Looking ahead 2020-2024

Our mission is to protect special places, forever. But exactly how do we do that, and how can you help? In November the board of directors of Groundswell Conservancy adopted a plan to guide our work over the next five years. The plan builds on our track record of protecting vital land and water, managing our nature preserves and local farms, and spreading the word and building allies for our important work.

What will your legacy be?

Opportunities to do things that last forever are few and far between. By including Groundswell Conservancy in your will, estate plans, or beneficiary designations, you'll protect special places, forever. Imagine the difference your beneficiary designations, you’ll protect special places, forever. Opportunities to do things that last forever are few and far between. By including Groundswell Conservancy in your will, estate plans, or beneficiary designations, you’ll protect special places, forever.

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Participating in our field trips and events. If you would like to learn more about what you can do, please read our

The volunteer power that plants new prairies and restores savannas, and you build community at our special places by

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You have protected forever 12,416 acres of cherished local land.

Places worth knowing

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Anybody can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie.”

— Willa Cather
Welcome Adam!

Adam Perizza is our work study student who joined the Groundswell team in September. Adam is pursuing a master’s degree in Environmental Conservation at the UW-Madison Nelson Institute. The story of his journey there is a most interesting one.

Adam found private land conservation as a vacation after a career in web and app design. After graduating from Virginia Tech in 2014 with a degree in Business Information Technology, he went to work for Design Unlimited, and supporters of Groundswell, whose mission is to protect Wisconsin’s natural resources. In 1991, when the DOT removed the tile and pumps, within months, 100 acres of water spread across the old marsh. This acquisition helps fill in the project boundaries of the DNR's 151. But in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, you would have missed it, because for nearly three decades the marsh didn’t exist. Drought and pumps kept the soil dry for farming. The expansion of Highway 151 in the early 1990s gave Bill Wambach and his team at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation an opportunity to restore the marsh. It became Wisconsin's first wetland mitigation project, designed to restore or create wetlands in place of the marsh destroyed by the highway way. For nearly three decades, a habitat restoration project began in the winter of 1991 when the DOT returned the tile and pumps. Within months, 100 acres of water spread across the old marsh and drew more than 5,000 ducks and 200 tundra swans during spring migration. Soon thereafter the DOT transferred the land to the DNR as Patrick Marsh Wildlife Area.

As Patrick Marsh grew, so did Bill’s love for the marsh. You could often find him at the marsh with Patrick Marsh Friends, often with Bill’s team at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and supporters of Groundswell. It became Wisconsin’s first designated wildlife area in 2002 when the DOT removed the tile and pumps. In 2004, Bill and Jeanne convinced Groundswell to buy additional land around the marsh, which we did, adding 105 acres over the years. Bill was a wonderful advocate for Patrick Marsh and a great friend to Groundswell. His passing leaves a hole in many of our hearts.

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Remembering Bill Wambach (1925 – 2019)

San Patrick’s Patrick Marsh wouldn’t be what it is today without Bill Wambach. Most of you probably know that on your right side as you drive north past San Patrick on Highway 151, the Black Earth Creek was being constructed. Bill Wambach, as he liked to be known, missed it, because for nearly three decades the marsh didn’t exist. Drainage ditches and pumping kept the soil dry for farming. The expansion of Highway 151 in the early 1990s gave Bill Wambach and his peers at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation an opportunity to return the marsh. It became Wisconsin’s first wetland mitigation project, designed to restore or create wetlands in place of others that were going to be destroyed when the highway was built. The project was a success, with 150 acres of wetland restoration project in the winter of 1991 when the DOT removed the tile and pumps. Within months, 100 acres of water spread across the old marsh and drew more than 5,000 ducks and 200 tundra swans during spring migration. 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Opportunities to do things that last forever are very special and rare. By including Groundswell Conservancy in your will, estate plans, or beneficiary designations, you will protect special places, forever. Imagine the difference your support will make. To learn more contact Heidi Habiger at heidi@groundswellwisconsin.org (608) 258-9797.

Places worth knowing

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Earth Day Celebration
Monday, April 20th
Virtual Event—Register for Details

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day at the John Muir Memorial County Park in Marquette County. Learn about local conservation heroes with a scavenger hunt completed when you visit the park on your own.

Thank you to our sponsors:

Annual Bird Walk
Saturday, May 23
8:30-10:30AM

Join us for a morning walk at the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve with birder Marty Evanson. Birds we hope to see during the spring migration include many different species of warblers.

Thank you to our sponsors:

Cave of the Mounds Tour
Saturday, June 27
2:00-4:00PM

Explore the local hotspot Cave of the Mounds and learn how conservation plays a role in protecting this underground marvel.

