and influence
- *Engaged constituencies* who value, support, and join together in land conservation

Our Strategies for Lasting Land Conservation

In order to create or sustain these **Essentials of Land Conservation in Wisconsin**, we will employ the following cross-cutting **Strategies for Lasting Land Conservation** that together *build the capacity of Wisconsin's land trusts, increase the rate and durability of land conservation, and elevate land conservation as a statewide priority.*

- Develop the capacity of Wisconsin's land trusts to implement and sustain land conservation by meeting best practices, fostering leadership, and promoting effective and efficient operations
- Advocate for public policies and funding that promote land conservation
- Enhance strategic conservation planning and implementation by enabling exchange of knowledge and technical expertise among researchers and practitioners
- Advance effective financing options for land conservation by pursuing opportunities to access new sources of capital for acquisition and management, including environmental markets
- Cultivate cross-sector collaborations to effectively address conservation priorities and trends through regional alliances and partnerships to maximize conservation impact
- Connect people to the land and celebrate success to broaden the constituency that supports and benefits from land trusts and land conservation
- Compile, maintain, and market information about the benefits of land conservation and land trusts

Our Key Initiatives

Gathering Waters' strategic plan—our commitment to land conservation—is intended to be adaptive and responsive. The following **Key Initiatives** describe how we will implement our cross-cutting **Strategies for Lasting Land Conservation**.

- **Land Trust Technical and Financial Assistance:** Gathering Waters offers tailored training, technical assistance, and other support to meet the evolving needs of Wisconsin land trusts. Through our Land Trust Excellence and Advancement Partnership (LEAP) with the Land Trust Alliance, we leverage expertise and resources to provide high-quality, high-impact services.
- **State Policy Advocacy:** Gathering Waters is committed to advocating for reliable, sustainable state funding for land acquisition and management, through renewal of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and alternative sources of revenue.
- **Wisconsin Land Trust Advocacy Ambassadors:** Local voices make the greatest impact in advocacy. We will enhance the effectiveness of our state and federal advocacy efforts by increasing the number of land trust staff, board members, supporters, and landowners who have relationships with their elected officials and can share compelling stories of land conservation from their communities.
- **Federal Policy Advocacy:** Through collaboration with state, regional, and national partners, we will engage members of Wisconsin's Congressional delegation and federal agency officials to strengthen relationships and advocate for funding and policies that support land conservation, including the Farm Bill, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- **Land Trust Cohort Learning:** In collaboration with the Land Trust Alliance, we will provide opportunities to connect, learn, and share experiences to create a vibrant community for land conservation capable of collaborating to address complex, systemic challenges.
- **Wisconsin Land Trust Conference:** Our annual conference builds capacity and community among land trust staff, board members, and partners as they gain new knowledge and skills, reinforce best practices, celebrate successes, and commit to continued progress in land conservation.
- **Wisconsin Land Trust Days:** A new initiative aimed at leveraging the statewide voice of Gathering Waters with fun, local events hosted by land trusts from mid-August through mid-September. Gathering Waters will invest in creating a statewide branding and marketing effort, while land trusts will showcase special places around Wisconsin. Land Trust Days is intended to celebrate the impact that Wisconsin land trusts have in their communities.
- **Land Conservation Leadership Awards Celebration:** This annual event raises the profile of land conservation, land trusts, and Gathering Waters and celebrates the outstanding achievements and contributions of individuals, policy makers, land trusts, and other organizations protecting the places that make Wisconsin special. This event honors the power of committed citizens and offers inspiring examples of conservation success.
- **Conservation Information:** We are investing in Geographic Information System (GIS) capacity that will serve as a *direct service* to many land trusts and as a starting point for *future capacity building* and *collaborative efforts*, taking into account the range of land trusts' GIS and the importance of visual data for promoting lasting land conservation.