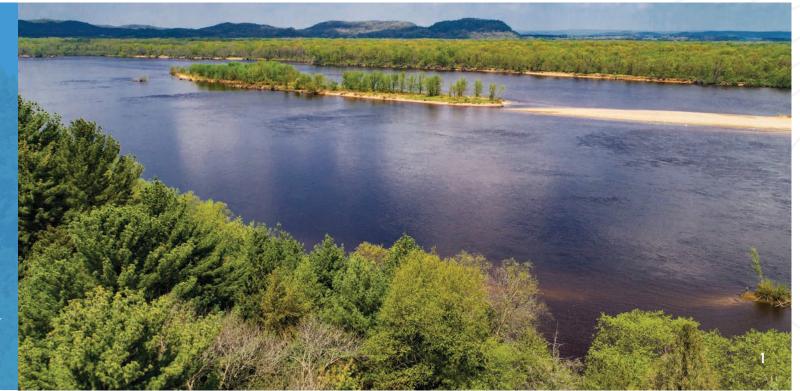


This past fiscal year our relationships with conservation-minded community members and landowners resulted in the permanent protection of wetlands, farmland, prairie, oak savanna, grassland, woodland, and shoreline. That means our water will be cleaner, farmers can keep growing food, wildlife has more places to thrive, and everyone has more access to nature. Your support makes it possible for us to build relationships and improve our community now and in the future.



Mario Quintana





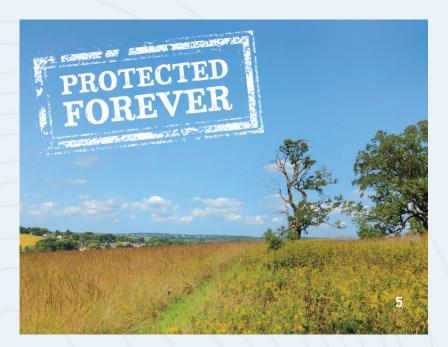




- 1 Groundswell teamed up with The Prairie Enthusiasts, along with conservation-minded landowners Ron and Darla Giordano, to help protect 40 acres of land in the Wisconsin River Valley. Groundswell led negotiations with the owners, made arrangements for the closing, and helped cover costs associated with the closing. With help, in part, from a generous donation provided by the Giordanos to support initial management of the site, The Prairie Enthusiasts can now ensure the continued vitality of this area.
- 2 The Town of Dunn and Groundswell placed a conservation easement on the Peterson Family centennial farm. This easement preserves valuable farmland by restricting development on the 133-acre property. A 300-foot-wide vegetative buffer between the cropland and Hook Lake will protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat. We thank landowners Lea Ann and Randall Heacox for their dedication to protecting this land. We also thank the Town of Dunn for their leadership on this project and for their continued commitment to conservation through their Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program.
- 3 More people will be able to safely access the Lower Yahara River thanks to Groundswell's purchase of 1.64 acres south of the Dunkirk Dam. This special place is adjacent to property owned by the Dunkirk Dam Lake District and to the Town's Charlie H. Lyon Memorial Park. The Town of Dunkirk plans to work with the Lake District to construct amenities on the property. Current plans include an ADA-accessible path, an accessible canoe & kayak put-in/take-out, and an accessible fishing pier. This acquisition was possible because of the generosity of the landowners, our partnership with the Town and the Lake District, and funding provided by the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and the Dane County Conservation Fund.
- 4 Later in the year, we purchased an additional 40 acres of wetland habitat within the Lower Mud Lake Natural Resource Area in the Town of Dunn. This acquisition came together thanks to the generosity of the landowner, supporters of Groundswell including Sean McBride, our Norm Anderson Conservation Opportunities Fund, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Habitat Areas Grant Program, and North American Wetlands Conservation Act funding administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited.

