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nature photos: Gil Gribb



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gathering waters conservancy

The Million Acre March: Gathering Waters Conservancy's 2008-11 Strategic Plan

by Mike Strigel, Executive Director

Every three years, Gathering Waters' staff and leadership meet to look out at the horizon. What vision are we working toward? What course should we chart for the next three years?

During our most recent round of strategic planning, we confirmed that we are an organization inspired by the natural beauty and vitality of our state, and by the momentum and success of Wisconsin's land trust community. So inspired, in fact, that we are now aiming to see Wisconsin boast a million acres of natural and working lands permanently protected during our lifetimes.

We believe land trusts are the principal agents for private land protection in the state and the engine of this Million Acre March. We're working toward a million acres of ecologically, economically and culturally significant lands protected by citizens who celebrate the value of conservation to their communities and to our state.

In pursuit of those million acres, Gathering Waters will work to make Wisconsin land trusts stronger. Over the next three years, we will:

Make land trusts stronger by continuing to provide them with free and low-cost technical assistance and consulting services. We will keep them apprised of national trends in conservation easement management, host the only statewide land trust meeting each spring, offer professional trainings and work one-on-one with land trust boards and staff to address particular challenges faced by each of our member land trusts. In the next three years we will aid organizations applying for a new national land trust accreditation program and connect land trusts to new funding sources.

Make land trusts stronger by advocating for public policies that funnel money to land protection. We will continue to build bipartisan support for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and push to increase its purchasing power. Additionally, we will work with policymakers to make new state programs available to owners of Wisconsin's vital working lands. We will also insist that state responses to climate change include incentives for permanent, voluntary private land conservation.

Make land trusts stronger through outreach campaigns targeting media, landowners and community leaders to convey the benefits of land trusts' work in Wisconsin communities. We aim to expand individual and community support for land conservation, increasing the membership bases of all Wisconsin land trusts.

Make land trusts stronger by fostering local and regional conservation initiatives. We believe that strong relationships between land trusts and community institutions—municipalities, civic organizations, business and other conservation organizations—will yield acres protected beyond what land trusts can achieve working one-by-one with individual landowners.

In the following pages, you'll read that these plans are already underway. Wisconsin's land trusts are poised to accomplish permanent protection of a million acres of our state's special places. Gathering Waters is uniquely positioned to equip and champion these remarkable organizations statewide. That's why we come to work every day and it's what we ask you, our members, to support.

We believe land trusts are the principal agents for private land protection in the state and the engine of this Million Acre March.

Gathering Waters Conservancy's mission is to help communities, land trusts and landowners protect the places that make Wisconsin special. Our goal is to increase the amount of protected land in the state through private voluntary action.

Gathering Waters Conservancy
211 S. Paterson Street, Suite 270
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: (608) 251-9131
Fax: (608) 663-5971
www.gatheringwaters.org

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From the Executive Director's Desk...



I would suspect that many of you have participated in more than a few strategic planning sessions and have experienced the long hours of flip charts, sticky notes, and multiple drafts that seem to be standard. While the process can be arduous, a well-done strategic plan truly does inspire. As our front page story describes, our recently-completed plan is a clear and inspiring blueprint for action that both connects us to the roots of our mission and launches us into new territory for this organization and for land conservation in Wisconsin.

But our work is obviously just beginning. This plan relies on our ability to connect to all of our members in ways that breathe life into the blueprint. We'll be initiating many of these connections through our land trust staff retreat in the spring, our Great Lake Gatherings in the fall, and our many other contacts with you throughout the year. But I also want to stress that we welcome your input at any time—in fact, we need it. The voluntary private land conservation movement is powered by you, the thousands of land trust members and staff across the state who protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

In this plan we renew our commitments to supporting land trusts and private land conservation through many of the tried-and-true programs that have led to success in the past, but it also contains an imperative to dedicate ourselves to new initiatives that will widen the scope of what we currently do in our efforts to make Wisconsin's land trusts stronger. With your support and valuable insight, I am confident that one million acres of protected land are well within our reach!



Michael Strigel, Executive Director

**Introducing:
Gathering Waters Conservancy's Advisory Council**

This spring Gathering Waters Conservancy welcomes a new group of collaborators to the GWC team. As we begin to roll out the initiatives of our new strategic plan, we are pleased to announce the creation of Gathering Waters' Advisory Council and to introduce the Council's charter members.

