

# YOUR DONOR REPORT

A PUBLICATION OF GATHERING WATERS • FALL 2024 • VOLUME 30 ISSUE 4

## You helped nurture a young conservationist's interest in nature

**You'll love this inspiring story. It begins with a simple request and ends with a generous gift.**

When Joe saw an offer from Gathering Waters for a free Wisconsin Nature Guide on his social media feed, he requested one for his daughter Kayleigh. A few days later, it arrived in the mail.

Kayleigh immediately read the guide from cover to cover. Twice! As she learned the names of native birds, plants, and pollinators, she peppered her parents with questions.

### **What happened next will warm your heart.**

Kayleigh saw the letter that was enclosed with her Nature Guide, which included an appeal to support conservation. She then asked her parents if she could make a donation.

Kayleigh's parents encouraged her and talked about the importance of protecting special places and taking care of the land.

**Thank you for helping to provide Wisconsin Nature Guides to young people like Kayleigh.**



Photo Courtesy of Kayleigh's Family

**Kayleigh enjoys being outside. Last summer, she caught this largemouth bass, her personal best! She likes bass fishing because, "They're feisty!"**

The next week, an envelope arrived at Gathering Waters.

Inside were five one-dollar bills—Kayleigh's ENTIRE allowance for the week.

### **Talk about generosity!**

Kayleigh put her love of nature into action. She's passionate about wildlife, and she wanted to do something to help ensure that her favorite birds and bats continue to have places to call home.

Kayleigh's story is a reminder of why we protect Wisconsin's land, water, and wildlife. With people like her caring for nature, this work will continue for generations to come.

**You can request a Wisconsin Nature Guide. Simply complete the form at [bit.ly/WINatureGuide](https://bit.ly/WINatureGuide).**

# You're part of a rich and vibrant history

## Part Two - Highlights from the last 15 years

**In 2010**, Gathering Waters launched a partnership with the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) called the Land Trust Excellence & Advancement Program (LEAP). LEAP was designed to offer a more focused and customized approach to serving Wisconsin's land trusts.

**By 2012**, three Wisconsin land trusts achieved national accreditation with the support of LEAP. By 2015, the number of Wisconsin's accredited land trusts had increased to nine. Today, there are 20.

**In the 2011, 2013, and 2015** state budgets, Gathering Waters and the conservation community mounted significant advocacy campaigns to defend the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program.

During this time, program funding was cut from \$86 million to \$33 million per year.

There was also talk of eliminating state funding for land protection altogether. But a broad coalition effort ensured it continued.



Pike River - Photo by Dan Giordano

**In 2016**, after working his way from intern to government relations director, Mike Carlson assumed the role of executive director. Mike continues to lead the organization today.

Mike joined LTA's National Leadership Council, which advises LTA's senior leadership and board of directors. He also joined the governance board of the Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition to advocate for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

**In 2017 and 2018**, Gathering Waters supported a merger between West Wisconsin Land Trust and Bayfield Regional Conservancy.

The newly-formed organization, known as Landmark Conservancy, continues to serve 20 counties in northwest Wisconsin.

The merger signaled a growing trend toward consolidation among land trusts. Since then, several organizations have merged in other regions of the state.

Today, more than 40 land trust organizations help protect land in Wisconsin.

**In 2018**, Gathering Waters launched Land Trust Days, an annual promotion of summer events hosted by land trusts to celebrate land conservation.

Since its debut, Land Trust Days has helped thousands of people connect with land trusts and the places they protect.

**From 2018 to 2020**, Gathering Waters staff grew. Charlie Carlin joined the team as director of strategic initiatives and played a key role in launching Team Knowles Nelson and [knowlesnelson.org](http://knowlesnelson.org).

Team Knowles Nelson has enabled faithful supporters like you to send thousands of messages to elected officials and make calls to legislative offices in support of state funding for land protection.

**In 2020**, Gathering Waters

*Continued on page 3*

**Because of the support of people like you, land trusts have grown stronger in the past 30 years!**

*Continued from page 2*

welcomed Creal Zearing, who now serves as our director of philanthropy.

Then COVID-19 hit, creating new challenges—and opportunities—for Gathering Waters and the land trust community. Virtual training opportunities and a hybrid work culture quickly became the norm.

During this time, Gathering Waters also invested in

mapping technology to help land trusts better assess and set land protection priorities.