Ben Jone

- oak savanna habitat in the Town of New Glarus. This was made possible by the generous donation of a private conservation easement by landowners Kris and Penny Kubly. The Four Oaks Farm Conservation Easement protects remnant prairie and oak savanna habitat, extensive restored prairie, and approximately 2,350 feet of streambank on Legler School Branch. Quality sedge meadows, emergent marsh, and oak woodlands are also now protected forever. Together, these habitats host numerous rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species.
- 6 Groundswell purchased 34 acres of wetland habitat within the Lower Mud Lake Natural Resource Area in the Town of Dunn. We thank the landowners, Craig and Renae, for wanting to see this land protected. Funding to purchase the land came from Wisconsin DNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant administered by Ducks Unlimited.
- **7** Groundswell helped the Town of Westport purchase 105 acres once proposed for a large bagel bakery. A mix of grassland, wetlands, and oak woods, the land is bordered by the Westport Town Hall on one side and the DNR's Six Mile Creek Fishery Area on the other. With the open space addition, there's now an almost unbroken corridor of protected public land around the north side of Lake Mendota, stretching from Governor Nelson State Park to Wisconsin 113. To ensure the property is never developed, the Town of Westport granted a conservation easement to Groundswell Conservancy. Thanks to Steve and Marianne Schlecht, the Town of Westport, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, Dane County, and our Groundswell supporters for making this important conservation project possible.





Ben Jone



Ben Jone

Letter from the Executive Director

Groundswell celebrated its 40th anniversary this year – and what an exciting year it's been! From protecting hundreds of acres of farmland and natural places and enhancing soil health to providing access to land for HMoob and Black farmers and purchasing a big

blue tractor named "Elmow" – we've been busy.

When I think of the last 40 years, I feel humble. We stand on the massive shoulders of countless stewards of the land who've shaped and protected the places we hold dear. By continuing their work, we pay it forward for our children and their children. Look around you at our beautiful prairies, woodlands, wetlands,

forests, grasslands, and farmland. Land that we are borrowing from our children. Land that cannot be carried away. We have but one task: to protect and nourish it, so it can thrive.

In this annual report, I invite you to explore the impact your support has had on the special places in our community. I hope you are inspired and continue to be part of our important work in ways large and small. Whether it's making a year-end gift, joining us on a hike or field trip, or getting your hands dirty as a volunteer, there are so many ways to celebrate and enjoy this beautiful land we call home.

Thank you for your help this year as we celebrate the last forty years and the next forty to come!

Photo by Ben Jones

New Tractor at Westport Prairie



Groundswell is now the proud owner of a brand-new tractor and mower. It will primarily be used for maintenance mowing of our newly planted prairies and for mowing the trails at Westport Prairie. This means more beneficial wildlife habitat and well-groomed trails for you to enjoy at this special place. We held a naming contest for the tractor, and the winning name was Elmow. Thank you to everyone who helped us with this purchase and to everyone who participated in the naming contest.

Patrick Marsh is a wonderful outdoor space visited by a wide variety of people, and we're on a mission to make it more accessible. Everyone should have the opportunity to get outside and explore, but there are often barriers. Recently, we reached out to an organization called Access to Independence to help us identify these barriers and explore new ways to make this place more accessible and inclusive. Staff from Access to Independence will visit Patrick Marsh and evaluate everything from signage to trails to viewing platforms. We want everyone to enjoy Patrick Marsh and look forward to making improvements. If you would like to donate to the cost of this accessibility audit, please email Heidi at heidi@ groundswellconservancy.org.





Ben Jones

Angela West Blank, Executive Director

Great news! On Tuesday, August 22, the Fitchburg Common Council voted to amend an ordinance that will allow Groundswell to construct a private well at Pasley's Swan Creek Farm in Fitchburg.

Groundswell purchased the farm in 2018 as part of our equitable access to land program. Neighborhood Food Solutions, run by Black farmer and Vietnam Veteran Robert Pierce, has been leasing the property from us to teach teens from low-income families and formerly incarcerated individuals skills

Thank you, Mitch!



BJ By

related to growing, distributing, and processing fresh produce. During the past four years, a city ordinance prohibited us from drilling a well on the property and required us to hook up to municipal chlorinated water, which is not ideal for crops.

