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Protecting Black Earth Creek Valley

Black Earth Creek is a treasure that starts near Middleton, where cold clear spring water bubbles freely from the earth. The creek winds and bends countless times on a journey to the Wisconsin River. It's considered one of the 100 best trout streams in the nation by Trout Unlimited.

The creek is as fragile as it is precious. It's threatened by runoff, development, and pollution. Groundswell is working with landowners and supporters to protect the stream. We recently completed three important conservation projects on the creek, and each represents a major accomplishment. Collectively, they add an important layer of protection to the Black Earth Creek watershed while providing new opportunities for the public to connect with nature. Read inside for stories of what you helped make possible. ●



PROTECTED FOREVER

In December we purchased 38 acres along Black Earth Creek that includes $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of shoreline. The property is adjacent to land owned by the Department of Natural Resources as part of the Black Earth Creek Fishery Area. The landowners have been good stewards of the property and when they decided to sell, we were ready. Groundswell will own and manage this property as part of the public conservation lands along the creek.

In March, we purchased a 93-acre agricultural easement on the south side of Black Earth Creek. The farmland property is next to a stream bank easement held by the

DNR along 3,000 feet of creek. The easement keeps the rich soil available for farming. It prevents development that could force large amounts of sediment-laden water into the creek. It also limits construction of impervious surfaces to a one-acre portion of the farm. This allows precipitation to continue to seep into the ground and keeps the watershed healthy.

In late December, we helped the Village of Black Earth acquire one acre of land to provide a new spot for canoeists and kayakers to get into the creek. The property was owned by David Cooper, a long-time resident. David's house and garage were heavily

damaged in the huge flood of August 2018. David had let Black Earth Administrator Shellie Benish know that he thought his land would make a great park, and Shellie agreed. The property is next to land owned by the DNR as part of the Black Earth Creek Fishery Area. It includes 120 feet of shoreline on the creek. This winter we donated the land to the Village. The Village will take on the work of removing the buildings and turning the land into a park, complete with creek access. "It's a story of how people working together can make nature more accessible. It's also great news for paddling enthusiasts!"

* * *

These projects only happened because of the generosity of conservation-minded landowners, partners, and supporters. Funders included the Dane County Conservation Fund, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, and Groundswell supporters including the Norm Anderson Conservation Opportunities Fund.

Groundswell has a long commitment to this watershed. These latest projects build on a long history of conservation success. Over the last two decades, Groundswell supporters helped protect more than a thousand acres (more than 900 football fields!) of farmland, wetlands, stream corridors, and hiking trails in the beautiful and significant Black Earth Creek valley. ●



SUE ANN SCHWANKE



Good News For Ducks, Geese, and Grassland Birds

With the help of conservation-minded landowners, Groundswell purchased 35 acres of wetland and woodland at the Becker Lake Waterfowl Production Area (WPA). The WPA is located in northern Columbia County and provides habitat for wildlife including grassland birds, migrating ducks and geese, and many other species of waterfowl. This purchase adds to the 360-acre WPA that consists of wetlands, grasslands, and woods. The property will be donated to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for long-term management and ownership.

Funding to purchase the property came from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Ducks Unlimited, Madison Audubon, Pheasants Forever, and Groundswell supporters including donors to our Norman Anderson Conservation Opportunities Fund. Thanks to Ducks Unlimited for its role in securing the federal acquisition funds. ●

More Good News for Wildlife

This past fall, Groundswell purchased 20 acres of wetland and woods at Anderson Waterfowl Production Area in southern Columbia County. In recognition of the family's legacy, we are calling this property the Midthun Addition to the Waterfowl Production Area (WPA).

Anderson is one of thirteen WPAs in Columbia County, spreading across 13,000 acres of land and water. They are managed by the Leopold Wetland Management District of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. WPAs are managed for breeding and migrating ducks, geese, and other waterfowl. They also provide important habitat for deer, turkey, pheasants, and other wildlife. We will donate the property to the Fish and Wildlife Service for long-term ownership and management.