We established the Advisory Council this year as a way to strengthen our relationship with a broader group of land conservation supporters. We hope the Advisory Council will help us to harness their wisdom and enthusiasm and further the mission we are all working to achieve: protecting the places that make Wisconsin special.

The charter members of the Council bring a diverse array of backgrounds and skills to the organization, but what they all share is a long-standing commitment to Gathering Waters and the land trust movement. Unlike our Board of Directors, whose role is to govern the organization, the Advisory Council will act strictly as an advisory body. We'll call on the members of the Advisory Council to lend their valuable expertise to timely conservation issues and to extend the reach of Gathering Waters and the land trust movement.

Elizabeth Kluesner, Administrative Policy Coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources, had this to say about her new role on GWC's Advisory Council: "I was honored to be asked to serve on the Gathering Waters' Advisory Council. The Gathering Waters model of working with private landowners to achieve conservation success is incredibly powerful. It builds on the tradition of independence and outdoor spirit that are a part of Wisconsin's history and will serve to infuse these values in every part of the state. I love being a part of this organization!"

In the future, Gathering Waters hopes to expand the membership of the Advisory Council in order to foster future leadership for the organization, to further engage close supporters, and to retain the wisdom and experience of past board members as their terms draw to a close.

**Advisory Council
Charter Members:**

- Dan Burke
- Julie Gallagher
- Bud Jordahl
- Elizabeth Kluesner
- Geoffrey Maclay
- Jean Meanwell
- Bill O'Connor



In Defense of Conservation

As a statewide land trust service center, Gathering Waters makes it a priority to stay abreast of national trends that may impact the work of Wisconsin land trusts. One such issue that has been coming up more frequently in the national discussion on private land conservation is the question of conservation easement defense.

As a legal tool, the conservation easement constantly evolves as land trust professionals, legal advisers, and landowners become more experienced and strive to make private land conservation ever more legally sound. As the land trust movement gathers steam nationwide, the work of land trusts becomes more visible—which we almost always consider a positive thing—but one drawback to having a higher profile is that many more land trusts are encountering legal threats to the permanent protection of their conservation easements and fee-owned properties. These threats may come from successive landowners, neighbors or others in the community who may not share the conservation vision of the original landowner.

