

# Conserved

Upper Mississippi River Valley

Fishing  
Spring Creeks

PAGE 36

Getting Kids  
Outdoors

PAGE 16

No Place  
Like Home

Taking care of places we love PAGE 8



“Let us leave a splendid  
legacy for our children.

Let us turn to them and say, “This you inherit;  
guard it well, for it is far more precious than  
money and once destroyed, nature’s beauty  
cannot be repurchased at any price.”

— Ansel Adams

# contents

## People

### 8 NO PLACE LIKE HOME

#### For Many Reasons, Landowners Are Protecting the Places They Love

Author Ben Logan immortalized the farm where he grew up in his book *The Land Remembers*. He then protected that farm with the help of Mississippi Valley Conservancy. Many other landowners are doing the same, acting now to keep both agricultural and wild lands undeveloped forever.

### 12 GREAT ADVENTURE

Artists Sara Lubinski and Neil Rettig call this region home, and they've each launched extended projects to protect the wonders of the blufflands.

### 16 GETTING KIDS OUTDOORS

Giving kids opportunities to explore our natural world is more important than ever. Let's help them connect to places we love—places humans have valued for thousands of years—and discover nature's mystery and adventures.

### 18 IT STARTED WITH A HANDFUL OF CITIZENS Mississippi Valley Conservancy

A small, committed group of people established Mississippi Valley Conservancy in 1997. Now more than 1,600 members, a strong staff and committed volunteers and funders are building a movement.

## Places

### 20 15 YEARS, 15 PIVOTAL PROJECTS

More than 16,000 acres of blufflands, prairies, wetlands and streams have been dedicated to conservation through ownership, conservation easements and a landowner registry program with Mississippi Valley Conservancy since 1997. These milestone projects show what's at stake.

### 26 WEB OF LIFE

#### On Blufflands Hillides, Unique Prairie Ecosystems Thrive

It's possible for people and rich, natural ecosystems to thrive together. With a little help, rare remnants of once-prevalent habitat types in our area are thriving again.

### 28 CONSERVING FARMLAND

In some years, 5,000 acres of Wisconsin farmland is lost every month to sprawl. As a matter of the heart—and deeply held values—many landowners are working with land trusts to halt the trend, and protect what matters most to them.

## Features

### 30 CONSERVATION STRENGTHENS LOCAL ECONOMIES

Local managers, developers and national research studies say undeveloped lands are an important draw for tourists, businesses, and sought-after employees.

### 36 CONSERVING LAND, TROUT AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT

#### Notes From a Fisherman's Journal

When wild lands stay wild, fish are not the only ones that thrive. Rick Kyte renews himself in coulees close to home, catching trout in the Driftless Area's cold water streams.

### 39 WHAT IS A LAND TRUST?

Many of us want to leave a legacy of natural space and outdoor experience for our children and grandchildren. With this in mind, the work of land trusts has never been more important.

### 42 GET OUT AND PLAY!

#### Hunt, Fish and Hike on Conservancy Lands

There's nothing better than time outdoors, so keep it simple and get outside! You can hunt, fish and hike conservancy-owned lands in every season.

## Get Involved

### 44 NOW IS THE TIME

Learn how you can be part of a movement of people who are protecting places they love.

### 46 INVITATION

The Mississippi Valley Conservancy's goal is to balance a growing, prosperous community with a healthy, diverse environment. To succeed at a critical moment in history, the enthusiasm and support of the whole community is needed.

# The Upper Mississippi River Blufflands— The Heart of America

Just as Mark Twain observed more than a century ago, each bend in the river reveals another striking juxtaposition of working and natural lands. The 24,000 square mile Driftless Area was bypassed by the last wave of continental glaciers, resulting in a steep and rugged landscape – often in sharp contrast to flatter land just miles away. The land's diverse topography, soils, and plant communities harbor many globally-imperiled natural communities, demonstrating amazing contrast—from hot-dry sites with prickly pear cactus and “goat” prairies to Ice Age holdovers like Pleistocene snails on algific talus slopes.

Here, prairie, oak savanna, wetlands and deciduous forests remain part of a mosaic of farms, suburban and urban areas. Here, the once free-flowing and meandering Mississippi River has been modified – but never completely tamed. Rather, as Congress declared in 1986, the Upper Mississippi River is both a nationally significant ecosystem and commercial navigation system.

This special place is designated as highest priority for the Wildlife Action Plans of the four states of the Upper Mississippi, though birds long-ago “designated” it as a major transcontinental migratory flyway. Strong local public-partnerships led by an alliance of area land trusts work with conservation-minded landowners and active communities to protect these natural resources for their own sake – and for their economic, health, aesthetic and other human benefits. These partners work cooperatively to achieve “a state of harmony between men and land” as sought by the great conservationist and Wisconsin native, Aldo Leopold.

