



*Conservancy Notes*  
SPRING 2025

## A legacy of land and love: The Groves family's conservation commitment

*By Karen Solverson, Director of Communications*

For several decades, Bill and Joanne Groves have called their beautiful 85-acre property home. Nestled in the rural Town of Rockbridge, just north of Richland Center, this land has been a constant presence in their lives, a place of quiet beauty and cherished memories.

They've cultivated a deep connection with the land—treasuring the rolling hay fields, the forested ridgeline, and the wide-open views that surround them. It was passed down to Bill by his family, including his beloved relatives Alice and Rinold “Riney” Jasper. Alice, though connected to Bill only through family marriage, always considered him her adopted son. Bill spent countless hours hunting the land with Riney, and he lovingly cared for Alice after Riney passed away. When Alice decided to pass on the property to Bill, she made her wishes clear: she

didn't want the land divided or developed.

Bill and Joanne have always held those wishes close to their hearts. They've spent years nurturing the property, watching wildlife flourish, encountering black bears, and regularly seeing their friend Robert the bobcat. Their children now help manage the forested areas, guided by a forest management plan,

*(continued on p. 4)*

*Above: Landowners Bill and Joanne Groves have made it a priority for decades to protect the land passed down to them from Alice and Riney Jasper. (Contributed photo)*

## Future promises

**A**s the sun begins to set on a spring day, one of my favorite rituals is stepping into the greenhouse, where tiny sprouts and tender seedlings reach for the light. I move carefully among them, checking each pot for signs of new life, watering and nurturing the plants that are already well on their way.

Every seed, every green shoot, is a promise—a promise of abundance, of meals shared with family and friends, of nourishment grown right here at home.

Tending to these small but mighty plants fills me with hope, much like the work we do together at Mississippi Valley Conservancy. With your support, we are protecting the farmland that will feed our communities, ensuring that families can enjoy fresh, locally grown food for generations to come. You are helping to preserve the special places where children can run through tall prairie grasses, where families can wander on wooded trails, and where the simple wonders of nature restore our hearts and minds—right here, close to home.

But there is more to do. We must act now to safeguard the farms and wild places that make the Driftless Area so special. Imagine a future where every family can stop by a local farm stand to fill a basket with just-picked vegetables, where autumn brings hayrides and pumpkin patches, and where sunrise strolls are filled with the flute-like song of the wood thrush and the evenings with the gentle chorus of tree frogs.

Let's promise that future together—a future where fresh food and wide-open spaces are part of our communities forever.

With your help, we can nurture the growth of land protection, preserving more family farms, bluff prairies, forests, and cool, clear streams for all.

Thank you for being part of this promise.

Together in conservation,



Carol Abrahamzon



*Prairie coreopsis blooming at  
Holland Sand Prairie State  
Natural Area near Holmen.  
(Photo by Karen Solverson)*





Support makes smiles like this possible across our whole nine-county service area! (Photo by David Nash)

## Connecting people to nature close to home

### How your support makes a difference

Being able to find places to hike, relax, and unwind close to home is a gift you make possible in communities across nine counties through your financial support AND hours of volunteering. Your donations create space for wildlife and imaginative play. Your hours of volunteering make it possible for us to clear trails. Community members are able to escape to the woods and become immersed in the cacophony of bird song in the spring or sit on a rocky outcropping in blissful silence as they watch eagles soar over the Mississippi River.

The testimonial below was made possible thanks to the support of each and every one of YOU!

*“It’s hard to reclaim wild and natural places. That’s why our family feels strongly about groups like Mississippi Valley Conservancy who are intentionally helping preserve and provide access to our beautiful outdoor resources.*

*We’re so lucky to have so many places to wander and explore in our area, and I can’t think of a single time we as a family have regretted simply getting outside (assuming we didn’t forget snacks). Sometimes we invite others and just let the kids run. Other times it’s a quiet walk alone through the woods, along a bluff or by a stream bank. The kids imagine and find a place for themselves in the natural world around us. You have to be intentional about getting outside, but once you do, everyone is better for it.” —David Nash & family*

*We thank  
these generous  
organizations for  
their support.*

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### ***A legacy of land and love... (continued from cover)***

continuing the family tradition of hunting together and stewarding the land with respect.

