



# Restoring the Landscape at Westport Prairie

**BJ Byers, Land Management Director**

Groundswell's Westport Prairie, located just east of Waunakee, is a special place. This 227-acre wildlife area is open for the public to enjoy. In the middle of the prairie is a 14-acre glacial drumlin State Natural Area owned by the Wisconsin DNR. The drumlin is home to over 100 plant species and is a prime example of a healthy short-grass prairie.

This spring, we brought fire back to Westport Prairie and burned just under 15 acres. The growing season after a burn is always the most beautiful. Flowers pop up sooner than those in unburned areas and provide a mix of color early in the season. This is partly due to the black ash that's left after a burn. The dark color heats up the soil faster in the spring which allows prairie plants to get a head start on their journey of reaching the sun.

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BJ Byers



## Good News for Ducks and Other Wildlife



Tony Abate

In January, Groundswell purchased 20 acres of wetlands in southern Columbia County. We are grateful to the Bredeson family for their interest in protecting the land for conservation.

The property lies within the Anderson Waterfowl Production Area (WPA). Anderson is one of 13 WPAs in Columbia County. These areas spread across 13,000 acres of land and water in Columbia County. They are managed as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System for ducks, geese, and other waterfowl. They also provide important habitat for other wildlife.

This property is open for hunting, fishing, and trapping (subject to applicable Federal and State laws). It is also open to hiking, cross country skiing, and observation. Groundswell 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, and Groundswell supporters. Thanks to Ducks Unlimited for its role in securing the federal acquisition funds.

## Knowles-Nelson Grant for Prized Property in Westport



Ben Jones

Groundswell Conservancy is thrilled to share the good news that the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program awarded the Town of Westport a grant of \$812,100 to support the purchase of a prized property on the northside of Lake Mendota.

Groundswell protected this special place, once slated for development, in December 2022. Since then, we continued to work with the Town of Westport and Gathering Waters to secure additional funding for this large purchase through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Our request for funding was approved in February.

A mix of grassland, wetlands, and oak woods, the land is an important part of the Lake Mendota watershed. It is home to a wide variety of wildlife. It also provides essential outdoor recreation space for the community.

Protecting special places is always a team effort. We are grateful to Steve and Marianne Schlecht and the citizens of the Town of Westport for their support. A special thanks to Senator Dianne Hesselbein and Representative Alex Joers for championing this grant. Thank you to Governor Tony Evers for making the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program a priority.



Ben Jones

## What is a Conservation Easement?

**Tony Abate, Conservation Director**

You might be familiar with easements outside of conservation. For example, a neighbor might grant you the right to use their driveway. This is a driveway access easement. You might grant a utility company the right to run a power line across your property. This is a utility easement. In both cases, rights are being exchanged. Sometimes those rights are exchanged for money.

For land trusts like Groundswell, a conservation

easement grants rights to protect certain conservation values. These conservation values can include important wildlife habitat, wetland and stream protection, or protection of prime farm soils. Groundswell purchases these rights through voluntary legal agreements with landowners to permanently limit uses of the land to protect conservation values. Landowners retain many of their rights, including the right to own and use the land, sell it, and pass it on to their heirs. Groundswell's conservation easement lands generally remain in private ownership.



