

Committed

to People and this Place



Annual Report 2012/2013



Highlights of 2013

Promises kept

Promises of a major conservation gift on the Kickapoo River were fulfilled when the Babson family added a nearly thousand-acre donated easement to their previous outright gift of more than 1,000 acres. The gifts created a ripple effect in additional land conservation in the region. Page 5

Teamwork strategy

MVC board president cites a team approach adopted in 2013 to ensure the board and staff remain in sync to carry out a five-year strategic plan. Page 2

Founders' dream fulfilled

A second-generation owner has added land and protection for a bluffland that was one of the first properties identified by founders of Mississippi Valley Conservancy as worthy of permanent protection. Once threatened by development, the land is now protected forever with conservation easements. Page 4

Youth on the land

Cadets from the Challenge Academy were among hundreds of young hikers and volunteers who made a difference in the region's conservation efforts in 2013. Their efforts help MVC honor its pledge both to conserve and restore lands and to provide ways for young people to experience the pleasures and satisfaction of being in nature.

Job ready

MVC's new land manager Peter Duerkop came fully equipped to carry out the organization's important land management work. Peter and five new board members join a veteran board and staff engaged in helping landowners protect the lands they love. Page 7

On the cover

Staff, volunteers and partners apply prescribed fire to the New Amsterdam Grasslands as part of a long term prairie restoration on the MVC project near Holmen. Fire is part of MVC's ecological management program.



Conservation Director Abbie Church and Board President Pat Caffrey inventory plant species on a prospective MVC project.

Committed to teamwork

By Pat Caffrey, MVC Board President

To conserve native and working landscapes through voluntary action, for the health and well being of current and future generations.

With this mission as guidance, MVC created a new five-year strategic plan in 2013. The plan emphasizes that values are critical for an organization that pledges to land owners and supporters to protect land forever.

Excellence, collaboration, integrity, transparency, accountability, relevance and service are the values that will support MVC's success.



In keeping with the values stated in the Strategic Plan, the board and staff have worked to make MVC truly function as a team. A management team, including key staff and the Board President has been formed to assure open communication and coordination between the board and staff. Committees, including board members, staff, and others with appropriate expertise, make recommendations to the board and provide support to staff in a variety of areas. Board members are selected to provide a diverse range of skills and expertise. It is important to have the organizational structure in place to support teamwork, but it really is the shared goals, open

By Carol Abrahamzon, Executive Director

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Aldo Leopold

This is my favorite Aldo Leopold quote. We are all members of this community and therefore we must work together as a team in our mission to conserve and preserve the land to which we belong.

In the few short months I have been here at Mississippi Valley Conservancy, I have had the privilege to work with an outstanding staff, an amazing board of directors, incredible



communication, and mutual respect of board, staff, donors, and volunteers that make MVC function as a team, and, as I can testify, a very rewarding organization to be involved with.

Although MVC does not publicly discuss individual land protection projects until they are approved, out of respect for property owner's confidentiality, there are several exciting projects being worked on. One would protect a large block of property including both natural habitat utilized by state threatened species, and working agricultural land. This project, involving multiple partners and funding sources, would demonstrate sustainable agricultural practices that would improve water quality, protect large natural habitat areas, provide public recreation, and significantly expand an already large block of adjacent protected habitat.

There is a list of hundreds of property owners who have contacted MVC about protecting their property, so the potential for protecting habitats and working farm land in our nine-county region is impressive. I think MVC has the team in place to take advantage of these many great opportunities to protect land for current and future generations as stated in the mission statement. We will never be able to say "Mission Accomplished" since there will always be more to do, but with all of us working together we can make an important and lasting difference in the regional landscape!

volunteers, tremendous landowners and dedicated donors. You are all on the Mississippi Valley Conservancy team. You are remarkable and you all make our mission work possible.

I am excited to be a part of the Mississippi Valley Conservancy team right now! There is so much going on every day. Working farms will stay working farms and not become sand mines or developments. Watersheds will begin healing and become healthy reservoirs of life. Wildlife will have large, contiguous corridors of rich habitat in which to grow and thrive. All of this is possible because we are a great team working together as a community, using land with love and respect.

As we head into the spring season for prescribed burns, you could say we're on fire for conservation!

Committed to protecting land

Conservation dreams of

Mississippi Valley Conservancy founders in 1996 included a large wooded bluffland in the Town of Onalaska that was eyed for residential development. The housing project failed to get permits and George and Sharon Kerckhove purchased the land and conserved it permanently with an easement in 2003. In

2013, that 203-acre property was expanded when its present owners, Charles and Heather Nolte, placed a conservation easement on 40 adjoining acres they had purchased. "We believe in the preservation of natural resources for future generations," said Heather Nolte.

