



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. 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.

From the Desk of the President

Hello Friends and Fellow Conservationists!

Butterflies!! Here on the eastern edge of the prairie pothole region, butterflies and pollinators embody a union of beauty and necessity. Their presence lends a vibrancy to our surroundings. Monarchs zoom like orange embers across fields, while swallowtails move with almost formal grace. These valuable friends and other pollinators are not merely expressions of natural beauty but are vital to successful habitats.

Our pollinators are far more than an aesthetic charm. As our various pollinators move among blossoms in search of nectar, they quietly transfer valuable pollen, enabling the reproduction of our native plants and crops. This process supports a broader web of life, one which we humans and many other species depend on.

In their brief lifespans, butterflies and bees remind us of the transient side of nature. Their seasonal lives mirror the rhythms of our environment in this region. Nearly all of us put an exclamation point on our first Monarch or Swallowtail of the year while we quietly forget the last ones we see in the fall. Keep that exclamation point front and center. Conservation of our land and habitat is a year-round adventure we are fortunate enough to participate in. Butterflies and bees are literally a product of reaping what we sow, forever vital to our needs. We appreciate your support of our conservation efforts, thank you.

Brian Headlee, President,
*Friends of the St. Croix
Wetland Management District*

Acting Project Leader's Corner

Celebrating a Gift for Generations: The Legacy WPA Donation

By Chris Trosen, Acting Project Leader

Last month, the St. Croix Wetland Management District, in partnership with Pheasants Forever Inc.'s Build a Wildlife Area Program, had the honor of celebrating a remarkable act of generosity and conservation vision: the donation of the newly dedicated Legacy Waterfowl Production Area by the Brakke Family. It was a moment that brought together partners, community members, and conservationists to recognize a gift that will benefit wildlife and people for decades to come.

Some places are simply too important to lose, and thanks to the Brakke Family, this land, located just north of Richardson, WI, will remain protected forever. Their decision to donate the property reflects a deep understanding of what makes our natural landscapes so valuable: they are living systems that support wildlife, protect water, inspire people, and connect communities. Every permanently protected acre tells a story, and the Brakke Family has added a meaningful new chapter—one rooted in stewardship, generosity, and a commitment to the future.

The wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands on this site may appear serene, but they support an incredible amount of life. Migrating birds, nesting waterfowl, pollinators, and countless

other species rely on habitat like this not just to survive, but to thrive. For wildlife, this isn't simply open space—it's home. And now, it will remain home forever.

But the Legacy WPA is also a gift for people. Healthy ecosystems provide clean water, outdoor recreation, educational opportunities, and the chance to experience nature in its purest form. In an increasingly fast-paced world, places like this remind us of the importance of slowing down, exploring, and reconnecting.

This property also carries the spirit of community-driven conservation that defines the St. Croix Wetland Management District. Our Seed Farm Program—launched in the late 1990s in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources—has grown into a nationally recognized volunteer effort supporting the restoration of native prairies, wetlands, and oak savannas. Each year, volunteers collect seed from more than 200 native plant species, helping to restore habitat for species such as the Karner blue butterfly and rusty patched bumblebee. In fact, seed from this program was used to begin the restoration of the agricultural field on the Legacy WPA site, bringing the land one step closer to its natural roots.

Celebrating a Gift for Generations: The Legacy WPA Donation

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Conservation doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen alone. It takes patience, collaboration, and a willingness to look beyond our own lifetimes. Thanks to the Brakke Family and to the dedicated staff, partners, and volunteers who helped bring this vision to life, the Legacy WPA will remain a place where wildlife flourishes, habitats endure, and future generations can experience the wonder of the natural world.

To the Brakke Family: thank you for your trust, your generosity, and your commitment to conservation. Your legacy will live on here, in every prairie bloom, every migrating bird, and every child who discovers nature for the first time on this land.



Left to right: Matt Holland (Pheasants Forever), Mark Brakke, Lin Brakke, Chris Trosen (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Eric Sytsma (Pheasants Forever).



Attendees of the Legacy WPA Dedication Ceremony. Photo Credits this page— Pheasants Forever, Inc.

What's New at the District?

