

2025 Knowles-Nelson Lobby Day and Wisconsin Land Trust Conference Schedule

March 12-14, 2025

Wisconsin Masonic Center – Madison, WI

Wednesday, March 12

9:30 am Lobby Day Registration Opens

Meet in the main lobby of the Wisconsin Masonic Center to check in, receive your Lobby Day participant packet, and enjoy a light breakfast.

10:30 am Educational Program, Speakers & Issue Briefing

Hear from a special guest speaker and Team Knowles Nelson leaders about the status of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program reauthorization. Materials and key talking points about the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program will be provided.

11:45 am Lunch

Lunch will be served in the Wisconsin Masonic Center's beautiful Grand Ballroom. Seats will be assigned by senate and assembly districts, so you'll have a chance to meet and strategize with your advocacy team.

12:30 pm Walk to the Capitol

Make the two-block trip to the Capitol.

12:45 pm Group Photo

Say "Knowles-Nelson!" Take a group photo before we enter the Capitol.

1:00 pm Legislator Meetings at the Capitol

Attend pre-scheduled meetings with legislators and their staff. Share success stories that demonstrate why Knowles-Nelson funding is essential for preserving Wisconsin's outdoor legacy.

4:00 pm Lobby Day Networking Happy Hour

As meetings wrap up, reconvene to debrief and connect with fellow advocates. Enjoy drinks and good conversation in the Wisconsin Masonic Center's Grand Ballroom until 5:30 pm.

5:00 pm Conference Check in

Check-in for participants who did not attend Lobby Day.

6:00 pm Welcome Reception and Dinner

Enjoy dinner and drinks in the Grand Ballroom. Dinner will be followed by a conference welcome and Wisconsin land conservation highlights from Gathering Waters.

Thursday, March 13

7:30 am Conference Check-in

Check-in for participants just arriving for the conference.

8:00 am Breakfast Out with Peer Groups

Connect with your people in similar roles, or with similar goals or conservation priorities over breakfast out. We'll provide some recommendations of the best spots nearby.

10:00 am Land Trust Leaders Panel

Hear from a panel of land trust leaders about recent trends in the Wisconsin land trust community.

11:00 am Concurrent Sessions (choose one to attend)

Building Strong Foundations for Perpetual Protection

Speakers TBA

An essential session that demystifies the core components of a robust stewardship program. Whether you're managing conservation easements or fee-owned properties, this workshop will walk you through the critical systems needed to meet Land Trust Standards and Practices and accreditation requirements. Deepen your understanding of why these systems matter for long-term conservation success. This session is perfect for new stewardship staff and seasoned land trust leaders looking to strengthen their organizational systems.

Geographic Information Systems and Strategic Conservation Planning (Part 1)

Charlie Carlin, Gathering Waters; Mike Koutnik, Consultant

This session will provide an overview of the GIS resources offered by Gathering Waters and an orientation to using those resources. Learn what data you can access in the conservation geodatabase and how to put the data to work yourself. This session is great for both new users of the GIS database and those looking for a refresher.

For hands-on experience with the tool, attend Part 2 at 1:00 pm.

The Triple A Team

David Allen, Development for Conservation

Every person on a land trust's staff and board should play a role in fundraising, but not everyone has to add to the equation in the same way. The "Triple-A" model (created by Kaye Sprinkel Grace) provides a way to talk about each team member's interests and competencies, and how to utilize these as part of an organization's development team. Gain insights and tools to assess the mix of ambassadors, advocates, and askers on your board, and to identify where further training and recruitment could be helpful.

12:00 pm Lunch

Lunch will be served in the Wisconsin Masonic Center's Small Dining Room.

Thursday, March 13, *continued...*

1:00 pm **Concurrent Sessions** (choose one to attend)

Conservation Finance Strategies

Clint Miller, The Conservation Fund; Emy Brawley, The Conservation Fund; Chris Gutschenritter, Gathering Waters

The innovative approach, Buy-Protect-Sell, empowers land trusts to respond to unique, and sometimes urgent, conservation opportunities. Whether your land trust is faced with escalating land prices, challenging barriers to protecting working lands, or looking to expand your conservation impact, this session will provide practical insights into structuring deals, building funding partnerships, and managing risks. Drawing from successful examples across the state, get the knowledge you need to evaluate strategies to strengthen your conservation toolkit.

Geographic Information Systems and Strategic Conservation Planning (Part 2)

Charlie Carlin, Gathering Waters; Mike Koutnik, Consultant

This session will explore the decision support tool, which is a powerful interactive application intended to aid conservation planning efforts by putting a tremendous amount of data at your fingertips. Walk through the robust filtering capabilities to help you quickly zero in on particular geographies and conservation priorities. Test drive the tool with the expert guidance of Mike Koutnik, who builds and maintains this app for the Wisconsin land trust community. Both novices and power users are invited to attend.

Juggling the Numbers: A Balanced Look at Financial Management and Communication

Carol Fisher, The Nature Conservancy; Jennifer Filipiak, Driftless Area Land Conservancy

Land trust staff often juggle a lot of different responsibilities and priorities. This session will take a common-sense approach to walk you through the Land Trust Standards and Practices about financial records and basic internal controls. Understand practical methods to communicate financial information in meaningful ways to staff and board members. Get tips that will help you keep all the balls in the air. There is likely to be actual juggling!

2:00 pm **Field Trip to Local Land Trust**

Take a field trip to some of Groundswell Conservancy's conservation easement and fee simple properties in the Black Earth Creek Valley. Hear from landowners, local decision makers, and land trust staff, then hike through this beautiful area (weather permitting).

5:45 pm **Happy Hour and Dinner**

After the field trip, return to the Wisconsin Masonic Center for a happy hour and dinner.

6:45 pm **Presentation**

Get updates on the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, a recap of Lobby Day, information about the Land Conservation Leadership Awards, and more.

7:45 pm **Evening Social**

The fun doesn't stop! Hang out at the Wisconsin Masonic Center for a game night and socializing.

Friday, March 14

8:30 am Working Breakfast

Breakfast will be served at the Wisconsin Masonic Center. There will be a professional development activity to engage with over breakfast.

9:45 am Concurrent Sessions (choose one to attend)

Anatomy of a Land Trust Deal

Speakers TBA

Back by popular demand (this session was presented at the 2023 conference), explore the various approaches and challenges of a land trust deal. Consider how those approaches and challenges might shift in the future given the social, economic, and other trends impacting land trusts in Wisconsin. Updated information and a new, hypothetical conservation project make this session worth attending again (or for the first time!).

Storytelling Workshop

Pat McMurtrie, Gathering Waters; Carol Abrahamzon, Mississippi Valley Conservancy

Leverage the power of storytelling to build stronger relationships with audiences. Learn effective strategies for communicating the great stories in the land trust community (with tips for both development and communications staff). Take things a step further with tips on repurposing content and sharing your personal values with followers and supporters.

11:15 am Snacks and Send-off

As the conference wraps up, grab a snack before you head home.