



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.

Update from the Board: President's Report

Hello Friends and Fellow Conservationists!

As spring gives way to summer in Wisconsin, the landscape bursts into full vibrancy, the fields are lush, gardens are thriving, and the days stretch long and warm. Pollinators are in full flight, busy among blooming flowers with the rhythm of nature at its energetic peak. This transition is a time of abundance and connection, when the outdoors comes alive with growth and renewal. Every year it particularly strikes me with the growth of trees. The conifers are obvious with their bright green extensions growing, but how can the green ash trees I planted 20 years ago be pushing past 45 feet tall? They're sneaky that way.

On a different note, also pleasing is the amount of red columbine I am seeing this year, both in my prairie area and on roadsides. It is exciting to see these native species flourish. Take a moment and reflect on what has stood out to you this growing season. What have you noticed and what has stood out? Will you do anything to affect next year? Every year is different, and ultimately, we only see a small percentage of the time our environment experiences. Do what we can personally to have an impact.

Brian Headlee
President, FSCWMD

FSCWMD is a 501(c)3 non-profit associated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thank you to all who contributed to this issue, including Jean Gfall, Brian Headlee, Chris Trosen, Larry Keller, Kari Healy, Veronica Bauer, Autumn Frederick, Bryce Johnsrud, Joel Upham, Tia Foster, Will Mahler, and Jean Maher.

Created and edited by Jean Gfall, Anthony Howe, Charlotte Nicholes, Allison Salas, and Greg Scheder.

Manager's Notes

Understanding the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program: Helping Our Communities

By Chris Trosen, Acting Project Leader

The Refuge Revenue Sharing program is set up by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to help out counties and local governments when it comes to land that's tax-exempt. This program is one way the federal government shows it cares about being a good neighbor to the communities around these lands.

This program started way back in 1935 when the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act was passed. The idea was simple: counties would get paid 25 percent of the money made from sales and activities that occur on national wildlife refuge lands, like timber sales or farming. If there wasn't any money coming in, though, there wouldn't be any payment.

In 1964, Congress made some changes. They decided that counties could either stick with 25 percent of net receipts or get 0.75 percent of the purchase price of the refuge land, whichever was higher. Over the years, as the revenue from these lands went up and down, some adjustments were needed. By 1976, there were times when the money earned from refuge lands wasn't enough to meet all the financial obligations, so in 1978, Congress updated the program to allow for more flexible funding.

Now, the program covers all lands managed by the FWS, including national wildlife refuges, waterfowl production areas, and fish hatcheries.

These payment funds help local governments that lose property tax money when the federal government buys land. While these lands come off the tax rolls, they often bring in visitors for things like ecotourism, which can actually lead to more tax revenue for local communities than what is lost when the land is taken.

Here in Wisconsin, these revenue-sharing payments can be used by townships for whatever governmental needs arise, giving local leaders the freedom to address various priorities.

As for how payments are calculated, the FWS uses a few different methods. This can include 0.75 percent of the market value, 25 percent of the net receipts from the refuge income, or a minimum of 75 cents per acre for land that's been purchased or donated. Since the program began, the aim has been to ensure that counties get at least what they received in 1977. For land that has never left federal control, the payments strictly depend

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Understanding the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program: Helping Our Communities

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on any income generated on that land. Importantly, if the National Wildlife Refuge Fund lacks enough money to cover these payments, Congress can step in and provide extra funding, ensuring local governments can count on this support.

In short, the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program shows how the federal government is committed to building strong ties with local communities. By compensating for the loss of tax income and promoting local economies through tourism, this program plays a vital role in supporting the management of public lands while also ensuring communities thrive. The ongoing teamwork between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local governments helps both wildlife and communities flourish together.

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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 second Wednesday of every month, 6 pm. See our calendar for more events!

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). Don't forget to shop the [Friends Apparel Store](#) while you're there!

Thank you to our many partners!

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

[FriendsOfTheStCroixWetlandManagementDistrict](#)

Calendar of Upcoming Events

JULY

Jul 22 & 29 TBD **Seed Collection;** Contact Jean Gfall at JEGfall252@gmail.com to be added to the notification list for time and place.)

AUGUST

Aug 5, 12, 19 & 26 TBD **Seed Collection:** Contact Jean Gfall at JEGfall252@gmail.com to be added to the notification list for time and place.)

