Westport Farm gets boost from Madison Community Foundation

Madison Community Foundation has helped to achieve major gains over the years. Thanks to a new $19,000 grant, we are well on our way to improving land security for a group of Hmong farmers at Groundswell’s new 10-acre Westport Farm in Waunakee.

“We’ve participated in a lot of exciting projects through the years, but I honestly can’t think of any that serve so many purposes and help so many hard-working people as the Westport Farm,” said Jim Welsh, executive director of Groundswell Conservancy. “This is a wonderful partnership between the Hmong growers, Jim Welsh, who generously sold the land to us, Community GroundWorks, and MCF.”

MCF has a track record of funding projects with both Groundswell Conservancy and Community GroundWorks, but this one is unique, says Tom Linkfeld, MCF’s Vice President of Community Impact. “We are excited to be part of this project, which develops infrastructure, governance, self-determination and long-term land stewardship for a group of local farmers,” he said. “The effort combines environmental stewardship and education with a culturally-inclusive approach to the Hmong community, who may not often be included in local planning efforts but have a powerful agricultural background and knowledge. This grant not only the only county’s environmental sustainability but also recognizes the value of our increasing diverse community.”

The grant is helping to work with the Hmong farmers to add infrastructure like a well and create long-term leases that will give them security on the land. Grover Mix Chiang says that the project will enhance their connections to the fertile fields north of Madison which they have raised for 14 years. “Every time I’m out on the land sending out the vegetables I’ve grown out of love, I’m so happy,” she said. “I find this enormous weight lifted from my shoulders.”

Groundswell’s habitat restoration sites include Westport Prairie and Patrick Marsh. Located east of Waunakee, Westport Prairie is a small remnant of the former 150,000-acre Empire Prairie which stretched across northern Dane and southern Columbia Counties. Patrick Marsh, on San Patricio’s nature Reserve, is a pristine, marshy, and marshy landscape. This picturesque marsh is home to ponds of white pelicans, a siege of herons, and rafts of waterfowl.

“‘Our job is to sharpen our tools and make them cut the right way…” – Aldo Leopold

“Each summer, Groundswell partners with Madison Audubon Society, Lakeshore Nature Preserves, Pleasant Branch Conservancy, and Pope Farm Conservancy to hire five undergraduate interns to restore wildlife habitat at each partner’s sites. Rain or shine, the interns work five days a week from May-August with each of their site experiences.”

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Every other Monday and each Tuesday, our Prairie Partners intern crew throws on their work gloves and spends the whole day restoring the land. This year they were removing invasive herbaceous plants like garlic mustard and giant ragweed as well as cutting back invasive brush like honeysuckle and buckthorn. Where there once was an impenetrable wall of honeysuckle on the base of the drumlin at Westport Prairie, there is now open, oak-savanna habitat.

Our interns have participated in a variety of projects this year. On Sunday, October 20, 2019, The SRC and IRA stations near Snake City take runners through serene prairie, hardwood forest, and a great plantasia above the Wisconsin River valley. Proceeds help Groundswell protect the special places you love. If you would like to help with parking, registration, or water stations, please contact Danza at (608) 258-9797 or danza@groundswellwisconsin.org.

Can you volunteer at our trail run in October?

The annual Black Hawk Ridge Trail Run will take place on Sunday, October 20, 2019. The SRC and IRA stations near Snake City take runners through serene prairie, hardwood forest, and a great plantasia above the Wisconsin River valley. Proceeds help Groundswell protect the special places you love. If you would like to help with parking, registration, or water stations, please contact Danza at (608) 258-9797 or danza@groundswellwisconsin.org.
Groundswell welcomes two new board members

Tracy Wikland recently retired from a 32-year career at UW-Madison. As a department administrator, her responsibilities included budgeting, human resources, financial oversight, facility management and planning. She holds a B.S. in Accounting and a M.S. in Management. Tracy loves a rural town near Madison with her husband and dog on 16 acres of rented farmland. For over a decade she served as a member (and then Chair) of the town’s Land Trust Commission, protecting farmland and natural areas through the town’s Purchase of Development Rights Program. Tracy enjoys painting (gouache, not walls), volunteering on the UW Credit Union’s Audit Committee, and spending time outside trying to keep honeysuckle and aspen out of the family prairie. These days, nature’s health seems to also need humans – as advocates, champions, protectors. I’m honored to be part of nature’s best advocate, Groundswell Conservancy.”