"Our hopes for the property have been fulfilled, and then some," said Barbara Frank, one of the MVC founders.

The Noltes' easement raised the total of land protected by MVC at the end of 2013 to more than 15,600 acres.

Sue Strehl had made a similar commitment to the future in 2013 when she donated a conservation easement on her 100-acre forested bluffs and farmland



Charles and Heather Nolte and their children, Victoria, Charles Jr. and Braden. The Noltes have donated an easement on their addition to a property already protected by an easement.

in the Town of Shelby. And Dianne Greenley donated a conservation easement on her 70-acre property that provides a buffer to the adjacent Nelson Dewey State Park and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

MVC's purchase of a 398-acre Boscobel Bluffs permanently preserves a family's legacy for the people of the state and region. John W. McNamee said the family was grateful that the purchase, made with a grant from the Stewardship Fund, fulfilled the wish of his father, the late Dr. J. R. McNamee, to preserve the bluffland he owned east of Boscobel "as a wilderness and a permanent habitat for the many rare, and in some cases, endangered species of flora and fauna who call it home." Endow-Bio also provided grant funding for the purchase.

Also in 2013, The Paul E. Stry Foundation of La Crosse

paid for a five-acre purchase that gives added protection to Cliffwood Bluff above the city.

MVC used the grant to protect

the southwest portion of the scenic bluff. The property was purchased from Gerrard Realty Corp., owned by M. William Gerrard, who has held the property since the 1960s.



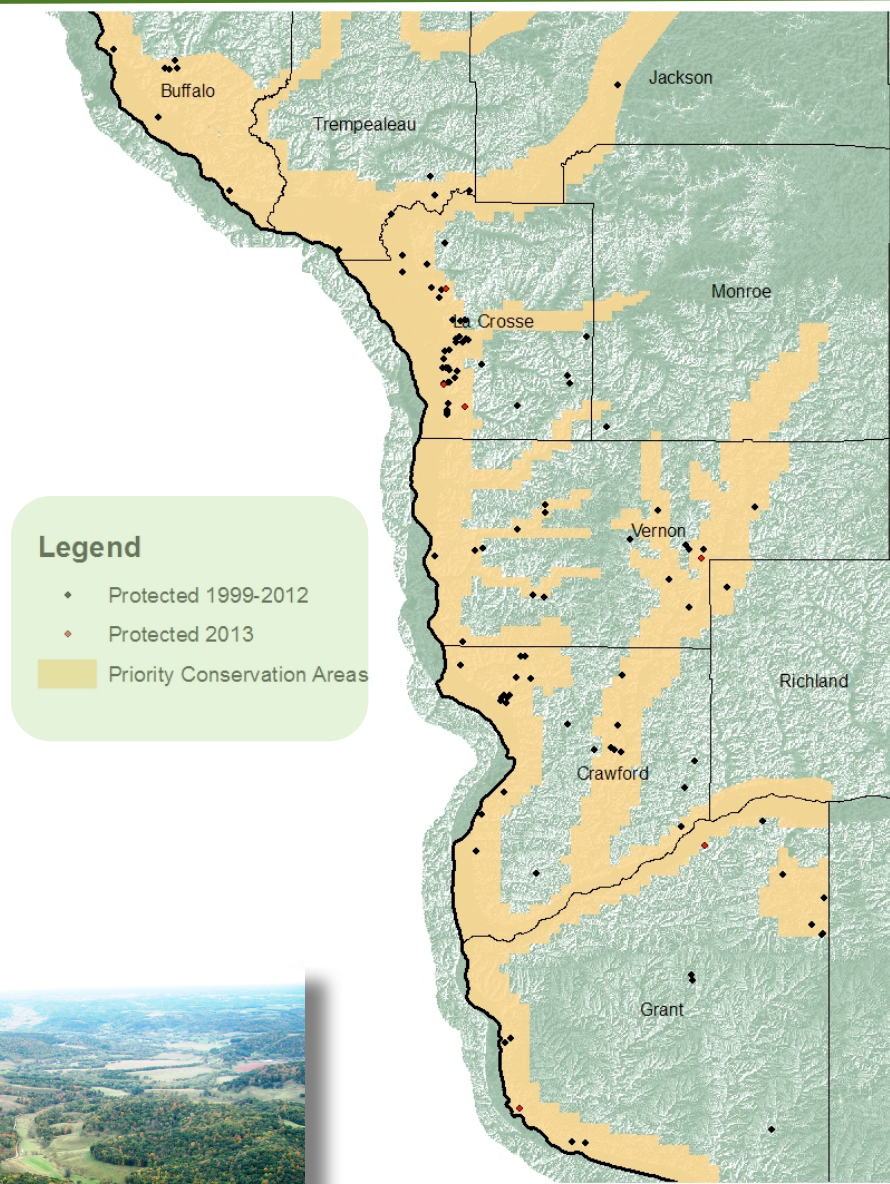
Forested bluff on the Nolte property north of Onalaska.