Aug 5 Tues 6:00 –7:30 pm **Migratory Waterfowl Hunting and Aquatic Invasive Species**
Guest Speaker – Tyler Mesalk, WI DNR, Prairie Flats South WPA.
2241 80th Street, New Richmond, WI 54017

Aug 13 Wed 6:00 –7:30 pm **Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting**
(Headquarters Office)

SEPTEMBER

Sept 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30 TBD **Seed Collection** (Contact Jean Gfall at JEGfall252@gmail.com to be added to the notification list for time and place.)

Sept 10 Wed 6:00 –7:30 pm **Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting**
(Headquarters Office)

Sept 13 Fri 5:00 am–11:00 am **Annual Veterans Early Goose Hunt,** 1st date, Erickson Waterfowl
Production Area, 145th St., New Richmond, WI 54017

Sept 15 Sun 5:00 am–11:00 am **Annual Veterans Early Goose Hunt,** 2nd date, Erickson
Waterfowl Production Area, 145th St., New Richmond, WI 54017

OCTOBER

Oct 4 Sat 8:30 am–2:00 pm **Conservation Day,** District Office, 1764 95th Street, New
Richmond, 54017

Oct 8 Wed 6:00 –7:30 pm **Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District Meeting**
(District Headquarters Office)

Another Amazing Clean Up Day on the WPA

By Jean Gfall, Volunteer Coordinator and FSCWMD Member

Once again, our awesome volunteers, many of them new, gathered on April 26th at the office for some brief safety instructions and then, away they went to clean up every one of our 45 waterfowl production areas (WPAs). Like last year, it was amazing.



This year, we were prepared to assign extra people to WPAs that could've used some extra hands last year. As it turned out, we had over 70 participants and many, many extra hands that enabled us to complete some of our most work-intensive WPAs in record time.

Another record was the 1,300 pounds of trash transported to the recycling and trash center near Barron. Included in that was the recycling of a stove, furniture, pipes, and metal of all sorts brought in by our volunteers who exceeded expectations to load those and many other unmanageable items into their trucks and trailers!

What can we say except that we have UNDOUBTEDLY the BEST volunteers ever, no matter what they're doing! Thank you all for another great clean-up this year. We can't do it without your generous efforts for this land we all love.



Photos Courtesy of Jean Gfall

Bob Goodlad Memorial Bird Banding Event

By Larry Keller, FSCWMD Board member



Photo Credit: Barn Swallow on Wire from Noun Project

The Bob Goodlad Bird Banding Program took place on May 17, 2025, at the Oak Ridge WPA in Star Prairie, WI, drawing a crowd of over 50 enthusiastic participants. Despite challenging high wind conditions that limited the number of birds banded, attendees were still able to observe over 50 different species throughout the day. A total of seven birds were successfully banded, including a barn swallow—a first for the program and the highlight of the event.

Special thanks go to our friends at the Carpenter Nature Center for leading the program and to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their support in setting up and providing equipment. It was a great day filled with learning, community, and a shared appreciation for birds and conservation.

What's New at the District?

Lots of New Faces Doing Good Things

Meet Kari Healy:

A University of Wisconsin–River Falls alumna currently serves as a Management Analyst for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Midwest Regional Office in Bloomington, MN. She is presently on a developmental assignment, contributing to various activities at St. Croix Wetland Management District.

After earning her B.S. in Agricultural Business from UW-River Falls in May 2020, Kari joined the Federal Executive Board of Minnesota in 2021 as Assistant Director, following an extensive internship period. In this role, she helped forge partnerships between federal, local, and state agencies; managed multi-agency employee development programs; and supported emergency preparedness initiatives across the Twin Cities metro area to enhance federal agencies' disaster readiness, response, and recovery capabilities. In 2023, Kari transitioned to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, where her efforts have been instrumental in developing the Midwest Region's New Employee Onboarding Program, Mentoring Program, and supporting student outreach.

"I am so incredibly grateful to the leaders, staff, and volunteers at St. Croix for their gracious welcome and continued support. My educational background is tangentially related to natural resource management, but I wanted to get more hands-on experience in natural resource management at a field station. And when I told Chris Trosen, he immediately said, 'Well, why don't you start coming to St. Croix?!"



Photo Courtesy of Kari Healy

"I've already learned so much and cannot wait to grow more deeply embedded in the communities around our WPAs at St. Croix WMD. I am extremely passionate about connecting communities to their public lands and the many ways, both big and small, that they can be natural resource stewards in their own communities."

