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nature photos: Gil Gribb



## gathering waters conservancy

### The Great News on the Stewardship Fund by Vicki Elkin, Policy Director

Last year, Gathering Waters came together with our supporters to help make history. As we celebrate the new year, we are also celebrating one of Wisconsin's biggest conservation victories to date: the passage of a new and improved **Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund**.

After months of hard work and seemingly endless negotiations at the Capitol, this year's state budget extends the Stewardship Fund through 2020 and increases funding by 40 percent—from \$60 million up to \$86 million a year.

Wisconsinites with long memories know that the recent budget process was one of the most contentious in history. Wisconsin was the last state in the country to pass a budget, and legislators from both parties ultimately made some difficult compromises in order to get the budget done. In the end, the Stewardship Fund was one of very few "winners" in the budget—almost no other program received an increase on the magnitude of the Stewardship Fund.

This was quite an accomplishment for everyone in Wisconsin who values our natural places. And while Gathering Waters provided the day-to-day coordination, our Stewardship Campaign was carried along by a groundswell of support from thousands of those people who share our vision to see the Stewardship Fund remain viable and competitive well into the future.

For example, in just one week, Gathering Waters helped to generate 1,800 calls from citizens to legislators. We also helped to encourage more than 100 favorable Stewardship articles, 18 editorials and dozens of op-eds that appeared

in newspapers across the state, and we served as a hub of Stewardship-related information for land trusts, government agencies and citizens alike.

There is much to celebrate in the renewal of Stewardship, but you won't see us resting on our laurels. We still have plans ahead of us in our Stewardship Campaign, and much more remains to be done before our goal of restoring the security of the Stewardship Fund is fully accomplished.

We intend to ensure that the Stewardship Fund survives the next round of state budget negotiations. If the time is right, we may push for additional funding for the program. And we will continue our efforts to solidify public support and expand public awareness of the Stewardship program.

Meanwhile, Gathering Waters is poised to join an Advisory Committee that will help the DNR develop administrative rules for the new Stewardship program. Although it is not glamorous and can be very time-consuming, rulemaking is a critical part of the process of ensuring that we have a Stewardship program that works well and gets the greatest benefit from our investments. We are determined to make sure that the voices of the land trust community and the citizens we serve are heard during this process.

*Gathering Waters Conservancy invites you to stay involved in our ongoing Stewardship Campaign.*

*For policy updates and more information, visit [www.gatheringwaters.org/stewardship](http://www.gatheringwaters.org/stewardship).*

### **The following deserve special mention for their efforts on behalf of the Stewardship Fund:**

- Governor Jim Doyle for his leadership in championing the Stewardship Fund
- Our allies from both sides of the aisle in the Legislature
- The Nature Conservancy and other conservation groups
- Land trusts who mobilized citizens across the state
- The thousands of individuals who contacted their lawmakers and voiced their support for the Stewardship Fund
- Our members and donors who provided us with the financial backing necessary to lead this campaign

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**

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**From the Executive Director's Desk...**

As I sit to write, 2007 is drawing to a close and the whole of 2008 lies ahead. The transition gives us an opportunity to both reflect upon our role in Wisconsin's conservation community and to train our sights on the ways in which we will continue to hone our mission in the coming year.

Many of you know that the headline story for us, both in this newsletter and for the year as a whole, was the successful reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. We're very proud to have spearheaded such an effective campaign that gained the support and participation of so many. As you read on page one, we look forward to continuing our role as a leader on the Stewardship front.

It would be hard to find a better newsmaker than the Stewardship Fund. You'll also read in this issue about an ambitious collaboration we've launched in the Lake Michigan basin that we hope will grab headlines in 2008. But as I continue to reflect upon our contributions to conservation in Wisconsin, it becomes clear to me that many of the things we do day-to-day—though they may be less "newsworthy"—are no less valuable simply because they happen behind the scenes.