Curt Bjurlin is a conservation biologist who was born and raised in Wisconsin. He has spent most of his career researching and monitoring birds in Wisconsin’s prairie ecosystems. Curt spent the first ten years of his career researching threatened and endangered species throughout the United States. He has published over 60 scientific papers on the ways in which desert tortoises and San Joaquin kit foxes interact with transportation and energy infrastructure. In his free time, he enjoys both cross country skiing and gardening. He lives in Madison with his wife, Alex, and their twin boys. “I’m excited to serve on the Groundswell Conservancy Board because I believe people can achieve their best results if they spend time in nature.”

Another Town of Dunn farmer protects land

In March another conservation-minded landowner permanently protected their farmland in the Town of Dunn south of Madison. The farmer entered into a permanent conservation easement – a voluntary land protection agreement benefiting Groundswell Conservancy. This agreement demonstrates that the rural lifestyle cannot be developed and will remain available for future use and in the future.

The residents of the Town of Dunn have made conservation a priority by providing funding for this conservation easement through the town’s Rural Preservation Program. Ed Minihan, the Chair of the Town of Dunn said, “This property is proof that the PDR program works. Here, we have a young farmer that wanted to purchase his own farm in the Town of Dunn and expand his business. The money he received through the PDR program made this dream economically feasible.”

This 80-acre farm is now part of a larger protected landscape. About 15% of the Town is permanently protected from development through the partnership of landowners, the Town, and Groundswell.

Meet BJ Byers

As our newest Conservationist in Residence, BJ Byers has his sights trained on Westport Prairie. BJ is an ornithologist who grew up in the United States. He has published numerous scientific papers on the ways in which desert tortoises and San Joaquin kit foxes interact with transportation and energy infrastructure. Although he has lived in Wisconsin for several years, BJ grew up in a military family that lived in 4 states and 3 countries. Whatever he has lost, BJ was drawn to the outdoors. He enjoys hiking, canoeing, fishing, birdwatching, and vegetable gardening.

BJ’s favorite bird is the northern flicker, and he counts Rachel Carson among his conservation heroes. He shares a love for birds with his wife, Carolyn, and their son Jay (named after the bird).
Another Town of Dunn farmer protects land

In March another conservation-minded farmer permanently protected their farmland in the Town of Dunn south of Madison. The farmer entered into a permanent conservation easement—a voluntary land protection agreement—made possible by the Town of Dunn’s Rural Preservation Program.

In 2017, Groundswell made an agreement with the Town of Dunn to establish a $70,000 matching grant for the Rural Preservation Program to expand the program. In addition, the Town of Dunn has made conservation a priority by providing funding for this conservation easement through the town’s Rural Preservation Program.

In March, following discussions, the Town of Dunn’s Land Trust Commission protected this 142-acre farm. This property is now part of a larger protected landscape. About 48% of the Town is permanently protected from development.

“Scientific research is showing that human health improves from exposure to nature. Spending time outside trying to keep honeysuckle and aspen out of the family prairie is joyful both for people and for wildlife. He also looks forward to supporting community conservation projects. For example, in the removing the drilling of a new well at Westport Farm, so the Housing communal group does not have to bring water from off-site to irrigate their crops. Curt’s talents include working with other community engagement efforts, as well as working with our conservation easements.”

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As our new Conservationist hired in March, BJ Byers has his sights trained on Westport Prairie. BJ’s favorite bird is the northern flicker, and he counts Rachel Carson among his conservation heroes. He shares a love for nature’s health seems to also need humans—as advocates, champions, protectors. BJ is honored to be part of nature’s best advocate, Groundswell Conservancy.