The change in the ordinance is a big win for Groundswell and will enable us to construct a well that will provide a permanent, sustainable source of water on the property. A big thanks goes to our staff, Fitchburg Mayor Julia Arata-Fratta, and Fitchburg's Common Council for helping to make this possible.

BJ Byers, Land Management Director

Last February, we welcomed Mitch Silva to the Groundswell team as our full-time Land Management Specialist LTE. Coming from Operation Fresh Start, Mitch had a background in conservation and a passion for restoring natural habitats. Mitch spent his days cutting down invasive brush at our oak savannas, pulling non-native weeds from our favorite green spaces, mowing our trails, writing land management plans, and helping with our conservation easement monitoring.

It was a pleasure working alongside Mitch, but unfortunately his position was temporary, lasting only six months. In August, he moved on to bigger and better things. Mitch was a huge help, and we know he has a bright future ahead of him. In fact, Mitch recently received the "Academy Participant of the Year" award from Operation Fresh Start in recognition of his incredible growth, leadership, and dedication to conservation. Congratulations to Mitch! We're excited to see what's in store for your future in conservation.

Special thanks to the Oberweiler Foundation and the Richard McCoy Estate for funding Mitch's time with Groundswell. Their generous support helped make this position possible.



BJ Byers, Land Management Director

Over the last five years, we've converted 25 acres (5 acres per year) of agricultural land to native tallgrass prairie at Westport Prairie! We do this by collecting prairie seed from nearby remnant prairies that once made up the historic Empire Prairie. While this is an impressive accomplishment worth celebrating, we still have ~175 acres of agricultural land at Westport to plant to prairie. The more we plant, the more seed sources we have to collect from. This means our plantings will grow larger and larger each year. In fact, this winter our planting will be 6.5 acres; next year it will be 7+ acres.

So how do we collect enough seed to make these planting possible? A decent amount is collected by our summer interns and monthly volunteers. Starting about three years ago, the bulk has been collected by Kaylee Nelsen. From late September through November, Kaylee spends evenings and weekends drying, processing, and weighing the seeds of each prairie plant species. She's got a knack for this kind of work, and it's very impressive! Most people have trouble identifying plants in full bloom, but Kaylee can identify them when they're all brown and shriveled up. Because of the important work Kaylee does for Groundswell and for conservation, we want to highlight her here. So, here's what Kaylee has to say:

"This fall will mark my third season helping collect native seeds at Westport Prairie as part of Groundswell's effort to convert cropland back into native prairie. When I was first recommended for the role, I had just finished my master's degree in environmental conservation from the Nelson Institute and was looking for something to occupy my time while searching for a full-time job. The calming and grounding nature of native seed collecting quickly grew on me, and by November I was fully enamored with the complexity of the remnants along with the ambiance of sights, sounds, and smells. The following spring, I was employed full-time working in conservation with Good Oak Ecological Services and continued to collect seeds part-time for Groundswell in the fall. There is a great quote in the book Noah's Garden by Sara Stein that poetically sums up why conservation is important to me.

'Remove the pheasant's cover or the butterfly's flower and you have erased its space. The less variety of habitat the landscape offers, the less space there is until, when all is mowed, even an expanse the size of a golf course becomes just a hole in the world.'

I am grateful to have this opportunity to work with the wonderful Groundswell staff and volunteers to fill some of the holes in our world." –Kaylee Nelsen

Conservation Easement Monitoring Focus on Soil Health: An Interview office teaching me the monitoring process, reporting Brandon Mann, Easement Stewardship Manager with Farmer John Meyers obligations, and software for tracking. BJ led from the Groundswell currently holds over 80 conservation field by supporting and accompanying me at each prop-

easements. Every easement requires monitoring and follow-up reporting each year. We also build relationships with landowners, share resources, and work to resolve potential easement conflicts.

For years, staff members Tony Abate and BJ Byers tackled this work together, while trying to manage all their other job duties. As the number of easements grew, it was clear they needed more help. That's when Groundswell hired me as the full-time Easement Stewardship Manager.

