



Blazing Star

Newsletter for the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District

Welcome to the Blazing Star, the newsletter for Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District (FSCWMD). Stay up to date on our current projects and events while learning about conservation and management efforts, endangered species, and habitat restoration.

Let's come together to protect our precious local flora and fauna.

Update from the Board: President's Report

Even as the halls of government were quiet for a while, waterfowl migrated, the prairies still went to seed, the wind still blew, and the sun still rose. If anything, the pause was a reminder of why our work matters: the outdoors doesn't depend on gridlock or headlines; it is always there. The outdoors depends on people who care enough to step outside, look around, and protect what they love. We are ecstatic to have the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) back in motion and moving forward. We are thankful

for the resilience and the determination of our partners in the USFWS and our volunteer friends.

As the winter season falls upon us following the recent Solstice, we have a busy schedule ahead, with many activities planned for the public and local WPA lands. Please keep an eye on our website calendar and social media for updates, times, and places you can join in the continuous celebration of conservation. We look forward to seeing you in 2026.

Brian Headlee
President, FSCWMD

Manager's Corner

2025 St. Croix Wetland Management District's Volunteer of the Year Award

This quarter, I would like to highlight the St. Croix Wetland Management District's Volunteer of the Year Award Program. I feel incredibly fortunate to work alongside a dedicated team of volunteers who support nearly every aspect of our work—biology, habitat management, maintenance, visitor services, and so much more. Over time, these volunteers have become an essential part of everything we do. Honestly, it's hard to put into words just how vital they are to our success.

The Volunteer of the Year Award program began in 2010, the same year the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District was established. While the Friends group and the Volunteer Program are separate, they are connected. All Friends members are volunteers, but not all volunteers are Friends. Our Friends volunteers serve as our core volunteers—helping organize and lead events, collect native seeds, present educational programs, and contribute in countless other ways.

Their passion and commitment make an incredible difference, and this program is one way we can celebrate the people who give so much of themselves to help us achieve our mission. This year, I'm honored to recognize two individuals for their outstanding contributions to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the St. Croix Wetland Management District: **Charlotte Nicholes and Claude Bovi.**



Photo Credit: Chris Trosen

- **Charlotte** has supported seed collection, outreach events, and the development of event flyers throughout 2025. Recently, she has helped plan the Seasons of the Wild Photo Contest. She also plays a key role in organizing and publishing the quarterly Friends "Blazing Star" newsletter.
- **Claude** has contributed through seed collection, repairing doors, coordinating large construction projects, assisting with kiosk sign installations, and providing essential maintenance support.

So many volunteers help us care for and maintain these public lands, and I am deeply grateful—not only to Charlotte and Claude—but to every member of our volunteer team. You make working here in western Wisconsin both rewarding and fun.

Chris Trosen

Acting Project Leader

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

[St. Croix Wetland Management District](#)

[Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge](#)

Photo Contest Spotlight — Tom Lindfors

Seasons of Wild

JANUARY 1 – OCTOBER 31, 2026

The district's inaugural photo contest, "Seasons of Wild," is underway. Beginning January 1, 2026, participants can upload their photos using a tab on the Friends website at <https://www.fscwmd.org/photocontest>.

The contest runs through midnight October 31, 2026. The fee is \$20.00 per submission. There is no limit on the number of photos participants can submit.

Photos must be made between Jan. 1, 2026, and Oct. 31, 2026, on one of the District's 48 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) located in St. Croix, Polk, and Dunn counties.

Photographers have their choice of five categories in which to enter: Flora, Fauna, Naturescapes, People, and Trailblazers (under 16 years old). Prizes will be awarded for Best in Show, People's Choice, and Second and Third place in each of five categories.

Participants and guests will vote to determine the winners at an Exhibition/Reception on February 6, 2027, at the 45th Parallel Distillery in New Richmond, WI.

WPAs are "wild" lands managed for wildlife and habitat. There are no designated trails, and signage is minimal. They provide extraordinary opportunities to witness the wonders of wildlife on nature's terms while fulfilling the district's mission to protect, restore, and manage wetlands, prairies, and oak savannas for the benefit of migratory birds and, by doing so, protect other wildlife.

The intent of the contest is to raise public awareness of these readily accessible wildlands in our backyards and raise funds

to support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's conservation efforts and educational programs during an especially challenging time.

Photographers of all skill levels are invited to put their abilities to the ultimate test, trust their instincts, and capture that signature moment showcasing the best that nature has to offer.

Four workshops will be offered over the course of the contest, the first of which took place on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. The workshops will address topics related to both photography and the properties themselves, and will include opportunities for participants to ask questions. The January workshop focused on tips for shooting in winter conditions.

Watch the Friends' Facebook page for details on how to sign up at: [Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District](#).

Additional workshops are planned for March 28, June 13, and September 19, 2026.

The contest is sponsored by Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District, Think Tank Photo, National Camera, West Photo, and 45th Parallel Distillery.



Volunteer Spotlight — Matthew Logering

A Family Growing Together in the Prairies and Wetlands

What started as a simple quest to learn more about the land near our home quickly became something much more. Through the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District (FSCWMD), our family found a welcoming community. From hands-on activities for the kids to meaningful engagement for adults, this group has become an important part of our lives.

Being involved fits perfectly with our family's goals: to engage in our local community, seek out meaningful experiences that expand our understanding of the world around us, and step away, if only briefly, from the fast pace of everyday life. Time spent in the prairies and wetlands helps us reconnect with our roots and develop a deeper appreciation for the complexity of these landscapes and for all those who came before us to protect their beauty. In giving just a little of our time, we've received so much in return from mentors who generously share their knowledge to experiences that stay with us long after we leave the lands. Even a short winter walk through the prairies and wetlands can completely

change our perspective. What begins as a dreary or heavy day often ends with renewed inspiration and gratitude. Sometimes that shift comes from something simple, like spotting a rabbit darting through the grasses, an unexpected moment that sticks with the kids long after the walk is over.

As a family, we've especially enjoyed collecting seed on beautiful summer days, climbing the big hills, learning which seeds to gather, and laughing as the kids discover just how sticky some of them can be. We've walked through prairies, rolled in tall grasses, and learned about migratory birds and the habitats they depend on. We've also built bluebird and duck houses together, learning about the birds that may one day call them home. Each experience brings new understanding and joy, shared across generations.



We've met so many intelligent and passionate people through this work, and we want to do our small part to help continue the legacy they are carrying forward. These prairies and wetlands are our small glimpse of heaven here on earth.

Whether you're looking to learn something new, connect more deeply with nature, refresh your perspective on life, gain inspiration, or meet truly wonderful people, your prairies and wetlands, along with the community that cares for them, welcome you with open arms.



Photos Courtesy of: Matthew Logering

WPA Spotlight — Tracy Ronnander

Winter Wonderland Opportunities

Did the early-arriving, beautiful white layer of snow on the ground leave you thinking about what you might do to get out and enjoy wildlife or what types of winter recreation options there might be? Why not try snowshoeing or cross-country skiing on one of the WPAs?

This past fall, staff mowed firebreaks on numerous WPAs in preparation for upcoming hazardous fuels reduction projects to support prescribed fire operations. These same firebreaks can serve a multipurpose role and provide a great route around the perimeter of the WPAs. It makes snowshoeing and skiing easier because the vegetation has been mowed down.

Consider checking out one of the following WPAs this winter for a day to reconnect with nature and enjoy the experience they have to offer.

Happy Winter!

Tracy



Photo Credit: Tracy Ronnander

List of WPAs

- Betterly
- Stanton
- 10 Mile
- BassLake
- Kostka
- Star Prairie
- Deer Park
- 12 Ponds
- Spring Meadows
- Rock Creek

Editor's Note: Please use caution when visiting WPAs in the winter, especially when parking and walking along the roads, as the parking areas are not plowed.

Knowles Nelson Needs our Help!

This is our first FSCWMD Call to Arms, or, in this case, your phone or laptop.

Background: The Knowles-Nelson (KN) Stewardship Program was established in 1989 to preserve valuable natural areas, protect wildlife habitats, and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities across Wisconsin. Named after former governors Warren Knowles and Gaylord Nelson, the program has funded over 10,000 projects statewide, making it a cornerstone of Wisconsin's conservation efforts. The St. Croix Wetland Management District has benefited from several grants in the past.

We are asking for your help. Funding for Knowles Nelson is set to lapse on June 3, 2026, the end of the current fiscal budget. It is important that this key funding resource receives continued support. That is why we are asking members and volunteers to help by reaching out to their state representatives. Senators and assembly members need to hear from their constituents. This is important to them. Time is of the essence. Please reach out to them by February 15, 2026, as this must be added to the legislative calendar this month.

