



# Wisconsin Land Trust Days Toolkit

## Thank you for your interest in hosting a Wisconsin Land Trust Days event!

Wisconsin Land Trust Days is an annual celebration with events hosted by land trusts in July, August, and September.

Taking part in Wisconsin Land Trust Days helps promote the entire statewide land trust community and brings attention to the importance of land conservation in Wisconsin.

This toolkit will guide your land trust through the steps for registering and planning an event.

You can use your event and the statewide voice of Wisconsin Land Trust Days to invite people to:

- Learn about the land trust community in Wisconsin, the value of protected land, and its importance to a healthy environment
- Find and visit protected lands
- Celebrate the work of land trusts and play a part in protecting important places for the enjoyment, benefit, and health of generations to come

We use the tagline “Have Fun Outside” to show people that interacting with land trusts can be fun! By hosting an event, you’re inviting people to learn about the land trust community in a fun and memorable way.

We’re so excited for Wisconsin Land Trust Days and we hope you are too!

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# What is Wisconsin Land Trust Days?

Wisconsin Land Trust Days is an annual marketing and communications campaign organized by [Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts](#). The initiative focuses public attention on the work of land trusts across Wisconsin and the value of conservation by promoting land trust events and featuring publicly accessible properties during July, August, and September.

Wisconsin Land Trust Days began in 2018 as a way to help connect people to the land and spread the word about the important work land trusts do.

The campaign leverages Gathering Waters' statewide reach to promote fun, public events hosted by Wisconsin land trusts. Promotional support for Land Trust Days is offered as a service to member land trusts and their partners. Land trusts maintain autonomy and ownership of their events.

**Participating in Land Trust Days supports the entire Wisconsin land trust community.** Inviting people to take part in fun activities at land trust properties increases visibility, community awareness, and public support of land trusts and conservation in Wisconsin. This annual celebration of land trusts is an opportunity to reinforce the value of land trusts and the importance of land conservation.

## What's New in 2024?

### Travel Stipend to Attend Other Land Trust Days Events

In 2024, we're offering travel stipends for land trust staff to attend a Land Trust Days event hosted by another land trust in a different part of the state.

Land Trust Days aims to raise the profile of the land trust community in Wisconsin and foster a stronger sense of shared purpose among Wisconsin land trusts.

Gathering Waters is offering a limited number of travel stipends as an incentive to strengthen connections. Take advantage of the opportunity to participate in a Land Trust Days event at another land trust.

Please recognize that this stipend may not cover all expenses associated with your travel, but we hope that this assistance will be an incentive to get out there and get a new perspective on Land Trust Days!

You can go on your own, or if more than one person from your organization is interested, you can travel together (one stipend).

If you are interested in applying for a travel stipend, email Amanda ([amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org)). You will be asked to complete a short form with details about which event you'd like to attend.

Stipends will be paid after you make your visit.



## A Few Reminders of What Changed in 2023

We have an updated Land Trust Days logo that debuted in 2023. You can download the logo on at <https://bit.ly/LTDResources> or email [amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org) to request the logo files.

## Social Media Support

In 2023, Gathering Waters made the decision to not create or boost Facebook events for land trusts. We still promote all registered events through Facebook and Instagram posts.

Land trusts should feel free to create their own Facebook events, and we will cross-promote and share them on our Facebook account.

## Gathering Waters Brochure

Gathering Waters developed a new brochure that you are welcome to pass out at Land Trust Days events. The brochure describes our work as a statewide alliance and the ways we support the land trust community.

The brochure was not quite ready for 2023 Land Trust Days, but it is available now and we can send copies to you at no charge upon request when registering your events, or by emailing [amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org).

Find more information on all of these new items later in the toolkit.

# Hosting an Event

## Criteria for Hosting an Event

There are just five criteria for participating in Wisconsin Land Trust Days. While land trusts are in charge of the events they host, Gathering Waters asks that all events meet these criteria.

- The host or co-host is a land trust member of Gathering Waters.
- The event is open to the public.
- Events take place between July 1 and September 30. No exceptions.
- Promotional event materials and communications created by the land trust include the Land Trust Days logo and mention Land Trust Days to increase statewide awareness.
- The host agrees to complete a post-event survey about their Land Trust Days experience.

Beyond these criteria, your events may:

- Be offered for free or require a fee to participate.
- Have unlimited capacity or limit the number of guests.
- Occur in-person or virtually.
- Allow for self-directed guest adventures. In lieu of hosting an event, land trusts may submit maps, trail guides, and other information about a protected property that will be open to the public during July, August, and September. Gathering Waters will promote these properties as featured Wisconsin Land Trust Days destinations.
- Allow walk-ins or require registration. Gathering Waters recommends hosts ask guests to register for their event in advance to help with planning. See more [Tips for Hosting an Event](#) below.