Meet the Interns

Jazmin Mikkelson

Hey Y'all! My name is Jazmin Mikkelson. I grew up on a small organic dairy farm outside Black River Falls, Wisconsin, and agriculture has shaped nearly every part of my life. From showing horses and dairy cattle to serving in multiple leadership roles through Wisconsin FFA, I've always been deeply connected to the agricultural community. I am currently a senior at the University of Wisconsin River Falls, majoring in Ecology and Organismal Biology with a minor in Animal Science. My career interests center on wildlife-focused research biology.

In my free time, you'll usually find me outdoors, exploring new hiking trails, hunting, fishing, or riding horses. On rainy days, I love settling in with a good book,



Photo Courtesy of Jazmin Mikkelson

watching cartoons or testing out a new recipe. I am very excited about this internship with Wild Rivers Conservancy and St. Croix Wetland Management District, which will help broaden my horizons of opportunities in the wildlife and waterfowl production areas.

Parker Verdon

Hey everyone! My name is Parker Verdon. I am from Menomonie, Wisconsin, and I'm a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. I will be a senior this year, majoring in conservation with hopes of becoming a game warden someday. A couple of my hobbies are hunting, fishing, baseball, watching sports, and boating. I really look forward to learning new things this summer, and I hope that we will have all sorts of new experiences. I am having a great time here in our first couple of weeks and really enjoying my time.



Photo Courtesy of Parker Verdon

What's New at the District?

Meet the Interns

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Katy Haworth

Hello! My name is Katy Haworth. I am from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and grew up playing outside and developing an appreciation for the natural world early on. That passion has stayed with me, and I will be graduating this fall from Winona State University with a degree in Geoscience. When I'm not exploring outside and making my friends nervous by crouching at the edge of a drop-off, you can find me with a good book or working on a new craft! I'm so excited to be a part of the Wild Rivers Conservancy and St. Croix Wetland Management District team this summer. I've already learned so much in these first few weeks and can't wait to see what else we accomplish and learn throughout the next couple of months!



Photo Courtesy of Katy Haworth

Izzy Dieter

Hi! My name is Izzy Dieter. I'm currently a senior at the University of Wisconsin River Falls, studying Environmental Conservation and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). I grew up in Southeastern Wisconsin and love doing anything and everything outdoors. Hobbies I enjoy are kayaking, snowboarding, hiking, camping, and mountain biking. I'm excited to be joining the Wild Rivers Conservancy and the St. Croix Wetland Management District as an intern this summer. These first few weeks have been amazing and I look forward to continuing to conserve and protect fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat within and around the St. Croix and Namekagon riverways!



Photo Courtesy of Izzy Dieter

Spotlight:

Don't Take Grants for Granted

By Anthony Howe



Photo Courtesy of Anthony Howe

This past spring semester marked another successful iteration of my Advanced Communication course for the second-year Machine Tooling Technics students at Northwood Technical College. This group of students has so far secured \$3,100 in grant funding to support upgrades to equipment that volunteers use to clean native seed at the Star Prairie Seed Nursery. This year, grants were awarded by the Eau Galle-Rush River Sportsman's Club (\$250), the St. Croix Valley Master Gardeners Association (\$350), and the St. Croix Valley Foundation (\$2,500). Students in the course spend the semester learning about the grant-making process, researching local grants, determining our project's eligibility, learning about the communication theory involved in producing this kind of request, writing each and every application, and finally presenting on the process to a group of stakeholders, which this year took place on a pleasant May morning at the Star Prairie Seed Farm.

The students worked closely with St. Croix Wetland Management District staff and

Friends volunteers to understand the Seed Farm's mission and how the upgrades could support it. The generosity and priority with which Chris Trosen, Alex Bouthilet, Jean Gfall, and Greg Scheder show the project contribute eminently to its success.

The project began several years ago as a way to fulfill the course's volunteerism requirement. Chris Trosen was kind enough to field a call I placed to his office to see if there was anything my students could help with between January and May. He graciously allowed my students to participate in producing a communication plan for a newly placed, accessible waterfowl blind at Erickson Waterfowl Production Area. While that project was interrupted by the challenges of COVID, we regrouped the following spring with an idea to write grants for a funding priority set by the Friends.

Each version of the project rests on the idea that communication animates every aspect of what it means to be human. I can't lament the

Don't Take Grants for Granted

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challenge that proving the utility of this idea to a class of twelve 19-year-old soon-to-be machinists poses a challenge to me every day because I choose to take this up as my profession, but it's a challenge nonetheless. What we achieve despite this, I hope, is the realization that thoughtful and well-intentioned discourse can lead to positive outcomes for people and places. In Advanced Communication, we discover that if we can communicate well, we can make a real difference. Raising \$3,100 for the Seed Farm is undoubtedly a desirable outcome, especially as the course's instructor, but it is just a tiny example of what I hope my students learn they are capable of.



Oak Tree, Foster Conservation Area, River Falls, WI.

Blazing Star

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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

Please 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).

[FriendsOfTheStCroixWetlandManagementDistrict](#)

A Recliner, a Toilet Seat, and 20 Tires = 1,440 Pounds of Trash... and a Big Thank You

By Jean Gfall, Volunteer Coordinator and FSCWMD Member



Photos Courtesy of Jean Gfall

Every year, I'm amazed and grateful for the eager willingness of you, our volunteers, to pick up trash along the highways, byways, and parking lots of our WPAs. It's awesome when I send out the "invitation" to come and pick up trash (some of it icky!) to see the replies come in almost immediately! Some of you say, "I'd like to do a new one I haven't seen before!" Some say, "I've learned my way around that one, and I love it and want to do it again. It feels like such a special place." Sometimes, I get regrets from people who have done it before and can't this year but say, "Keep me on the list!" Not to worry, we will!!

Finally, there always seem to be enough volunteers to do every WPA again. Some people can't do it the actual day but make sure it's done and the trash brought to the office so it gets counted in our total pounds for the year!



Our trusty "Truck and Trailer Crew" is on call to zip out to locations when there's a couch in one of the parking areas or an appliance in a deep ditch that the volunteers can't get out. It all gets done-by hook or by crook. Our WPAs are safer and more beautiful because of you all. One of the volunteers said she thought people were starting to notice because this year they didn't have as much to clean up. We all hope that's true.

A Recliner, a Toilet Seat, and 20 Tires = 1,440 Pounds of Trash...and a Big Thank You

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So, **THANK YOU, THANK YOU.** We hauled 1,440 pounds of trash for incineration or recycling, including 20 tires, car bumpers, a toilet seat, a PARTY bucket, and a recliner, to name a few. After returning, there's lunch and visits with familiar and new faces who bring the same passion for these beautiful lands that each of us does. So again, thank you all. If you've never joined us, there's always next year. Come and join in the fun!



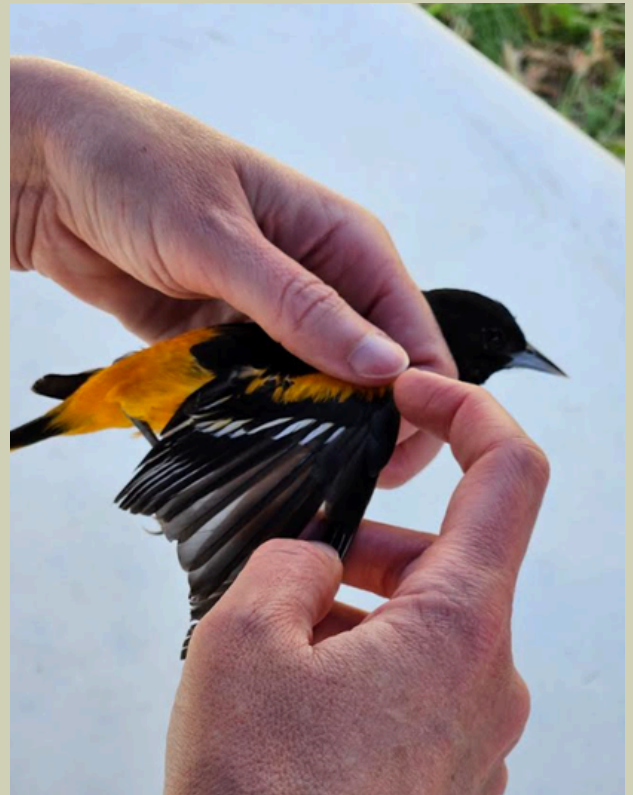
Photo Courtesy of Jean Gfall

Bob Goodlad Memorial Bird Banding Program Draws Strong Community Participation

By Larry Keller, FSCWMD member

On May 16, 2026, more than 50 people gathered at Oak Ridge Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) near Star Prairie, Wisconsin, for the annual Bob Goodlad Memorial Bird Banding Program. The event was hosted through a partnership between the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District, Carpenter Nature Center, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-St. Croix Wetland Management District.

