



1997

Mississippi Valley
CONSERVANCY

2007

**Ten Years of Protecting the Natural
Resources of the Bluffland Region**



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President's Message

Being president of Mississippi Valley Conservancy the past four years has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. As a young man, I was like most entrepreneurs who devoted most waking hours to growing their own business. The fine people at MVC opened my eyes to donating business skills to a new cause. We invite you to bring your unique life experiences and join us in our conservation efforts.

Several years ago MVC bought a piece of property above the City of La Crosse from the Hass family. We held a press conference at the property to announce our newest purchase. As the media and guests were assembling I wandered off alone to survey the property. It gave new meaning to the old phrase, "Stop and smell the roses."

I have been atop Grandad Bluff hundreds of times, where we have made other major purchases, but the view from the Hass tract was like nothing I'd experienced in my 35-plus years in La Crosse. Knowing that future generations would be able to walk, run, hunt, snowshoe, ski, mountain bike or just stand as I did and take in the serenity and natural beauty of the area assured me our cause is among the most noble.

We hope you enjoy our tenth anniversary issue. And if you'd like to stand atop our world as I did, directions to the Hass tract can be found at the MVC website:

www.MississippiValleyConservancy.org/rec.html

Yours in conservation,
Ralph Heath



Empowering People of the Coulee Region to Leave a Land Legacy

by Tim Jacobson, MVC Executive Director

In the relatively short span of the four decades I have lived, I have experienced the loss of beautiful woodland and hunting ground near the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers that had been owned by my parents and with which I possessed a deep and personal connection.

The land, once covered with shadowy forests where ginseng berries ripened to a deep crimson each summer, where wild turkeys fledged their poults, where deer roamed and squirrels taunted visitors with their chatter, has been sold and irrevocably altered.

As a boy, I spent countless hours in “my” woods. Our family dog, a black lab/German shepherd mix, always accompanied me, unless I was deer hunting and had to put

her in the garage. In the fall, I often carried my .22/20-gauge over/under to pursue squirrels or an occasional ruffed grouse. Other times, I took only a pair of binoculars to search for birds or my trusty SLR camera to snap pictures of delicate wildflowers.

I particularly enjoyed strolling into the woods in the inky darkness of night with a canine companion but no flashlight. I would walk to the small clearing at the top of the hill where the trees parted for me to hunt for faint satellites sneaking past the relatively static backdrop of stars.

Now, I feel a penetrating sense of loss when I think about my rooting to that parcel of land being torn out.

If Mississippi Valley Conservancy had been around many years ago, my story about our land might have ended differently. The options and opportunities MVC makes available to landowners now, such as the potential for tax breaks resulting from conservation easement donations to MVC, were not available or known to my parents when they decided to sell.

Residents of southwestern Wisconsin, along with visitors, are greatly blessed by gorgeous views, accessible outdoor recreation and hunting and fishing opportunities here.

The natural beauty of the

landscape not only provides a high quality of life, but it also fuels our local economy with tourism dollars, helps attract new businesses, and assists existing businesses in retaining quality employees who might venture elsewhere but for the natural assets of “God’s Country.”

“Our rocky blufftops are jewels on the crown of nature encircling us, and the Mississippi River is the artery and lifeblood of our existence here.”

One can’t help but appreciate how special this area is with every look through a window or windshield, every stroll down a sidewalk, every hike through the woods, and every excursion in a boat. Our rocky blufftops are jewels on the crown of nature encircling us, and the Mississippi River is the artery and lifeblood of our existence here.

Anyone who has lived in the Coulee Region over the past 25 years has witnessed dramatic changes in land use and population. For example, the population of the City of Onalaska has grown by 72 percent during that time.



A father introducing his children to a lifelong relationship with the great outdoors.

Some changes are beneficial, but others are detrimental. We all like to see the tax base increased, along with opportunities for business growth and increased employment. But this should not come at any and all cost, according to recent citizen surveys that indicate a desire to protect and preserve our bluffs and other important features of the landscape.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy provides solutions and opportunities to conserve the precious parts of the landscape for all future generations. Each and every person who lives in or enjoys visiting the region has a deep stake in the level of success MVC achieves. No individual here can escape the consequences if we fail to protect the natural assets of the Coulee Region, the assets that ensure continued opportunities for growth of our economy and a rich heritage of outdoor recreation.

We are fortunate today that a group of local citizens began meeting in 1996 to organize MVC, which was incorporated on December 31st of that year. Since then, with the help of the Blufflands Alliance, the McKnight Foundation, the Stry Foundation, the State of Wisconsin Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, the City of La Crosse for the Bluffland Protection Program, and generous donors in our seven-county area, the organization has protected nearly 7,000 acres of land with purchases and conservation easements along with an additional 1,400 acres in MVC's Landowner Registry Program.

MVC works cooperatively with landowners to assist them in conserving scenic and biologically



Kathi Woods

Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area - Because of MVC's member support, this serene meadow will be enjoyed in its natural beauty by our children, grandchildren and the countless generations that will follow.

significant woodlands, bluffs, wetlands, and prairies for future generations. Utilizing legal tools such as conservation agreements, MVC can assure landowners that their wishes for their property will be carried out in perpetuity, creating lasting legacies that benefit the whole region.

Not only is every resident and visitor to southwestern Wisconsin affected by the work of MVC but, also, everyone has the opportunity to participate in MVC's accomplishments through contributions of money or land or by donating their time and talent. We all can claim a stake in the gift of a beautiful region that we leave for people 25 years from now and also hundreds, if not thousands, of years into the future.

Unlike Europe where lasting and prominent examples of civilization have remained for many hundreds of years, it is sometimes difficult for Americans to appreciate the legacy we leave for the future. But like the beautiful and sacred Sistine Chapel

that has stood in Rome for more than five centuries, conserving our scenic bluffs and native prairies for those who follow will be a sacred and lasting testament to the wisdom and caring attitude of the people of today.

MVC's ability to protect land with monetary contributions from donors is leveraged at about a four-to-one ratio through grants MVC receives from several sources. This means that donors can feel comfortable that each dollar of their contributions is stretched far and gets much conservation work done.

The scenic beauty and unique habitats of the unglaciated Coulee Region are too precious to take for granted. With Mississippi Valley Conservancy working here, landowners and other members of the public have options and opportunities to conserve land and maintain its character for generations to come, while also reaping many benefits today.



History of Mississippi Valley Conservancy

by Dave Skoloda, MVC Founding Board Member

“These things take time.” That’s what those of us who started the Mississippi Valley Conservancy a decade ago often said as we learned the patience required to build an enduring institution for land preservation where none had existed before.

Land protection is a slow, careful process and so were the steps to starting the organization.

Some of the founders had gathered on our deck on a sunny June day in 1995. Rose-breasted grosbeaks serenaded us as we brainstormed how to preserve some of the ecological and scenic features of the region we believed were important. After the meeting, we invited The Nature Conservancy to look at a bluffland property as a possible project. The TNC official who came from Madison said after walking the property that it was certainly worth preserving, but it wasn’t in a TNC priority area. She suggested we start our own land trust.

So, eventually, we did.

Another year went by before the following group met at the La Crosse South Side Library: Craig and Mary Thompson, Maureen Kinney, Charles Lee, Peg Zappen, Barbara Frank, Pat Wilson, Fred Leshner, Ann Korschgen, Gretchen Benjamin and Dave and Gretchen Skoloda. This group continued meeting and, with the addition of Beth Moore, became the first board of directors in 1997 of a new non-profit land trust. Attorney Maureen



Sister Anita Beskar, Craig Thompson, Peg Zappen, Mary Thompson and Gretchen Benjamin talk at the introduction of Mississippi Valley Conservancy at the Grandad Bluff shelter – October 1997.

Kinney, working pro bono as she has for the organization since it started, filed the papers. The first officers were: Dave Skoloda, president; Craig Thompson, vice president; Maureen Kinney, secretary, and Pat Wilson, treasurer. Philip Gelatt joined the board before the organization went public with an event on Grandad Bluff Oct. 13, 1997. He brought both substantial financial backing and vision to the young organization. As the board huddled in the Grandad Bluff shelter after the public announcement on a windy, cold day, Gelatt asked us to identify a project that could make a significant immediate impact beyond the ability of the young organization to tackle. Craig told him of a 340-acre farm near Holmen in the Conservation Reserve Program that was a rare breeding area for grassland birds. It would likely be developed for housing in the near future. Not long after that Gelatt

said that he would acquire and preserve the farm by swapping land that he owned next to the freeway in Onalaska. It took time, but several years later, he did just

that. Gelatt has been restoring the New Amsterdam Grasslands to prairie, and MVC purchased it in 2007 using money from the State Stewardship Fund and a donation of a substantial part of the value by Philip Gelatt.



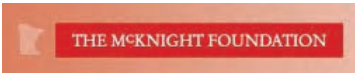
MVC's first banner hangs on the shelter at Grandad Bluff. Because there was no permanent office, the founders of MVC chose Grandad Bluff as a place to introduce MVC to the public.

Early on, we established ties with the Blufflands Alliance and received startup grants from the McKnight Foundation and Stry Foundation – the first of many key grants from Stry.



The Blufflands Alliance required a three-year work plan that helped us to focus our early efforts.

The Alliance, and the McKnight Foundation that provides its funding, continue to be a key part of our success.



We also had early support and advice from Gathering Waters, the state support group for land trusts. Our paid membership had reached 200 by April 1998. In October 1998 we hired our first executive director, Cynthia Olmstead, and established an office in La Crosse.

Our first project, The La Crosse River Conservancy, was announced in 1999 – a cooperative effort with Gundersen Lutheran, Western Technical College, the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and several private landowners to preserve the wetlands along the La Crosse River behind the Valley View Mall area. Our first land purchase came later in 1999 when we signed an option to purchase 77



The La Crosse River Conservancy is an area of the La Crosse River floodplain that contains wetlands that are important to waterfowl and migratory birds and amphibian populations.

acres of Sugar Creek Bluff near Ferryville. After that purchase was completed, extensive volunteer and staff labor restored the goat prairie on the bluff, a model for that would be accomplished on other sites acquired since then.



Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area - restored "goat prairie" shown with a light dusting of snow. Your support of MVC helps fund both the acquisition and restoration of this magnificent bluff.

Abbie Meyer


I've drawn much of this brief history from a log that Gretchen kept in her role as chair of the development committee. She also reminded me of a gathering in a parking lot in Holmen when Ron Benjamin, Gretchen Benjamin's husband, made a persuasive argument in favor of a membership organization – one that could draw financial and volunteer support from its membership. His advice prevailed in subsequent meetings on the subject.

So that summarizes the early years of the conservancy. Our timeline (beginning on page 10) will demonstrate the progress we've made together. You will see in the list of current board and volunteers that most of the early members are still active in MVC – loyal to each other, the organization and, most importantly, loyal to the land.

It's that sense of loyalty to our fantastic landscape that allows us to maintain a high membership retention rate even as we approach 1,000 members. We've protected more than 7,000 acres, but there is much more to be accomplished.

And, with dedicated members, an experienced and effective staff and a strong board, we will. In a partnership with the City of La Crosse, MVC is well on its way to protecting most of the bluffs above the city. Is it too much to hope that we will have similar success in the broad reach of our bluffs from Buffalo to Grant counties? Will we have 20,000 acres or more protected before another decade is gone?

Oh, and what about the property that we discussed with the Nature Conservancy so long ago? The 240-acre bluff land with woods and goat prairies changed hands since then and is now owned by George Kerckhove, a member of the MVC board. He's planning to place a conservation easement on it.

These things *do* take time. 

A Grand Tradition of Land Protection & Conservation

by Ed Hill, MVC Board Member

Mississippi Valley Conservancy has accomplished much in its seven-county region of responsibility, during the first ten years of its existence. Much remains to be done, of course. Increasingly, landowners appreciate the importance of protecting special places and creatures.

foundations of this movement in Wisconsin and elsewhere. Charles Van Hise, who was a geologist and president of the University of Wisconsin, wrote *The Conservation of Natural Resources in the United States* (1910), was pivotal in his era. Leopold became the first professor of game management in the United States at this university.



Photo courtesy of Aldo Leopold Foundation

Wisconsin's own Aldo Leopold sitting on a ridge top during a hunting trip.

This sensitivity to such places is not new, however, and we acknowledge the many individuals and organizations that have made a difference in Wisconsin's conservation ethic.

There are too many to cite here, but of particular importance are such people as John Muir, who came to Wisconsin from Scotland in 1849 at the age of eleven. He later went on to California, and worked to set aside a farm. There was also Aldo Leopold, whose Sand County Almanac first appeared in 1949. These men were giants in the conservation movement. Leopold's book remains essential for understanding the

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, which has made a critical difference in the protection of special lands for the Mississippi Valley Conservancy and elsewhere in Wisconsin.

Closer to home, we see the results of forward-thinking land protection in Hixon Forest, Myrick Park and Marsh, the nation's first watershed protection district near Coon


Political figures Gaylord Nelson and Warren Knowles were attentive to the urgency of land conservation. Nelson originated "Earth Day," which is still widely celebrated.

These two men helped create the



The Coulee Region has a long history of conservation. This sign denotes the country's first Soil and Water Conservation District in Coon Valley just southeast of La Crosse on Highway 14/61.

Valley (there is a historical marker just west of that town), county and city parks, various area trails, and bluffland protection by the City of La Crosse.

The need to protect precious natural resources increases as population and development pressures increase. This task of protecting special places and regions is really a legacy for those who follow. It is a task MVC takes seriously. 



The star of the Coulee Regions's history of conservation was recorded back in 1909 in this La Crosse Leader-Press article about J.W. Losey's dream to protect La Crosse's bluffs.

A Landowner's Reflection

Lynne and Keith Valiquette completed a conservation easement in 2007 on their coulee and bluff property north of Holmen. We asked Lynne, a poet, to give us a sense of their decision in her poetic way. Here is her response.

Ansel Amundson, the old Norwegian widower who lived across Sour Creek, taught us how to live in this coulee, in so many ways. He connected us to its seasons, its boundaries, its history. This land is to us, a “link between earth and air.” Once it was indeed frail, as we watched development swallow surrounding bluffs, woods, fields, and farmland. Now, with the help of the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, we know this will always be a good place for the ever renewing natural “paths of spawn and spore” that sustain us all. It is our legacy.

Legacy by Lynne Valiquette

*Before Ansel died,
he told us where to find morels,
frail links between earth and air.
Under the gooseberry bush, he said,
near the dead elm.
He gave us his pitchfork, a calico cat,
and told us about the morels.
an old man's secret.
Under the gooseberry bush, he said,
near the dead elm.
But something shifted that warm spring,
and they were gone.
Still, each wet May,
we search for the paths of spawn and spore,
those sponge thumbs pressing up
through humus.
Our first stop is Ansel's elm.*

Ten Pivotal Land Projects in Ten Years

1. Kube Conservation Easements



This 756-acre conservation agreement (the largest protection project in MVC history) was completed in August of 2007. It also was our first project in Buffalo County. MVC preserved land adjacent to the Whitman Bottoms where Kenny Salwey's "Last River Rat" shack existed. These properties are quite scenic and offer large tracts of high-quality wildlife habitat. Waumandee Creek meanders across both tracts, and is an important component of the watershed.



Cardinal Flower



Waumandee Creek

When Mr. and Mrs. Kube signed the conservation agreement with MVC, Carol Kube said, "It's a relief to know and a comfort that the land is going to be preserved and others can enjoy what we are, because it's so important."

2. La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program

A unique city-land trust partnership in Wisconsin, which has provided \$1.47 million in city capital improvement funds matched by \$922,000 in state grant dollars (more on the way) to protect land worth \$3.75 million in the first 5 years of the program. The Medary Quarry acquisition, MVC's largest *owned* property, was completed in December 2005 with the help of a quarter-million-dollar state grant. MVC has protected almost 900 acres in this project area, effectively doubling the size of Hixon Forest.



Granddad Bluff



Medary Quarry

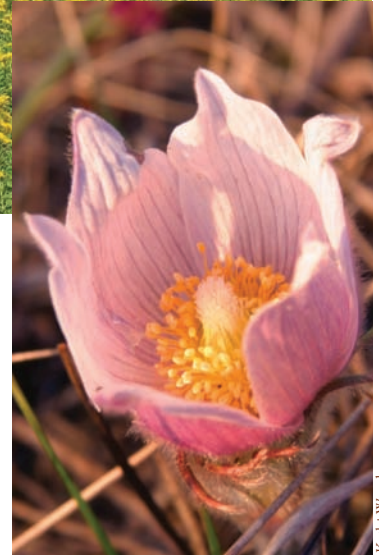
3. Holland Sand Prairie

Holland Sand Prairie is the first land purchase by MVC with a million-dollar price tag. Through the combined resources of MVC, the Town of Holland, the Stry Foundation and the State Stewardship Fund Program, we saved the last sand-prairie remnant of the once vast Prairie La Crosse, with incredible diversity of plant life. Remarkably, Town of Holland citizens voted unanimously to tax themselves and contribute nearly \$300,000 to the purchase. This is the first project in the state where a small town did this in support of a land conservation project.

The prairie sits atop the expansive Mississippi River Terrace created over 20,000 years ago during the last ice-age and contains native land forms, such as wind-formed dunes, that remain similar to their formation prior to European settlement.



Birdfoot Violet



Pasque Flower

Kathi Woods

4. New Amsterdam Grasslands



The Conservancy utilized the largest Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund grant for western Wisconsin at nearly \$1 million to save the last large grassland area in La Crosse County. This is an important grassland bird preserve with two threatened species and more than 90 species of native birds, 10 of which are state-listed species of special concern.



Monarch Caterpillar



Henslow's Sparrow

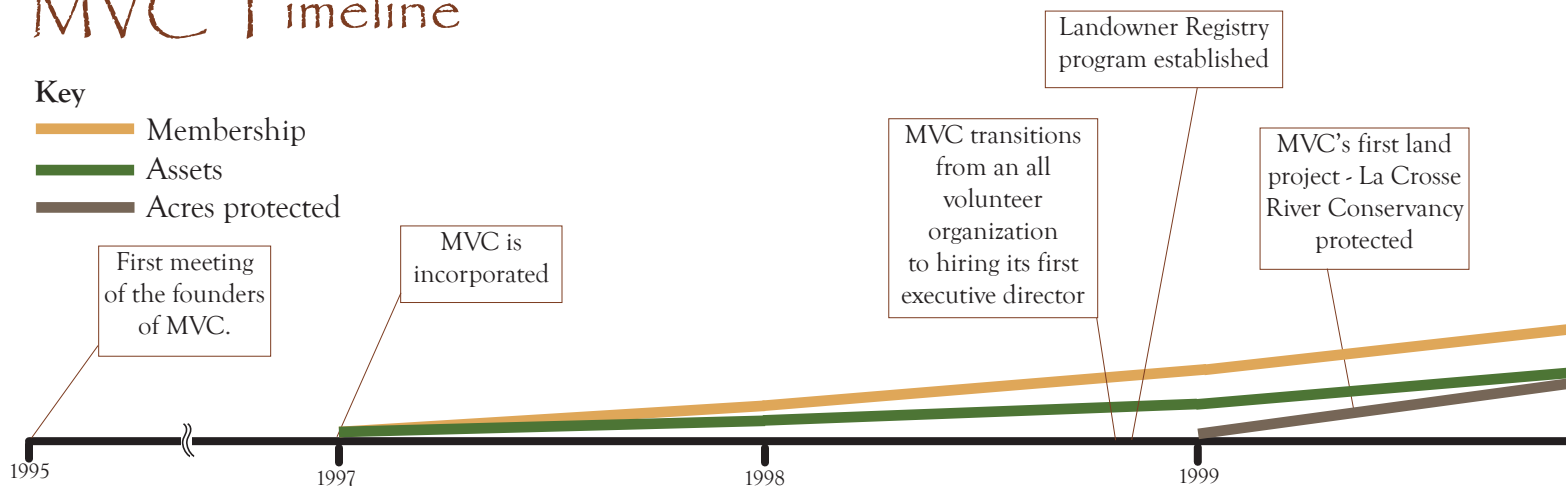
5. La Crosse River Conservancy Project

The La Crosse River Conservancy Project is a large cooperative effort of local units of government and private landowners, along with MVC, to create a 373-acre wetland complex preserved for waterfowl and other wildlife habitat with hiking trails for the public. The partners making this happen include City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, Gundersen Lutheran, Donald and LaVonne Zietlow, Western Technical College, Coulee Region Humane Society, and Arlen Lee, all of whom donated land or conservation easements to the LRC project. (July 1999 - December 2005)



Robert J. Hurt

MVC Timeline



6. Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area

MVC's first major land purchase and creation of a State Natural Area (113 acres). This site includes a scenic bluff and trout stream south of Ferryville. MVC has spent years restoring the ecologically significant large "bluff prairie," one of the rarest habitat types. The preserve is open to hunting, fishing, hiking and other nature enjoyment. The prairie is host to a range of colorful plant species including bird's-foot violet, hoary puccoon, slender ladies' tresses and blazing star. A 40-acre acquisition in 2007 expanded the preserve to 153 acres.



Kathi Woods

7. Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area



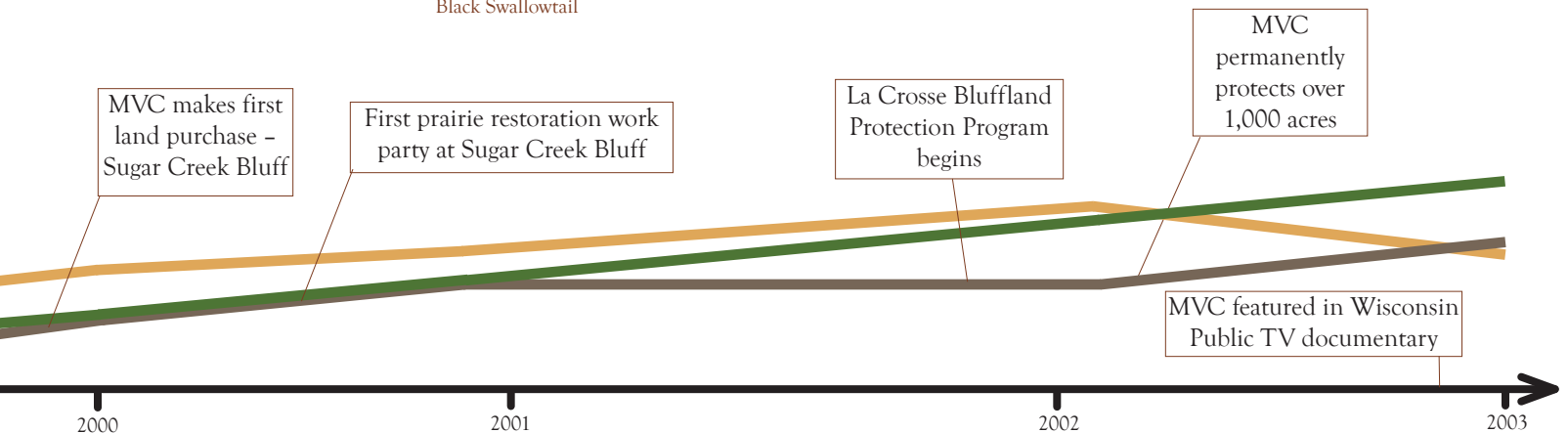
This 153-acre site was the first MVC land project in our Kickapoo River Valley Priority Area. It's also the first land MVC protected having a federally endangered species (Northern Monkshood). The property is very scenic with rock cliffs along the Kickapoo River, ice caves, waterfalls, prairie, oak savanna, grasslands and wetlands. Both the Wisconsin DNR and the US Fish & Wildlife Service provided funding that MVC used to purchase this site.



Black Swallowtail



Northern Monkshood



8. Brady Conservation Easement

Jim and Jan Brady donated the conservation easement on their 425-acre farm at the end of 2006, which was the first project in MVC's Lower Black River Valley Priority Area. It was the largest conservation easement done by MVC at the time, and it's still MVC's largest in Trempealeau County. This diverse and scenic tract contains white pine relicts, springs and coldwater trout streams.

Over the years, the Bradys completed numerous soil and water conservation projects on their property, a registered historic farm with the State of Wisconsin.



9. MacGregor Conservation Easement



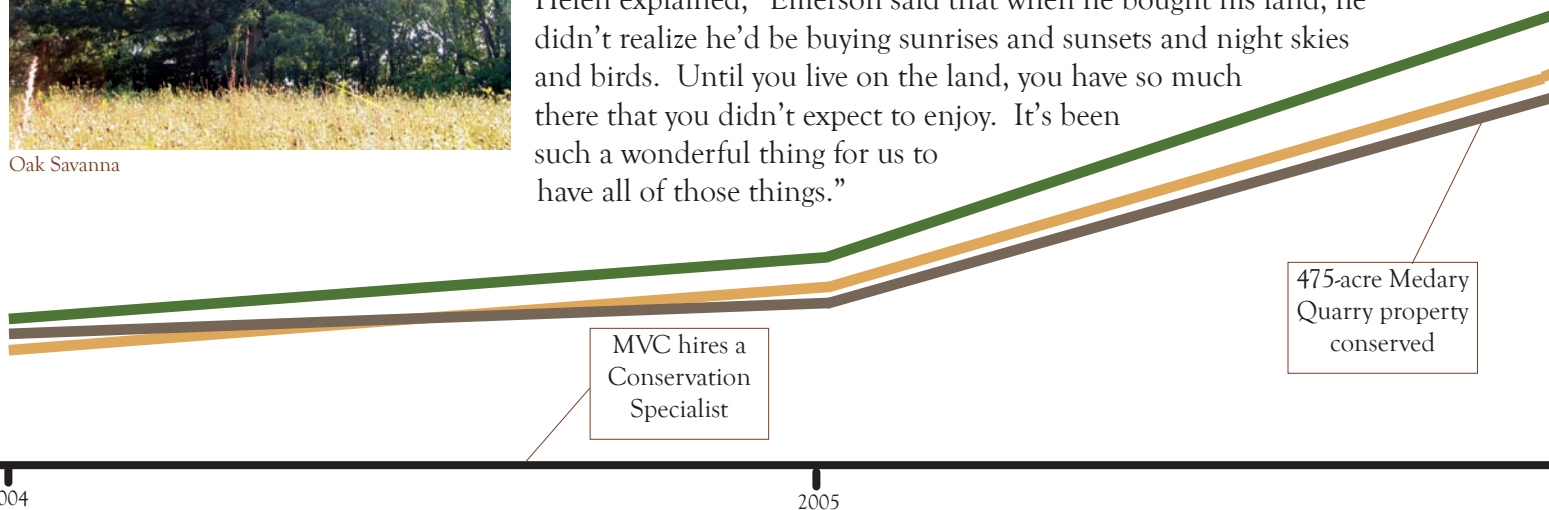
Oak Savanna

The 350-acre MacGregor property includes prairie, old-growth forest, and oak savanna natural communities and rare plants unlike any other privately-owned land in southwest Wisconsin.

The property contains plants that are quite rare, including species that had not been documented anywhere elsewhere in the entire state.

"There's great peace of mind to know that after all these years the land will be protected," Helen MacGregor said. "I made a promise to my trees and my land that they'd always be protected. We're keeping our promise."

Helen and David are pleased with owning a slice of rural Wisconsin. Helen explained, "Emerson said that when he bought his land, he didn't realize he'd be buying sunrises and sunsets and night skies and birds. Until you live on the land, you have so much there that you didn't expect to enjoy. It's been such a wonderful thing for us to have all of those things."

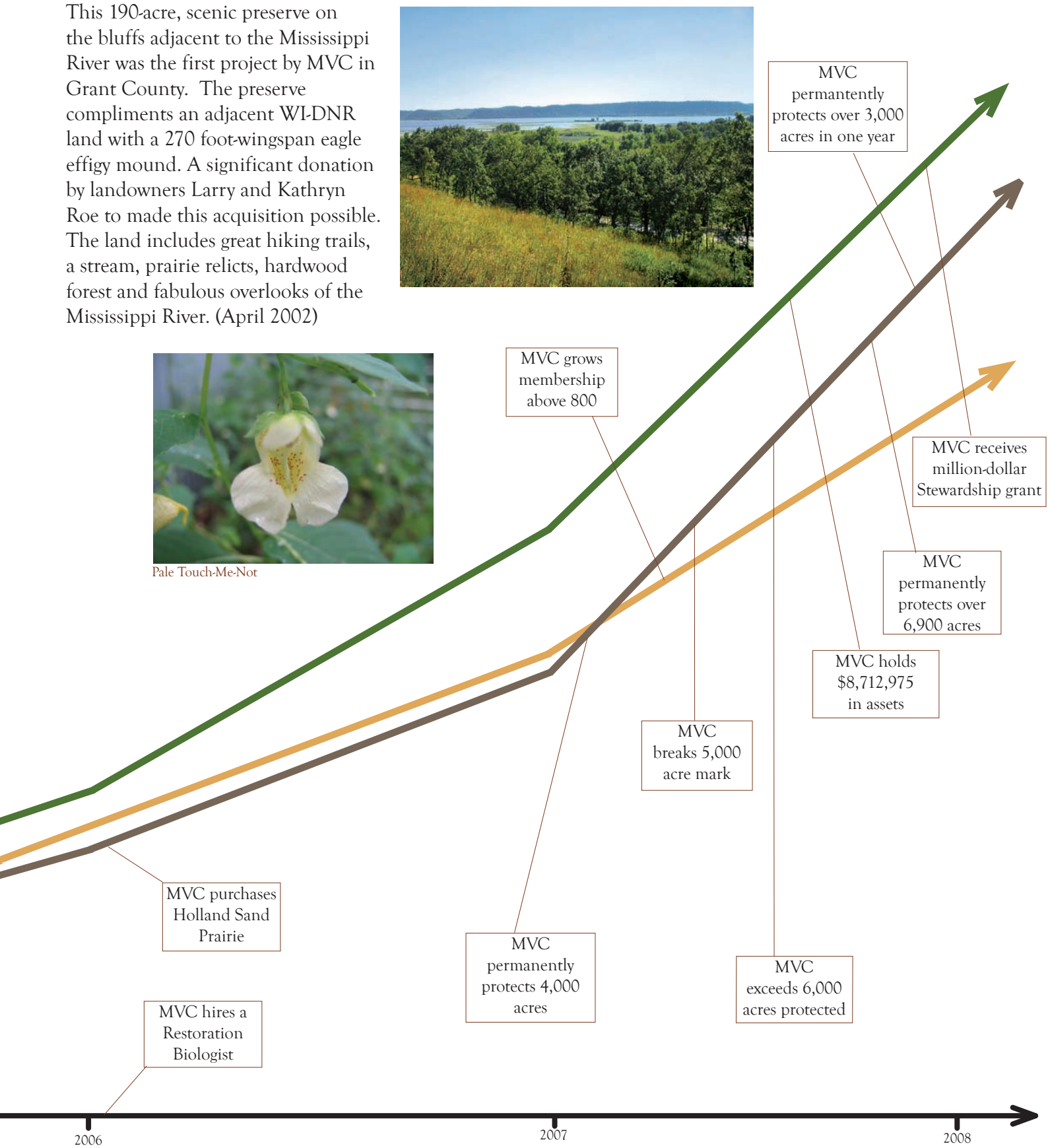


10. Cassville Bluffs State Natural Area

This 190-acre, scenic preserve on the bluffs adjacent to the Mississippi River was the first project by MVC in Grant County. The preserve compliments an adjacent WI-DNR land with a 270 foot-wingspan eagle effigy mound. A significant donation by landowners Larry and Kathryn Roe to made this acquisition possible. The land includes great hiking trails, a stream, prairie relicts, hardwood forest and fabulous overlooks of the Mississippi River. (April 2002)



Pale Touch-Me-Not



How Much Land Protection is Enough? or When Will We Know We Have Achieved Complete Success?

by Gretchen Benjamin and Dave Skoloda, Founding Board Members of MVC

We often ask ourselves, “When will MVC complete our vision for land conservation?” For an answer we turn to a mix of biological, social, aesthetic, economic, and spiritual considerations that add up to the unsatisfying answer of, “it depends.” In one sense, our job will never be “done” since we must monitor conservation easements “in perpetuity.” But the question remains as to how much land must we protect?

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is specifically committed to conserving the diverse landscapes and natural areas of the Coulee Region of western Wisconsin. This scenic region is under pressures unknown a generation ago. Our rural countryside is being fragmented into smaller parcels, and development in the hills and along the bluff tops is impacting scenic views and degrading sensitive habitats. To ensure the most effective use of our conservation efforts, MVC has identified priority areas that are especially valuable or threatened natural resources requiring additional protection efforts.

They are the valleys of the Bad Axe River, Black River, Coon Creek, Kickapoo River, La Crosse River, Mississippi River, Rush & Sugar Creeks, Trempealeau River, and Wisconsin River, along with the Snow Bottom State Natural Area. MVC will continue to work with landowners and partners to conserve the diversity and health of the natural world in this unique area for generations to come.



Abbie Meyer

White Camas (special concern), found on MVC's Juniper Partner property.

On a larger scale, various plans from the state of Wisconsin, The Nature Conservancy, and the federal government outline important land conservation priorities for the next 50 years. In the Wisconsin Land Legacy Report, for example, over 200 sites were identified by resource managers and the public as places that will be critical to meet

future conservation and recreation needs. Nineteen of these critical sites are located within MVC Priority Areas. Also, the State Wildlife Action Plan lists native wildlife species with low or declining populations that are most at risk and the habitats they are associated with, in order to keep them off Endangered or Threatened lists. With the completion of this plan, funds from the federal government and private foundations will be available to purchase land. Together, the conservation goals outlined in these documents include thousands of acres of opportunity for MVC, landowners and partner groups.

“MVC will continue to work with landowners and partners to conserve the diversity and health of the natural world in this unique area for generations to come.”

You may have noticed that many communities in our region that used to turn their back on the Mississippi River are now embracing the beauty of the river valley. The 1972 Clean Water Act helped communities clean up the river, which led to new recreational opportunities and a transformation of the waterfronts, which in turn led to downtown revitalization. Suddenly everyone wants to take advantage of the rediscovered and enhanced scenic beauty and natural resources.



Abbie Meyer

MVC is working on protecting the Coglean property which provides habitat for the “special concern” species Prairie Racerunner.

Tourists flock to the once sleepy towns along the river for relaxation, bird watching, fishing, hunting and the unique attributes of each river community. However, the ability to maintain the scenic quality and natural diversity of the area will be necessary if we are going to continue to attract this economic benefit to our area. MVC has and will partner with these communities to conserve the emerald bluffs, wetlands, grassland and forests so that residents can maintain a high quality of life and visitors will still be attracted to the area.



Jessica Bolwahn

Northern Monkshood (federally & state threatened), found on MVC's Tunnelville Cliffs preserve.

Spiritually, humans have been connected to this land for many millennia. MVC has preserved land with ancient burial mounds and effigies that speak to the profound connection people had with the land over one thousand years ago. Deep cave rock art and artifacts such as native clam shell remnants, bones, and pottery shards found in archeological sites along our river shores show the connection of the water and land to people of the past.

More recently, families pass land from one generation to the next. These generational lands often provide a wealth of childhood and family memories that landowners want to preserve. In other cases, newer landowners buy their piece of heaven and work for years to restore

natural vegetation communities like forests and prairies. They experience the resurgence of the land and the positive response of resident and migratory wildlife that use the land and want to ensure that it will remain in this renewed state. In truth, most landowners come to MVC seeking help to conserve their land in perpetuity because of these intense connections to the land, and this may be the most important reason why MVC is so successful. The mission to help these landowners maybe best captured by the philosophy of our first MVC President, Dave Skoloda, who says, "We will be done when all of the land conservation needs of landowners have been met."



Abbie Meyer

Pale False Foxglove (state threatened), found on MVC's Medary Quarry property.

In the end, there are many threats to the land and to the fragile natural communities that depend on those lands: development/construction and pollution, invasive species displacing native species, global climate change and a general lack of human connection to the natural world. Our involvement in resource protection must continue in order to maintain our natural heritage. MVC has conserved over 7,000 acres in just 10 years and



Abbie Meyer

Pickerel Frog (state special concern), found on MVC's Devil's Backbone property.

for that we must be proud. But our work, while doable, is just beginning.

In MVC's seven-county area there are nearly 3.4 million acres of land. At present 169,000 acres are conserved by county, state and federal units of government. Add MVC's 7,000 acres to the 169,000 and we are about halfway done, if our goal is to protect, say, for example, 10 percent of the landscape. While there are no exact numbers we can cite for what constitutes "enough," you can see that our organization and our partners still have lots of hard work to do.

Yes, as we said at the outset of this discussion, "it depends" – It depends on our evolving world and the needs and desires of future generations who will carry on this land protection effort after us. The beauty of voluntary land conservation, such as practiced by MVC, is that it retains great flexibility and adaptability to meet the needs of landowners and the community as a whole, it's a grassroots approach, and it builds win-win partnerships.



In the Blink of an Eye: Changes to a Timeless Landscape

by Tim Jacobson, MVC Executive Director

During the last Ice Age, several continental glaciers bulldozed their way down from the arctic across most of the Upper Midwest. While these thick sheets of Pleistocene ice encircled southwestern Wisconsin with landscape-changing force, our Coulee Region was somehow bypassed, leaving a refuge for wildlife and wildflowers.

The glaciers, after more than a million years of struggle against sun and earth, retreated a final time roughly 10,000 years ago. Before disappearing, the melting ice sheets doused the landscape with massive quantities of water that incised deeply through strata of dolomite, sandstone and shale, leaving the rugged bluffs and secluded coulees that we see and enjoy today.

Throughout this landscape, we have been left a cornucopia of natural

communities arranged like nowhere else on earth. Among these are algific talus slopes, which create a refrigerator-like micro-climate that supports rare cold-adapted plants, contrasted by dry bluff prairies that are home to native Prickly Pear Cactus, rattlesnakes and lizards, which conjure up thoughts of a hot desert.

These varied natural communities commingle to create an Eden-like setting that provides a prime eco-destination that continues to bring visitors, both people and animals, to our region each year.



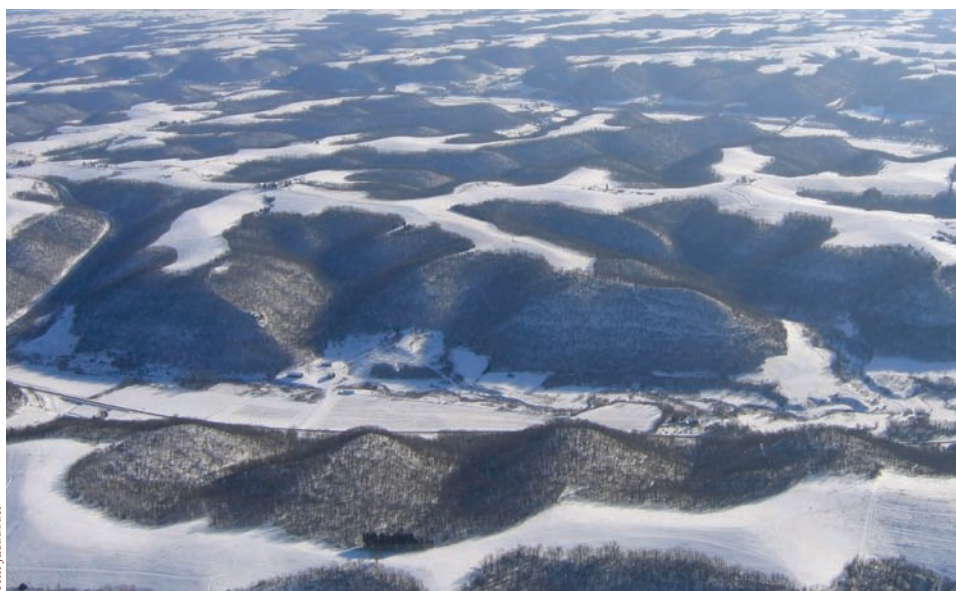
Abbie Meyer

Oak savanna, a globally imperilled natural community, is permanently protected on a number of MVC properties.

Millions of migratory birds stop here during their seasonal journeys along the Mississippi River Flyway, while many make this their summer home, like majestic bald eagles and swift peregrine falcons. Our native “garden” boasts some of the most beautiful and delicate flowers imaginable like Yellow Lady’s Slipper, Showy Orchis and the purple blossoms of Northern Monkshood, to name just a few.

Unfortunately, the unique natural communities, rare plant and animal species, and scenic beauty of this region that withstood the Ice Age face new threats that could quickly destroy what took millions of years to perfect.

The trifecta of poorly-planned development, ineffective or nonexistent land use regulations, and spreading invasive species jeopardizes our timeless treasure and threatens to irreparably



Tim Jacobson

Wintry view of the Coulee Region, which clearly depicts the dendritic topography typical of the Driftless Region.

harm the natural qualities of this area that a million years of surrounding glaciation could not do.

Fortunately there is hope.

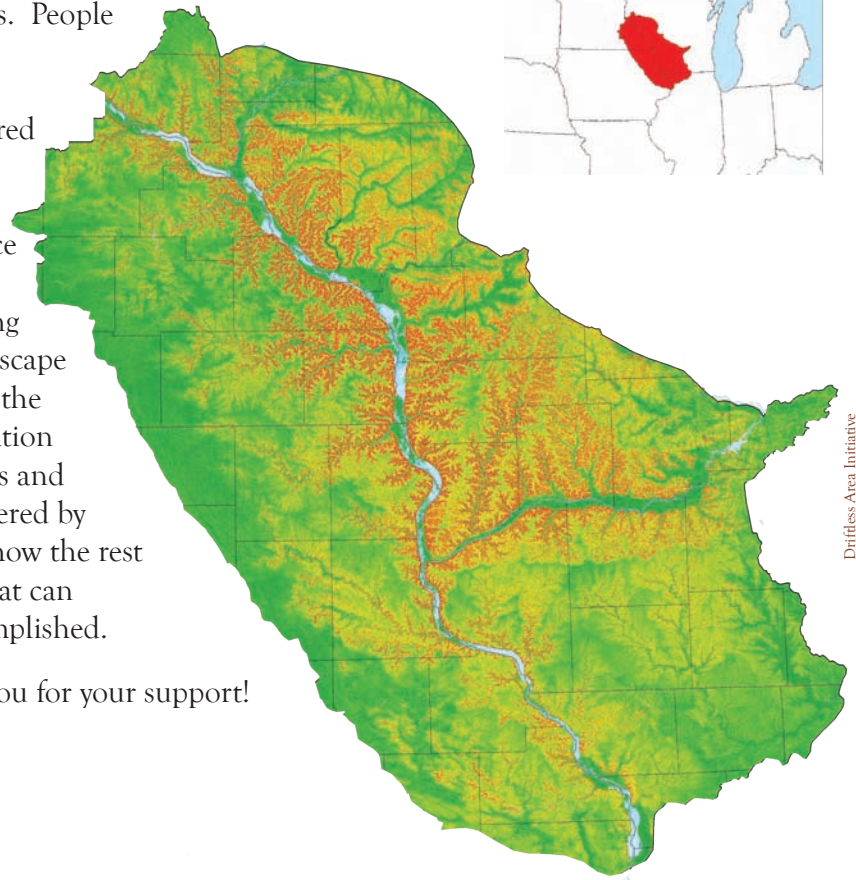
That hope is you!

In order to conserve the best of our natural resources and scenic beauty, we are addressing these modern threats to the landscape through the work of Mississippi Valley Conservancy. We do this with voluntary land conservation – working cooperatively with landowners who wish to see their precious gems of soaring bluffs, twisting coldwater trout streams, and colorful prairies conserved for the children of tomorrow to enjoy just as we do now.

And it's working!

Each year more and more people are doing their part to pass on these wonderful natural resources. People like you, who are empowered to make a real difference in protecting our landscape through the conservation programs and tools offered by MVC, show the rest of us what can be accomplished.

Thank you for your support!



Driftless Area Initiative

Defining “Endangered,” “Threatened” or “Special Concern” Species

A species that is rare and declining in population numbers is listed as federally endangered or threatened, or state endangered, threatened, or special concern. This includes plants, fish, mammals, insects, and mollusks. Declining species are identified through State Wildlife Action Plans, which have used scientific evidence to determine if a species should be protected. Once a species is listed, specific restrictions apply to protect it from further population deterioration. Lands with protected species on them may qualify for state or federal funding for restoration and management. The goal of listing certain species as

endangered, threatened or of special concern is to identify and enact specific actions to prevent extinction and provide for the continuation of the species. Federally endangered species are at risk of extinction nation-wide, whereas state-endangered species are at risk of extinction within a given state.

The term “**endangered species**” means any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

A “**threatened species**” includes any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all

or a significant portion of its range.

“**Special concern species**” are those species about which some problem of abundance or distribution is suspected but not yet proved. The main purpose of this category is to focus attention on certain species before they become threatened or endangered. This category only applies on the state level.

Lands protected by Mississippi Valley Conservancy include all categories of protected species: federally threatened and endangered species, and state endangered, threatened and special concern species.



Natural Communities

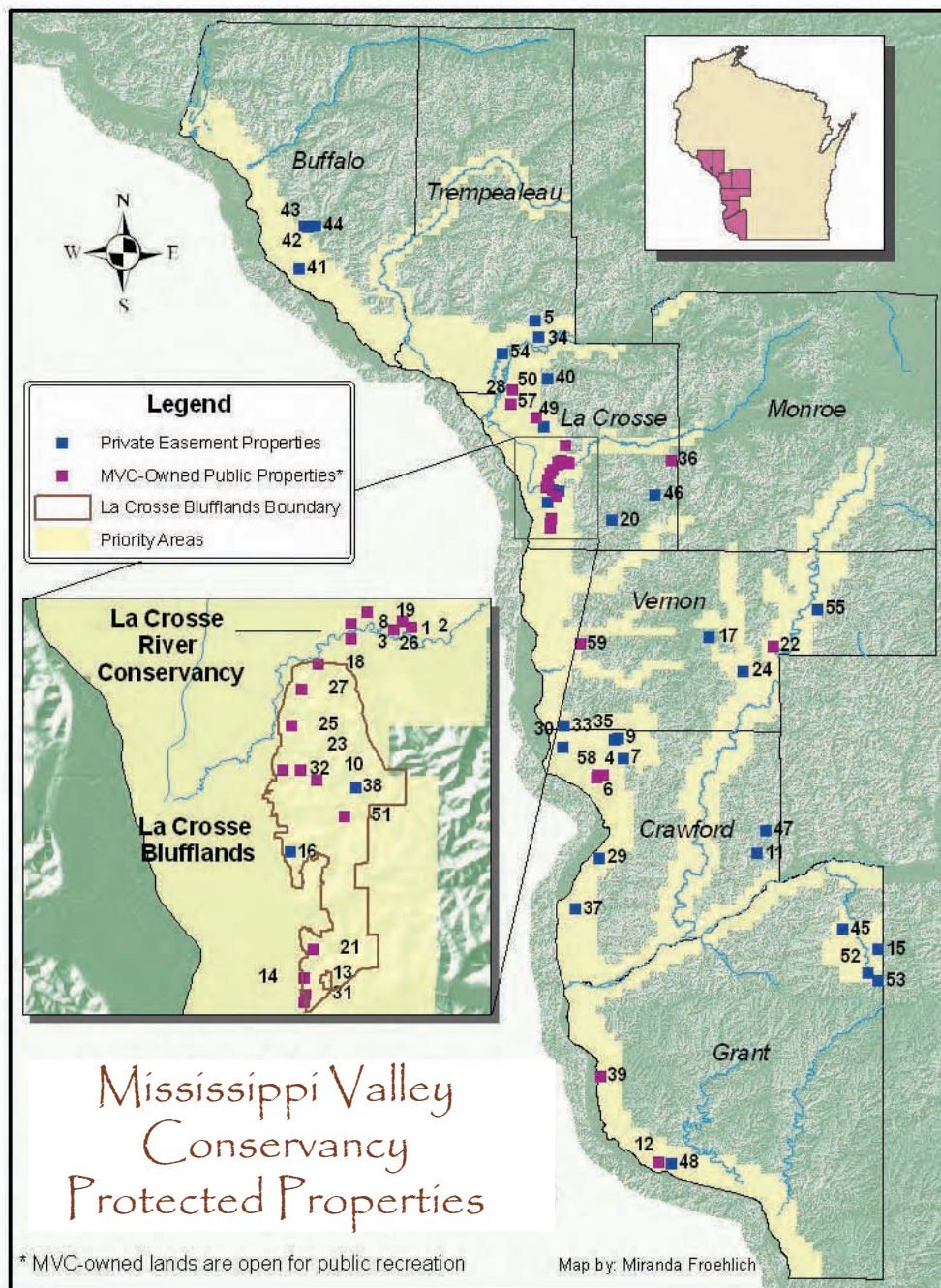
Prairies are communities comprised of native grasses and wildflowers. A prairie can be categorized by the soil moisture and species as a: dry, mesic (medium between wet and dry), dry-mesic, wet-mesic and wet Prairie. Sand Prairie is a dry prairie on sandy soils. Rare species that use native prairies include the Prairie Racerunner featured on page 14 and the Pale False Foxglove and White Camas featured on page 15.

Sedge Meadows are wetland communities dominated by sedges and rushes. Sedges are grass-like wetland plants. Sedge meadows also include many wildflowers. Rare species that use sedge meadows include the Pickerel Frog, shown on page 15.

Forests are communities comprised of trees, with an understory of shrubs, wildflowers and grasses. Forests can also be categorized based on their soil moisture and species as a: dry, dry-mesic, mesic and floodplain forest. Rare species that use forests include Wild Ginseng and the Cerulean Warbler.

The **Oak Savanna** natural community is intermediate between prairie and forest. It consists of large, sprawling oak trees, widely spaced, with prairie grasses and wildflowers beneath. Oak Savannas are often described as “park-like.” The habitat is considered “globally imperiled” and can be seen in the photo on page 16.

A **Pine Relict** natural community is another forest community, made up of isolated stands of pine on thin, rocky slopes. Pine relicts are often found around talus forest or algific talus slopes. Talus forest is a forest on a very rocky substrate, with many northern species. An algific talus slope is a rare community of steep slopes, rocky substrate, and stone fractures that blow cold air throughout the growing season.



Species in all of these communities often include pines with an understory of many species more typical of northern regions. Algific talus slopes provide habitat for the federally protected Wild Monkshood, featured on page 15.

Cliffs are vertical bedrock exposures that harbor a unique set of species. Cliffs may be dry or moist. Moist cliffs are associated with an underground seep. Cliffs provide habitat for the

endangered Peregrine Falcon.

Many MVC properties include spring-fed **Coldwater Streams**, or portions of **Rivers**, which provide valuable habitat for fish, mussels, invertebrates, and other species. As Mississippi Valley Conservancy protects a variety of natural communities, the threatened and endangered species that use the communities will also be protected. Support MVC and protect our regional biodiversity!



Mississippi Valley Conservancy Properties and their Natural Communities (see corresponding map on previous page)

1. Zietlow (La Crosse River Conservancy - LRC) ↓ 🐾
2. Western Technical College (LRC) ↓ 🐾
3. City of La Crosse (LRC) ↓ 🐾
4. Vaughn (Sugar Creek Bluff - SCB) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾
5. Hill 🐾 🐾
6. Harris (SCB) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾
7. Baker 🐾 🐾 🐾
8. Gundersen Lutheran (LRC) ↓ 🐾
9. Schmidt 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾
10. Fitzpatrick (La Crosse Bluffland - LBPP) 🐾
11. Brandt 🐾 🐾
12. Roe (Cassville Bluffs SNA) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
13. Welch (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲 🐾
14. Frank (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🐾
15. Ventura/Krome 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
16. Baier (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾
17. Blaustein/Fair 🐾 🐾
18. Skemp Trust (LBPP) 🐾
19. Coulee Region Humane Society (LRC) ↓ 🐾
20. Mikshowsky 🐾 🐾 🐾
21. Hass (LBPP) 🐾 🌳 🐾 🐾
22. Lee (Tunnelville SNA) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 ↓
23. Hoeschler (LBPP) 🐾 🐾
24. Meloy 🐾 ↓ 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
25. Mathy (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾
26. Lee (LRC) ↓ 🐾
27. Lenox (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲
28. Holland Sand Prairie 🐾
29. Papenfuss 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
30. Erb/Caron 🌳 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
31. Juniper Partners (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
32. Beck (LBPP) 🌳 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
33. McDevitt 🐾 🐾 🐾
34. Brady 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲
35. Lawrence 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
36. Fish Creek ↓ 🐾 🐾 🐾
37. Toberman 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
38. Gollnick (LBPP) 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾

39. Devil's Backbone 🌳 🐾 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾
40. Valiquette 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾
41. Kube - Drew Tract 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 ↓
42. Kube - Waumandee Tract 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 ↓
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45. MacGregor 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
46. Kick 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
47. Jones/Linton 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
48. Worsham 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
49. Leary 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
50. New Amsterdam Grasslands 🐾
51. Skemp Trust - Parcel II (LBPP) 🐾 🐾
52. Sime - Stake Bluff 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
53. Sime - Parish Bluff 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
54. Ford 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾
55. Shird 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾 🐾
56. French Valley 🐾 🐾
57. T&D Real Estate 🌳 🐾 🐾 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾
58. B & T Properties (SCB) 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾
59. Anderson/Jackson 🌲 🌲 🌲 🐾 🐾 🐾

Legend:

🐾 Talus forest	🐾 Coldwater stream
🌳 Algific talus slope	🐾 River
🐾 Dry prairie	🐾 Oak Savanna
🐾 Dry-mesic prairie	🌲 Dry forest
🐾 Mesic prairie	🐾 Dry-mesic forest
🐾 Wet-mesic prairie	🐾 Mesic forest
🐾 Wet prairie	🐾 Floodplain forest
🐾 Sand prairie/former sand prairie	🐾 Dry cliffs
🐾 Sedge meadow	🐾 Moist cliffs
	🌲 Pine relict

Answers to the most asked questions about MVC

Q What is a land trust?

A A conservation land trust, such as Mississippi Valley Conservancy, holds land or the development rights of privately held land to perpetually preserve sensitive natural areas, species of ecological concern, farmland, water resources, or notable landmarks. Some land trusts are large international organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, while others like Mississippi Valley Conservancy operate on a regional or local level.



Jessica Bobwahn

MVC provides great outdoor recreational opportunities, including guided hikes.

Q What is a conservation agreement or easement?

A A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits certain uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Landowners voluntarily enter into such agreements for many reasons, including a desire to see their land protected for children and grandchildren to enjoy, out of love and respect for our beautiful earth, and sometimes as a way to ensure financial viability for retaining ownership of family farms and other rural lands.

Q What are the restrictions and permitted uses on land with a conservation agreement?

A Conservation agreements are written to reflect the values and intentions of the landowner to restrict certain

types of development and other major alterations of the landscape that would unduly harm the conservation values of the property. Appropriate restrictions are agreed upon by the landowner and the land trust. The landowner retains all rights to the land other than those specifically restricted, including the right to sell the land or pass it on to heirs. MVC conservation agreements generally allow for farming, managing forests, hunting and trapping and other uses consistent with long-term conservation.

Q What are the financial implications associated with conservation agreements?

A When a landowner donates the development rights of a property to a land trust through a conservation agreement, the landowner may be entitled to deduct the fair market value of the development rights as determined by a qualified appraisal. Also, in some instances, landowners may be entitled to a reduction in real estate taxes and/or a reduction in estate taxes. Sometimes, land trusts can pay landowners for the development rights.

Q Why doesn't the government do this work?

A The government does protect land but often lacks the necessary resources and is often too slow in its ability to protect land when it comes on the market. Private land conservation conducted by nonprofit organizations such as MVC can be more flexible in land protection negotiations and can access financial resources that are not available to government agencies. MVC often works collaboratively with units of government to carry out land protection.

Q Who has access to MVC-protected lands?

A MVC protects land it owns as well as land owned by other private parties. MVC encourages people to use and enjoy properties owned by MVC through activities such as hiking, mountain biking, hunting, and bird watching. For privately-held land subject to a conservation agreement, the public must seek permission from the landowner for access. Check MVC's "Recreational Lands" page on the website for more information.

(See www.MississippiValleyConservancy.org/rec.html.)

Q How does MVC decide which land to protect? Will MVC protect my land?

A MVC has established several priority areas in its 7-county territory. Land is chosen for protection based upon ecological significance, scenic value, proximity to other protected lands, and availability. Landowners interested in conservation should contact one of MVC's land protection specialists.

Q Does MVC buy land? Does MVC pay for the development rights?

A MVC does buy land or development rights if property has appropriate conservation qualities and if sufficient grant money can be obtained. MVC encourages landowners to donate some or all of the value of the land, which can be considered a charitable contribution for which a tax deduction may be available.

Q Do conservation agreements take land off the tax rolls?

A When MVC utilizes conservation agreements, the land stays in private ownership and on the tax rolls, although in some instances the landowner may be able to seek a reduction in property taxes. When MVC buys land outright, it often applies for a tax exemption. However, some studies have shown that creation of conservation lands causes no net loss of tax revenue due to the enhancement of property values adjacent to nature preserves.

Q Can I hunt on MVC-protected land?

A Land owned by MVC is generally open to the public for hunting and fishing unless otherwise restricted by law or as a result of particularly rare or sensitive wildlife. For privately-held land subject to a conservation agreement, the public must seek permission from the landowner for access. See MVC's "Hunting Fact Sheet" for more information, located on our website:

www.MississippiValleyConservancy.org/rec.html



You Can Make Your Annual Gift FOREVER!

If your annual gifts total:

\$100
\$200
\$300
\$500
\$1,000
\$2,000
\$5,000

You can perpetuate them with a bequest of at least:

\$2,000
\$4,000
\$6,000
\$10,000
\$20,000
\$40,000
\$100,000

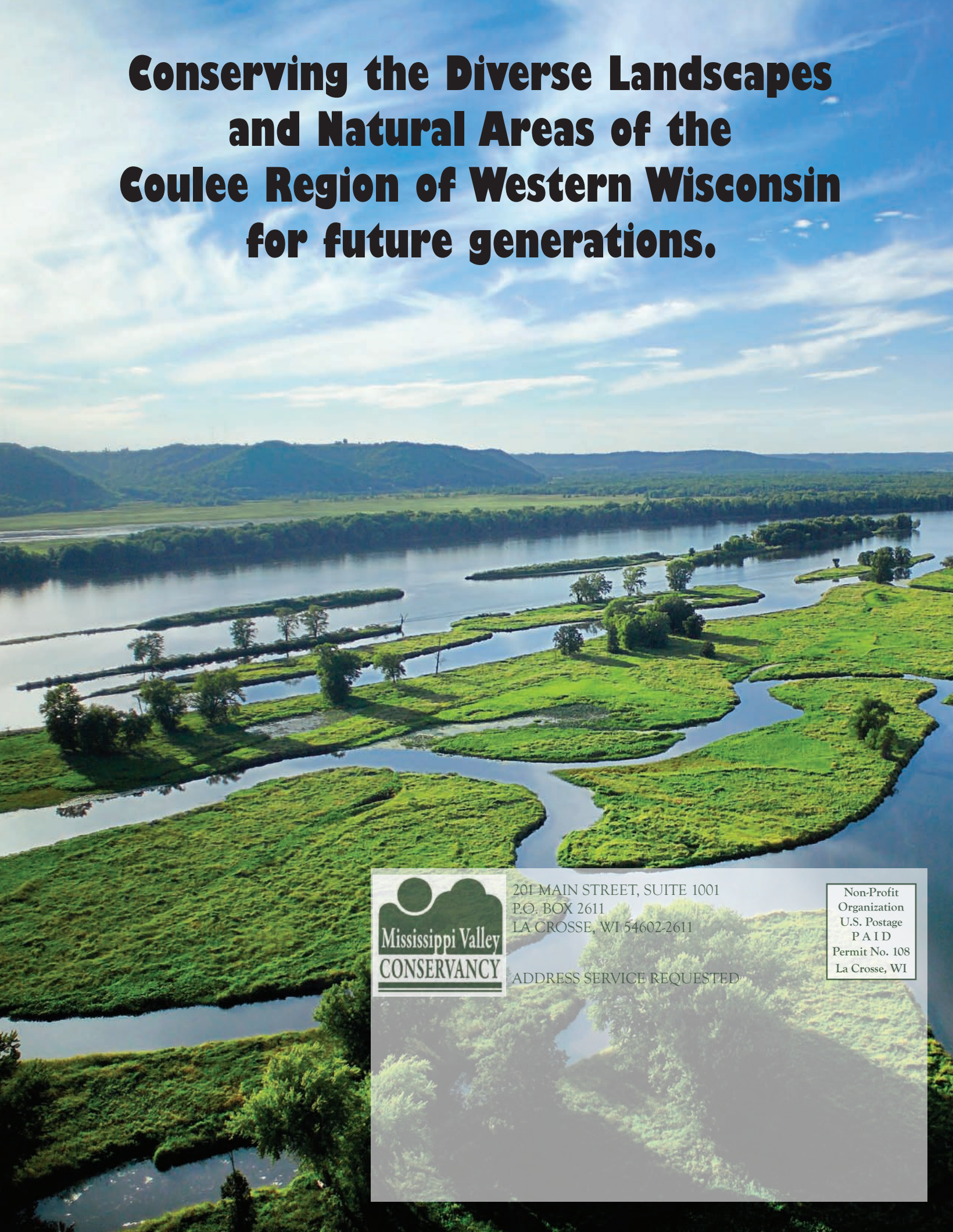
A five percent annual return on your bequest, as represented in this table, would ensure that you can always continue your thoughtful annual contributions will continue forever.

Please include Mississippi Valley Conservancy in your will or estate plan. For more information, please contact our Advancement Director at 608-784-3606.



Perpetuating your annual gift to MVC is as simple as adding a line in your will.

Conserving the Diverse Landscapes and Natural Areas of the Coulee Region of Western Wisconsin for future generations.



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