Cliffwood Bluff (center) received additional protection from a five-acre purchase.

Faithful to their promise

, the Jean Babson family in 2013 donated to Mississippi Valley Conservancy a conservation easement on 983 acres on the Kickapoo River between Viola and La Farge. This land is contiguous with several other protected properties, including the 1,118 acres donated outright by the Babsons to MVC in 2009. The family accompanied its gift at the time with the promise of the additional easement in the future. And the donations have enabled an even wider conservation impact: The value of the first 1,118-acre donation of land by Babsons was used by MVC as State Stewardship Fund grant match, allowing the protection of other significant properties. At the end of 2010, the Babson land value allowed MVC to acquire the 30-acre Elmwood Bluff property in the City of Onalaska. And by using additional grant match from the Babson donation, MVC purchased the 389-acre Boscobel Bluffs. The total size of the protected properties largely made possible by the Babson donations is 2,697 acres.



An aerial view of the combined 2,000 -acre Babson easement and gift on the Kickapoo River. Below, left to right, Susan Strehl on her farm, a view of the Greenley easement land and cup plants in bloom on the Boscobel Bluffs.



Financial Highlights

ASSETS LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Assets	
Cash and Investments	\$ 286,725
Equipment	23,189
Land	10,287,415
Total Assets	<u>\$10,597,329</u>

Liabilities and Net Assets	
Total liabilities	\$ 5,161

Net Assets	
Unrestricted - undesignated	\$ 50,666
Unrestricted - designated	1,132,251
Temp. restricted	184,324
Perm. restricted	9,224,927
Total Net Assets	<u>\$10,592,168</u>

Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$10,597,329
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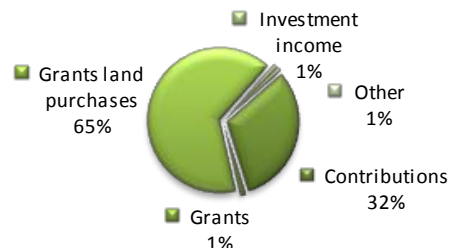
ACTIVITIES -MODIFIED CASH BASIS

Revenue	
Contributions	\$ 448,078
Grants	17,983
Grants land purchases	925,000
Investment income	16,485
Other	12,764
Total Revenue	<u>\$1,420,310</u>

Expenses	
Program	\$ 292,736
Management	72,957
Fundraising	41,961
Total Expenses	<u>\$ 407,654</u>

Total revenue includes grants secured by MVC and paid directly to landowners for the purchase of land.

2013 REVENUE



2013 EXPENSES



Committed to youth

By Andrea Matson Student Intern

It seems that today's youth spend more time inside than interacting with the natural world. MVC is working to provide opportunities to get young people active outdoors and learning how to care for the environment.

Outreach Coordinator Kathy Frise works with area schools and youth groups on various outdoor projects including hikes, educational activities, and land restoration. Schools include K-12 and college; groups have included YMCA, Scouts, and 4H.

The past year has seen the Eagle Scouts building a trail from the Shelby water pump area up to MVC's Dobson property, Lincoln students collecting seeds at New

Amsterdam Grasslands, and UW-L students working on Savannah Oaks.

MVC has also been working with families by giving guided hikes for stay-at-home parents.

"The idea was to offer something different than the standard pool day and to show parents the trails," said Frise.

Frise has been working with youth projects for the past four years and

enjoys watching kids' reactions when they are out in nature, especially when she takes them out to a spot they haven't been.

One moment that stands out to Frise is a work day with at-risk

See YOUTH next page



Lincoln Middle School students cheer their collection of trash during an MVC work day.

Committed staff and board

Peter Duerkop's specialties listed in his LinkedIn account are biological surveys and prescribed fire – essential tools in MVC's important work of preserving and restoring the special landscapes of our nine-county service region. So it's no wonder that he has recently found a home at MVC as our new land manager, writing and executing land management plans, using prescribed fire, doing chemical treatment of invasive species, and grant writing and implementation.