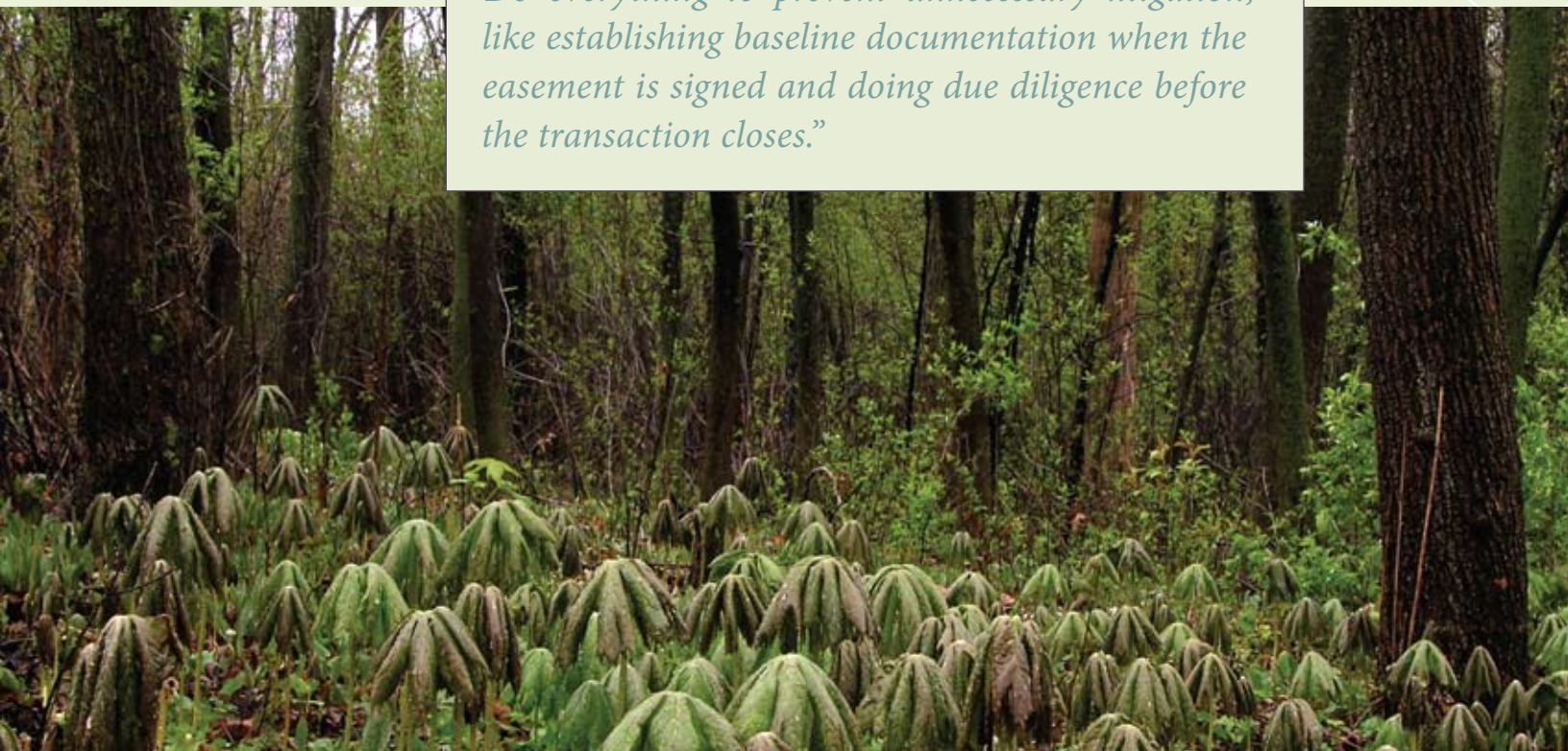
To keep Wisconsin’s land trusts up to speed on conservation easement defense, we work closely with the **Land Trust Alliance**. LTA has begun to coordinate a national plan of action for defending land trust conservation projects facing legal challenges, and they recently hired **Leslie Ratley-Beach** as their first Conservation Defense Director. Leslie is working on initiatives for conservation defense, including a forum for practitioners and a Conservation Defense Fund for LTA to use in cases with national implications.

Leslie explains that LTA’s Conservation Defense Fund will allow the Alliance to identify and react to a few high-profile easement defense cases each year. By filing amicus briefs, LTA will provide the courts with broad, nationwide perspective on land trusts and private land conservation. This will be especially important in cases in which the court’s decision could impact future challenges to conservation easements. “We’ll work with our advisors to select cases that are of utmost importance to land trust community,” Leslie said.

A piece of advice that Leslie offers to land trusts wondering how they can be proactive about possible challenges to their conservation work: “Do everything to prevent unnecessary litigation, like establishing baseline documentation when the easement is signed and doing due diligence before the transaction closes.” Leslie also recommends that land trusts keep a legal defense fund separate from funds they maintain for land stewardship or operations.

We’ll stay in close contact with Leslie and LTA as they continue to develop initiatives to help land trusts meet challenges to permanent land protection. For more information about LTA’s conservation defense initiatives, contact Leslie at lrbeach@lta.org and ask to be added to the email updates list.

“Do everything to prevent unnecessary litigation, like establishing baseline documentation when the easement is signed and doing due diligence before the transaction closes.”



School's out—outside, that is!

Across Wisconsin, dormant landscapes have sprung to life and land trusts are gearing up for the busy summer season. Warmer temperatures bring the traditional summer duties of easement monitoring and restoration, but some groups are also ramping up their environmental education and outreach efforts. These programs not only provide needed opportunities for kids to expend some of that endless energy in the great outdoors—they also foster the strong connections with nature that we hope will inspire today's youth to become conservation leaders of the future.

Here is a taste of what a few Wisconsin land trusts are doing to keep the conservation ethic alive for generations to come:

West Wisconsin Land Trust

West Wisconsin Land Trust was one of the first Wisconsin land trusts to create a staff position focused solely on environmental education when they hired Bill Dingwall as their Education Director in 2005. Three years later, their programs have provided opportunities for almost 4,000 kids to get outside and learn hands-on about the natural world. In addition to hosting youth-oriented field trips on their own privately protected properties, WWLT travels throughout western Wisconsin delivering customized programs for groups like 4-H and Boy Scouts. They also work in partnership with the Menomonie School District, using the school forest as a classroom for groups of students from seven local public schools. "Our program is set up to provide positive outdoor experiences. It is not designed to be preachy. Instead, we have set up our educational programs to be an inspirational introduction to land conservation for younger generations," said Dingwall.



