

CROSS CURRENTS

# YOUR DONOR REPORT

30th Anniversary • Advocacy Edition

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## It's time to celebrate! You helped protect the Pelican River Forest!

***The largest conservation project in state history is protected – forever!***

This project has been years in the making.

**Thanks to faithful supporters like you, the Pelican River Forest cleared every hurdle opponents tried to throw in its way.**

Supporters rallied together and formed the Friends of Pelican River Forest.

Tireless volunteers took to the airways, wrote letters to the editor, and contacted elected officials. Wisconsinites demanded accountability.

Your support ensured local voices were heard through Team Knowles Nelson and facts were shared on a dedicated Pelican River Forest website.

The tremendous outpouring of public pressure forced dissenters out into the open.

The project faced numerous twists and turns. Last year, the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance denied Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funding for the project in a party-line vote.

And the opponents didn't stop there. They actively distributed misinformation to town



Pelican River Forest Copyright Jay Brittain

When the Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance blocked state funding for the Pelican River Forest, you took action.

officials and county boards to sow confusion and doubt about land protection.

**Through all these challenges, supporters of conservation, like you, never gave up.**

Thanks to Governor Evers' leadership and commitment to conservation, the Pelican River Forest is safe. Earlier this year, he authorized the DNR to finalize the project and accept federal Forest Legacy funding. Governor Evers then announced the protection of Pelican River Forest in his State of the State address in February.

**Thanks to your support, special places like the Pelican River Forest are protected forever.**

**Learn more about taking action and joining Team Knowles Nelson at [knowlesnelson.org](http://knowlesnelson.org).**

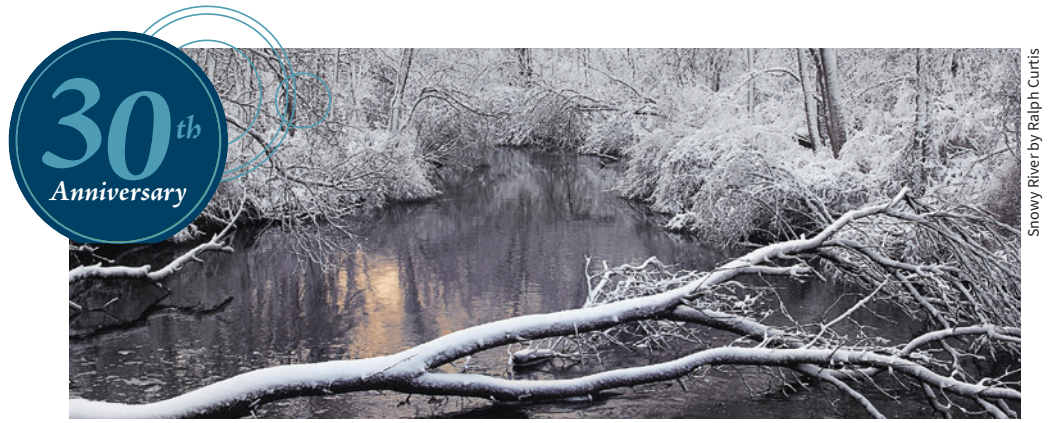
# You helped Gathering Waters reach a milestone!

## Your support has built an impressive legacy.

Gathering Waters turns thirty this year. And because you generously support this work, we thought you'd enjoy knowing the origin story.

To learn about the early days, we turned to Bill O'Connor, one of Gathering Waters' founders.

Visits to his grandparents' rustic Lake Superior cabin triggered Bill's love of nature. During



Snowy River by Ralph Curtis

**You've helped protect Wisconsin's special places forever.**

college, Bill realized he wanted to work on conservation in Wisconsin.

His conviction was so strong that he traded a prestigious career at a Chicago law firm to start an environmental law practice in Madison.

True to his goal, Bill made a difference. He worked with

elected officials to pass the Uniform Conservation Easement Act in 1982. And, he helped establish more than two-thirds of Wisconsin's land trusts and drafted scores of land protection agreements.

**Bill O'Connor was also one of the driving forces behind Gathering Waters.**

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Your support makes advocacy possible

## Thanks to you, there's a new voice speaking up for land protection.

Meet Advocacy Manager Morgan Rusnak. Morgan joined Gathering Waters in January to bolster the number of individuals and organizations across Wisconsin who are speaking up on behalf of land protection.

Before joining the team, Morgan led Destination Door County's community outreach and sustainability efforts. She also serves on the Door County Board of Supervisors.

Morgan's experience working with local governments will be invaluable as she helps connect land trusts and conservation partners with their elected officials. She's well-positioned to take efforts like Team Knowles Nelson to the next level.