Tony and BJ mentored me through my first easement monitoring season. Tony took the lead from the erty visit.

Being new, we also made a renewed effort to meet with landowners in-person so I could begin forming relationships with them. Meeting with Kris Kubly on his property outside New Glarus was particularly noteworthy for me because I remember spending many, many hours helping with prescribed fire and weed management on the property years prior.

Having one staff person focused on this work has improved our monitoring process and allows us to protect more special places through conservation easements in the future.

Brandon Mann, Easement Stewardship Manager

John Meyers loves talking soil. It's a big part of his life as a farmer. John, his wife Nancy, and their son Jered farm approximately 350 acres along Co Hwy K south of Barneveld. They sold two conservation easements to Groundswell Conservancy, one in 2010 and one in 2013. John credits the decision to protect their farmland forever with helping keep the farm in the family, among other positive outcomes.

I spoke with John earlier this year, and he shared some insight into his experience as a farmer.

What is your evolution as a farmer? We started out moldboard plowing and working the soil many times to prepare a seedbed. The second year, we went to a chisel plow and offset disk and eliminated a lot of trips and saved soil and moisture by doing so. We alternated strips of row crops with hay on the contour. We were among the first to officially adopt a nutrient management plan. Most of that plan we were already doing. Managing nutrients saves money and makes you more efficient. It also prevents runoff of valuable nutrients.

What management practices related to soil health/conservation are you using on your farm and why? We always kept hay in our rotation, and we included grass for 30 years. The contour strips and hay strips conserve soil. Our son Jered has taken over the farm and also the conservation practices. He converted to 100% no-tillage. The no-till enhances

soil conservation and greatly reduces the fuel needed to make field passes because there's less drag on the tractor. It also maintains a higher level of crop residue on the soil surface, which retains soil moisture and reduces erosion.

What changes have you observed in your soil since adopting those practices? I believe the topsoil depth has improved, especially on the north farm which we purchased in 1996 (original farm was 1988). The north farm saves and holds water better and the topsoil is deeper.

Do you speak with other farmers who've adopted things like cover cropping, no-till, diversifying their crop rotations, or rotational grazing? We did a fair amount of rotational grazing in 2015 when our son took a more active role, and it helps with the forage quality and maintains the stands of grass too. We consulted other farmers. We have since downsized the beef cow herd. Our son researched the no-till practices with neighbors. We are considering cover crops. It will be especially needed if we move away from hay crops. In the past, we used winter wheat as an alternative crop. It works much the same as a fall planted cover crop. But it provides summer grain and straw while controlling erosion.

To read John's entire interview and learn more about Groundswell's soil health initative, visit groundswellconservancy.org/focus_on_soil

Water on the Farm

Yimmuaj Yang, Community Director

This year, we installed a much-needed water distribution system at Westport Farm. As a result, farmers had easier access to water this growing season, helping their plants grow and flourish. It was especially important during the two-month dry spell this summer. People and plants alike are benefiting from the new system, and our farm is thriving.

Thanks to the Evjue Foundation, Boyden Financial, Inc, High Wind Association Foundation, Willy Street Co-op, and Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern WI for supporting this project.



HMoob elder Xao Cha using a garden hose thanks to the newly installed water system at Westport Farm.

ARING

FOR SPECIAL PLACES

Years of Conservation at a Glance

We've accomplished so much together these past four decades. From our first land purchase in 1991 (protecting wetlands at Cherokee Marsh) to being the first nonprofit approved for

a Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program grant in 1993, we've come a long way. Here are just a few measures of how the tiny seed that was planted back in 1983 has grown.

projects completed - 13,896 acres protected

stewarding **8** easements

\$9.5 million

in Dane County Conservation Fund grants leveraged to protect more than 43 projects

\$20 million

in Knowles-Nelson Stewardship grants leveraged to protect more than 72 projects

acres protected in Black Earth Creek Valley

5.321 acres protected an open to the public

6,460 approximate acres of wildlife habitat protected

3,729 acres protected in the Town of Dunn

6,823 approximate acres of farmland preserved

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LAND MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR

BJ Byers

OUTREACH & EVENTS COORDINATOR

Ben Lam

Ann Vaj

OUTREACH & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MANAGER

BY THE NUMBERS

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023 Your individual gift makes a big difference!