Funding to purchase the property came from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Ducks Unlimited, Madison Audubon, Pheasants Forever, and Groundswell supporters. Thanks to Ducks Unlimited for its role in securing the federal acquisition funds. ●





Trout Stream Land Protected Forever at Dell Creek

In January, Groundswell purchased 40 acres of land at Dell Creek Wildlife Area in Sauk County. The land features 1,850 feet of Dell Creek as well as part of a tributary to the creek. A recent fish survey of Dell Creek confirms it as a good and improving trout stream.

When a hoped-for grant to match the Stewardship Program funding didn't come through, the anglers stepped up. In less than a month, the Aldo Leopold Chapter Trout Unlimited, Badger Fly Fishers, Southern Wisconsin Chapter Trout Unlimited, and the Watershed Access Fund of the Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited raised \$20,000 needed to complete the deal. This quick work made it possible to meet the landowner's deadline to sell the property before the end of January.

This acquisition came together thanks to the generosity of the landowner, anglers, supporters of Groundswell including Sean McBride, our Norm Anderson Conservation Opportunities Fund, and the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. ●

Farmers Market

The third annual Linden Cohousing Farmers Market will be every Thursday, 3:00 – 6:00 pm, in the Linden Cohousing parking lot (2082 Winnebago St, Madison). It will run from May 26th to September 22nd. Come support local food producers of color!



Leave a Legacy



Want to do even more to conserve land for generations to come? Join Groundswell's Legacy Circle by leaving a gift to Groundswell in your will or estate plans.

To encourage you to join them, a group of Legacy Circle members will donate \$1,000 to Groundswell in your honor ---- right now. And you will be able to choose how that money will be spent. So far, 12 people (out of a goal of 20) have responded to this campaign, honoring our former executive director and Legacy Circle member, Jim Welsh.

To learn more, contact Heidi Habeger at heidi@groundswellconservancy.org, call (608) 258-9797 or go to groundswellconservancy.org/legacycastlecampaign.

Welcome Angela!

I'm excited to join Groundswell Conservancy as its new executive director! Before joining the team, I spent decades helping to protect the environment and working with underrepresented communities with groups like Wisconsin Conservation Voters. I'm a hiker, biker, paddler, and I love getting out in nature. I'm also a storyteller. To introduce myself, I thought I'd share the story of the week leading up to my first day with Groundswell. It goes like this...

It was late February, and there was a chill in the air. I was feeling overjoyed after landing an amazing job. Unfortunately, as with all lucky streaks, the universe decided to strike back. You've been there, I'm sure. First, my computer broke down. Then my collie Rose developed a stomach bug. Last but not least, my car stalled in the drive-up lane at the local Walgreens. "Why me?" I remembered thinking, only to be met by the harsh, cold stare of my darkened dashboard. What could I do? I turned towards the intercom to let the pharmacist know that my car decided it needed a rest. That's when I noticed them – two tiny snowflakes on the driver's side window. Just before they melted, I took in their lacy, intricate designs and thought "no two snowflakes are identical". It was something I'd known... well... forever, but at that moment, I was filled with awe. Suddenly, my horrible week seemed pretty insignificant. Nature in all its wonder and diversity had come to the rescue and put everything in perspective.

Now it's spring, and, if we're lucky, the snowflakes are fewer and far between in Wisconsin. The cranes and robins are nesting, and the prairies, farms, and wetlands we love so much are reborn. Yes. There are challenges ahead: overdevelopment, pollution, food insecurity, inequitable access to the land, and the greatest of all – climate change. But I'm an optimist. I know what engaged and empowered people can achieve. And I know that our Groundswell community is strong and diverse. I also know how committed we are to protecting the land forever and for everyone, and that fills me with hope. Finally, I know that, in a world where billions upon billions of snowflakes have fallen and no two have ever been alike, anything is possible. I can't wait to meet you and get started! ●



ERIN BLOODGOOD



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 all people's physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. If we don't protect undeveloped land now, it may be lost forever.