Peter Duerkop

Peter's thesis work at St. Cloud State University where he taught as a graduate assistant was related to oak savanna restoration using prescribed fire as the primary management tool. He has also served previously as a range technician with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a biological technician with the National Park Service.

Peter joins a team of veteran MVC employees and board members (see staff and board listing on page 12) including an executive committee as follows: Pat Caffrey, president; Jon Rigden, vice president; Bob Fisher, secretary, and Roy Campbell, treasurer.

Recent additions to the 24-member board include:

Jerry Arndt, senior vice president of business services for Gundersen Lutheran, served previously on the board. He said, "it has truly been a blessing to live in this area since 1970; I have enjoyed the beauty of nature in this area and feel responsible to help preserve it."

Gretchen Benjamin, one MVC's founders and early board member, presently works as large rivers program director for The Nature Conservancy. She previously served as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Mississippi River specialist. She said, "this understanding [of the river] could be of value to MVC" from an ecological standpoint and from an understanding of policy.

Brian Barton, La Crosse attorney, grew up in the La Crosse area where he enjoyed exploring the area's rivers, marshes, and bluffs. "My interest in our natural resources has been one of great respect." He said he would like to help "preserve that which most of us take for granted every day."

Andrea Benco, a former state parks naturalist, serves as chair of the City of Onalaska Department of Parks and Recreation. She has volunteered with MVC

since its beginnings. "My commitment to MVC stems from my desire to preserve land in its natural state for both human and natural needs. The permanent preservation of large pieces of undeveloped land is a critical piece of the long term environmental integrity puzzle."

Bob Schmidt, the owner of Schmidty's Restaurant, is a lifelong resident of La Crosse. He is an ardent runner and has completed more than fifty marathons. This active lifestyle has given him an appreciation of the beauty of this area. "I will do everything I can to maintain or enhance that beauty," Schmidt said.

YOUTH from page 6

high school students at Miller Bluff. One girl was crabby and having a bad day. Frise took the class to the prairie and overlook. "As we were hiking out that same girl came up and hugged me. She said that she was so happy she came and that being out on the prairie was just what she needed and she felt so much better."

MVC partnered with the EcoPark and hosted Eco Explorer Day -- 17 kids ages 7 to 12 participated in this event. Redfeather snowshoes personnel were on hand to demo snowshoeing and provide hot chocolate. The kids did snowshoe hikes then did a series of environmental activities inside.

Of special note in 2013 was the participation of cadets from the Fort McCoy Challenge Academy for at-risk youth in a series of workdays.

Frise said the number of kids interested in the outdoors has increased. She estimated that she worked with about 1,000 kids last year. "They are looking forward to field trips and I think teachers and adult leaders are looking for more outdoor activities. We intend to provide them," she added.



Cadets from the Challenge Academy and MVC staff and volunteers take a break during a work day in 2013.

Committed CITIZENS

Donations in fiscal 2013, July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013

\$10,000 & above

Anonymous Donor
Philip and Melissa Gelatt
Warren and Denise Loveland
Barbara and Donald Frank

\$5,000-\$9,999

John Bosshard Charitable
Trust
Jay and Judy Hoeschler

\$1,000-\$4,999

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Kerckhove
Dr. Bill Bender & Heidi
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Terry and Karolyn Collins
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Susan Strehl
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These members have included MVC in their will or estate plan, ensuring that MVC's conservation work continues into the future.

Driftless documentary released by MVC, partner

The documentary film, *Mysteries of the Driftless*, a production of Untamed Science and Mississippi Valley Conservancy released in 2013, features a team of explorers and scientists as they reveal the majesty and allure of the Driftless Area using a stunning combination of filmmaking and genuine adventure.

What strange forces spared one isolated region along the Upper Mississippi River from the repeated crushing and scouring effects of massive continental glaciers during the last 1.6 million years? What pre-Ice Age throwbacks survived here in this unique refuge that holds more Native American effigy mounds, petroglyph caves, strange geological features, and rare species than anywhere in the Midwest? A

team of science filmmakers explores these questions and more in this captivating new adventure documentary about the Driftless Zone.

The team was led by two award-winning filmmaking scientists: biologist Rob Nelson and geologist Dan Bertalan. They are joined by author/archaeologist Robert Boszhardt and James Theler, Ph.D., the late geography professor Jim Knox, and our own Abbie Church, among others.

To purchase a DVD of the film, please contact us at (608) 784-3606 ext. 3 or email info@MississippiValleyConservancy.org

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