This past fall, we helped a land trust whose membership had outpaced the capacity of their software to install a new database; one of our board members generously hosted a gathering where we introduced another land trust to a local foundation interested in funding conservation in their community; and as you'll read on the facing page, our staff spent many hours working (successfully) to amend a rule change to a conservation program that had the unintended consequence of making federal funds less accessible to Wisconsin land trusts.

We share with you the full spectrum of stories about what we do—from the grand to the minute—because they are all foundational to our mission and, I believe, the reason you choose to support us. No other organization is positioned to do the integrated work that we do on so many fronts to ensure that land trusts, communities, and landowners have the programs, resources, and support they need to protect Wisconsin's special places.



Last fall I reported to you in this space that we had begun the conversations that would lead to our new strategic plan for the next three years. This winter our staff, board, and trusted advisors are busy hammering out the details, and I look forward to sharing those with you in the spring. Today I can say with confidence that our strategic vision for the next several years will see us expanding what it means to be a land trust service center. We will continue to be creative about what we do—delivering the same core benefit that has earned us your support, while always keeping an eye toward new opportunities to further land conservation in our state.

Thank you for all that you do to advance our shared mission of helping people protect the places that make Wisconsin special.



**Michael Strigel**, Executive Director



**Board Member Profile: Alice Godfrey**

Alice Godfrey's commitment to land conservation runs deep. Raised in Massachusetts by a family involved in conservation issues and active in a large land trust, Alice attributes much of her conservation ethic to her father's passion for the land trust movement. After moving to Chicago in 1979, Alice and her husband, Rick, took a trip to southwestern Wisconsin. They instantly fell in love with the area's rolling farmland and decided to purchase some land near the Avoca Prairie in 1986. Today they have pieced together nearly 750 acres of protected land in Iowa County.

Alice became involved with Wisconsin's land trust community in 2000 as she grew more and more concerned that, without a land trust, the beautiful landscape of southwestern Wisconsin would be lost to development. That year, Alice attended the first public meeting of the Driftless Area Land Conservancy and joined their board soon later, helping to hire the Conservancy's first paid staff member. In 2006, she joined Gathering Waters Conservancy's board. Alice feels that her most important quality as a board member is her love of the land and her desire to see it protected for future generations. She is committed to bringing new voices to the land trust community and is particularly interested in cultivating a younger, more diverse base of support. We're thankful to have Alice's energy supporting Wisconsin conservation!

## The 2006 Tax Incentives: The ongoing story of a good idea's journey through the federal process

*Weren't there generous income tax incentives for easement gifts last year? Yes! Didn't they expire? Yes. Is that the end of the story? Probably not! Read on:*

In 2006, Congress strengthened the tax incentives for voluntary conservation donations, which enabled farmers and moderate-income landowners to receive significant tax benefits for conservation easement donations. Unfortunately, those incentives expired in December 2007.

The Land Trust Alliance has been working hard to extend those tax incentives, and progress (albeit slow progress) is being made.

The rollercoaster of 2007 legislative activity continues into the first few months of this year. Language extending the tax incentives was put forward in both the House and the Senate. There are at least 150 co-sponsors of a House bill (H.R. 1576) that would make the tax incentives permanent. Here in Wisconsin, Representatives Kind, Ryan, and Kagen are co-sponsors.

In November, the House passed a one-year extension of the conservation easement incentives as part of a much bigger bill extending a variety of expiring tax laws. Unfortunately, because of convoluted tax politics, the Senate removed the one-year extensions from the bill. While this was disappointing, conservation tax incentives live on in the epic production of the 2007 Farm Bill.

The Senate's version of the Farm Bill includes language that would make the conservation tax incentives permanent. Unfortunately, the House version does not. Before the Farm Bill becomes law, the House and Senate will meet by conference committee to work out differences between their two versions. (Funding for the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program mentioned below is also embedded in the House version of this giant piece of legislation). There is strong pressure to finish the Farm Bill before the end of February (when planting season starts), and it seems likely that if the tax incentives are included in the final bill, they would be retroactive to January 1, 2008.

There's a lot of support for the tax incentives, and we hope to see them extended one way or another. Stay tuned!