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CARING FOR SPECIAL PLACES

Busy As a Bee at Patrick Marsh

Patrick Marsh has been abuzz with activity lately. With the generous help of our community and partners, **Groundswell was able to accomplish two great tasks this past fall — installing a new boardwalk near the kettle pond and planting 25-acres of prairie!**

The boardwalk was the idea of a local Girl Scout named Laurretta who was working towards achieving her Gold Award. This award is the highest achievement within the Girl Scouts and only given to roughly 5% of eligible scouts. Her plan was to make Patrick Marsh

more accessible to the community, and she did just that! Huge thanks also go out to our trusty volunteers and partners who helped with the construction.

Last fall, we planted native tallgrass prairie at the recently purchased Hanley property adjacent to Patrick Marsh Middle School (PMMS). With the help of our volunteers, local partners, and over 300 PMMS students, we were able to plant the full 25 acres in just a few short hours. Shoulder to shoulder, the students walked in straight lines while hand broadcasting locally sourced prairie seed. There are too many people to thank individually, but special thanks goes out to Ron Endres who donated all of the seed and PMMS teacher Vincent Brandl who helped coordinate the hundreds of students! ●



New Westport Prairie Access This Spring

This spring, enjoy better access to Westport Prairie! This year, Groundswell put in a new parking area, created better signage, added two new mowed trails, and will remove the locked gate at the driveway entrance. We also hired Operation Fresh Start to renovate the inside of the tobacco barn. Now one section of the barn will host events and the other side will store crucial land restoration equipment. You'll also find a new sign at the entrance which identifies Westport Prairie. Join us to celebrate better access — see the back page for details. This work was made possible thanks to Karl Gutknecht and Susan Hunt, James E. Dutton Foundation, and Oberweiler Foundation. ●

ON THE LAND



MARIO QUINTANA

On a beautiful night in January, Patrick Marsh Middle School and Eastside Elementary students helped us host our annual hike and bonfire at Patrick Marsh. ●

Thank you to our sponsors:



MARIO QUINTANA

In February, English teacher Jennifer Doucette read poems written by her Waunakee High School students as we explored a new hiking trail at Westport Prairie. We survived the frigid temps thanks to a bonfire and s'mores awaiting us at the end. ●

Thank you to our sponsors:



BEN JONES

Save the dates

Food AND nature, what a combo! Purchase your food and then find a spot to settle in to enjoy picturesque settings with friends and neighbors. Entry to these events are free. Food and beverages are available for purchase.

Patrick Marsh Food Cart Night

This summer, check website
Derby Dr, Sun Prairie

Enjoy an evening next to Patrick Marsh hosted by Groundswell and neighbors of this special place.

Town of Dunn Food Cart Night

Wednesday, July 27, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
4544 Dons Rd, Madison

Join Groundswell Conservancy and hosts Carole and Don Schmidt and Custom Metals for an evening on the land.



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Places worth knowing

In-person field trips are back! Get to know the places you help protect. Field trips are free, but space is limited. Reserve your spot at groundswellconservancy.org/events.

MARIO QUINTANA



Westport Prairie Renovation Celebration

Friday, May 20, 2022
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Check out the new trails, parking lot, and signage at Westport Prairie! Also enjoy a tour of the newly renovated historic tobacco barn, thanks to Operation Fresh Start.

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Botany with BJ

Wednesday, June 15, 2022
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Back by popular demand! Join our conservationist BJ Byers on a summer hike at Westport Prairie. BJ will share tips and tricks for learning to identify plants and remember their names.

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ROBERTA HERSCHLEB



Insect Safari for Kids

Wednesday, August 10, 2022
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Bring your kiddos and join Wisconsin's "Bug Guy" PJ Liesch on an insect safari at Patrick Marsh! Perfect for little ones who love to get outside and look for crawly critters.

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