## Registering an Event

To register your event, complete the registration form with the event name, description, date, location, and other details. You can also selection which promotional materials you'd like to receive during registration.

Complete your registration at <https://bit.ly/LTD24Registration> by **Friday, May 10, 2024**.

All events registered before the deadline will be included in a large-format Wisconsin Land Trust Days event calendar, which is created, printed, and mailed by Gathering Waters to our list.

Your land trust can also mail the calendar, confidentially, to your own mailing list for just the cost of postage. Learn more about the [Large-Format Event Calendar](#) later in this toolkit.



Land trusts can mail this calendar for just the cost of postage!

If you need inspiration for what type of event to host, see the [Event Ideas](#) section below. You'll also find a list of [Tips for Hosting an Event](#) to help you prepare.

Gathering Waters offers promotional support for Wisconsin Land Trust Days to member land trusts and their partners taking part in Wisconsin Land Trust Days. Branded marketing materials are available for land trusts who register events. Learn more about the [Resources](#) available later in this toolkit.

## Key Dates

**April 5, 2024**

Event registration opens

**May 10, 2024**

Event registration closes

**June 15, 2024**

Large-format calendar is in the mail

**July 1 - September 30, 2024**

Wisconsin Land Trust Days events happen!

## Event Ideas

Previous Wisconsin Land Trust Days events have included:

- Nature walks and guided hikes
- Bicycle rides
- Canoeing and kayaking
- Horseback riding on equestrian-friendly properties
- Night events like stargazing, full moon hikes, or bonfires
- Citizen science activities such as monarch-tagging or birding
- Environmental education sessions like plant identification
- Tours of restored ecological areas
- Volunteer activities like trail building or seed collection
- Mindfulness activities and outdoor yoga sessions
- Annual gatherings, celebrations, and picnics
- Community events that feature musicians, artists, authors, or comedians
- Farm-to-table and food cart events
- Wine tasting and happy hour events
- Events tailored to specific age groups or diverse communities
- Self-directed adventures and challenges (scavenger hunt, Trail Trek Challenge)

The possibilities are endless. We welcome your ideas for ways to have fun outside and teach people about land trusts.

If you're willing to share details about your events with other land trusts, Gathering Waters created a [Google Sheet](#) where you can add information about events you have hosted in the past. This is a collaborative spreadsheet that is meant to be used by land trust staff as a way for you to connect with each other to share your knowledge about hosting successful events.

## Tips for Hosting an Event

When attendees have an enjoyable experience, they will likely leave with positive feelings about your organization and about land conservation. Here are some suggestions to consider before, during, and after your events, based on past Land Trust Days experiences.

1. **Collect registration information in advance, even if the event is free, so you can prepare for your guests.** Guest registration helps build your mailing list and allows you to follow-up with individuals who may become future volunteers or donors. Registration also contributes data about statewide participation at Land Trust Days events. If you choose not to collect registration in advance, circulate a sign-in sheet to collect contact information at the event.
2. **Take photos to share after your event.** Be sure to ask for permission. During registration or check-in, you could include a checkbox or signature line authorizing the use of images. Alternatively, you can include a disclaimer that all photos taken during the event will be public domain. If someone prefers that their photo not be used, they should contact the event host.
3. **Offer a welcoming and inclusive environment for all guests.** The outdoors should be a place of healing and enjoyment for all. Ideas for promoting [Access and Belonging](#) are below.
4. **Create an outdoor hospitality station with water, mosquito spray, and tick repellent,** as well as hand sanitizing supplies and a place to dispose of trash and recycling. Make sure guests know where the nearest restroom facilities are located.
5. **Set up for your event in advance so you are ready to greet guests as they arrive.** Introduce yourself. Make sure attendees know who the event leaders and volunteers are. Invite guests to ask questions about the event or the property.
6. **Start and end your event on time.**
7. **Let people know what to expect: what the activity is and how long is it likely to take.** And when planning hikes, identify “bail out” points for those who may need them. Recruiting volunteers to act as guides if attendees must leave an event is a sound practice. It ensures the event will continue and people who need to leave are as safe as possible.



8. **Use simple language to include everyone in the conversation.** Avoid acronyms, technical terms, and conservation jargon. Define, or better yet, demonstrate concepts by showing what you mean when you talk instead of using terms like “land restoration” or “habitat management.”
9. **Use your event as an opportunity for participants to learn about land trusts and the value of land protection.** Engage your audience by relating information to their experiences. Share your passion for conservation. It’s infectious.
10. **Be the last one to leave.** Of course, if the event is hosted on a public property and participants want to stay after the event and explore, they are free to do so. Just check in with them to make sure they don’t need anything before you leave.
11. **After the event, follow up and thank participants for attending via mail, email, or a phone call.** Share photos of the event and information about your organization’s upcoming events or volunteer opportunities.