In Kari's free time, she enjoys traveling, volunteering in her community, kayaking down the Kinnikinnick River, camping, and spending time with her cat, Armando, and boyfriend, Matt. She is also a servicemember with the U.S. Navy Reserves of Minneapolis, MN.

What's New at the District?

Lots of New Faces Doing Good Things

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Meet Veronica Bauer:

Hello! My name is Veronica Bauer, and I am the Acting Biologist for the St. Croix Wetland Management District for the 2025 summer field season. I will be leading our biology program and our UW River Falls interns in managing invasive species and conducting multiple surveys, including bat acoustic monitoring, grassland bird counts, bumblebee monitoring, and Prairie Restoration Initiative (PRI) meandering walks, among other things.

My home station is the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, where I work as administrative personnel and assist other Refuge programs with any needs they have (i.e., prescribed fire, biology, maintenance).

I grew up in Germantown, WI, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse in 2020 with a biology and environmental studies degree. Before my current position, I worked seasonally as an AmeriCorps crew member and leader in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota.



Photo Courtesy of Veronica Bauer

My hobbies include brewing kombucha, thrifting, traveling, biking, painting, knitting, and reading a book with my cat, Reishi, in my lap.

This summer, I look forward to making new connections, building on my existing skills and relationships, and, most importantly, having fun and enjoying what the District offers. I am excited to be working with you!

What's New at the District?

Lots of New Faces Doing Good Things

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Photo Courtesy of Autumn Frederick

Meet Autumn Frederick:

My name is Autumn Frederick. I was born and raised in a small town in Southeast Minnesota called Wykoff, but I have since grown my roots in River Falls, Wisconsin, where I am in my final year of school studying Conservation. Since I was a small child, I knew my life's purpose was to be a steward of the land. Working with the St. Croix Wetland Management District has allowed me to practice and deepen my values while also learning new things every single day. I am so beyond grateful for this internship, and I can't wait to see how it shapes my future!

Meet Bryce Johnsrud:

My name is Bryce Johnsrud. I'm originally from the small town of Hollandale, located in southwestern Wisconsin. I will be a senior this fall at UW-River Falls, majoring in Ecology and Organismal Biology. Being given this great opportunity to intern for the St. Croix Waterfowl District is extremely exciting.

I'm looking forward to gaining all the experience and participating in all the new opportunities available this summer. With a background in hunting and fishing, I plan to use the knowledge I gain through this internship to better manage and conserve our future game and fish species once I graduate and enter the workforce.



Photo Courtesy of Bryce Johnsrud

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What's New at the District?

Lots of New Faces Doing Good Things

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Photo Courtesy Joel Upham

Meet Joel Upham:

Hello there. I am Joel. I am currently pursuing a degree in Conservation and Environmental Planning at UWRF, entering my senior year. I enjoy hiking and exploring cool places, going on adventures with friends, discovering neat thrifting finds and cuddling my tarantulas. I am looking forward to absorbing what I can from my time with St. Croix. Animal surveying in particular holds great interest to me.

Meet Tia Foster:

Hello! My name is Tia Foster, and I am interning at the St. Croix Wetland Management District Office in New Richmond, WI, this summer. I am an upcoming senior at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls, majoring in Conservation with a GIS minor. I will also be serving as Vice President of the Resource Management Club on campus this next semester until I graduate in December.

A few of my hobbies include hiking, kayaking, camping, reading, and learning/exploring new things! This summer, I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge of the conservation world, especially through plant identification, field data collection, and gaining hands-on experience in the field.