783 Supporters

534 Acres Protected Forever This Year

Between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023 Groundswell Conservancy raised \$1,012,193 for programs and operations and spent \$944,443 for programs and operations. In addition, Groundswell received \$1,684,082 in private gifts and public funds to permanently protect 500 acres of land.

Income for Programs and Operations

O	4000.007	0.00
Contributions from individuals, businesses, foundations	\$990,326	879
Restricted gifts	\$96,500	89
Consulting fees, rental income, and other	\$21,867	29
Endowment distributions from Madison Community Foundation		3%
Easement Enforcement Endowment	\$19,880	
Operations Endowment	\$4,601	
Bob and Anne Bolz Gift Endowment	\$8,111	
Total Program and Operating income	\$1,141,285	100%
Total Income for Land Acquisition	\$1,684,082	
Expenses for Programs and Operations		
Conservation, Education, and Outreach	\$664,709	70%
Fundraising	\$183,949	20%
Management and General	\$95,785	10%
Total Program and Operating Expenses	\$944,443	100%
3	, , , , , ,	

As of June 30, 2023 Groundswell Conservancy had total assets of \$10,661,241 and liabilities of \$358,410. Most of our assets are our nature preserves.

The above financial information is unaudited. To view the details of our financial health, please see our financial reports posted at www.guidestar.org. The 2022-2023 report should be posted by February 2024. You can also view our federal tax returns at our website under the tab "ways to give" / "donate with confidence."



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 undeveloped land now, it may be lost forever.



THANK YOU for your investment in conservation where you live

Each and every gift, no matter the size, helps protect the land we love, forever. These generous supporters gave gifts to Groundswell Conservancy between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. Thank you for protecting special places, forever.

\$1,000,000+

Steve & Marianne Schlecht⁵

\$50,000 - \$149,999

EM & RW McCoy Gift Fund

\$30,000 - \$49,999

Anonymous American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate & Social Impact Nimick Forbesway Foundation

\$20,000 - \$29,999

Anonymous Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

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\$250-\$499 Anonymous (5) Iim Acker Sylvia Adrian Nicole Anzia & Michael Davies Patricia Arndorfer Jim Arts & Helene Nelson Helen Baldwin Jan Behn & David Henige Michael Benish Andrew Bent & Anna Huttenlocher Matt & Sarah Braun Jim Bredeson & Cheryl Becker³ Carrie Breunig Anne Brindley Jane Clark & Trace Soper³ Kenneth & Patricia Connors Ronald Cook Jim & Jane Corkery Tom Cottington Lois Curtiss Patti Daubs Laura DeGolier Joshua & Nicole Deno Mary Detra Don & Linda Diers Daniel Fields & Jeanne Behrend³ Julie & Doug Fiers Wesley & Ankie Foell Fontana Sports Specialties¹ Joyce & Charles Gelderman Sara & Jonathan Giacalone³ Kennedy Gilchrist & Heidi Wilde Susan & Gary Gimmestad Mark Gnabasik

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Susan & Conrad Iostad²

Lee Grubb

Terry Haller

Amie Hoag

Monica Jaehnig

in Wisconsin, we have had the opportunity to share experiences with Groundswell that have added richness to our lives. Whether volunteering at Patrick Marsh, assisting with projects to increase accessibility to areas or lessen the impact on protected resources, or attending social and cultural events, our lives have been enhanced by these connections to the land and our neighbors. This year we contributed in a different way to Groundswell. Through the donation of shares of an investment, we were able to provide finan-

C Through our years here

– Amy and the Rev. Bill Dunlop

cial support to Ground-

swell's efforts to protect the

land and our neighbors. 22

¹Event Sponsor ²Prairie Partners Sponsor ³Monthly Sustainer ⁴Part or all of gift is to help uphold our conservation easements 5Part or all of gift for land acquisitions. Names in bold are donors who have given for 20+ consecutive years.