The following language is specifically drafted to share with Senator Stafsholt's office, but most of it can be used for any representative. As chair of the Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage, Senator Stafsholt must place this funding legislation on the calendar.

As a conservation-minded individual in your district, I'm asking you to support the continuation of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. The program has protected the lands and waters that make Wisconsin a great place to enjoy the outdoors and has made it possible to share this heritage with our families, children, and grandchildren.

Since 1989, Knowles-Nelson has invested in local conservation, expanded public access to public lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreation, and strengthened rural economies through partnerships that match state dollars with local and private funds.

In Senate District 10, there have been more than 380 projects funded by the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. These projects have improved boat launches, wildlife areas, forests, and trails that my family and I use every day.

The land protected through Knowles-Nelson gives us access to quality public lands, healthy fisheries, prairies and wetlands, and safe public spaces to pass our outdoor traditions down to our kids and grandkids. These are the same places where we teach conservation, stewardship, and respect for the land,

Knowles Nelson Needs our Help! continued from previous page

values that define Wisconsin's history as a leader in outdoor heritage.

Without reauthorization, the program will expire in 2026, threatening public lands and the habitat that our outdoor traditions depend on. Supporting Knowles-Nelson means standing up for Wisconsin's conservation heritage.

Senate District 10:

Sen. Rob Stafsholt (Pierce, Dunn & St Croix Counties)

Room 15 South State Capitol PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

(608) 266-7745

Sen.Stafsholt@legis.wisconsin.gov

Assembly District 28:

Rep. Rob Kreibich Room 107 West State Capitol

PO Box 8952

Madison, WI 53708

(608) 237-9128

Rep.Kreibich@legis.wisconsin.gov

Assembly District 30:

Rep. Shannon Zimmerman Room 324 East State Capitol PO Box 8953

Madison, WI 53708

(608) 237-9130

Rep.Zimmerman@legis.wisconsin.gov

Assembly District 75:

Rep. Duke Hunter Room 418 North State Capitol

PO Box 8953

Madison, WI 53708

(608) 237-9175

Rep.Tucker@legis.wisconsin.gov



Photo Credit: Mark Ritzinger

Calendar of Upcoming Events

11 Feb, Wed 6:00 – 7:30 pm Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting
1764 95th St, New Richmond, WI 54017, USA

1 Mar, Sun All day WILD PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

<https://www.fws.gov/media/legacy-wpa-maps-st-croix-wetland-management-district>

11 Mar, Wed 6:00 – 7:30 pm Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting
1764 95th St, New Richmond, WI 54017, USA

28 Mar, Sat 10:00– 11:00 am Photo Session Location to be determined.

1 Apr, Wed All day WILD PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

<https://www.fws.gov/media/legacy-wpa-maps-st-croix-wetland-management-district>

8 Apr, Wed 6:00 – 7:30 pm Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting
1764 95th St, New Richmond, WI 54017, USA

18 Apr, Sat 9:00 am – 12:00 pm Annual WPA Spring Clean-up Day

Saint Croix Prairie Waterfowl Production Area, 1764 95th St., New Richmond, WI 54017 St. Croix Prairie, New Richmond, WI 54017, USA

25 Apr, Sat 12:00 – 4:00 pm Earth Fest at UW-RF, FSCWMD participating. More info to follow

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How to get involved

1. Volunteer

We're always looking for volunteers to help with our conservation projects and events.

Contact us by sending an email to StCroix@fws.gov or visiting our website to learn more (link below).

2. Upcoming Events

The Friends Group holds monthly meetings at the headquarters office on the first Wednesday of every month, 6 pm. See our calendar for more events!

Thank you to our many partners!

For more information on our partners, please visit fscwmd.org.

3. Donate

Your donations help support our conservation efforts and make a difference. All donations to the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District are 100% Tax-Deductible. Donate here through [PayPal](#).

4. Follow Us

Stay up to date on our latest projects and events by following us on social media. Find us on [Facebook](#), join our email list, and check out our website (link below).

5. Apparel Store Update:

Please visit FSCWMD.org and check out the updated product list under Shop!

FriendsOfTheStCroixWetlandManagementDistrict