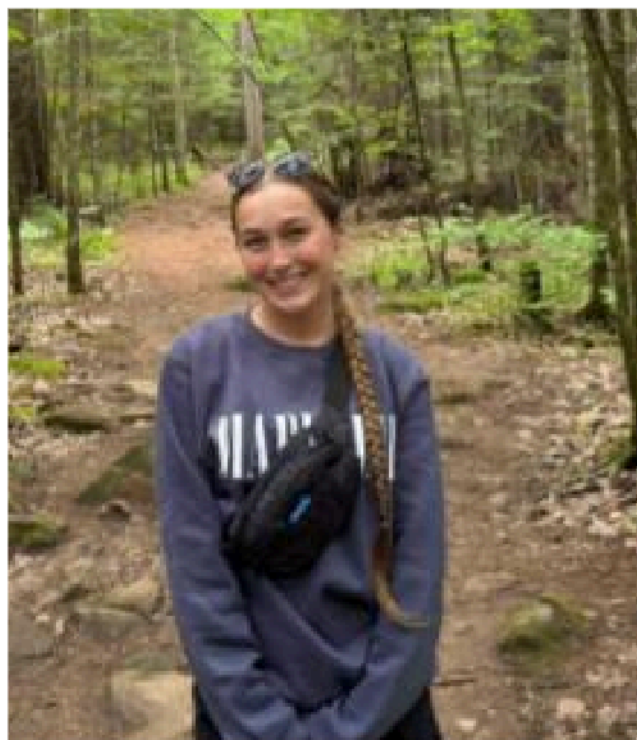


Photo Courtesy of Tia Foster

Spotlight: Conservation Corner

Build it and They Will Come

By Will Mahler—FSCWMD Member

In today's fast-paced world, the fate of our favorite wild places and animals can often seem in peril. We hear researchers and scientists tell us the great losses Mother Nature has suffered at the hands of mankind's progress, whether it is the startling decline of our favorite feathered friends or the widespread destruction of the once vast native landscapes that called this great state home. Threats to the remaining habitats we enjoy are everywhere.

Whether it is invasive species, development, or a simple lack of manpower to maintain them, it is sometimes hard to fathom how we as individuals can make a lasting impact on the landscape.

That is why places like St. Croix WMD are so special. I challenge everyone reading this to explore a WPA close to them and note the life that now abounds. I have had the privilege of watching numerous WPAs blossom into an oasis of life over the years. Where corn and beans once stood, big bluestem and switch grass now sway. An array of native wildflowers bloom from



Photo Credit: Mark Ritzinger

spring to fall, and the prairie soundtrack is again graced by the elegant calls of the meadowlark and bobolink. In many ways, these WPAs are islands of habitat in an increasingly inhospitable landscape. They serve as vital stepping stones for migratory species and critical nesting habitat for local wildlife. They are a true testament to the power of partnerships and the impact that can be made when we all work towards a common conservation goal. I do not know what the landscape we call home will look like in the next decade, which species will flourish, or which will be in peril, but one thing I am certain of is, if we build it, the species that call it home will come!

Volunteer Spotlight: Jean Maher

Putting Down Roots in the Prairie

By Jean Maher

I've been volunteering with this group of people for less than a year, but it feels like I've known them for a long time. Those whom I've met are of a similar mindset, caring deeply for nature spaces that belong to all of us—public lands. I came to my first meeting early in the summer of 2024, at which time the group generously allowed me a few minutes to talk about a nature photography book that I had recently finished. It didn't take long for me to become enthusiastic about the organization.

In that first meeting, an item on the agenda was seed collecting. I learned that the seed is collected from the prairies of the public lands and then used to restore areas as needed. I was curious and volunteered. From the start, it has been a great way to see the prairie up close and learn about the plants, their personalities
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and behaviors (really, they do have behaviors!) and how each species has a place, a season, and a purpose for being there, whether they be lichens, plants, insects, birds, reptiles, or mammals. My level of knowledge has grown exponentially about the importance of these spaces and how much more there is to be discovered, especially beneath what we can see.

I'm humbled by how these lands are historically significant and how they support life. I've only scratched the surface in getting acquainted with what's there.

Collecting seeds on the prairie is soothing to my soul. I leave the day's concerns behind and lose myself in the open space, the wind blowing, the laughter, the companionable silence, and staying watchful of an approaching storm on the horizon. I make a game of finding as much seed as I can. It's fun!



Volunteer Spotlight: Jean Maher

Putting Down Roots in the Prairie

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Plus, there's always the potential of an in-depth lesson about a plant beyond its name from Alex Bouthilet, who manages the seed farm. The Friends group supports events like field trips. A local school district made a visit to one of the properties, sending fifth-grade students to learn about the importance of the prairie and to have an experience collecting targeted seeds. Some of us were on hand to help. The kids were amazing. Their enthusiasm was

contagious, and by appearances, they had fun and were inventive in how they collected seeds. Students experienced how special a wild space is. They made a difference, and I hope they felt appreciated. What they did was important, and they left wanting more.

I visit the prairies more often now, in all seasons of the year, my camera in hand to snap a photo of something that catches my eye, whether it's a grasshopper on a seed head, or a soaring raptor or crane, or milkweed wafting seeds in the wind, or

a meadowlark, singing the sun down.

There's more to be done. Now, I'm learning to do upland bird counts at one of our public lands, another way we can volunteer.

I guess I'm putting down my own roots in the prairie!

