

# Conservancy Notes

## Learning from the land in Vernon County

Land ownership offers many learning opportunities, and that was certainly the case for Bruce Harvey when he and his wife, Nancy, chose to purchase a 97-acre property in Vernon County in 2006. Now celebrating the early results of their efforts to conserve their land, with its ridgetop farm fields and wildlife habitat, the Milwaukee-based couple recently signed an agreement with Mississippi Valley Conservancy to permanently protect the land from development.

Nancy said they didn't fully understand the ecological significance of the land at the time of their purchase. By engaging the Conservancy in the process of protecting their land, they've learned a great deal about the features of their land that provide crucial habitat for wildlife. In addition to creating a refuge for themselves, they have done the same for birds with bird houses and feeders, for butterflies and other pollinators with plantings through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and for other wildlife with hazelnut shrubs that provide food.

They've also learned a great deal through the process of finding the right farmer to lease some of their ridgetop farmland. After working with an organic farmer to transition the land, a variety of soil conservation practices, including no-till, contour strips, and grass waterways are now being practiced on their fields. "It's been a coopera-

tive effort," Bruce said, "and it's satisfying to know that these practices are protecting the soil and also benefitting the farmer with the higher market value of organically produced crops."

Perhaps most satisfying of all their experiences on the land has been sharing it with their visiting grandchildren. The children love to explore and draw maps of trails in

the woods, including one trail that Bruce created with the input of an expert who helped him design it to resist erosion. The trail terminates at a huge oak that the children have named "the grandfather oak."



*Bruce and Nancy learned about permanent land protection while attending a Conservancy volunteer day. They share their conserved land with many native wildlife species.*

## Gift expands protected land in Onalaska

As its second gift of land to be preserved for wildlife habitat and public recreation, T & D Real Estate Investments LLC has donated six acres of bluffland property to Mississippi Valley Conservancy to expand the Apple Valley Bluff nature preserve.

The generous land donation provides much improved access to the Conservancy's Apple Valley Bluff, a 20-acre nature preserve that was donated by T & D for conservation in 2008. Apple Valley Bluff is open to the public for

hiking, bird-watching, hunting, and other nature-based activities. The improved access will also allow Conservancy staff and volunteers to more easily get onto the property for habitat restoration work when needed. We thank Richard Graw and Thomas Johnson, owners of T & D for their generous land donation.



# The monarch butterfly effect: partners are making a difference



The effects of climate change are becoming more obvious, and the 90% decline in the population of monarch butterflies over the past 20 years is one of many indicators. For many essential pollinators, including the monarch butterfly, habitat loss is a threat to their very existence.

With warming temperatures, severe weather, and land development on the rise, everyone from homeowners to owners of protected land can help ensure that monarchs have what they need to continue with their beneficial role for our environment. The good news: It's easy, fun, and rewarding to do!

*With your support, the Conservancy became a partner in the Monarch Joint Venture in late 2018. The MJV is a partnership of federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic programs that are working together to support and coordinate efforts to protect the monarch migration across the lower 48 states of the U.S.A. Their website offers many resources for those who want to help at: [www.monarchjointventure.org](http://www.monarchjointventure.org)*

*Planting native milkweed and nectar plants is the most important action you can take to support monarchs.*

As a partner in the *Wisconsin Driftless Area Monarch Butterfly Initiative*, much of our current work to increase the quality and quantity of monarch butterfly habitat is being supported by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant will help to support our ongoing pollinator plantings and prairie restorations at Sugar Creek Bluff and Angel Bluff – two of the nature preserves where we're currently focusing our habitat restoration efforts.

Landowners interested in learning about cost-sharing opportunities for pollinator projects on their lands should check with their local natural resources conservation service or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service private lands biologist.



*Monarch butterfly photo courtesy of Bruce Bartel.*

## Creating monarch habitat is easy, fun, and rewarding

For the last sixteen years, Carol Labuzetta has enjoyed restoring local habitat for monarch butterflies, both in her home gardens and at schools in the Driftless Area. After moving here in 1999, Carol caught the monarch "bug" by witnessing these butterflies migrating by the hundreds. Since that time, she has immersed herself in efforts to sustain the monarch by planting both native flowers and the milkweeds that support their life cycle. She has found these activities to be both easy and fun – something anyone can do to help the monarchs! For more information on how you can support the monarch butterfly, contact Carol at [labuzetta@mississippivalleyconservancy.org](mailto:labuzetta@mississippivalleyconservancy.org).



*Carol Labuzetta, Outreach & Education Program Manager for the Conservancy, was thrilled to learn that some of the monarch butterflies that she and her students tagged in Holmen, Wisconsin, were recovered in Mexico in the spring of 2018!*



# WANTED: Volunteers and friends to LOVE THE BLUFFS!

The La Crosse Blufflands – the ancient and beautiful backdrop of the City of La Crosse – need help from all of us. Owned by the City of La Crosse and protected by Mississippi Valley Conservancy, the La Crosse Blufflands serve as a unique community resource that is currently misused and abused by some of the people who go there for a variety of recreational activities. Property use policies are being ignored. Evidence of this abuse is seen as litter, graffiti, rogue trails, trail erosion, illegal parking, and more.