The river floodplain along MVC's territory was declared the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1924 – another gift to the future from the hard work of citizen conservationists along with public and private agencies. This 240,000-acre refuge, which runs for 261 miles along the river valley, provides habitat for 40% of America's waterfowl, more than 300 bird species and 260 species of fish. With more than 500 access points and harbors, the river is a recreational resource to more than 3 million people annually (more than Yellowstone), supporting a \$6.6 billion annual recreation and tourism economy. Just recently the Upper Mississippi River was designated a RAMSAR wetlands of global significance.

We, as an American people have both been shaped by this river and its blufflands, and we have shaped it as well. There is an important story to be told about the interrelationship between this mighty river and people and this Midwestern landscape. This landscape is here for all of us to enjoy, on foot, on bicycles, by auto, train and boat. There is a story around every bend.

It is the story of people taking care of the places they love.

*This article was authored jointly by the members of the Blufflands Alliance. Special thanks to Dan McGuinness and Mark Ackelson.*

“Along the Upper Mississippi every hour brings something new. There are crowds of odd islands, bluffs, prairies, hills, woods and villages—everything one could desire to amuse the children.”

– Mark Twain, 1886 interview

# Conserved

This magazine is published by Mississippi Valley Conservancy, a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Since 1997, more than 16,000 acres of blufflands, wetlands, and streams in nine counties have been dedicated to conservation through ownership, conservation easements and a landowner registry program.

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“It means a great deal to put a piece of land aside, never to be developed. It is one legacy I can leave behind.”

— **Jim Theler, La Crosse, Wisconsin**

*Dr. Theler permanently protected 48 acres on the Bad Axe River with a conservation easement in 2011.*

# No Place Like Home

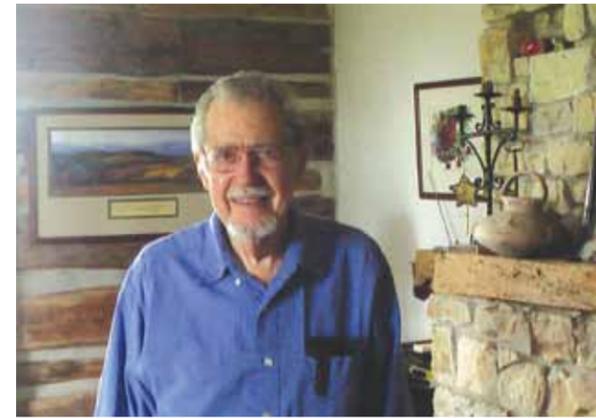
By Dave Skoloda

For Many Reasons, Landowners Are Protecting the Places They Love



## Laura Coglan

Laura Coglan has permanently protected her 63-acre "Bobolink Farm Preserve" near Blue River in the Wisconsin River valley. Coglan, who grew up on a farm that later was developed for housing, said, "It seems living space for animals, birds and plants will always be pushed aside to make more room for people... I couldn't let that happen to this beautiful and unique little corner of Wisconsin, and you never can know what may happen years down the line."



## Ben Logan

Author Ben Logan bought back and protected the Crawford County farm where he grew up and subsequently wrote about in *The Land Remembers*. The reasons he gave for placing a conservation easement on the farm with Mississippi Valley Conservancy were, as one might expect from such a thoughtful writer, quite philosophical: "Sometimes I call it the urbanization trap. We're too far from intimacy with the land to know what it's saying to us," he said in an interview recorded in 2008. Asked why he wrote *The Land Remembers*, he said:



**"I realized at some point that the people of the land were not represented.... And I began to write with more of a sense of responsibility. We were taking land for granted, and all of this began to be tied together into a carelessness we'd been living with and a need to get people to recognize that land has a voice. You know, people, animals—all of this is linked together."**

*Other landowners who have protected southwest Wisconsin properties have been philosophical as well, in ways as distinctive as the properties they've protected. Here are just some of the reasons they gave when easements were signed over the last 15 years.*



## Stanley A. Ledebuhr

Stanley A. Ledebuhr, a retired Winona teacher, donated a 20-acre bluff directly across the river from Winona. Ledebuhr stipulated that the land should be open for public use. And he wanted it named "Angel Bluff," a tribute to his late wife.

## James & Janice Brady

James and Janice Brady donated a conservation easement on 425 acres of their farm in Trempealeau County, near the lower Black River. The Brady's "Pine Point Farm" is a registered historic farm with the State of Wisconsin. Developers had proposed buying their farm and turning it into a golf course with adjacent homes. They protected it instead.