## Access and Belonging Considerations

Improving access and belonging is an ongoing learning process for all of us. Following are some questions and ideas to consider.

**It starts with how people find out about your event.** If they don’t know you and they don’t know anyone who has attended your events, they aren’t likely to choose your activity over another option.

**How can you invite different communities to your event?** Could you invite a band, poet, community group, or food truck with a following? Make connections with new groups through partners who have trusted relationships with churches, health, and other community organizations. Engaging new people as a group can increase their interest and comfort level.

**Does everyone feel welcome?** As event host, you play a key role in creating a welcoming event. How can you present yourself in a personal, accessible way? How can you demonstrate that you are learning, too, and not present as an intimidating expert about nature and outdoor skills? How can you help attendees connect with one another?

**How can participants get to your event?** Besides driving, are other transportation options available like a carpool meeting point, public transit, or a bike route? For those hard-to-find locations, add directional signage and publish a contact number of someone who can guide people to the location.

**What should guests expect?** Provide mobility information in advance. Grade the level of skill needed to navigate the terrain (i.e. an easy/moderate/difficult walk or hike). If appropriate, include the distance. Tell guests how long the event will last. Also publish access information.

**Describe what supplies you will provide and what should participants bring.** If someone doesn't own the necessary equipment, such as binoculars or a kayak, are there options for borrowing or renting?

**Keep an open mind about gear and devices.** Not everyone has the "right gear," especially the first time they try something. The idea that devices don't belong in nature has certainly shifted with the evolution of apps and maps. And, for some, headphones/earbuds are their jam—don't write off younger participants because they have them on.

**Preview the program and describe what it will entail.** Let participants make informed choices rather than assuming what they are or are not capable of doing.

Encourage questions, and rather than singling someone out, check in with them on the side about their concerns or comfort level.

**Create connections at the event to build future engagement.** What did you learn about your guests? How can you encourage them to come back? Ask how you can make the event more engaging.

Questions help strengthen relationships. Can you reach out to community groups or create a network to support mutual goals? Are people from your organization showing up for their events? If not, why not?

**What story do you tell about the land?** When we seek to understand the longstanding history that has brought us to the land where we are today, we can expand who is connected and included in conservation.

Land acknowledgments can serve to recognize displacement of indigenous peoples and to inspire action to support indigenous communities. [Learn about indigenous land acknowledgment.](#)

**How can you help break down some of the barriers to access and foster a sense of belonging for all?**

- Is there one new direction you might take with your Land Trust Days event to make new meaningful connections?
- What lessons have you learned that other land trusts could benefit from hearing?

Below are some helpful resources for disability inclusion. Keep in mind that there is a wide range of disabilities and not all are visible or obvious.

- [Open to All: A Disability Inclusion Guide for Land Trusts](#) (Land Trust Alliance)  
Includes examples, advice, and guidelines to help your land trust address and remove the barriers that prevent inclusion of people with disabilities in your programs and on your nature preserves.
- [Disability Etiquette](#) (United Spinal Association)  
Offers tips on interacting with people with disabilities. And if you are ever unsure how to interact with a person who has a disability, just ask!
- Did you know that Access Ability Wisconsin has all-terrain wheelchairs available to reserve and use free of charge at several locations around the state? [Find out more.](#)

## Resources

### Large-Format Event Calendar

To promote Wisconsin Land Trust Days statewide, Gathering Waters creates and mails a professionally produced large-format calendar of events.

The calendar is sent to our mailing list of approximately 12,000 people. It's just one way people learn about land trust events and activities.

### Mailing the Land Trust Days Event Calendar

Land trusts have the opportunity to mail the calendar, confidentially, to their own mailing list. Any land trust can choose to mail the calendar to their list.

**Land trusts only pay the cost of postage for names on their unique mailing list.**

Gathering Waters pays the printing and mail-fulfillment costs, and covers the postage for any addresses that also appear on our mailing list.

To take part in the mailing, please let Amanda ([amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org)) know how many names are on your mailing list. We need this information so we know how many extra calendars to print. **Land trusts send their mailing list directly to the printer, so your list remains confidential.**

The printer will combine all lists involved in the mailing to realize the best postage rates. The postage for any duplicate names found on a land trust's list and Gathering Waters' list during the mail sort will be paid for by Gathering Waters. Land trusts will be billed for the postage for their list after the mailing is sent.

Land trusts can also add a two-line message above the delivery address. However, to realize the greatest savings on postage, the return address must be Gathering Waters. All land trusts that mail the calendar to their list will also have their logo featured on the calendar.