In 2019, thanks to a grant from the La Crosse Community Foundation, your Conservancy and partners, including the City of La Crosse and Friends of the La Crosse Blufflands, are launching a program to help build a culture of caring for the city’s most beloved landscapes. *Love the Bluffs* aims to engage as many people as possible with habitat restoration, improved signage, and public education about why and how to protect this beautiful land.

The program will focus on the La Crosse Blufflands–North and create a model for future improvements in other parts of the blufflands. We invite organizations and individuals who are interested in volunteering to sign up now for this great community service project. Let’s build a tradition together!

*Together, we’ll create a tradition of caring for the La Crosse Blufflands and eliminate problems like those shown below (trail erosion, graffiti, garbage dumping).*



Sign up to help care for the La Crosse Blufflands by visiting the *Volunteer* page of our website (under *Get Involved*). Registered volunteers will receive updates about planned events and activities. Want to get your school, business, or club involved? Contact us at [info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org](mailto:info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org).

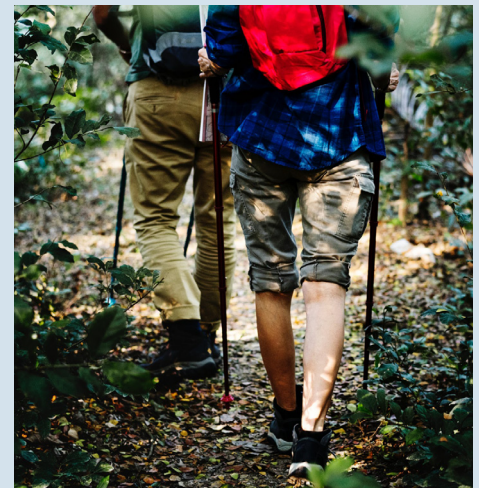
## Could walking poles help you get more out of your daily walk?

Walking poles work your arms, shoulders, chest and upper back muscles through a functional range of motion as you walk — which can help you turn your daily walk into a full-body workout. Most walking poles have rubber tips that grab the pavement and wrist straps that secure the poles to your arms. With one walking pole in each hand, you grip the handles and push off with each stride.

Dr. Edward R. Laskowski, co-director of the Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine Center, recommends walking poles for many people because they offer these benefits:

- The arm movement associated with walking poles adds intensity to your aerobic workout, which helps you burn more calories.
- Walking poles improve balance and stability.
- Walking poles help you maintain proper posture, especially in the upper back, and may help to strengthen upper back muscles.
- Walking poles take some of the load off your lower back, hips and knees, which may be helpful if you have arthritis or back problems.
- Walking with poles may improve your mood.

Walking poles are available online and in many sporting goods stores.



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# KNOWLES NELSON

## Help prevent the loss of **MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN STATE FUNDING** for land and water protection.

Governor Evers and Wisconsin legislators have begun debating the next state budget. If they cannot agree to fund the *Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program*, future land and water protection efforts in Wisconsin will be devastated.

Please join *Team Knowles-Nelson* by letting them know you want the program renewed and strengthened for the protection of more land and water in the Driftless Area for the future.

For your convenience, we've provided the mailing addresses for southwest Wisconsin's State Senators and for Governor Evers.

*If you prefer to contact your elected officials by email, please use the handy tools on our website so you can stay informed and receive updates as the budget debate heats up.*

**[www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/Renew-Knowles-Nelson](http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/Renew-Knowles-Nelson)**

*If you prefer to contact your elected officials by text, contact them now by texting "DRIFTLESS" to 25994*

### **Governor Tony Evers**

115 East/State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53702  
Telephone: (608) 266-1212

### **Senator Jennifer Shilling** – Senate District 32

Room 206 South/ State Capitol/PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707  
Telephone: (608) 266-5490 or (608) 782-2785

### **Senator Patrick Testin** – Senate District 24

Room 131 South/State Capitol/PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707  
Telephone: (608) 266-3123  
Fax: (608) 282-3564

### **Senator Howard L. Marklein** – Senate Dist. 17

Room 8 South/State Capitol/PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707  
Telephone: (608) 266-0703  
Fax: (608) 282-3557

### **Senator Jeff Smith** – Senate District 31

Room 22 South/ State Capitol/PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707  
Telephone: (608) 266-8546 or (877) 763-6636  
Fax: (608) 282-3571

You can also contact your state legislators by calling the toll-free legislative hotline at **1-800-362-9472** (266-9960 in Madison).