In 2022, the Groves took the first step that would honor Alice's wishes in the most lasting way. That year, the Conservancy closed on a conservation easement with their neighbor, one of the Conservancy's largest easements ever. After thoughtful discussions with their neighbor, Bill and Joanne chose to work with Mississippi Valley Conservancy to donate a conservation easement on their property, ensuring its protection for generations to come. This decision was made with great care and a deep sense of responsibility—to preserve the land that had meant so much to their family, and to honor the legacy of those who had come before them.

On February 17, 2025, after many discussions and planning meetings between Bill and Joanne and Conservancy staff, the conservation easement was signed. According to Chris Kirkpatrick, Conservation Manager for the Conservancy, "Their donated easement, combined with that of the neighbors'

property, has established one of the largest privately owned protected wildlife corridors in the area, now totaling 1,078 acres."

By protecting their land, Bill and Joanne have not only preserved the scenic beauty of their home but also ensured the health of its wildlife habitats—where thriving butternut trees, a species of special concern in Wisconsin, naturally reproduce, and diverse forests and productive hay fields remain intact. This expansive corridor will continue to provide sanctuary to countless species for years to come.

Their commitment to conservation aligns with the goals of the Town of Rockbridge Comprehensive Plan, which prioritizes the protection of farmland and natural resources. By signing this conservation easement, Bill and Joanne have ensured its permanence as a vital piece of the local landscape, safeguarding the land from the threat of development, unsustainable farming practices, and the fragmentation that often accompanies subdivisions. Although it is protected by the Conservancy, it will remain a private property for their children and grandchildren to enjoy.

*Below: The Groves' donated easement, combined with the neighbor's property, creates a protected corridor of more than 1,078 acres, one of the largest privately owned and protected wildlife corridors in the area. (Staff photo)*







For Bill and Joanne, this conservation easement is more than just a legal agreement—it is a testament to their love for the land and a way to ensure that Alice and Riney’s wishes are honored for years to come. It’s a legacy they’ve created, not just for their family, but for the land and wildlife they cherish so deeply.



*Top: This property includes scenic, open grasslands, which are now protected forever, providing habitat for native plants, insects and animals. (Photo by Chris Kirkpatrick) Right: Bill and Joanne making memories with family at their farm. (Contributed photo)*

## Do you have farmland YOU want to protect forever?

You can protect your farmland, woods, prairies, or blufflands forever just like Bill and Joanne. By working with us to establish a conservation easement, you can ensure your land remains productive and healthy for future generations while preserving its natural beauty and wildlife habitat. Your legacy of stewardship will make a lasting impact, safeguarding the land you love. To learn more about how we can help you protect your farmland, contact us at [info@MississippiValleyConservancy.org](mailto:info@MississippiValleyConservancy.org).



# Recent 200-acre acquisition protects critical habitat along the Wisconsin River

By Dave Skoloda



With the purchase of nearly 200 acres of floodplain forest, marsh and meadow along the Wisconsin River in Grant County last fall, Mississippi Valley Conservancy has guaranteed public access and protection to a part of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway—a landmark project in the state’s land conservation history. This acquisition is also a milestone for the Conservancy, bringing the total acres we’ve protected to more than 26,000 in our nine-county service area. Of that, the Conservancy has opened over 7,000 acres to public access for hiking, bird-watching, hunting, fishing, and other nature-based outdoor activities.

This new acquisition is known as Woodman Floodplain State Natural Area. “It’s an important addition to the riverway,” said Mark Cupp, executive director of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway Board. “It demonstrates the growing importance of land trusts in adding to the project that was created by the Wisconsin

State Legislature in 1989.”

Partners in the project included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with funding through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) Hunting Heritage Super Fund, along with an in-kind donation by the seller, who has asked to remain anonymous.

Clayton Lenk, district biologist for the NWTf, said that while the property has good habitat for wild turkeys, including the mature floodplain trees they like for roosting, the NWTf is more broadly interested in the public access for other recreational uses as well. “It’s not just for turkey hunters,” he said. He stated that the project’s location offers more accessible outdoor space to the large Midwest population centers that encircle it. Mississippi Valley Conservancy’s publicly accessible land in northern Grant County also includes the Conservancy-owned Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area just five miles to the east.

