

**“Anybody can love  
the mountains,  
but it takes a soul  
to love the prairie.”  
— Willa Cather**

Dedicated Groundswell volunteers planted eight acres of prairie this winter at Westport Prairie and Patrick Marsh. At Westport Prairie, we are restoring some of the last remaining pieces of the historic Empire Prairie. These remnant prairies were part of the Empire Prairie landscape, which once covered over 50,000 acres from Waunakee to Arlington. Our volunteers and partners at Waunakee High School and Madison College collected seed from these remnants to preserve the genetic value of these few remaining pockets of prairie. They then scattered the seed across five acres of former cropland at Westport Prairie.

At Patrick Marsh, we are restoring one of our rarest landscapes — oak savanna. This winter volunteers planted three acres of oak savanna and prairie on the west side of the marsh around the small pond. This planting enhances the oak savanna restoration that Groundswell has been working on with volunteers and Operation Fresh Start for many years. Over 90 species of plants were included in the seed mix. In a few years, visitors will enjoy the elegant blooms of cream wild indigo and the aptly named bottlebrush grass. We thank everyone who helped with these two very special plantings, from collecting and cleaning seed in the fall, to scattering it over the snow this winter. ●





## Remembering Bill Wambach (1925 – 2019)

Sun Prairie's Patrick Marsh wouldn't be what it is today without Bill Wambach. Many of you have probably seen the marsh on your right side as you drive north past Sun Prairie on Highway 151. But in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, you would have missed it, because for nearly three decades the marsh didn't exist. Drainage tiles and pumps kept the soil dry for farming. The expansion of Highway 151 in the early 1990s gave Bill Wambach and his team at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation an opportunity to restore the marsh. It became Wisconsin's first wetland mitigation project, designed to restore or create wetlands

in place of others that were going to be destroyed when the highway was widened. The restoration project began in the winter of 1991 when the DOT removed the tile and pumps. Within months, 100 acres of water spread across the old marsh and drew more than 5,000 ducks and 200 tundra swans during spring migration. Soon thereafter the DOT transferred the land to the DNR as Patrick Marsh Wildlife Area.

With the marsh restored, local citizens led by Bill Wambach and Jeanne Behrend saw a new vision for Patrick Marsh. In 2002 they formed Patrick Marsh Conservancy to make sure the marsh was loved. Bill and Jeanne convinced Groundswell to buy additional land around the marsh, which we did, adding 105 acres over the years.

As Patrick Marsh grew, so did Bill's love for the marsh. You could often find him at the marsh with Patrick Marsh Middle School's Discovery Club. He championed Sun Prairie Rotary's involvement at the marsh. When Operation Fresh Start was hired to build a new wildlife viewing platform, Bill was at their side. Many of the Aldo Leopold benches found at the marsh are thanks to Bill — he built one for each of his kids. Two falls ago, just months before his cancer diagnosis at age 93, Bill was knee deep in the mud helping Groundswell build a boardwalk to improve access to the south side of the marsh.

Bill was a wonderful advocate for Patrick Marsh and a great friend to Groundswell. His passing leaves a hole in many people's hearts. To read stories about Bill shared by his daughters, please visit [groundswellwisconsin.org/wambachlegacy](http://groundswellwisconsin.org/wambachlegacy). ●

## Land protection flows in the Black Earth Creek Valley



The Black Earth Creek valley is cherished by many for its beauty, trout fishery, productive farmland, and healthy communities. Since 2003 Groundswell has worked with eleven conservation-minded landowners to permanently protect 1,000 acres of productive farmland, streambanks, wetlands, and trails in the valley.

In December we added five more acres to list of protected places, thanks once again to a conservation-minded family and strong community support for protecting the creek. The property is adjacent to state-owned land on the east side of Cross Plains between Hwy. 14 and the railroad tracks. This acquisition helps fill in the project boundaries of the DNR's Black Earth Creek Fishery Area and Dane County's Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area.

Best of all, this acquisition forever prevents the development of the property. A 2003 study by the University of Wisconsin estimated that 4.5% of the valley was already covered with impervious surfaces like pavement and rooftops. A generally accepted rule of thumb is that stream health begins to decline when impervious surface reaches 10% and becomes severely degraded when imperviousness exceeds 30 percent.

Funding to purchase the property came from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Dane County Conservation Fund, Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and supporters of Groundswell, including the estate of Marie Fraser. ●

Groundswell supporter Mike Dubis with a stocked rainbow trout caught in Black Earth Creek.







## Welcome Adam!

Adam Pereira is our work study student who joined the Groundswell team in September. Adam is pursuing a master's degree in Environmental Conservation at the UW-Madison's Nelson Institute. The story of his journey there is a most interesting one.