## Restoring the Landscape at Westport Prairie

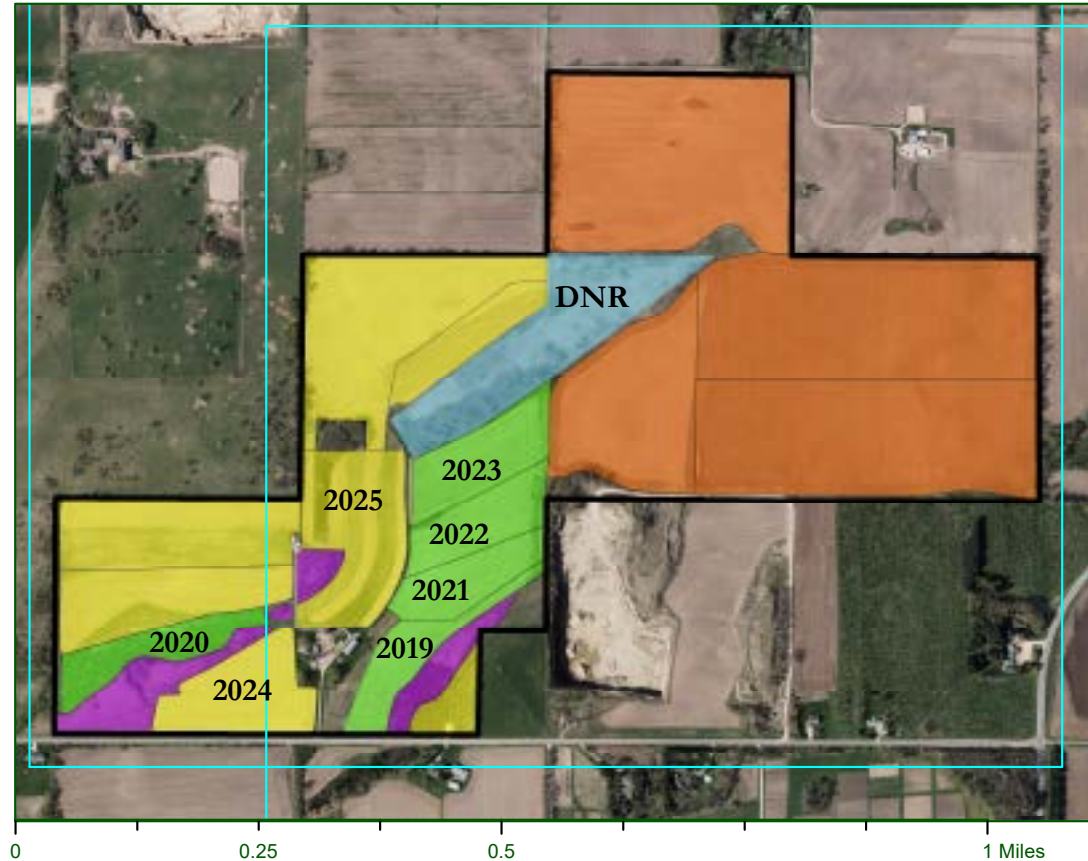
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When Groundswell first purchased the land at Westport Prairie surrounding the State Natural Area, most of the land was farmed. Our goal is to turn all the surrounding farmland (over 200 acres) into native prairie, and we're well on our way! Every year, we take more than 5 acres of farmland out of use and plant native flowers and grasses in its place. These prairies provide habitat, reduce runoff and erosion,

moderate flooding, and help mitigate the effects of climate change.

With each prairie we plant, our seed source grows which means the size of our plantings will also grow. In 2023, we planted 6.5 acres. This year, we will plant 7.5 acres, and 9.5 acres the year after that. Piece by piece, our goal is to bring back a lost landscape by creating habitat that will live on the landscape forever.

### Westport Prairie Planting Plan



-  Westport Prairie Boundary (Groundswell)
-  Empire Prairies State Natural Area (DNR)
-  Remnant Prairie (Groundswell)
-  Year 1-5 (~5 acres/planting)
-  Year 6-10 (~10 acres/planting)
-  Year 11-15 (~20 acres/planting)



A map showing Groundswell's prairie plantings by year.



## Wetland Restoration at Pasley's Swan Creek Farm

BJ Byers

*Restored wetland area this spring.*

**BJ Byers, Land Management Director**

Since 2020, Groundswell has been working with partners to improve the health of Swan Creek and the Waubesa Wetlands. We recently created a series of berms and basins located on the north end of Pasley's Swan Creek Farm in Fitchburg. These berms will capture surface runoff and slowly fill the basins with water when it rains. Over time, the water in these pools will filter through the soil, which will help absorb nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants before reaching the creek and wetlands to the south.

The earthwork began last September, with contractors creating three berms and basins. Then Groundswell staff seeded them with cover crop and diverse plant species. Now that spring is here, we're excited to see the plants bloom while the pools fill with water and protect the wetlands to the south.

A special thanks to everyone who helped make this project happen, including Joy Zedler, Scott Taylor, Bill Dunlop, Jim Welsh, Mike Engel (US Fish & Wildlife Service), and Ducks Unlimited for securing North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant funding.

## Navigator Grant Kick-Off

**Brandon Mann, Easement Stewardship Manager**

In January, I attended the kick-off meeting of the Land Transfer Navigator Program in Savannah, GA hosted by American Farmland Trust. It was a jam-packed three days, with group discussions led by seasoned practitioners and powerful stories from landowners. I also learned what goes into a successful succession plan from experienced professionals.

We left the conference tasked with developing a four-year action plan. A key goal, which is also one of Groundswell's goals, is to increase land access opportunities for next-generation or historically marginalized farmers.

Navigator training will support our work to connect



Megan Faller, American Farmland Trust

existing farmers with a more diverse generation of farmers. Groundswell is one of only 36 organizations chosen to participate nationwide. You can learn more about this grant program on American Farmland Trust's website, [farmland.org](https://farmland.org).





Roberta Herschleb

Nancy McGill accepting Gathering Waters' Land Trust Volunteer of the Year award from Executive Director Mike Carlson.

## Volunteer Spotlight: Nancy McGill

Nancy McGill is a special part of the Groundswell team. She has been a regular office volunteer with our organization for more than 10 years. In 2023, she surpassed 2,000 hours of volunteer time. That's equivalent to nearly one year of full-time work!