Abbie Church, conservation director with the Conservancy, said that Woodman Floodplain provides exceptionally diverse wetlands and floodplain forest, southern sedge meadow, emergent marsh, and wild rice marsh. The riverway was designated by the Ramsar Convention as a “wetland of international importance,” the second largest such site in Wisconsin.

In addition to the riverway boundary, she added, the site is within three other priority areas: the Conservancy’s Wisconsin River priority area, the Lower Wisconsin River Important Bird Area (a global initiative administered by the Audubon Society) and the Lower Wisconsin Bluffs and Floodplain Conservation Opportunity Area (a priority area designated as of continental significance according to the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan).

The property is adjacent to 1,198 acres of the Wisconsin DNR’s Lower Wisconsin River State Wildlife Area, and Woodman Lake Sand Prairie, and Dead Lake State Natural Area. The acquisition of Woodman Floodplain forms a nearly 1,400-acre complex of publicly accessible wildlife habitat. Cupp



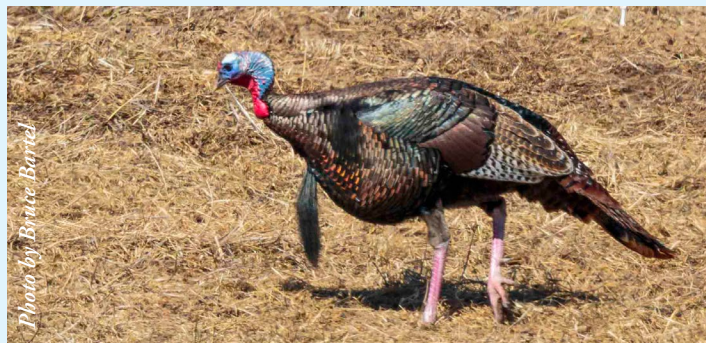
noted that the designated boundaries of the riverway include about 100,000 acres along the entire length of the 92-acre parcel from below the dam at Prairie du Sac to Prairie du Chien, of which about half are so far protected by public ownership.

Carol Abrahamzon, executive director at the Conservancy, said protecting large blocks of contiguous habitat is one of the most effective means of ensuring the resilience of species and habitat in a changing climate. “We couldn’t do this work or make such acquisitions without the ongoing support our nonprofit organization receives from private donations and memberships,” she said.

The anonymous party who originally purchased the property to take it off the market said that it was good luck for her to learn it was for sale and that it fit with her passion “for saving every inch we can.” Following our purchase of this property, the Conservancy, in turn, intends to transfer the land to the Wisconsin DNR, subject to a conservation easement to restrict future land use for the benefit of the wildlife habitat and natural communities.

According to Eric Epstein, a retired DNR ecologist, the site is one of the best-known representations of southern wild rice marshes in Wisconsin that hasn’t been significantly altered from its natural state. With this acquisition the site now becomes one of the few such marshes that is protected in Wisconsin.

Along with the robust southern wild rice marshes, the southern sedge meadow on the property is also exceptionally diverse, with bluejoint grass, cattail sedge, lake sedge, swamp milkweed, joe pye weed, and an abundance of other species, according to a site inventory. The property also includes fish and wildlife spe-



cies such as the state endangered starhead topminnow, beaver, white-tailed deer, the species of special concern red-shouldered hawk, trumpeter swan, green heron, sedge wren, red-headed woodpecker, great blue heron, sandhill crane, state threatened cerulean warbler, and special concern prothonotary warbler.

The Conservancy’s acquisition fits with goals of Wisconsin’s State Wildlife Action Plan (2015), the Grant County Comprehensive Plan (2009), the Town of Woodman Comprehensive Plan (2009), the Grant County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (2018), and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Master Plan (2016), which all prioritize the protection of wetlands and floodplains.

According to Allan Beatty, president of the Conservancy, the Woodman Floodplain State Natural Area will now provide an exceptional scenic resource for the local community, including paddlers and anglers, in perpetuity. The property is visible from the Wisconsin River and Woodman Lake, from the surrounding DNR-owned land and habitat, and from adjoining and nearby properties.