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Prairie

Dedicated Groundswell volunteers planted eight acres of prairie this winter at Westport Prairie and Patrick Marsh. At Westport Prairie, we are restoring some of the last remaining pieces of the historic Empire Prairie. These remnant prairies were part of the Empire Prairie landscape, which once covered over 50,000 acres from Waukesha to Arlington. Our volunteers and partners at Waukesha High School and Madison College collected seed from these remnants to preserve the genetic value of these few remaining pockets of prairie. They then sowed the seed across five acres of former cropland at Westport Prairie.

At Patrick Marsh, we are restoring one of our rarest landscapes — oak savanna. This spring volunteer planted three acres of oak savanna and prairie on the west side of the mound around the small pond. This planting enhances the oak savanna re-creation that Groundswell has been working on with volunteers and Operation Fresh Start for many years. Over 30 species of plants were included in the soil mix. In a few years, visitors will enjoy the elegant blooms of cream wild indigo and the aptly named bottlebrush grass. We thank everyone who helped with these two very special plantings, from collecting and cleaning seed in the fall, to sowing it over the snow this winter.

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Remembering Bill Wambach

(1925 – 2019)

Sun Prairie’s Patrick Marsh wouldn’t be what it is today without Bill Wambach. Many of you have probably seen the marsh on your right side as you drive north past Sun Prairie on Highway 151. But the marsh is much more than a scenic view spot; it was Bill’s vision that made it what it is and he would probably be aghast if it had been developed instead.

In place of others that were going to be destroyed when the highway was widened in the early 1990s, Bill Wambach persuaded his colleagues at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to acquire a 100-acre piece on their own initiative rather than sell it to the private sector. The restoration project began in the winter of 1991 when WLT purchased the marsh and its riparian buffer, the Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area. Bill was a strong advocate for the creek, which has been restored and now thrives.

In December we added five more acres to list of protected places, thanks once again to a conservation-minded family—this time the Endres and Dane County Parks. Follow-up work will be done by Groundswell staff, volunteers, and Prairie Partners interns. We can’t wait to get started on this restoration project.

Imperiled oaks saved at Patrick Marsh

A dense oak trees have stood on the east side of Patrick Marsh for decades. Several of these trees have been seen on some of Wisconsin’s oldest aerial imagery from the 1930’s. Over time, these grand oaks have been shaded out by invasive, weedier trees. Their leaves have been eaten by pests and diseases. The oaks are invaded by other species of trees that were planted to improve access to the north side of the marsh.

For over a decade, Bill Wambach worked to make the marsh a better place for the environment. Many of you have probably seen the marsh on your right side as you drive north past Sun Prairie on Highway 151. But the marsh is much more than a scenic view spot; it was Bill’s vision that made it what it is and he would probably be aghast if it had been developed instead. In place of others that were going to be destroyed when the highway was widened in the early 1990s, Bill Wambach persuaded his colleagues at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to acquire a 100-acre piece on their own initiative rather than sell it to the private sector. The restoration project began in the winter of 1991 when WLT purchased the marsh and its riparian buffer, the Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area. Bill was a strong advocate for the creek, which has been restored and now thrives.

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Welcome Adam

Adam Perzio is our new work study student who joined the Groundswell team in September. Adam is pursuing a master’s degree in Environmental Conservation at the UW-Madison Nelson Institute. The start of his journey there is a most interesting one.

Adam found private land conservation as a reaction after a career in web and app design. After graduating from Virginia Tech in 2014 with a degree in Business Information Technology, he went to work for a design consultancy in Austin, Texas. Adam’s experience with design coupled with his love for nature led him to the Pacific Coast Trail in 2017 and the Appalachian Trail in 2018. Through these experiences, Adam felt the importance of protecting the natural environment.

In 2020, Adam joined the Patrick Marsh project team in a volunteer role. He wanted to be a part of something bigger than himself. It was then that he connected with Groundswell and decided to pursue a career in conservation.

Groundswell works with people’s hearts. To read stories about Bill shared by his daughters, please visit groundswellwisconsin.org/wambachlegacy.

Growing conservations at Mendota Elementary School

Some of the next great conservationists will come from Madison’s north side. At Mendota Elementary School, they are already being trained to be the leaders of tomorrow.

The school is located in one of Madison’s older neighborhoods, just a few blocks from the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. The building is more than 100 years old and shows signs of age. But the students who walk through its hallways have a different view of what a school should be.

The Green Team is currently developing the curriculum plan to get the school aligned with the next generation’s environmental priorities. With so much to consider, it’s important to get the students involved.

The students are simple.

- Gather data from friends, their families, teachers, and community members.
- Develop a green schoolyard campus plan from those ideas.
- Develop a green curriculum plan.
- Gather feedback on both plans from the school and community.
- Implement the green schoolyard program alongside the new science curriculum.

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2:00-4:00PM
Explore the local hotspot Cave of the Mounds and learn how conservancy plays a role in protecting this underground marvel.

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