Adam found private land conservation as a vocation after a career in web and app design. After graduating from Virginia Tech in 2014 with a degree in Business Information Technology, he went to work for a design consultancy in Austin, Texas.

Adam's connection with nature deepened after hiking the Pacific Crest Trail in 2017 and the Appalachian Trail in 2018. Through these experiences, Adam felt the necessity to use his experiences of listening to what folks want or need and apply it to protecting the natural environment.

Adam views private land conservation as a way to achieve equitable outcomes for people and the environment and has been influenced by environmentalists Gary Snyder and Aldo Leopold. At Groundswell Adam is helping with database management, renewal of our accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance, an analysis of conservation easements, and a master plan for Westport Prairie. Adam loves walking in the outdoors, running, photography, yoga, reading books, and, since he's been in Wisconsin for his first real winter, playing board games! ●

## Imperiled oaks saved at Patrick Marsh

A few dozen oak trees have lived on the east side of Patrick Marsh for decades. Several of these trees can be seen on some of Wisconsin's oldest aerial imagery from the 1930's. Over time, these grand oaks have been shaded out by faster-growing weedy trees, killing some of their lower limbs. These oaks needed help, and even though they are located on DNR land at the marsh, that's when Groundswell stepped in. This fall, Groundswell was awarded a grant from the John C. Bock Foundation to restore the two-acre oak woodland. We hired Quercus Land Stewardship to come in with chainsaws and heavy equipment to remove the invasive trees. The area was planted by volunteers with prairie/oak woodland seed that was donated by Ron Endres and Dane County Parks. Follow-up work will be done by Groundswell staff, volunteers, and Prairie Partners interns. We can't wait to watch this restoration grow! ●

Oaks at Patrick Marsh breathe new life now that weedy trees have been removed.









## ON THE LAND

Groundswell enthusiasts enjoyed the Wisconsin winter around bonfires with friends and neighbors at Patrick Marsh and Westport Prairie.

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## Growing conservationists at Mendota Elementary School

Some of the next great conservationists will come from Madison's north side. At Mendota Elementary School efforts are underway to revamp the relatively barren schoolyard and get every student outside. This new green schoolyard will provide important academic, health, and community benefits. It will also help students build an appreciation for nature at an early age. The effort is led by a team of teachers, parents, Groundswell staff, and other guests including students and partner organizations. Together we're the Mendota Green Team.



Mendota Elementary students built a stump circle gathering place, the school's first outdoor classroom.

ROBERTA HERSCHLEB

The steps are simple:

1. Gather great ideas from students, their families, teachers, and community members.
2. Develop a green schoolyard campus plan from these ideas.
3. Develop a green schoolyard curriculum plan.
4. Gather feedback on both plans from the school and community.
5. Implement the green schoolyard program alongside the new science curriculum.

The Green Team is currently developing the curriculum plan and has also been working on important projects. Already, we installed a rain garden and stump circle. We built wheelchair-accessible garden beds. We planted trees with the whole school, each class adopting a tree. Groundswell is excited to be part of this meaningful school collaborative. ●



We protect special places forever.

We want everyone to live in a world filled with green places where communities thrive. We believe that land is essential for people's physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. If we don't protect land now, it may be lost forever.

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## Places worth knowing

Spring is here! Don't miss a chance to get outside to enjoy the season with Groundswell Conservancy on our free field trips. Space is limited so be sure to register at [groundswellwisconsin.org/events](http://groundswellwisconsin.org/events) soon.

MARIO QUINTANA



### Earth Day Celebration

Monday, April 20th  
to Saturday, April 25

[Virtual Event—Register for Details](#)

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day at the John Muir Memorial County Park in Marquette County. Learn about local conservation heroes with a scavenger hunt completed when you visit the park on your own. ●

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### Annual Bird Walk

Saturday, May 23  
8:30-10:30AM

Join us for a morning walk at the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve with birder Marty Evanson. Birds we hope to see during the spring migration include many different species of warblers. ●

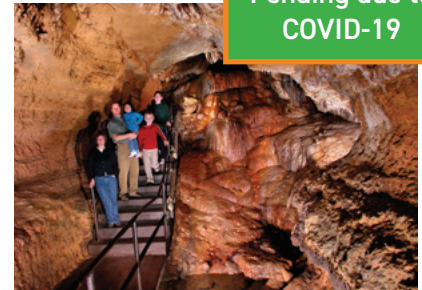
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CAVE OF THE MOUNDS NATIONAL NATURAL LANDMARK

### Cave of the Mounds Tour

Saturday, June 27  
2:00-4:00PM

Explore the local hotspot Cave of the Mounds and learn how conservation plays a role in protecting this underground marvel. ●

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