*Opposite: The obedient plant is just one of many native plant species found at this unique property. Above: Wild turkey love to roost in mature floodplain trees. Below: A bird’s-eye view of a small portion of the Woodman Floodplain State Natural Area, now protected forever and open to the public. (Staff photo)*





# The anatomy of a burn

By Levi Plath, Land Manager, and  
Chris Kirkpatrick, Conservation Manager

## WHY WE BURN

Fire from both natural and human causes has been a part of the landscape for thousands of years. The Conservancy uses prescribed burns as a key management tool to reintroduce this natural process and promote diverse ecosystems on our nature preserves. These burns benefit fire-dependent communities like native prairies, marshes, sedge meadows, oak woodlands, savannas, and forests by reducing fuel loads, recycling carbon, and stimulating plant growth.

Prescribed fires encourage native plants to regenerate, boost flower and seed production, and limit invasive species. They also support wildlife, including pollinators, wild turkeys, deer, and red-headed woodpeckers. Additionally, prescribed burns are used to top-kill brush and help control invasive species like garlic mustard, honeysuckle, and buckthorn.

*Below: A lush hillside of native Virginia bluebells thrive after a prescribed burn.  
(Photo by Abbie Church)*



## WHAT GOES INTO A BURN

Prescribed burning is a seasonal activity that requires extensive planning in accordance with a detailed burn plan. The Conservancy's burn plans cover numerous details, such as objectives, permits, weather conditions (temperature, humidity, wind), smoke management, crew needs, equipment, and safety protocols. Due to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, there have been fewer optimal burning days in recent seasons, so having everything carefully prepared helps the team make the best use of their time.

Plans also include firebreak preparation, which involves clearing vegetation to ensure safe access and containment of the burn. Additionally, refugia, or unburned areas, may be incorporated to provide habitat for specific wildlife when necessary. Burn units often rotate across the preserve to optimize management and provide adequate untouched habitat, which is especially important for species like pollinators that rely on refugia.

*Left: Team members check the firebreak one last time before starting the prescribed burn. (Staff photo)*





## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The Conservancy uses specialized firefighting equipment to ensure burns are safe and efficient. This includes fire-resistant clothing, helmets, gloves, belt weather kits, and leather boots, along with chest harnesses for carrying essentials like maps, radios, and snacks. Tools like rakes, flappers, and pulaskis help control smoldering fuel. Drip torches ignite fire in desired patterns, while water, carried in back cans or on vehicles with pumper units, is crucial for controlling and extinguishing flames. A portable pump allows us to refill pumper units from nearby streams, saving time during burns. Staff are trained on all equipment and attend annual refresher courses, passing fitness tests to stay certified and physically fit for burns.

## THANKS TO YOU!

YOU are giving native plants a chance for a fresh start through your membership and gifts. By keeping invasive species under control, the rusty-patched bumblebee and other pollinators can thrive because a diverse blend of food sources are able to grow.

*Below: Tools of the trade include pumpers, leaf blowers and back cans.  
Bottom: The burn team meets to review the plan with the burn boss, who assigns tasks. (Staff photos)*

## CONDUCTING A BURN

Once all the planning is complete and weather conditions are favorable, typically from October to May, the burn is ready to begin. Conservancy staff prepare equipment, secure permits, and notify nearby property owners. Upon arrival, the crew conducts a briefing, reviews the burn plan, and assigns tasks for the day. After a test fire, the burn boss decides whether to proceed or call off the burn. If all goes as planned, two crews ignite the fire along the firebreak, using radios to communicate and spread fire safely.

The burn typically moves from upslope to downslope, into the wind, until both crews meet and the fire naturally extinguishes. During the burn, crews use firebreaks to control fire spread. Afterward, the crew “mops up” by checking for smoldering spots and extinguishing them using water, tools, or soil. If the fire cannot be fully extinguished by the end of the day, a team member stays overnight to monitor it. The Conservancy must maintain a presence until the fire is declared fully out by the burn boss. After it is all done, the team debriefs to assess and learn from the event.