Kinnickinnic River Land Trust

Eric Forward of the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust has invested a lot of time into educating his community on the importance of a healthy watershed. It can be a difficult concept to communicate, especially when working with children, who may learn more easily about things they can see directly.

To help local kids better understand how the health of the river is connected to what happens on land, KRLT introduced a rain garden project in partnership with the River Falls School District. They have now involved 700 students and 16 teachers in the process of planning and creating the gardens, and today almost every school in River Falls is maintaining a rain garden as a living reminder of the community's role in supporting a vital watershed. "This program is really starting to blossom," said Forward.

Door County Land Trust

In 2000, the Door County Land Trust received a generous donation with an interesting set of strings attached: the 170-acre parcel of land on Washington Island, now known as the Richter Community Forest, came with the provision that it must be used as an educational tool for local schools. Terrie Cooper, DCLT's Land Program Director, jumped at the opportunity. DCLT accepted the donation, and Cooper obtained a grant from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board to develop environmental programs for K-8 students in the surrounding area. The forest parcel is a sustainably-managed working forest, and DCLT now uses the property to teach students about forest ecology as well as how a sustainable working forest functions. In addition to the K-8 curriculum, Terrie has also been developing a program that would strengthen the connection between the forest and the surrounding community by directing the timber and resources harvested in the community forest toward uses in the local economy.

For more information about these land trust groups and their education programs, please visit: www.wwlt.org, www.krlt.org, or www.doorcountylantrust.org.



Photo: Eric Sherman

Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation Celebrates 50 Years on the Trail!

This year, one of the state's oldest land trusts is celebrating half a century in the business of protecting land in Wisconsin. The Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation was established in 1958 by Milwaukee attorney and avid outdoorsman Ray Zillmer, who had a vision that Wisconsin would one day boast a continuous footpath stretching more than 1,000 miles, tracing the contours of Wisconsin's unique glacial geology from one state border to the other.

In Zillmer's vision, the trail would provide new opportunities for education, recreation, and forming meaningful relationships with natural landscapes in the places we call home. Millions of Wisconsinites would be able to find accessible wilderness in their backyard, without having to drive cross-country to visit remote national parks in distant states. Thanks in large part to the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation and the dedicated volunteers of their 21 county chapters, that vision is truly becoming a reality.

With support from the Wisconsin DNR, the National Park Service, and various local governments, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation works with landowners to protect land for the trail to pass through. Their combined efforts have resulted in a planned trail of more than a thousand miles. Over 500 of those trail miles have already been protected and built, and volunteer trail-builders add more miles each year. More than 25 percent of Wisconsin residents can find a segment of the Ice Age Trail within just 10 miles of their home!

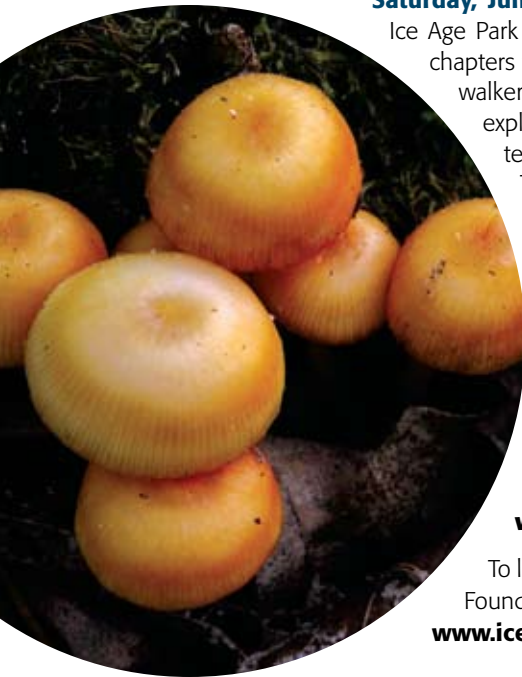
This summer and fall, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation invites you to come out and share in the excitement of 50 years on the trail:

Saturday, June 7 — As a part of National Trails Day, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation and their 21 volunteer chapters welcome families, nature enthusiasts, weekend walkers and serious hikers to participate in group exploring the Trail. Between sunrise and sunset, chapters will organize participants so that every mile of the Trail is covered!