**"Jim and I could see in each other's eyes what we wanted to do. It gives me chills every time I think of it," says Jan.**

In this photo, U.S. Representative Ron Kind recognizes the Bradys for their vision.



## Loran Nordgren

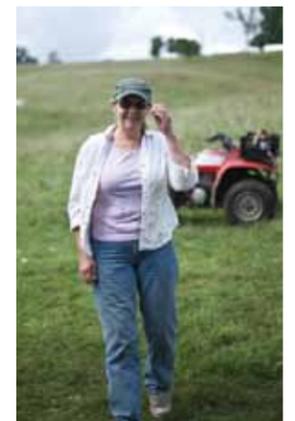
Loran Nordgren and his children Loran Jr., Erik, Carl, and Lauren Nordgren-DuBois donated a 348-acre conservation easement on their Bad Axe River valley property. Asked about his interest in protecting the land, Loran quoted author Willa Cather:

**"People come and people go, but the land is here forever. Those who love it and care for it and understand it are those who own it for a little while."**

## Bonnie Wideman

Bonnie Wideman, who donated a conservation easement on her 160-acre organic farm in Crawford County, said:

**"Even if my children are not interested in continuing the farming tradition here, even if they sell the land, the gift will go on. It can continue to be working farmland, but also the wildlife habitat and native features of the land will continue to be enjoyed by future owners."**





## Tom Boston

Tom Boston owns property with trout fishing access on the Bad Axe River, where he's taken on extensive wildlife habitat improvement and stream bank stabilization projects in recent years. These have improved trout habitat on both the Bad Axe River and Hornby Creek, which are listed as trout waters in the State of Wisconsin fishing guide. To permanently protect this special place, Tom donated a conservation easement. In the photo above, Tom and former MVC employee Abbie Church hold a photo of his land.

## Dr. Robert & Lori Wallock

Dr. Robert (Bob) and Lori Wallock donated an easement on 346 acres sharing a mile of common boundary with the 1400-acre DNR Bell Center Unit, for a total protected acreage of 1700 acres just south of Gays Mills. **Asked about the reason for protecting the land, Bob replied, "...just to keep the land as it is. I don't want it ever changing."**



## Jim & Phylis Munsch

Jim and Phylis Munsch placed an easement on their 98-acre Vernon County organic beef farm overlooking Coon Valley. Jim said **"I am concerned about the loss of agricultural land in the U.S., especially land lost to residential and commercial development. Farmland is one thing you cannot manufacture. As an individual and a landowner, there's something I can do to stop that trend and Phylis and I have a strong commitment to do just that."**



## The Babson Family

The Babson family, owners for many years of the Chicago-based Surge milking machine business that was part of the modernization of dairy farming, protected 1,118 acres on the Kickapoo River north of Viola in Vernon County. Jean Babson said her late husband, James Babson, who served as president of Babson Brothers Company, bought farms in the area some 35 years ago and consolidated them into a grazing operation. According to Jean,

**"James Babson had vision, had a love of the land. The whole place meant a lot to (him)... It's such a beloved part of the country that meant so much to me and (my husband), and it's nice to know it's going to be in good hands."**

Pictured at left: Steve and Cindy (right) with their mother, Jean, in 2009 at Kings Point Farm in Vernon County. Other siblings are Nick of Montana, Nina, who lives in New Zealand, and Henry, who operated the farm.



## Fredrick & Lou Anna Domann

Fredrick and Lou Anna Domann placed an easement on their 108-acre property near Platteville in Grant County. Fredrick Domann said:

**"My first motivation (to protect the land) was after I had planted 5,100 trees on the property. I didn't want someone to destroy them to build a mansion or a residential subdivision on that beautiful river bluff... I can't think of a better way to protect the land than with a conservation easement. If your kids or grandkids promise not to destroy the land, that promise is only good for a lifetime. The easement is a way to make that permanent." Lou Anna added, "We don't own the land, we only lease it from the next generations."**

Above, Fredrick and Lou Anna are shown above with their son, Rick, and daughter, Katie.

## Jim & Joyce Czajkowski

Jim and Joyce Czajkowski of Wauzeka donated a conservation easement on their 80 acres in southern Crawford County, seven miles west of Wauzeka and five miles northwest of the Wisconsin River.

**The Czajkowskis say they value open space and wildlife habitat and want to be good stewards of the land.**

*Whatever reasons landowners expressed, conservation easements have been written to incorporate and respect them. For its part, Mississippi Valley Conservancy has taken on the responsibility to see that those reasons are respected and, if necessary, enforced in the years to come. Like the land, the easement remembers.*