*Virginia bluebells blanket the floodplain in the protected corridor now passed on to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. (Photo by Abbie Church)*

## Land Transfer Strengthens Kickapoo River Conservation Efforts

*By Sarah Bratnober*

In 2023, the Conservancy acquired a 17-acre parcel along the Kickapoo River in Vernon County with the aim of conserving it and eventually transferring it to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR). The property includes wetlands, waterways, and diverse natural communities. In February 2025, the Conservancy officially transferred ownership to KVR, signing a conservation easement to protect the land from future development.

Although small, the property plays a vital role in connecting over 12,000 acres of protected land, including Wildcat Mountain State Park and KVR. Wildlife corridors like this are essential for maintaining biodiversity and water quality. Hay Valley Creek, which runs through the property, is a Class I trout stream, and the adjacent section of the Kickapoo River is designated as a Class II trout stream. “Protecting the land around Hay Valley Creek will stabilize the stream banks, provide healthy soils that will absorb excess water and nutrients during rain events, and sequester carbon to fight climate change,” said Allan Beatty,

Conservancy board president.

Abbie Church, the Conservancy’s conservation director, highlighted the mutual benefits of this partnership, which aligns with the goals of the Conservancy, KVR, Trout Unlimited, and the State of Wisconsin. Although this acquisition is the first joint project between the Conservancy and KVR, the Conservancy has previously protected and transferred other lands, such as La Crosse Bluffs to the City of La Crosse, Greens Coulee to the City of Onalaska, Holland Sand Prairie to the Town of Holland, Borah Creek Prairie to the Prairie Enthusiasts, and others.

KVR is managed by the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board (KRMB), a collaboration between the State of Wisconsin and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in trust for the Ho-Chunk Nation. Jason Leis, KVR’s Executive Director, noted that in addition to the benefits to wildlife, “Having access to the river will allow us to clean up debris and fallen trees so we can keep the Kickapoo River open for paddlers and anglers.” Scott Lind, a



KRMB member, emphasized the rarity and value of such large protected tracts of land in southwest Wisconsin, adding, “We are grateful that the Conservancy took the lead and put all the effort into acquiring and then donating this parcel that will serve in perpetuity as another refuge for many species and for the enjoyment of human visitors.”

The 2023 acquisition was made possible with major support from the Wisconsin Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the Trout Unlimited Watershed Access Fund, the Coulee Region Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and smaller grants from the Wisconsin Land Fund, the John C. Bock Foundation, and private donors.

## Conservation close to home

Together, we can do more to protect undeveloped land and clean, cold water for all in the Driftless Area. That includes all who need forests, prairies, wetlands, streams, and farmlands to nourish their bodies, lift their spirits, and connect with nature. By working together to protect these special places close to home, we are ensuring that generations of families and wildlife can be nourished and thrive because of the actions we take today. Visit our website to learn about the many ways you can be a part of protecting these special places close to home, either through giving donations or volunteering your time. Learn more: [MississippiValleyConservancy.org](https://MississippiValleyConservancy.org).

*Below: Kickapoo Valley Reserve staff will now be able to keep this entire 17 miles stretch of the Kickapoo River clear of debris for people who enjoy using the river. (Photo by Abbie Church)*





# Better than we found it

## Angel Bluff: Steep challenges, but steady rewards for conservation

By Drake Hokanson

**A**nybody who has worked to restore a prairie, rid a piece of land of invasive buckthorn, or revitalize a woodland knows that some conservation work is almost entirely done by hand, one task at a time, with simple tools, sturdy gloves, and a strong back. Add to that a seemingly impossible slope, and you have your work cut out for you. Carelessly put the chainsaw down, and you might have to chase it several hundred feet down the hill.

“Angel Bluff is one of our more rugged, steep properties. I was younger when we started,” said

Levi Plath, Conservancy land manager. “Folks are shocked at how steep the property is.” So it is—and will continue to be—on Angel Bluff in Buffalo County. This 20-acre nature preserve, owned and managed by the Conservancy, fronts the Mississippi River just south of Fountain City, Wisconsin, and offers extraordinary views of the river and Winona, Minnesota, for those hardy enough to scramble to the top.