**In 2022**, Gathering Waters launched the groundbreaking Land Conservation Law Program and hired Chris Gutschenritter as its first director. This initiative provides land trusts with legal services and is helping to build a community of attorneys across the state who are familiar with land conservation.

From 2023 until now, there have been many advancements, including a favorable ruling from the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

While our priorities have evolved since 1994, Gathering Waters has continued advocating for state funding for conservation and providing training and services to land trusts through events like the Wisconsin Land Trust Conference.

**To learn more visit, [gatheringwaters.org/timeline](https://gatheringwaters.org/timeline).**

## Your support makes Gathering Waters more effective and resilient

**Please join us in welcoming Lily Butler and Cindy Benzschawel to the team.**

**Lily Butler joined Gathering Waters as the events and outreach coordinator.**



Lily plays a central role in planning the Wisconsin Land Trust Conference, Land Trust Days, and the Land Conservation Leadership Awards, among other annual events.

Before joining Gathering Waters, Lily gained experience as the native plant sale coordinator for the Friends of the UW Arboretum in Madison, where she led volunteers and helped increase sales.

*“I’m excited about drawing attention to the amazing conservation work being done across the state,” Lily said. “I’m passionate about helping people protect Wisconsin’s natural resources.”*

**Cindy Benzschawel became Gathering Waters’ database and annual giving coordinator.**



Cindy supports our mission by ensuring our database of conservation supporters and land trust leaders is secure and accurate, and accessible to our team.

She understands the importance of connecting people with causes they care about.

Before coming to Gathering Waters, Cindy refined her skills in data management and donor relations as the operations coordinator at Junior Achievement of Wisconsin.

*“Data is my passion,” Cindy said. “I’m excited to use my experience to help staff connect with those who support and engage with us.”*

**To learn more about Lily, Cindy, and the entire team, visit [gatheringwaters.org/who-we-are](https://gatheringwaters.org/who-we-are)**

# Land protection in Wisconsin is at a critical juncture

WILL YOU MAKE A SPECIAL GIFT TO HELP PEOPLE SPEAK UP FOR STATE FUNDING FOR LAND PROTECTION?

## The future of our state's funding for land protection hangs in the balance.

After the election, there will likely be many new faces in the Wisconsin Legislature. And they'll be making a crucial decision about the future of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Without this vital source of state funding, safeguarding Wisconsin's land, water, and wildlife will become a steep uphill battle.

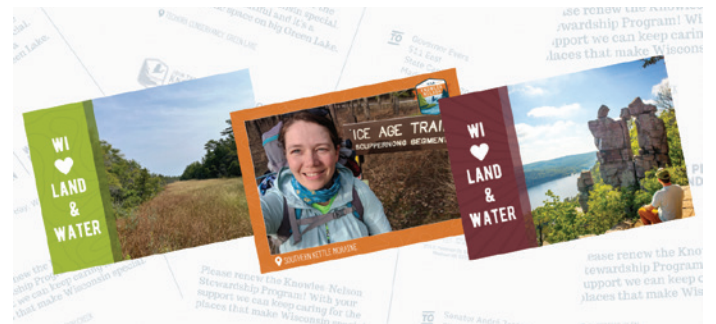
### Will you make a gift to ensure lawmakers renew state funding for land protection?

We're organizing an innovative postcard campaign to blanket the State Capitol with personalized messages highlighting how people like you use and cherish our state's natural treasures.

It's vital that every lawmaker—especially those who will be newly elected—understands how important land and water protection is for their districts and for Wisconsin's future.

We're proactively asking people to take action and create personalized postcards to send to their elected officials.

This outreach will help create strong support



when it comes time to vote for state funding.

### Will you make a special gift to help fuel this vital advocacy campaign?

Your donation will help:

- Send personalized postcards to Wisconsin lawmakers, supporting a 10-year renewal of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.
- Create informational materials that showcase the economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits of protected lands.

Together, we can ensure state funding continues to protect Wisconsin's land, water, and wildlife for generations to come.

### Will you send a special gift today to help protect state funding for land protection?

## I will help protect state funding for land protection!

**YES!** Please use my gift to help send postcards to lawmakers to ensure they know how important land protection is to the people they represent. I'll also help support all the work of Gathering Waters. Enclosed is my gift of:

- \$35 to help support the postcard campaign and renew state funding for land protection.
- \$50 to help support the postcard campaign and renew state funding for land protection.
- \$100 to help support the postcard campaign and renew state funding for land protection.
- I'm sending \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help support the postcard campaign and renew state funding for land protection.

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.