Saturday, October 4 — Hikers and trail enthusiasts will converge on the Chippewa Moraine segment of the Ice Age Trail to enjoy the fall colors, walk the trail, and commemorate the 50th anniversary. Open to all interested in learning more about the trail.

Ongoing — The Ice Age Trail Mobile Skills Crew wants you! This group of volunteers meets several times annually at Ice Age Trail segments around the state for a long weekend of trail-building and camaraderie. Visit www.iceagetrailmsc.org to learn more about their events.

To learn more about the Ice Age Trail, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation, or for a statewide listing of trail-related events, visit www.iceagetrail.org.



Office Notes

A Partnership for Dane County's Lakes

Gathering Waters has long used our statewide voice to facilitate local and regional collaborations, bringing together the resources and expertise of diverse groups to accomplish conservation goals beyond the scope of what any of us could achieve working alone.

As you read on page one, our new strategic plan enables us to engage more actively in local and regional collaborative efforts in the coming years. To that end, we recently began participating in the **Yahara Lakes Legacy Partnership**, a consortium of public and private organizations who share a stake in revitalizing the water quality of our state capital region's iconic lakes.

Dane County's lakes are among the gems that make this area a truly special place to live and visit. Recreational opportunities like fishing, boating and swimming, and sporting events such as Ironman Wisconsin, attract people to Dane County from all over the world to enjoy our water resources.

But as residents and visitors in our state's capital know, foul-smelling water, summer algae blooms, thick weed mats and fish consumption advisories have cast a shadow over many of the benefits that Madison and Dane County lakes have to offer. Although much has already been done to clean up the capital region's lakes in recent decades, these signs tell us we need to do more.

Through a grant from the Madison Community Foundation, Gathering Waters and our partners—the Wisconsin DNR, the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Dane County, the City of Madison, and Clean Wisconsin—have joined together to find answers to many of the challenging technical questions about pollution in the Madison-area lakes. We are gearing up to inform, engage, and excite the community about our vision for a healthier watershed in the capital region. Soon, we hope to involve

more organizations and individuals, such as local watershed groups, local governments, farmers and citizens—anyone with an interest in keeping Dane County's water resources vital for years to come!

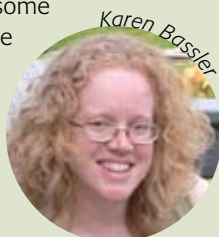
Conservationists of the future ...

We're thrilled to welcome two new (and very small) members to Wisconsin's land trust community. On February 18, our Outreach Director **Pam Foster Felt** and husband Tim became the proud parents of baby Mercy Caroline. Just one week later, our Board Secretary **Joy Stieglitz Gottschalk** and husband Rob said hello to newborn daughter Allyson Reed. Warm congratulations to both of these families!

A Changing of the Guard

For seven years, Gathering Waters' office has been energized by the passion and brilliance of our Conservation Program Director **Karen Bassler**. We sadly report that Karen is leaving Gathering Waters Conservancy this summer to infuse the work of Wisconsin Wetlands Association with her unstoppable conservation convictions. The future of Wisconsin wetlands is bright!

Karen's creativity and cheerful drive have fueled some of Gathering Waters' most successful programs. She ran our Partners in Preservation programs, represented Wisconsin land trusts in national meetings, and has logged uncountable miles crisscrossing the state to work directly with land trusts from the North Woods to the Lake Michigan Basin to the bluffs of the Mississippi. An inventory of her contributions to Wisconsin's land trust movement and the work of this organization would fill all eight pages of this newsletter and then some.



We and Wisconsin land trusts will miss Karen's dogged belief in the power and promise of the land trust community, and are incredibly grateful to her for helping make all of our organizations stronger, more strategic and better able to fulfill our mission to protect and preserve Wisconsin's most special places now and forever.