Stanley A. Ledebuhr, a retired public school teacher and lifelong Winona resident, donated the property to Mississippi Valley Conservancy 17 years ago with the promise from the Conservancy that it would be protected and open for public use. He had owned the property for 30 years and called it “Angel’s Monument” in honor of his late wife, Marian. Since Angel Bluff’s acquisition in 2008, Conservancy staff

and volunteers have tackled the slopes and are restoring steep goat prairie, oak openings, and native woodland.

“Back in 2008 there was just a little prairie on top,” according to Pat Caffrey, volunteer and Conservancy board member. “A lot of the property was mixed woodland with an understory of buckthorn.”

Restoration efforts include cutting stands of invasive native red cedar trees on the steep slopes, selectively felling trees in the woodlands to provide better opportunity for desirable native trees, and cutting and chemically treating large areas of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle.

“Angel Bluff is only 20 acres,” said Plath. “But



Photo by Pat Caffrey



we've put in so much work because of what's there: prairie, oak opening, and oak woods...all habitats that are becoming more rare." Conservation workers also know that progress is often determined by the number of hands on deck. Along with Conservancy staff, volunteers at Angel Bluff have included the Boy Scouts, Challenge Academy, and Winona State University students and faculty.

Funding for habitat restoration work has been supported by the C.D. Besadny Conservation Fund administered by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, a State Wildlife Grant, the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program, Buffalo County, and the members and supporters of the Conservancy.

In addition to the work with shovels and saws, controlled burns have written an important chapter in the evolving success of habitat restoration on Angel Bluff. The Conservancy has been implementing prescribed burns for over a decade there, and staff members have seen an increase in native prairie wildflowers and species diversity. "Past burns did miracles. They really opened up the west side of the property," according to Caffrey.

After years of hard work, the changes are becoming more evident each year. Native prairie plants that have been biding their time for decades slowly emerge in the new sunlight once dense stands of cedar are cut and the area is burned. Overall, the prairie is returning to the steep slopes, the woodlands are returning to a more natural habitat, and the buckthorn is diminished. "There is still buckthorn," said Caffrey, "but it's better." And in the end, that is the goal with every Conservancy project...that it is left better than we found it for the wildlife and people who live in the area.

Angel Bluff is open to the public for hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, and wildlife observation. Bring good boots; it is a steep scramble to the top with no trail, but the view is fantastic.

Habitat restoration work is ongoing and opportunities provide volunteers with fun opportunities to

learn about habitat restoration, species identification and conservation topics. To learn more about volunteer opportunities or to sign up for the Conservancy volunteer email list, visit [MississippiValleyConservancy.org/volunteer](https://MississippiValleyConservancy.org/volunteer).



*Above: Over the past 17 years, volunteers have regularly cleared invasives and conducted prescribed burns to encourage native plant growth. (Staff photos) Opposite: A view of Angel Bluff from Highway 35 in 2024.*



# From photos to spreadsheets: Diverse ways you can make a difference

Everything we do is possible because of the people who step up to help as volunteers. You don't have to be able to handle a chainsaw to help us protect, preserve, and restore habitats. You don't even have to live close to our office! Here are some ways you can help:

- Photograph a workday or event
- Join the Communications, Outreach & Education, or Development Committee to help with writing an occasional article, fundraising event, or hike
- Address or stuff envelopes for fundraising campaigns
- Volunteer at a workday (in Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, or Vernon County)
- Share your talent by leading a guided hike
- Assist with Excel, Word, or GIS projects
- Let others know that if they are a Thrivent member, they can use Thrivent funds to help fund events or workdays at the Conservancy
- Proofread print material prior to publication
- Record videos of members telling their conservation stories
- Become a site steward for a nature preserve
- Share information about the Conservancy's events and mission with your family and friends
- Bake cookies or cupcakes for events



*Above: Office volunteers provide critical support for fundraising efforts and daily operations. (Staff photo)*

- Distribute flyers about volunteer workdays to locations near the nature preserve
- Gather names for speakers or hike leaders
- Send us articles when you see the Conservancy mentioned in the news
- Drop off a few newsletters or annual reports in waiting rooms or other places where the public gathers
- Offer to host a Linked to the Land event on your property

Some of these tasks take just a few minutes and some a few hours, but they can all make a big impact on what we are trying to do together. If you would like to help, please fill out the volunteer form online to tell us how you could use your talents to enhance our mission of protecting and preserving habitat in our area.