*"I'm thrilled to be part of the team," said Morgan. "I enjoy meeting people and hearing their stories. Each unique experience someone has out in nature helps shape a powerful message about conservation in Wisconsin."*

*"My goal is to remove barriers and invite the land trust community and elected officials to the table for authentic conversations. I want to amplify a wide range of voices to build a stronger and more diverse conservation community throughout Wisconsin."*

**Learn more about Morgan at: [gatheringwaters.org/about/who-we-are](https://gatheringwaters.org/about/who-we-are).**



Photo Courtesy of Morgan Rusnak

**An active outdoor enthusiast, Morgan has a passion for helping others connect with nature in their own way.**

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In 1990, Wisconsin changed how it funded land protection projects.

Wisconsin's original conservation program — the Outdoor Recreation Act Program (ORAP) — had been in place since the early 1960s. There was a need to rethink how land protection was being funded.

**Thanks to a bipartisan agreement, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program was passed into law.**

For the first time, state grant funding was provided to nonprofit land trusts, helping drive a rapid expansion of interest in private land conservation. By 1994, it became clear that Wisconsin needed a statewide organization to support this growing land trust community.

Visionary leaders, including Jean Meanwell, Robert Chambers, the late Harold C. “Bud” Jordahl, the late Geoff Maclay, and Bill O’Connor, came together to create a new land trust service organization known as Gathering Waters.

That was thirty years ago.

*“It’s been so gratifying for me to see how Gathering Waters has evolved over the years,” Bill said. “For thirty years now, I’ve watched the organization mobilize the land trust movement*



Rhianon Morgan

Today, you help Gathering Waters fulfill its primary goals of advocating for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and supporting land trusts.

*and preserve the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.”*

**The need for Gathering Waters is far from over.**

In addition to the battles for state funding, Bill O’Connor sees other challenges on the horizon. One growing risk involves the intergenerational transfer of conserved property.

*“Landowners spend hours working with land trusts to set the detailed terms in conservation easements,” Bill said. “But as protected lands start to change hands, folks who inherit or buy these special places might not*



**Land trusts help landowners define how land is protected for the future.**

*share that same dedication to conservation.*

*“Some successor owners won’t understand, and a few may flat-out disagree with restrictions set out in conservation documents.*

*“We can expect disputes over land trusts’ interpretation and even challenges to the validity of easements in the courts. This type of litigation is costly and could put a lot of pressure on land trusts’ resources.”*

**When legal challenges happen, your support gives land trusts a place to turn for advice.**

Your support of Gathering Waters’ Land Conservation Law Program helps land trusts resolve disputes over existing easements and continue to create solid conservation agreements that endure.

**Thanks for all you do to protect Wisconsin’s special places.**

**Because of your support, land trusts are strong and have access to timely resources and expert advice.**

# Your support will appeal to the Supreme Court for land protection

WILL YOU MAKE YOUR BEST GIFT TO HELP INFORM THE SUPREME COURT?



## It's time to fix what's ailing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

**Big news:** Governor Evers has sued the Legislature over their mishandling of state conservation funding — and the Wisconsin Supreme Court has agreed to take the case.

This lawsuit provides a unique opportunity.

## Will you send your best gift to help us intervene as a party in this case before the Wisconsin Supreme Court?

Gathering Waters is intervening in this case to ensure that the story of land protection is told.

Your support will help inform the justices about the harm caused by the secretive review of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship grants by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance.

## Now is the time to act!

It will take effort and expertise to research the case law and craft the best possible arguments

on behalf of state funding for land protection.

Briefs submitted to the court need to be thorough and compelling!

## The court's decision could be a game-changer.

It could determine the future of the state funding and whether new land protection projects get approved in a transparent and timely manner.

## Will you help fund this crucial intervention in the Knowles-Nelson case with your best gift?

There's a lot of work to do between now and April 17, when the court will hear oral arguments.

## Will you send your best gift so the Wisconsin Supreme Court understands how important state funding through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is to land protection in Wisconsin?

## I want to help inform the Wisconsin Supreme Court about land protection!

**YES!** Please use my gift to intervene in this Wisconsin Supreme Court case and support all the work of Gathering Waters. Enclosed is my gift of:

- \$50 to help intervene in this case and support Gathering Waters.
- \$100 to help intervene in this case and support Gathering Waters.
- \$150 to help intervene in this case and support Gathering Waters.
- I'm sending my best gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help intervene in this case and support Gathering Waters.

I am giving:  by check.  by credit card.  by DAF or IRA distribution.  I want to learn more about including GW in my estate plan.