## *Special Thanks to Our Conservation Partners*

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Organic Valley  
Radisson Hotel La Crosse  
Xcel Energy

### **GOLD**

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Associated Bank  
Dahl Automotive  
Fowler & Hammer General Contractors  
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### **CONSERVATION SUPPORTERS**

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WLAX-Fox 25



# It's a wonderful life in Wisconsin's Driftless Area

*Your voice is needed to keep it that way.*

Since its inception in 1989, the *Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program* has been championed by Republicans and Democrats across Wisconsin. Without it, these local wildlife habitats would not have been saved:

- Borah Creek Prairie SNA\***
- Boscobel Bluffs SNA\***
- Cassville Bluffs SNA\***
- Devil's Backbone**
- Eagle Eye SNA\***
- Greens Coulee & Savannah Oaks Nature Preserves**
- Holland Sand Prairie SNA\***
- Kickapoo Bottoms**
- Kickapoo Caverns**
- La Crosse Blufflands**
- New Amsterdam Grasslands**
- Sugar Creek Bluff SNA\***
- Trempealeau Lakes**
- Tunnelville Cliffs SNA\***

Wisconsin's future depends on renewed funding and a strengthened program. You can help.

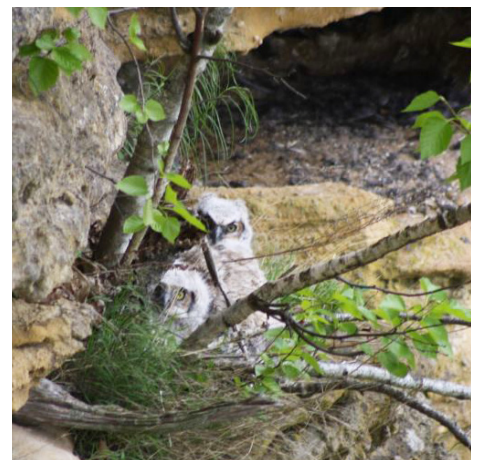
\* SNA is the abbreviation for State Natural Area, a Wisconsin DNR designation of ecological significance.

Do you remember the first time you paddled the Kickapoo River and touched the damp mosses growing from the ancient cliffs of karst limestone? Or your first breathtaking view of the Mississippi River from Sugar Creek Bluff or Perrot State Park?

Have you ever imagined, like George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, what those places would be like today if nobody was working to protect them?

While you were enjoying nature's delights, you shared space with clever birds, sleeping bats, delicate butterflies, and buzzing bees. Their kind have depended upon those places for food, water, and shelter for thousands of years. And they play the essential role of pollinating orchards, fields, and gardens, eating pests, and teaching us the wise ways of nature. The increasing effects of climate change are reminders that those species need their native habitats as much as we need their services. Our futures are one.

In addition to your generous support, more than \$6.5 million from the state's *Knowles-Nelson Stewardship*



Owlets on a bluffsides. Photo by Christopher Smith.

*Program* has helped fund the acquisition of unique wildlife habitats and farmlands for conservation in the Driftless Area over the past 21 years. Protecting those places has also supported the tourism, recreation, and agricultural sectors of our local economies.

There is much more land, water, and wildlife to be protected, but the *Stewardship Program* will expire in early 2020 if funding isn't renewed. Without it, our ability to conserve land will be diminished. Your voice is needed to see that the program is renewed and strengthened in Wisconsin's 2019 budget.

*We've provided tools to make it easy for you to let the governor and your state legislators know you want a renewed and strengthened Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program in their 2019 budget. See reverse side.* ➔





1309 Norplex Drive, Suite 9  
 La Crosse, WI 54601  
 608.784.3606  
 MississippiValleyConservancy.org  
 info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

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*Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy permanently conserved 20,494 acres of bluffs, prairies, wetlands, and streams in and around the Mississippi, Kickapoo, and Wisconsin Rivers since its founding in 1997. Over 4,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird-watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.*

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**The Challenge is ON! It's easier and more fun than ever!**

The Trail Trek Challenge is now a year-round hike/walk program in the nature preserves you've helped protect in five counties. Sign up FREE to receive a trail guide with hike descriptions and a place to log the qualifying hikes and events you're completed. Hike at least 5 trails and send in your hike log before April 1, 2020, to be eligible for a drawing at next year's Earth Fair, where another year of hikes and walks will be kicked off! Share the fun at **#trailtrekchallenge**

It all starts at Earth Fair in La Crosse on Sunday, April 28, 2019. Details and free sign-up are at [www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/TTC](http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/TTC)

**Join Us For These Upcoming Events**

- April 28 **Trail Trek Challenge Warm-up Hike** – Myrick Park in La Crosse
  - May 4 **Spring Foraging** – Boscobel Bluff, a *Seasons in the Coulee Region* event sponsored by Gundersen Health System
  - May 11 **Migratory Bird Walk** – Sugar Creek Bluff SNA, Ferryville
  - May 18 **Volunteer For the Wild** – Sugar Creek Bluff SNA, Ferryville
  - June 22 **Prairie Pollinators** – Borah Creek Prairie SNA, Ferryville
- Details for these events and more at [mississippivalleyconservancy.org/events](http://mississippivalleyconservancy.org/events)*