The morning proved to be an outstanding opportunity for both education and bird conservation. A skilled team from Carpenter Nature Center, supported by dedicated volunteers, safely captured, identified, measured, and banded 22 songbirds. Participants also observed an impressive 65 bird species throughout the morning.



Photos Credits this Article: Larry Keller

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Bob Goodlad Memorial Bird Banding Program

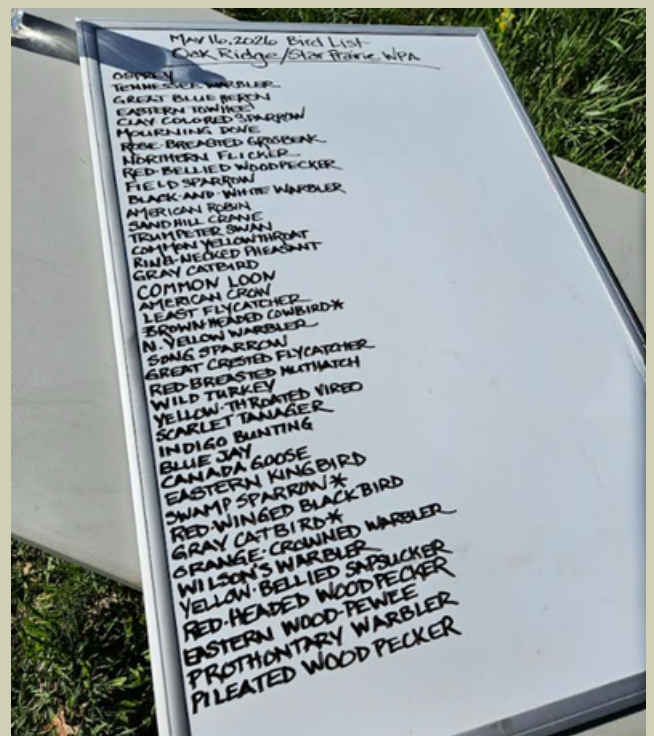
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Among those attending were a group of Wisconsin Master Naturalist students, who participated as part of their educational training toward certification. Visitors of all ages had the opportunity to see birds up close, learn about migration, and gain a deeper understanding of the scientific value of bird banding.

Bird banding is an important conservation tool used by researchers to study bird migration, survival rates, habitat use, and population trends. Each bird receives a small, uniquely numbered band that allows scientists to identify individual birds if they are recaptured or encountered elsewhere. The information collected helps wildlife managers better understand how birds use habitats throughout their annual life cycle.

The importance of Oak Ridge WPA as migratory bird habitat has been demonstrated repeatedly through past banding efforts. In previous years, birds banded at the site have been recaptured, providing valuable evidence that these wetlands and surrounding habitats serve as important stopover locations for migrating songbirds. These recaptures help researchers track movement patterns and better understand the habitat needs of migratory species.

Events such as the Bob Goodlad Memorial Bird Banding Program not only contribute valuable scientific data but also connect people with the natural world. By bringing together conservation organizations, volunteers, educators, and community members, the program helps inspire wildlife stewardship and highlights the critical role that protected habitats like Oak Ridge WPA play in supporting migratory birds.



The Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District would like to thank Carpenter Nature Center, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, volunteers, Master Naturalist participants, and all attendees who helped make this year's event a success.

Earth Fest

Friend's Group Goes on the Road

By Greg Scheder, FSCWMD Board Member

The Friends Group reveled in the Earth Fest test run we participated in on April 25, 2026, at UW River Falls. An event featuring more than 200 organizations promoting environmental advocacy, Friends members Jarell Kuney, Jean Gfall, Jean Ritzinger, Jean Maher, Will Mahler, Jada Gundersen, and I ventured out for four hours of mingling with the public, promoting the St Croix Wetland Management District (SCWMD) to a broader audience. With over 2,700 attendees, there was a constant parade of curious people checking us out, many of whom were completely unaware of the St. Croix Wetland Management District (part of the Fish and Wildlife Service), or of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWR) of which the Fish and Wildlife Service is a part.

The goal was threefold: increase awareness of the SCWMD, promote volunteer opportunities, and spread the word about many citizen opportunities, such as waterfowl and grassland bird surveys.