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“We’ve participated in a lot of exciting projects through the years, but I honestly can’t think of any that serve so many purposes and help so many hard-working people at the Westport Farm,” said Jim Weske, executive director of Groundswell Conservancy. “This is a wonderful partnership between the Hmong growers, Jim Weske who generously sold the land to us, Community GroundWorks, and MCF. MCF has a track record of funding projects with both Groundswell Conservancy and Community GroundWorks but this one is unique, says Tom Linfield, MCF’s Vice President of Community Impact. “We are excited to be part of this project, which develops infrastructure, governance, self-determination and long-term land stewardship for a group of local farmers,” he said. “The effort combines environmental stewardship and education with a culturally-inclusive approach to the Hmong community, who may not often be included in local planning efforts but have a powerful agricultural background and knowledge. This grant not only fulfills the county’s environmental sustainability but also recognizes the value of our increasingly diverse community.”

The grant is helping us work with the Hmong farmers to add infrastructure like a well and create long-term leases that will give them security on the land. Grinner Ming Chang says that this project will enhance her connections to the local farmers, “The effort combines environmental stewardship and education with a culturally-inclusive approach to the Hmong community, who may not often be included in local planning efforts but have a powerful agricultural background and knowledge. This grant not only fulfills the county’s environmental sustainability but also recognizes the value of our increasingly diverse community.”

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The 2019 Prairie Partners interns, new joins us from UW-Madison (Margaret Johnson, Tucker Sanborn, Dane Sanborn, Calla McKittrick, and Rachel Norris), and UW-Stevens Point (Rachel Montemer). This internship provides invaluable hands-on experience with habitat restoration that will foster their careers.

Peterson Prairie is located on the east side of the city of Sun Prairie just north of the Wisconsin River.

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grown out of love, I’m so happy,” she said. “I feel this enormous weight lifted from my shoulders.”

that will give them security on the land. Grower Mai Chang says that the project will enhance her connections to the community and recognize the riches of our increasingly diverse community.

approach to the Hmong community, who may not often be included in local planning efforts yet have a powerful agricultural background and knowledge. This grant enriches not only the county’s environmental sustainability but also recognizes the value of our increasingly diverse community.

The grant is helping us work with the Hmong growers to add infrastructure like a well and create long-term leases for the 9 farmers raising vegetables, fruits, and flowers at Westport Farm. Andy Yang is one of the 9 farmers, and he says that with the grant they are well on our way to improving land security for a group of Hmong farmers at Groundswell’s new 10-acre Westport Farm. "We've participated in a lot of exciting projects through the years, but I honestly can't think of any that serve so many purposes and help so many hard-working people as the Westport Farm," said Jim Welsh, executive director of the Madison Community Foundation. "This is a wonderful partnership between the Hmong growers, Peg Whiteside who generously sold the land to us, Community GroundWorks, and MCF.

The grants are helping us work with the Hmong growers to add infrastructure like a well and create long-term leases that will give them security on the land. Grower Mai Chang says that the project will enhance her connections to the community and recognize the riches of our increasingly diverse community.

Places worth knowing

Join Groundswell Conservancy outside and get to know the places you help protect. Our expert-led outings offer you unique opportunities to enjoy and learn about our wonderful landscape while meeting others who share your commitment to conservation where you live. Our field trips are fun and free, but pre-registration is required. Reserve your spot online today at groundswellwisconsin.org/events.

Can you volunteer at our trail run in October?

The annual Black Hawk Ridge Trail Run will take place on Saturday, October 20, 2019. The 5K and 10K courses near Sauk City take runners through scenic prairie, hardwood forest, and a poor prairie along the Wisconsin River valley. Proceeds help Groundswell Conservancy protect the special places you love. If you would like to help with parking, registration, or water stations, please contact Danni at (608) 258-9797 or danni@groundswellwisconsin.org.

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