[MississippiValleyConservancy.org/volunteer](https://MississippiValleyConservancy.org/volunteer)



## Your future gift unlocks conservation funding today!

A generous local couple, passionate about conservation close to home, has offered a \$15,000 challenge grant to support land protection. For each person who includes the Conservancy in their will or estate planning, \$1,000 will be unlocked! Now is the perfect time to consider a future gift through your IRA, will, or a land donation to help protect the places you love. To learn more or participate in the Bequest Challenge, please contact Carol Abrahamzon at 608-784-3606 ext. 4.



# Protecting rare and fascinating species in our region

By Justin Nooker & Karen Solverson

At Mississippi Valley Conservancy, we're dedicated to preserving the diverse wildlife and plants that make our region so special. We provide a voice for all wildlife, including the small, lesser-known creatures that play a crucial role in the health of our ecosystems. Take, for example, some fascinating moth species that rely on prairie plants like leadplant and New Jersey tea. While these moths may not have the same name recognition as something as flashy as a monarch and other butterflies, they are vital to the environment we are working to protect.

Let's introduce a few of these species:

- *Anacamptis wikerii* — A new species of micromoth discovered in 2013, it is known to feed only on leadplant and false indigo bush. This species is still not well understood, and scientists are eager to learn more about its life cycle and role in the ecosystem.
- *Erastria coloraria* — Also known as the broad-lined Erastria, this moth is host-specific to New Jersey tea. While it was first documented in 1798, much about this species remains a mystery, and it faces threats that have made it critically imperiled in some areas.
- *Catocala abbreviatella* — Known as the abbreviated underwing moth, this species exclusively feeds on leadplant, making it another species we need to protect to ensure its survival.

You might wonder, "Why should we care about moths?" Moths play an essential role in nature. Their larvae are important food sources for many animals, and adult moths help pollinate plants, contributing to biodiversity. In addition to their ecological value, moths and other insects can offer potential future benefits in education and even economic development. But for these possibilities to become a reality, we must ensure these species are present and thriving. To thrive, these moths need healthy populations of their host plants.

Native prairies where leadplant and New Jersey tea are found have been decreasing nationwide. The Conservancy's For the Wild volunteer program has been reversing this trend by expanding prairies little by little through efforts with volunteer work days to remove invading trees and brush and implement prescribed burns. One of the host plants, leadplant, can be found on at least 20 Conservancy nature preserves and on more than fifty private properties protected through conservation easements.

Many of these rare and important species can be found on our protected lands, close to home. By supporting the work of Mississippi Valley Conservancy, you are helping to protect habitats for these and many other species that rely on habitat restoration and protection. Together, we can ensure that our region's natural heritage endures for generations to come.



Above: *Anacamptis wikerii* larvae. (Photo by Kerstyn Perrett)



Above: *Erastria coloraria* moth. (Photo by Jim Sogaard)



Above: *Catocala abbreviatella* larvae. (Photo by Angus Mossman)





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Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, nonprofit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy has permanently conserved more than 26,200 acres of bluffs, prairies, wetlands, streams, and farmlands in Wisconsin's Driftless Area since its founding in 1997. Over 7,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.

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Connor Kotte, *Stewardship Specialist*  
Michael Reitz, *Restoration Ecologist*  
Levi Plath, *Land Manager*  
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La Crosse, WI



## Exciting news is on the horizon!

In the next few months, we will have the opportunity to expand our protected natural areas with a property that plays a vital role in the survival of peregrine falcons. With your generous support, we can ensure this land remains a safe haven for these magnificent birds and countless other species that depend on it.

Very soon, you'll have the chance to be part of this incredible conservation effort. Your contributions toward the acquisition of this property will make it possible to safeguard wildlife and preserve the beauty of our bluffs for future generations. These funds will also help us to restore and expand rare and fragile prairie and savanna ecosystems on this property. Together, we can create lasting impact—right here, close to home. Stay tuned for details on how you can help!

*Above: With your support, the peregrine falcons will have a safe place to hunt, and the rare dry bluff prairie will expand and give native plants a chance to thrive. Photo by Dianne Mollers.*