Backdropped by a 13-foot blue stem and leadplant photo, the team reached out to many participants who were unfamiliar with the SCWMD and the NWR. The crew shared the vision of the SCWMD all day with a collection of birds on a stick, interactive activities including seed cleaning and prairie seed collection, "I Spy" (a book about citizens of the wild), "Harold" the blue heron, "X" the unnamed badger, and many handouts.



Photo Credit: Jarell Kuney

It was a great day! In our excitement at this first-time opportunity, we brought more information than necessary. Things that grabbed attention were the interactive activities, wetlands coloring books, opportunities for kids to touch and handle birds, sift seeds, and receive maps and nature guides.

The maps were attention grabbers! Many visitors were unaware of the SCWMD, but the gap in understanding the National Wildlife Refuge system was even greater. The large Polk/St Croix county WPA map was a great starting point. We gave out a lot of those maps, opening the door for conversation about local public lands and the 856+ million acres in the NWR. What we learned is that we have a lot of work ahead to bring awareness not just of the SCWMD but of the NWR as a whole. However, I believe this Friends group can take on the challenge!



Photo Credit: Jarell Kuney



Photo Credit: Jean Maher



Photo Credit: Jean Maher

Dragons & Damsels of Wisconsin with Dan Jackson

By Greg Scheder, FSCWMD Member

On Sunday evening, June 7, 2026, Dan Jackson from the Wisconsin Dragonfly Society shared his thoughts and information on dragonflies and damselflies of Wisconsin. Dan is a citizen scientist with many interests, supporting not only the Odonata, but also actively surveying the birds and the bees of our state, as well as mussels, frogs, and butterflies! The presentation was terrific. While sharing information about these unique and ancient inhabitants of wetlands and prairies, Dan opened the door to future citizen-scientist opportunities for members and volunteers.

A small but engaged group joined the meeting and the pre-meeting activities, which was a demonstration of the process for surveying and documenting these delicate animals. Dan first gave an overview of the survey process. The goal of the Wisconsin Dragonfly Society is to gain a better understanding of the species inventory in this area. This area of the state lacks sufficient reporting data on local populations, so the evening began with Dan leading a walk-through of the inventorying process with the group. What do you need? A lightweight net with an extendable handle, a jeweler's 10x magnifying glass, an Odonata ID guide, and an affinity for wood ticks. Oh yes, and a delicate touch when identifying these insects because of their delicate wings and bodies, especially if recently emergent. The group enjoyed the experience. Then Dan provided an overview of dragonflies and damselflies of Wisconsin and the world.



Photo Credits this page: Greg Scheder

While I've always appreciated their contributions to hellgrammite bait for late-season bluegills, the true value of these insects lies in their impact on mosquitoes, deer flies, etc. Eating up to 200 a day, they certainly have an impact. While Wisconsin is known to have 162+ unique Odonata, they are always looking to increase local inventory analysis. During the evening, Dan cataloged five additional newly documented species for St Croix County. Identifying them is complex. It's based on their reproductive organ structure. Each species is unique, which virtually eliminates crossbreeding.

It was a fun, informative event, and we hope to do it again. Anyone who wants to contribute as a citizen scientist, mark your calendars for early June 2027. Let's see what's here in the St. Croix Wetland Management District!



Conservation Corner

Invader Spotlight

By Will Mahler – FSCWMD Board Member

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).

Sometimes it's hard to believe that the prettiest species can pose some of the greatest threats to the health of our native ecosystems. I must confess that it's hard not to admire the beautiful mid-summer blooms in a stand of glistening purple loosestrife. But the degradation the species can cause to native wetland vegetation is real. A resilient perennial supported by an extensive woody taproot and rhizomes, it can create dense stands that displace native emergent wetland species. While widespread as an invasive species in the Greater Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and the St. Croix Valley, it is not abundant on the St. Croix Wetland Management District. How do we keep it that way, you might ask? By reporting new populations and applying control while the population is small!

This is where we need your help! So far, populations are only known on two waterfowl production areas (WPAs). They are Bass Lake and Deer Park WPAs. Let's keep it that way!

When you're out enjoying your public lands this summer, keep an eye out for this species around the edges of wetlands or low wet meadows. If you think you've found some, take a picture and record the latitude and longitude the photo was taken at, then please send both to chris_trosen@fws.gov.



Photo Credit: Will Mahler

Thank you for being an active steward of the beautiful landscape we all cherish, which is the Saint Croix Wetland Management District. For more information on Purple Loosestrife and other invasive species in Wisconsin, check out the WI DNR invasive species webpage at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/invasives>.

Volunteer Spotlight:

Working Toward the Same Goals

By Jada Gundersen

I have been volunteering at the SCWMD since the Fall of 2023. I may not be the most consistent volunteer or put in the most hours, but I know the Friends group is something I always come back to. Whether it is Conservation Day, doing a WPA Clean Up, or even something new like attending Earth Fest this year, there is something about being surrounded by so many different people working towards the same goal that I love.

I remember my first time volunteering was for Conservation Day, when volunteers helped pick native seeds with a Boy Scout troop. I came in not knowing anyone or much about what a WPA really was. I came out of that experience with newfound knowledge about the importance of WPAs and some native plant life, and I found a group of people who were just excited to be outside with one another on the prairie.

It has been amazing to see what a group of volunteers can accomplish. Like picking up a giant trailer full of trash every year. Without volunteers, that trash would still be sitting there piled up on our public lands. Without picking seed, we wouldn't be able to restore these prairies to their former glory. Without tabling at a large event like Earth Fest, our

cause wouldn't have reached this far. These may all seem small in the moment, but with the right people, we truly do have a positive impact not only on the environment but also on those around us.

I can't wait to see what the future holds for the SCWMD, and I'll do my best to keep recruiting the younger generations to continue all the hard work we've put in.



Photo Credit: Jean Maher

Calendar of Upcoming Events

JULY		
Jul 21 & 28	TBD	Seed Collection: (Watch for Jean's updates, or check the website. Activities are updated every Monday.)
AUGUST		
Aug 4, 11, 18 & 25	TBD	Seed Collection: (Watch for Jean's updates, or check the website. Activities are updated every Monday.)
Aug 12 Wed	6:00–7:30 pm	Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting (Headquarters Office)
Aug 15 Sat	TBD	Bird Walk & Talk (A walking photography workshop. More details to follow.)
SEPTEMBER		
Sept 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29	TBD	Seed Collection: (Watch for Jean's updates, or check the website. Activities are updated every Monday.)
Sept 9 Wed	6:00–7:30 pm	Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting (Headquarters Office)
Sept dates	TBD	Annual Veterans Early Goose Hunt, with Fallen Outdoors, Erickson Waterfowl Production Area, 145th St., New Richmond, WI 54017
September 19	TBD	Photo Contest Workshop
OCTOBER		
Oct 6, 13, 20, 27	TBD	Seed Collection: (Watch for Jean's updates, or check the website. Activities are updated every Monday.)
Oct 3 Sat	8:30 am–2:00 pm	Conservation Day, District Office, 1764 95th Street, New Richmond, 54017
Oct 14 Wed	6:00 –7:30 pm	Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting (District Headquarters Office)

On the Horizon: Strategic Plan Review

Brian and Greg, along with Will Mahler and Chris Trosen, are looking for a few more members or volunteers to help with a Strategic Plan Review and Update this fall. It's been two and a half years: some things we've accomplished, some things need to be changed, and some need to be removed as the mission has evolved.

Starting in mid-September, this will entail two to three working evenings of collaborative meetings, each lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. If you are interested in throwing your hat in the ring, contact Greg Scheder, Schedenator@gmail.com, or Jean Gfall, JEGfall252@gmail.com

Calling all Members — Birds on a Stick Replacements

Time and handling have taken their toll on some species. We need the following replacements for the Birds-on-a-Stick collection. Please bring frozen specimens to the office.

- Mallard - Drake & Hen
- Wood Duck - Drake
- Gadwall - Drake
- American Wigeon - Drake & Hen
- Northern Shoveler - Hen
- Green Wing Teal - Drake & Hen
- Blue Wing Teal - Drake & Hen
- Canvasback - Hen
- Redhead - Drake
- Bufflehead - Drake
- Hooded Merganser - Drake & Hen

2026 Federal Duck Stamps are in!



Get your 2026 Duck Stamp at the District Office beginning July 27, 2026. The cost is \$25.00 per stamp. Make checks payable to: St. Croix Wetland Management District. Office hours are 7:00 am to 3:30 pm.