CI passionately believe that a healthy environment with plenty of natural open space and fertile farmland is fundamental to everyone's health and happiness. It is a pleasure to be able to support an organization that shares my passion and skillfully works towards those goals. Making a Qualified Charitable Contribution from my IRA is not only easy, it's very satisfying to know that my resources are placed in capable hands and being used for the benefit of all **33**

– Donna Sereda

If you are over 70.5 years of age, you can avoid taxes on transfers from your IRA with a Qualified Charitable Distribution to Groundswell. It's another way to support conservation where you live.

\$250 - \$499 continued

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- Gary Schwager and Gabrielle Banick

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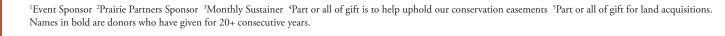
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In preparing this report, we tried to ensure that it was accurate and complete. If we made an error or omission, please accept our apologies and contact Liz Pelton at 608-258-9797 or liz@ground-swellconservancy.org so we can correct our records.

Your Legacy, Next Generation's Future

When it comes to conservation, legacy gifts make a world of difference. Richard McCoy's thoughtful planning has done just that. Dick passed away last July, but his support of conservation continues.



Lisé Gessert, Dick's niece and trustee of his estate, shared this story about his legacy gifts: "Dick was a philanthropist at heart and hoped to instill that in his 14 nieces and nephews by leaving us a small portion

of his estate to contribute to charitable organizations that mattered to each of us." Back in 2019, Dick shared with us his "planting the seeds" plan. His plan was to encourage philanthropy in the thinking and planning of his nieces and nephews. He wanted them to help him make gifts when he was no longer able to, and he had full confidence in the choices they would make. His hope was that, over time, they would add to the balance in the gift accounts he'd left them, so that they could continue to give more in the future.

Groundswell was the beneficiary of two gifts from the funds Dick established. These gifts helped us hire Mitch Silva as an LTE Land Management Specialist. Mitch was a graduate of Operation Fresh Start's Conservation Academy and gained valuable hands-on land stewardship experience (read more about Mitch on page 6). These gifts also supported the Lifting Hearts Therapy Garden at Westport Farm, a special place that Dick supported in the past. Lastly, these gifts will help fund our easement enforcement endowment at Madison Community Foundation.

Groundswell recognizes people who have included us in their will or estate plans as Legacy Circle members. To learn about your options for adding Groundswell to your estate plans, including bequests, IRA or life insurance designations, and more, visit groundswellconservancy.org/legacy or contact Heidi Habeger at (608) 258-9797 or heidi@groundswellconservancy.org.



Mario Quintana



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Annual Report designed by Jeff Weyer

Groundswell Conservancy strives to use equitable language in our written communications. If you have feedback about how we can improve, please contact Liz at liz@groundswellconservancy.org.

Places Worth Knowing

Join us for a Groundswell event! Space is limited, so be sure to register at groundswellconservancy.org/events soon.



Ben Jones

Thank You Party

Thursday, January 25, 2024

5:00 - 7:00 pm

Lussier Family Heritage Center 3101 Lake Farm Road, Madison

Come celebrate all the special places you protected this year! We want to show our appreciation for your dedicated support of conservation where you live. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and refreshments with a short program at 6:00 pm. You could win a local door prize! RSVP online at groundswellconservancy.org/2024thankyouparty or call (608) 258-9797.



Heidi Habeger

Patrick Marsh Bonfire & Candlelit Hike Saturday, January 27, 2024

5:30 - 7:30 pm

Join your friends and neighbors for an easy 1.5-mile candlelight hike from Patrick Marsh Middle School into Patrick Marsh Wildlife Area. A warm bonfire and s'mores await you at the end of the trek. Check our website for more exciting details closer to the date.

Thank you to our sponsors:



