



Recreational Use Policy

(Board Approved February 2010, Revised & Approved 1/22/2025)

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is pleased to offer the public the opportunity to visit a variety of nature preserves in nine counties in southwestern Wisconsin (Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, and Vernon). It is critical for the future of these special places that visitors minimize their impact on the land and help to maintain the integrity of the natural features that we and our supporters have worked so hard to protect for the benefit of the region's natural resources for residents, visitors, and future generations. Visitors to Conservancy-owned properties are required to abide by this recreational use policy.

Conservancy nature preserves protect plants, animals, natural communities, and the biological diversity they represent while providing public access for low impact, nature-based recreation, scientific study, and educational instruction. Access to some areas is restricted based upon the rarity or sensitivity of what is being protected, and some areas can only be visited for educational or research purposes with written permission from Conservancy staff. The term "nature preserve" refers to both properties owned and managed by the Conservancy, as well as sites managed in partnership with other organizations or municipalities. Many nature preserves were acquired with Wisconsin DNR Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Funding and/or other funding sources that have specific requirements regarding allowed and/or prohibited uses. This policy pertains only to Conservancy-owned properties; partner-owned nature preserves are subject to each partner's rules or policy. All activities shall be conducted in accordance with local, state and federal ordinances and statutes.

Visitors to Conservancy-owned properties must abide by the following use restrictions:

Activities that are **ALLOWED**:

- Hiking
- Wildlife viewing
- Fishing
- Canoeing and kayaking
- Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Photography and videography for personal use
- Foraging: Edible fruits, edible nuts, wild mushrooms, wild asparagus and watercress may be removed by hand without a permit for personal consumption by the collector. "Edible fruits" means fleshy fruits from plants, including apples, plums, pears, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, junberries and strawberries harvested for human consumption. "Edible nuts" means walnuts, hickory nuts, acorns and other similar nuts from trees and shrubs.
- **Hunting and Trapping**
 - Hunting and trapping are allowed at all Conservancy-owned properties, EXCEPT hunting and trapping are PROHIBITED at Wilton Hemlocks and the closed portion of Plum Creek Conservation Area (Western 578 acres). See the Conservancy website for details.
 - The La Crosse Blufflands - La Crosse Floral preserve is restricted to bow hunting only.
 - Hunting stands, blinds, and cameras must be removed from Conservancy-owned preserves at the close of hunting hours each day. Stands and cameras left up overnight will be removed by the Conservancy.
 - Tree steps are prohibited.
 - Hunting dogs are allowed only during hunting season at Conservancy-owned properties open to hunting.

For any land you intend to hunt, trap, or fish on, please verify the requirements or restrictions of any applicable ordinances (which in some cases prohibit the discharge of firearms and/or bows), and verify the ownership and boundaries of adjacent properties.

Activities that are **PROHIBITED**:

- Camping and campfires
- Use of motorized vehicles, including ATVs, motorcycles, drones, and snowmobiles.
- Biking
- Pets including dogs and cats, EXCEPT certified service animals.
 - On-leash dog walking IS allowed at Fish Creek.
- Horses and pack animals
- Collecting, picking or digging up any plant or plant parts including seeds, roots, boughs, flowers etc. or removing any plants, fungi, rocks, minerals, fossils, archaeological artifacts, soil, downed wood or any other natural material, alive or dead.
- Geocaching
- Dumping
- Syrup collection
- Feeding animals, including birds or fish
- Introducing plant or animal species
- Commercial use of any kind
- Placement of structures (with the exception of day-use hunting stands or blinds)
- Vandalism, defacing and/or destruction of natural resources
- Rock climbing
- Hang gliding
- Target practice, paintball, airsoft
- Unauthorized trail construction or modification

Activities that are **REGULATED**:

- Research – If you have a research project, permission can be requested by contacting the Conservancy for a Research Permit Application form. Properties designated as State Natural Areas also require a separate state permit. Drones may be allowed for the purpose of research with written approval.
- Firewood collection – Requires written permission from the Conservancy.

Other Activities and/or Restrictions:

Disabled Access

- The Conservancy allows disabled users to access Conservancy-owned properties with aid from a Other Power Driven Mobility Device (OPDMD) in congruence with the Conservancy’s Disabled Persons Accessibility Policy provided they have written permission from the Conservancy. Please contact the Conservancy for a copy of the policy and an application for access with an OPDMD.

Property Specific Restrictions

- New Amsterdam Grasslands
 - 270 acres of New Amsterdam Grasslands is closed from April 1 – August 1 for grassland bird nesting season. The southwestern portion (approximately 40 acres) remains open year-round.
- Plum Creek Conservation Area
 - The western 578 acres of Plum Creek Conservation Area is closed to the public.

Respect Neighboring Property:

Many nature preserves are adjacent to private land. Property lines are marked with yellow signs stating “Private Lands Ahead.” It is critically important that people not trespass onto neighboring properties while utilizing nature preserves.

Please contact Mississippi Valley Conservancy with any questions or to report problems like trespassing, trash, property damage, or broken signage to our office at (608) 784-3606 or info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org.