*For up-to-date information on the status of the tax incentives legislation, visit [www.gatheringwaters.org](http://www.gatheringwaters.org) or [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org).*

## Untangling kinks in farmland protection funding

In the summer of 2007, the U.S. Department of Agriculture increased the stringency of rules governing the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) in a way that nearly stymied a few Wisconsin land trusts with important conservation deals all but finished. Those land trusts called Gathering Waters for help.

Land trusts apply for money from FRPP to help purchase permanent conservation easements on working farms. For many Wisconsin land trusts, FRPP funds are critical to their agricultural land protection strategies.

The new guidelines severely limited the options for landowners of FRPP-protected lands to contribute financially to the easement transaction and to the land trust itself. These rules would have made it challenging if not impossible for land trusts to participate in FRPP.

It is Gathering Waters' goal to see public funding programs work well for Wisconsin land trusts, so we got on the phone. We explained our member land trusts' concerns and helped negotiate with the national office of the

USDA a compromise on the new guidelines. FRPP was initially developed for use by local units of government, so this situation provided an opportunity for us to help the USDA understand how their policy changes also have a great impact on land trusts whose work depends on FRPP funding.

We're pleased to report that the USDA responded positively to our concerns. In October, they released a new, much more land-trust-friendly set of guidelines. We plan to continue working with federal agencies to ensure that their programs maximize the effectiveness of Wisconsin land trusts.



### **Wisconsin land trusts**

*have received **\$6.7 million** to protect working farms through FRPP.*

*This money has protected over **6,200 acres** on **41 farms** in **7 Wisconsin counties.***



## New faces in the land trust community



Deb Nett

Wisconsin's land trusts are a dynamic bunch, constantly growing and hiring new staff who bring fresh energy and ideas to the protection of Wisconsin's natural places. We spoke with three new Executive Directors—Deb Nett, Jo Seiser, and Nelson French—about the challenges and opportunities they look forward to meeting in the year ahead. Please help us welcome them to Wisconsin's land trust community!

**Deb Nett** came on board as the Executive Director of the **Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust** last year after having volunteered for the land trust since finishing her degree in environmental policy and nonprofit administration at UW-Green Bay.

A relationship that began by chance—Deb originally found NEWLT by typing “land trust” and “northeast Wisconsin” into a search engine—has grown into a strong commitment, fueled by Deb's longtime love for the natural world.

“I was an outdoor-loving kid who became an outdoor-loving adult,” Deb says. “I care about our natural resources and the kind of experience people will have living here in the future. This is our state; it's special, and we should do what we can to keep it that way.”

Deb's energy and enthusiasm have been matched by conservation-minded landowners in that part of the state. “We are striving to manage in the face of an explosion in demand for our services,” says Deb. “We are hopeful that this trend will continue and are looking forward to another great year!”



Jo Seiser



Nelson French

courtesy of River Falls Journal

**Jo Seiser** was no stranger to Wisconsin land trusts when she stepped into her position as the very first Executive Director of the **North Central Conservancy Trust**. After five years as NCCT's board president, Jo was poised to take her involvement with the land trust to the next level.

“While on the board, I liked using my imagination and creativity to put together pieces of a working organization,” says Jo. For NCCT, that meant establishing the practices that would help them continue to grow as a sustainable land trust.

Jo brings a wealth of experiences to NCCT, including positions in water quality management both in Portage County and in Mozambique, Africa as part of a United Nations development program. She also served as an alderperson for the city of Stevens Point.

Among Jo's favorite NCCT traditions are annual events in the spring and fall, when members gather at a land trust-protected property or on local public land to connect with each other and to celebrate the work that has been done to preserve the natural heritage of central Wisconsin.

“We are growing very fast, and the challenge is to provide adequate support to our active members,” Jo says. “We are concerned about affirming their work...and keeping it fun.”

**Nelson French** comes to his position as Executive Director of the **Kinnickinnic River Land Trust** after more than 30 years working for public and private natural resource protection and conservation in neighboring Minnesota.

When asked about the transition to Wisconsin's land trust community, Nelson emphasizes that inter-state collaboration is critical to conservation in border regions like the Kinnickinnic River watershed.

“Watersheds and rivers don't recognize boundaries like people do,” Nelson says. “I am truly excited to be learning more about the Wisconsin approach to watershed conservation and reconnecting with many Wisconsin friends with whom I have worked over the last 25 years.”

Most recently Nelson served as Director of Legislative Affairs for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, a position that he described as “very interesting and energizing,” but he says he was eager to return to the private conservation field.

“The timing is perfect to move forward with landowners to protect the watershed and ensure that its natural resources and scenic beauty are protected for future generations,” says Nelson. “We are well on our way to a successful 2008.”

*For more information on these three land trusts, please visit:*  
[www.newlt.org](http://www.newlt.org) • [www.nctwi.org](http://www.nctwi.org) • [www.kinniriver.org](http://www.kinniriver.org)

## On the road with Gathering Waters: Giving mileage to your contributions

*Our staff know Wisconsin's highways and byways like the backs of our hands – not only because we love our state, but because we spend quite a bit of time on the road, visiting land trusts and delivering the wide variety of services they need to keep pace with the always-growing demand for conservation easements. Here are just a few highlights from our recent travels:*

This past fall, as the Bayfield Regional Conservancy staff sat down to draft a year-end letter to their members, they learned that their software could no longer help them communicate with their growing membership. They had maxed out their database. Our database diva and Operations Manager, Liz, packed up her custom-built land trust membership database and drove to Bayfield to help the Conservancy staff install their new software.

During that very same trip, Pam, our conservation easement expert, led a seminar for area attorneys on working with land trusts, conservation transactions and associated tax laws. Now attorneys from Iron River, Michigan to Hayward know where they can turn when clients have conservation desires for their property.

Finally, we can hardly count the miles that Karen, our Conservation Programs Director, has logged on I-94, traveling to meet with conservation leaders in northwestern Wisconsin, where she facilitates the St. Croix Conservation Collaborative, a group of conservation organizations and public agencies working across state borders to protect the viability of the St. Croix River and its watershed.

It is our hope that someday soon we'll be able to announce that we've acquired an almost-new, highly energy-efficient vehicle that could take us to the places we are needed most while using the fewest resources as possible. We'll keep dreaming big in that regard as we continue to support land trust operations in all corners of our state.

## Thousands of acres and counting...

While we were checking in with new land trust Executive Directors (see page 4), we thought it would be a good time to see what else was new out on the land trust landscape last year. We're glad we asked, because the answer is: a lot! We're thrilled to brag that among just 6 of Wisconsin's over 50 land trusts there are 11,000 acres permanently protected as of the end of 2007. When Gathering Waters Conservancy was founded, there were 12 land trusts working in the state. Here's to the truly remarkable growth of the land trust movement and these exciting 2007 milestones:

- The Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust, in addition to hiring Deb Nett as their new Executive Director, closed easements on over 1,200 acres in 2007—50 percent more land than they were protecting just one year earlier.
- New Executive Director Jo Seiser reports that on the very last day of 2007, the North Central Conservancy Trust signed an easement that put them over the 2,000-acre mark.
- This past November, Kenosha/Racine Land Trust president Chuck Haubrich was invited to write a column in the Racine Journal-Times, where he reported that the land trust had protected its 1,000<sup>th</sup> acre during 2007. He also announced an ambitious goal: to double the land trust's existing membership during 2008!
- In our backyard here in Dane County, Natural Heritage Land Trust Executive Director Jim Welsh let us know that the land trust closed on their 5,000<sup>th</sup> protected acre in December.
- Alison Sazama reports that in November the Chippewa County Land Conservancy, with the help of three other local conservation organizations, began permanent protection of Kemper's Woods—one of the last remaining undeveloped woodlands in the Eau Claire-Chippewa Falls metro area.
- The Kinnickinnic River Land Trust had protected more than 2,000 acres in their watershed as of September of last year. During 2007 they also distributed information to all Wisconsin schools about a rain garden volunteer project in which they engaged more than 700 students!

We always enjoy hearing (and sharing!) land trusts' stories of new projects completed and new milestones passed. Please call or send us an email with exciting conservation updates anytime!



## Mark your calendars!

On March 6-8, the Land Trust Alliance will host their annual **Midwest Land Conservation Conference** in northern Illinois. Gathering Waters staff was honored once again to be part of the committee designing the program. The conference promises two days of timely topics: conservation easement defense, what to think about when land trusts consider merging, making open space referenda succeed, easement appraisal issues and special topics for land trust boards. We're also proud to say that Wisconsin author and humorist Michael Perry will be the keynote speaker, celebrating his connection to Wisconsin places. Please consider attending! To register, visit [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org).



## Ahead in 2008: Great Lake Gatherings

Wisconsin has the good fortune to fall within the watersheds of two Great Lakes—Superior and Michigan. While most of us appreciate and make use of our Great Lakes, we can sometimes forget that these features of our home landscape are also globally significant natural resources, not just neat places to swim, sail, or fish. Together the Great Lakes cover 90,000 square miles—nowhere else on earth is so much fresh water concentrated in one place!

But our Great Lakes are also beset by a host of problems: zebra mussel infestations, historically low water levels, even talk of shipping Great Lakes water to the dry states of the southwest. These challenges have inspired many who live in the Great Lakes region to take action to protect the integrity of this unique ecosystem.

One group that has been mobilizing is the **Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance**, a coalition of nine land trusts working in Wisconsin's Lake Michigan basin. The Alliance, convened by Gathering Waters in 2002, has spent the last several years identifying conservation priorities within the watershed and defining action plans to protect those important places.

Now the Alliance is gearing up to engage their communities in a conservation vision for the watershed. Thanks to a two-year grant from the Joyce Foundation, an organization leading the way on Great Lakes conservation, Gathering Waters and the Alliance are planning four **Great Lake Gatherings**, to be held at various locations throughout Wisconsin's Lake Michigan basin during 2008.

The Gatherings will provide a forum for members of the public and Alliance land trusts to meet and discuss the issues facing Lake Michigan's waters and shoreland areas. They are intended as springboards for community-based action to reverse the declining health of the watershed, with land trusts leading the charge. We want to encourage local officials, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, school districts and others to see how they can work with Alliance land trusts and play an active role in protecting the conservation priorities in their communities.

If you live, work or play in Lake Michigan's waters and shorelands, we hope you will attend one of these Gatherings. Come out and see what is being done to preserve and restore one of Wisconsin's (and the world's!) greatest natural resources, and find ways that you can be involved. We can do more than just take pride in this Great Lake—we can take action to keep it great!



We might be biased, but we think that Gathering Waters' office is one of the greatest places to work in the conservation community. Smart, energized staff bustle in and out each day. Good food is always on hand, laughter erupts regularly, and what we come to work to do—help people protect Wisconsin's special places—could hardly be a better motivator. So, unless you've met **Althea Dotzour's** charming family, it's hard to imagine what might draw anyone away.

Sadly, at the end of 2007 we said a bittersweet goodbye to Althea, our Outreach and Policy Coordinator for the last four years. She is off to apply her organizational savvy and unflappable demeanor to the daunting, delightful work of full-time parent to a toddler and a newborn.

As Mike Strigel says, there is no way to sugarcoat Althea's leaving. We will sorely miss her talents and shining humor.

Not to be undone by disappointment, however, we're very proud to announce our hire of **Mike Carlson**. In our last newsletter we introduced Mike as an intern volunteering with our Stewardship Campaign. A recent graduate of the UW Law School and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies with a master's degree in Land Resources, Mike joined our public policy team full time in January, and plans to lend his lawyerly instincts to our technical assistance work as well. In addition to his dual degrees, Mike's recent history includes mountaineering, fly-fishing, and an Ironman Triathlon finish. Needless to say, we have ambitious designs on his energy! Please help us welcome Mike Carlson.



## Transitions at Gathering Waters

## A Special Thank You To: The Land Legacy Society

In the fall of 2004, Gathering Waters Conservancy introduced the Land Legacy Society: a unique opportunity to protect Wisconsin's special places. The Land Legacy Society is a group of generous individuals who share our love for Wisconsin and who have made a commitment to donate \$1,000 or more annually to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of our programs.

The Society, now in its fourth year, is truly picking up the pace of conservation in Wisconsin. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has made this important commitment:

### Land Legacy Society members (as of January 23, 2008)

#### \$10,000 and above

Alice Godfrey  
Jean & Walter A. Meanwell

Outrider Foundation  
Margaret Van Alstyne  
West Bend Community  
Foundation's Ziegler  
Family Foundation Fund  
Nancy Winter

Barbara Manger & William Lynch  
Howard & Nancy Mead  
Marilynn Myers  
Bill O'Connor & Krista Roys  
Lorain Olsen  
Charlotte Palmer  
Phillips Foundation

#### \$5,000 - \$9,999

Tom & Carol Ehram  
Julie Gallagher & Ted Rolfs  
Arthur Harrington  
David Ladd  
Walter E. & Stacey Meanwell  
Arline Paunack

#### \$1,000 - \$1,999

Anonymous  
Bruce J. Adreani  
Andy Baltins  
Darrell Bazzell  
Bill Berry  
Robert & Anne Bolz  
Bob & Geri Brogan  
John Brogan  
Peter & Joy Dohr  
Emily Earley  
Dan Erdman  
Kevin & Joan Evanich  
Scott Froehlke  
John Gehl  
Rob & Elke Hagge  
Charlie & Carol James  
Harold "Bud" Jordahl  
Mary & Charles Kamps  
Sara Krebsbach & Glenn Reinl  
Tuck & Peggie Mallery

Bill & Betty Parsons  
John Edward Porter  
Lewis & Vicki Posekany  
Mary Kay Ring  
Tom & Mary Rolfs  
Robert Rusch  
Gerald Scholz  
Eric & Jane Schumann  
David & Kate Simon  
Sub-Zero Foundation, Inc.  
John & Kine Torinus  
Lynde Uihlein  
Gail & Willi Van Haren  
Joyce Vande Bunt  
Frank & Mariana Weinhold  
John & Cindi Woollam  
Joan & Peter Ziegler

#### \$2,000 - \$4,999

Anonymous  
Francis Beidler III  
Peter Bemis  
Charles Boardman  
Linda Bochert  
Eugenie Mayer Bolz  
Family Foundation  
W. Jerome Frautschi &  
Pleasant Rowland  
Joy & Rob Gottschalk  
Terry F. & DiAnne Hatch  
Charles & Jill Haubrich  
Geoffrey & Edith Maclay  
Wendy McCalvy  
Luigi Mumford



## Gathering Waters would like to thank:

**Johanna Alex** for co-presenting at the Financial Planning Association Symposium

**John DuPlissis** for inviting us to present at the American Tree Farm System Convention

**Robert Baller** for sharing fantastic photos of the Prairie Enthusiasts in action

**Darrell Bazzell** for hosting a house party this fall

The Madison offices of **Godfrey and Kahn** for several days' meeting space in recent months

## Land Conservation Leadership Award Nominations

It's not too early to start thinking about honoring the individuals and organizations whose outstanding work will blaze new trails for conservation in the upcoming year.

Gathering Waters is now inviting nominations for our **2008 Land Conservation Leadership Awards**. To nominate your local conservation leader, visit [www.gatheringwaters.org](http://www.gatheringwaters.org) and download a nomination form, or call (608) 251-9131 to request a faxed or mailed copy.

*Mark your calendars and celebrate with us: September 25, 2008, at the Monona Terrace in Madison!*



**crosscurrents**  
a newsletter to serve the land conservation  
community of Wisconsin

**gathering waters**  
conservancy

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## Why do these folks look so festive?

### ***Gathering Waters threw a party, that's why!***

Open up to the front page to find out what we were celebrating. (We'll give you a hint—it was a major victory for everyone who cares about Wisconsin's special places, and we have all of you to thank!)