We also bid farewell to **Andrea Ward**, our Communications Intern for the past two years. Andrea edited our recent publication, *Stories of Stewardship* (call or email our office for a free copy), and has been invaluable ever since. Willing to compose anything that needs writing—press releases, newsletter articles, grant applications—she has spoiled us. Andrea completed her master's degree in journalism at UW-Madison in May and will spend the summer inspiring the next generation of conservationists by leading a 45-day canoe expedition in the Canadian Arctic for Camp Manito-wish YMCA. Bon voyage, Andrea!



Celebrating our land legacy

As the pasque flowers began their perennial bloom, ushering in another glorious Wisconsin spring, Gathering Waters Conservancy hosted a fun and intimate event in the Baraboo Hills for many of our closest friends and supporters. Our first annual **Land Legacy Gathering** was a wonderful opportunity for us to recognize some of the people who make it possible for us to continue Wisconsin's land legacy, and to share our strategic vision for the coming year.

The Gathering was held on a blustery Saturday in late April at the newly-constructed Aldo Leopold Legacy Center. Built from pines planted by the Leopold family, the Legacy Center was recently named the first LEED Platinum-certified, carbon-neutral building in the world. Guests had the opportunity to tour the historic Leopold "shack"—the Leopold family's weekend retreat and the inspiration for the observations, lessons and land ethic enshrined in *A Sand County Almanac*.

Later in the evening, Gathering Waters' executive director, Mike Strigel, introduced our new vision for the coming decade: Wisconsin's Million Acre March. As Mike explained, it will be our goal to see Wisconsin boast a million acres of permanently protected land by the year 2020, and that those acres will be ecologically, economically, and culturally significant lands protected by citizens who celebrate the value of conservation to their communities and our state.

We also had the opportunity to hear from David Wernecke, executive director of the Baraboo Range Preservation Association, who spoke of the great work being done in the Baraboo Hills to protect one of Wisconsin's most treasured and historic landscapes. David also graciously paid tribute to Gathering Waters' work as a leader in the land trust community.

We hope that the Land Legacy Gathering will become an annual event. It was the perfect way to welcome spring and to connect with many of the people without whom our work strengthening Wisconsin's land trusts would not be possible.

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Save the dates!

For five years and counting, Gathering Waters Conservancy's annual **Land Conservation Leadership Awards** have recognized some of the outstanding individuals and organizations working tirelessly to protect the places that make Wisconsin special. Join us for a night of camaraderie and inspiration at Awards Celebration 2008: Thursday, September 25 at the Monona Terrace in Madison. To RSVP, call (608) 251-9131 x15 or email info@gatheringwaters.org



This fall, Gathering Waters Conservancy and the Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance will present the **Great Lake Gatherings**, a series of four community forums in the Lake Michigan Basin designed to provide individuals, organizations, business leaders and governments with the tools to work together locally for real conservation progress in the Lake Michigan watershed. If you live, work, or enjoy spending time in the Lake Michigan Basin, mark your calendar for one of our gatherings and come see what you can do to keep the Great Lakes' future bright!

Green Bay: September 16, UW-Green Bay Phoenix Rooms

Sheboygan Area: October 1, Kohler Art Center

Mequon: October 8, Mequon Nature Preserve

Milwaukee: October 15, Milwaukee Art Museum

Exact times will be posted on the Gatherings web page as they are finalized.

For more information, please visit www.greatlakegatherings.org

Gathering Waters would like to thank:

Mequon Nature Preserve and **Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy**

for hosting a meeting of the Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance

All those who have volunteered to serve on local Advisory Teams for the upcoming Great Lake Gatherings.

Godfrey & Kahn for providing meeting space on several occasions



crosscurrents

a newsletter to serve the land conservation
community of Wisconsin



Gathering Waters Conservancy
211 S. Paterson St., Suite 270
Madison, WI 53703

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A decorative graphic consisting of two overlapping ribbons. The top ribbon is white with a black outline and contains the text "THE PARADE of" in a serif font. The bottom ribbon is also white with a black outline and contains the text "PRESERVES" in a larger, bold, serif font. To the right of the ribbons is a small, stylized illustration of a bird in flight.

THE PARADE of PRESERVES

Wisconsin's land trusts work hard all year long to preserve our open lands and wild places. With summer just around the corner, it's the season to start getting back outside and making the most of their accomplishments. Gathering Waters is announcing our fourth annual **Parade of Preserves**. Cure your cabin fever—find a land trust field trip near you!

See complete field trip listings on the web at
www.gatheringwaters.org/parade