## Promotional Materials

In addition to the event calendars, Gathering Waters offers promotional materials, some of which are customizable, for participating land trusts.

Available materials include:

- Land Trust Days stickers
- Nature scavenger hunt handouts
- “What is a Land Trust?” fact sheet
- Gathering Waters brochure
- Event postcards (event-specific, customizable)
- Event flyers (event-specific, customizable)

When registering an event, you’ll have the opportunity to let us know what printed materials you are interested in receiving. Gathering Waters will follow up with you to answer any questions and determine quantities.

For the customizable event postcards and flyers, Gathering Waters designs these materials for you and will reimburse up to \$100 per event for printing. Once the design is finalized, we send the final print files to a local printer for pickup. If you need help identifying a local printer, please let us know.

Land trusts are responsible for sending the invoice or receipt to Gathering Waters for reimbursement by emailing [rhianon@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:rhianon@gatheringwaters.org).

## Wisconsin Land Trust Days Logo

If you create your own event materials, please include the Wisconsin Land Trust Days logo to help support all the land trusts taking part in Wisconsin Land Trust Days.

Request logo files by emailing Amanda ([amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org)), or find a PNG file to download at <https://bit.ly/LTDResources>.



## Wisconsin Land Trust Days Website

Gathering Waters has a Wisconsin Land Trust Days webpage on our website: <https://gatheringwaters.org/land-trust-days/>. This includes information about events and more. This page can also be accessed with the link [HaveFunOutside.org](https://HaveFunOutside.org), which is shorter and easier to remember.

We have a Land Trust Days webpage specifically for land trusts. It contains resources, like a PDF of this toolkit, the event registration link, and more. You can find that webpage at: <https://bit.ly/LTDResources>.

## Wisconsin Nature Guides

Gathering Waters created a beautiful, weatherproof pocket guide of common plants, animals, and other wildlife in Wisconsin.

Land trusts can request copies of the guide to hand out when registering an event, or by emailing [amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org).



Individuals can request the nature guide directly from Gathering Waters through our website, and we will send a copy in the mail at no cost to all who complete this form: <https://bit.ly/WINatureGuide>.

## YETI Cooler Drawing

Each year, Gathering Waters holds a prize drawing for a grand prize of a YETI cooler and several smaller YETI items.

There are several ways people can enter the drawing.

1. Check a box on the nature guide/calendar request form to enter the drawing
2. Fill out a paper YETI drawing sheet and mail it to Gathering Waters
3. Complete a Google Form (link available during Land Trust Days)

Printed slips to enter the YETI drawing will be sent to each land trust host. You may want to include a box or basket to collect the drawing slips, or attendees can send their slips to Gathering Waters on their own. Scan, take photos, or return the slips to Gathering Waters' office or email them to [amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org).

Winners will be selected via a random drawing and notified after Land Trust Days concludes.

## Social Media Support

Gathering Waters manages social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. During Wisconsin Land Trust Days, events will be cross-promoted on our accounts, expanding the reach to our audience of over 10,000 people.

If you are not already a follower, please find us at:

[Facebook – Gathering Waters \(@GatheringWatersWI\)](#)

[Instagram – Gathering Waters \(@gatheringwaters\)](#)

When promoting your event on social media, please tag **@GatheringWatersWI** on Facebook and **@gatheringwaters** on Instagram to broaden your reach. When we create posts about your event, we will tag your organization.

Gathering Waters has two hashtags for Wisconsin Land Trust Days. We encourage you to use these hashtags in your posts!

#HaveFunOutside  
#WILandTrustDays

Since many people use Facebook to find information, we encourage you to post updates (e.g. registration is full, an event is canceled due to weather) about your events on your social media accounts as well as on your website, and let Gathering Waters know too!

### Facebook Events

Gathering Waters will **not** be creating and boosting individual Facebook events for each registered Land Trust Days event.

Land trusts should feel free to create their own Facebook events, and we will cross-share them on our Gathering Waters Facebook account.

Gathering Waters will continue to promote all registered events through individual Facebook and Instagram posts. We'll try to do at least one post per event to encourage attendance and increase awareness.

## Toolkit Updates & Contact Info

We hope you've found this toolkit helpful and are excited to start planning your Land Trust Days event!

Gathering Waters updates this toolkit every year to reflect any changes made from one year to the next.

We welcome your feedback! If you have any comments to share or additional resources you would like to see for Land Trust Days, please reach out to Amanda at [amanda@gatheringwaters.org](mailto:amanda@gatheringwaters.org).

We would love to hear from you!

And finally, thank you for taking part in Wisconsin Land Trust Days. We appreciate your time and effort making the statewide promotion of Wisconsin's land trusts and the work they do possible.