One of Nancy's first projects was leading our application for the Land Trust Alliance's accreditation program. In years since, she's headed up the reaccreditation process using her strategic project management and organizational skills. Nancy was also a key asset during Groundswell's transition between executive directors in 2022. She assisted our part-time Land Protection Specialist Mike Foy in protecting six properties totaling 409 acres. This included our highest value property ever, at a price of \$6M.

Last August, Gathering Waters recognized Nancy's extraordinary volunteer efforts by awarding her the 2023 Land Trust Volunteer of the Year award. We are so grateful to have Nancy on our team and for her commitment to local conservation.



Ann Vaj

## HMoob Farmer Workshops

Yimmuaj Yang, Community Director, introducing herself during the workshop in Madison.

In partnership with Fondy Food Center, Fairshare CSA, UW-Extension, and the Department of Agriculture, Trade, & Consumer Protection, Groundswell recently hosted two workshops for HMoob farmers. UW-Extension presented information about farmland access and recordkeeping. Attendees received a recordkeeping kit and enjoyed a culturally appropriate lunch.

We will host six workshops throughout the year in Eau Claire, Madison, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Wausau/Stevens Point area, and Manitowoc. These workshops aim to provide HMoob farmers with information and resources to help them grow their skills and improve their farming operations.



Roberta Herschleb

## Thank you, Liz Pelton!

We would like to express a heartfelt thank you to Liz Pelton, our Development Coordinator, for her hard work and passion these past several years. Liz's tenure has been marked by growth in financial support from individuals and wonderful field trips, like the Insect Safari for Kids. We wish her the best of luck in her new job with Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance (formerly Madison Audubon)!

## Linden Cohousing Farmers Market Ends

Since 2020, Groundswell and Linden Cohousing have partnered together to provide a unique farmers market for HMoob growers to sell their produce. The market was created to help disadvantaged growers withstand the abrupt closures of farmers markets during the pandemic. With markets in full swing again, the Linden Cohousing Market will no longer continue. Thank you to all who supported the growers over the past four years!

Are you looking for an easy way to support conservation where you live in 2024? It's fast and simple to set up automatic monthly gifts to Groundswell. Your gifts will provide reliable, ongoing support to help protect special places for everyone in our community. Monthly giving is convenient, secure, and eco-friendly. Sign up today at [groundswell.org/donate](https://groundswell.org/donate) and select the monthly donation type or call 608-258-9797.



Yolibeth Rangel

*"In a short period of time, our land has been destroyed by exploitation and extraction of what our Mother Earth lovingly gives us. As an individual, I can only do so much to protect her, but when we come together, we can be stronger and achieve more. This is why I contribute to Groundswell Conservancy's efforts to protect land from being developed and further destroyed. I have seen closely, right in my own town, the work they do, and I'm grateful for it."*

-Yolibeth Rangel, Monthly Sustainer

## 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 learn more about your options, contact Heidi Habeger at [heidi@groundswellconservancy.org](mailto:heidi@groundswellconservancy.org), call (608) 258-9797, or go to [groundswellconservancy.org/legacy](https://groundswellconservancy.org/legacy).



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## MISSION

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.



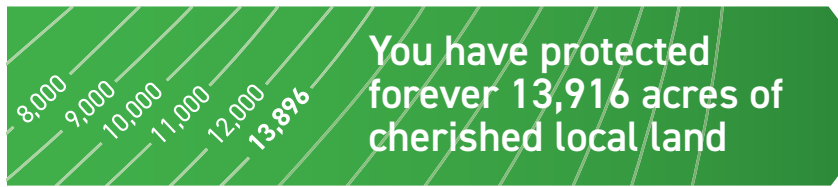


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Groundswell Conservancy strives to use equitable language in our written communications. If you have feedback on how we can improve, please contact Ben at [ben@groundswellconservancy.org](mailto:ben@groundswellconservancy.org).

## Places Worth Knowing

Join us out on the land this summer and explore the special places you help protect. Reserve your spot today at [groundswellconservancy.org/events](http://groundswellconservancy.org/events).



Tony Abate



Jason Sromovsky



Ben Jones

### Four Oaks Farm Tour

Sunday, June 9, 2024

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Join us for a tour of the Four Oaks Farm. You will hear the story about the work that Kris and Penny Kubly have done to restore, manage, and protect this special place.

Thank you to our sponsors:



### Electrofishing Black Earth Creek

Date: TBD

Join WI DNR for an electrofishing demonstration. You will learn about electrofishing as a conservation tool and about the fish that inhabit Black Earth Creek.

Thank you to our sponsors:



### Cave of the Mounds Tour for Families

Sunday, August 18, 2024

2:00 pm - 4:30 pm

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

Thank you to our sponsors:

