



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

At this writing, we are in the first full week of the new year and without snow cover. While not the best case for soil moisture and wetlands, the species wintering here are enjoying easy access to all of the available forage in these cold temperatures that have come with the new year. Speaking of the new year, it is a time many of us reflect on the events and experiences of the past year. It is also a time when we look ahead and wonder about the upcoming year and our plans. As an optimist with a streak of realism, I enjoy seeing the brighter side of our experiences, and I look to see more of them this year.

I hope to continue having a positive impact where I can: my outlook, friends and family, the local community, my little prairie and wetland, and of course the St Croix Wetland Management District. Where do you envision your impact in the upcoming year? Together, we as the Friends Group can have a larger impact collectively than any single one of us. Thank you for your membership and support. We look forward to another successful year in 2025.

Brian Headlee
President, FSCWMD

Manager’s Notes: The Importance of Volunteering with Organizations That Align with Your Core Values

By Chris Trosen, (he/him) Acting Project Leader

Volunteering is not just an act of giving; it’s a profound way to connect with your community and contribute to causes that resonate deeply with your core values. When you choose to volunteer with an organization that reflects your beliefs, the experience becomes more than just a commitment of time—it transforms into a fulfilling journey that enriches both your life and the lives of others.

At the St. Croix Wetland Management District, we offer a variety of volunteer opportunities that allow you to engage with nature and support conservation efforts. Whether you are collecting native seeds to restore habitats, monitoring grassland birds to help track their populations, or conducting waterfowl surveys to assess their health, each task contributes to the preservation of our precious ecosystems. These hands-on experiences provide a unique chance to learn

about wildlife, engage with like-minded individuals, and make a tangible impact on the environment. Volunteering not only nurtures your passion for conservation but also fosters a sense of belonging within a community of dedicated individuals. It’s an opportunity to develop new skills, gain valuable knowledge, and create lasting friendships while working towards a common goal. If you are looking to make a difference and align your actions with your values, consider joining our Volunteer Team. Your contributions can help ensure that future generations inherit a thriving natural world. For more information on how you can get involved, please reach out to me at Chris_Trosen@fws.gov or contact Jean Gfall at Jean_Gfall@fws.gov. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in our environment and communities.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---|
| February 12 Wed | 6:00–7:30 pm | Friends of the St. Croix WMD Meeting (Headquarters Office) |
| February 23 Sun | 6:00–8:00pm | Owl Prowl backup date only if February 2 has not happened. 2241 80th St, New Richmond, WI 54017, USA |

MARCH

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|----------------|-------------|---|
| March 12 Wed | 6:00–7:30pm | Friends of the St. Croix WMD Meeting (Headquarters Office) |
| March 27 Thurs | 6:00–8:00pm | Doug Tallamy "What's the Rush?" Glenwood City Public Library, 217 W Oak St, Glenwood City, WI 54013, USA |

APRIL

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|--------------|--------------|---|
| April 9 Wed | 6:00–7:30pm | Friends of the St. Croix WMD Meeting (Headquarters Office) |
| April 26 Sat | 9:00 am–12pm | Annual WPA Clean-up Meet at Office/St Croix Prairie WPA, 1764 95th St., New Richmond, WI 54017 |

Spotlight: Conservation Corner

Lead in the Environment: A Clear and Present Danger

By Mike Reiter



Buck Malick with Trumpeter Swan #98 – Summer Banding: Photo Credit—Chris Trosen

More than 10 years ago, at a meeting of the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District (FSCWMD), the subject of lead contamination and its effects on animals and the environment was discussed. This was and still is a huge problem that continues to wreak havoc at several levels with the continued use of lead ammunition and lead fishing baits and lures in Wisconsin and across the nation. Over the years, we have removed lead in paint to prevent lead poisoning in children who consumed it. The use of lead in plumbing is no longer allowed as the toxic effects on our water supply were recognized. Lead used in gasoline to provide smoother combustion in our gas-powered engines was banned, eliminating contamination and lead toxicity. Objects containing lead have also been outlawed for sale, and in 1977, the lead used in shots for hunting waterfowl was eliminated, and non-toxic shots were mandated. In 2009, a study from North Dakota outlined the potential hazard of using lead-core bullets in high-powered hunting rifles.

Animals, like eagles and other birds of prey that consume the carcasses of animals that have already succumbed to lead poisoning, can themselves become victims of lead. It doesn't take much to cause death. A sliver of lead, the size of a pinhead, can be sufficient. Buck Malick, a founding FSCWMD member from Hudson, participated in the trumpeter swan banding project north of New Richmond a few years back and placed the neckband on swan #98P. A few months later, an eagle was photographed eating on a dead swan that had, in all probability,



Trumpeter Swan #98 that following winter, died from lead poisoning: Photo Credit—Chris Trosen

died from lead pellet ingestion. The neckband indicated it was the same swan #98P! The eagle may be the next victim because lead is the toxin that keeps on giving!

Several years ago, in cooperation with the Willow River Rod and Gun Club, the DNR held a demonstration comparing the dynamics of lead hunting bullets with non-toxic copper bullets. When ingested by birds and other animals, including humans, lead can be highly toxic. Even though the high-velocity lead bullets are coated in a copper shroud, the lead core still poses a very serious health risk to any animal exposed to bullet fragments. The comparison between the bullets was dramatic!

Lead in the Environment: A Clear and Present Danger, continued

Along with the lead bullet slugs retrieved intact and showing very good mushrooming, there were hundreds of small lead shards visible to the naked eye. The copper bullets also showed excellent mushrooming, with each of the expansion petals intact, indicating perfect expansion. No fragmentation was noted with the copper projectiles. Prior to the demonstration, DNR Wildlife Biologist Harvey Halvorsen provided an introduction that documented the detrimental secondary effects of lead core bullets. Photos of packaged venison showed lead contamination upon X-ray, and whole animal scans detailed lead fragments some distance from the fatal shot's entry.

There is an urgent need now to address these issues of environmental lead contamination. We need to contact our senators and legislators at both the state and federal levels to make our case to move forward to eliminate lead in both ammunition and fishing tackle. We need to "get the lead out" when it comes to getting the lead out! We are losing countless birds and affecting all animals that are exposed to lead in our environment. The clock is ticking!

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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!

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).

Thank you to our many partners!

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

[FriendsOfTheStCroixWetlandManagementDistrict](#)

2024 Seed Farm Success

By Alex Bouthilet

2024 was another very successful and productive year for the St. Croix Wetland Management District's native seed production program. With the assistance of our incredible volunteers, we were able to harvest 82 species of forbs, six species of grasses, and one sedge species. The total calculable market value of this seed is 129,086 dollars, not including the several species that are unavailable commercially. The seed was provided to the National Park Service (NPS) through a new partnership, the Wisconsin DNR, Friends of Interstate and Straight Lake State Parks, the City of New Richmond, Bayfield County, and Riverwood Nature Center for habitat projects totaling over 44 acres.

We completed a 30-acre seeding at the new Legacy WPA and interseeded over 10 acres of current WPAs with new species. We had the invaluable help of many volunteers for over 4,500 hours (the majority of the 5,743 total 2024 Volunteer hours), including every class of 5th graders from the New Richmond School District and the sophomore class from Somerset High School. Through volunteer and educational events, we were able to reach over 1,000 people and make them aware of our seed farm program and its many benefits.



Friend's Members and Volunteers—Separating the Seed (left to right): Jean Maher, Jean Ritzinger, Barb Kolpin, Chris Trosen (USF&WS), Jean Gfall: Photo Credit— Jean Gfall



Friend's Volunteer Sierra Stukenholtz—Collecting the seed: Photo Credit — Jean Gfall

The FSCWMD Strategic Plan: Our Roadmap to Success

By Greg Scheder

About a year ago, the Friends of the St Croix Wetland Management District (Friends) finalized our first strategic plan (Plan) after 14 years. The idea had been bandied around and discussed off and on, and rough plans had been knocked out informally, but, as a board, we hadn't put a structured plan in place. I have a copy of what we called a strategic plan from as far back as 2015, but it was more of a wish list of things various members wanted to support. Even though we hadn't drafted a formal plan, our solid partnership with the St Croix Wetland Management District (SCWMD) fostered aligned goals and activities and led to many successful collaborations. But we really didn't know how to make the strategic plan sausage! Not having a formal plan wasn't a barrier, but Friends thought we could do more if we created a plan.

Things changed during the summer of 2023. Good fortune was with us during the July 2023 board meeting. That day, Buck Malick, a perennial volunteer to many local conservation-oriented groups, happened to be in attendance. While discussing the idea of a Plan, Buck offered the suggestion that we reach out to the St. Croix Valley Foundation for help. Unknown to us, they offer a consulting service that will guide nonprofit organizations through the process of creating an initial Plan. With that knowledge, FSCWMD reached out, provided the information about the group, and through the Foundation's guidance, met with the consultant Cecily Harris who emphasizes coaching conservation-oriented organizations. We were off and running by October of 2023.

Over the next several months, a dedicated team of Friends members and volunteers, Brian Headlee, Jean Gfall, Mark Ritzinger, Tim Nixon, Shelly Matthys, Claude Bovi, Mike Reiter, and me, along with District Project Leader Bridget Olson, and Foundation Consultant Cecily Harris (the Team) met four times to hammer out the Plan. Initially, the group drafted a "Who We Are Statement" and then defined a vision,



Strategic Plan working session – From front left to right: Mark Ritzinger, Jean Gfall, Claude Bovi, Consultant Cecily Harris, Shelly Matthys, Greg Scheder, Bridget Olson. Not pictured – Tim Nixon, Mike Reiter, Brian Headlee:
Photo Credit—Brian Headlee

mission, and values statement. The goal wasn't starting over but modifying and collating various talking points and Friends' goals from previous documents like our brochure, the Nature Guide, and other publications, and creating a unified roadmap to success. We borrowed some ideas from plans Cecily Harris brought to the Team as examples but modified them to align with what we wanted specifically for the District. It was a great collaboration. By April 2024, the language was finalized and adopted at the group's board meeting.

Reflecting on the process, we have achieved a number of the objectives outlined in the Plan as a group. But the beauty of a strategic plan is that it's a living document. The initial goal was to sit down and re-evaluate what we have completed and other objectives still to be completed or even added. While we initially targeted December 2024, with the change in Administrations in Washington DC, the review will be postponed until new direction is provided to the Fish & Wildlife Service and the District so we can continue aligning the group's efforts with the District's. Stay tuned for all the great things we will continue to pursue as we update the program's goals.

Volunteer Spotlight: Aimee Eberle

SCWMD: Finding Connection and Community in Nature

By Aimee Eberle

There's something magical about standing in the middle of a prairie, surrounded by tall grasses and a symphony of birds. Every visit feels like stepping into another world, where nature unfolds in ways that are both grounding and awe-inspiring. That's exactly what I experienced this summer while volunteering with the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District (FSCWMD) on bird surveys in Star Prairie, WI. Each month brought something new. In June, the prairie was alive with birds singing their hearts out. I'd chart out my GPS coordinates, stand still, and just listen. It was like a concert in the wild. By July, the grasses had shot up over my head, and walking through them felt like getting a hug from the land itself. Every spot I visited felt different, like its own little world, yet connected to the bigger picture of the prairie. By August, everything had started to change. The grasses were dying back, the birds were heading out, and the prairie felt quieter, almost lonely. it was



Fading September Evening at the Seed Farm: Photo Credit—Aimee Eberlee

bittersweet watching the season shift. I missed those vibrant summer mornings so much that I jumped at the chance to sign up for seed collection projects to keep the connection going. One of my favorite moments happened at the seed farm in Star Prairie. As I arrived, a huge rainbow stretched across the field, arching over the prairie like a warm welcome. I resisted the urge to grab my phone for a picture. Instead, I stayed in the moment, letting the beauty of the rainbow and the calm of the prairie wash over me. It was a moment of pure presence and connection that I'll never forget. That's the beauty of being an FWS volunteer.

It's not just about the work—it's about the moments, the quiet connection of standing among the tall grasses, the songs of birds, the sunsets, and even the option to just exist in the space without saying a word. It's been a gift to experience all of that. For me, the prairie has become more than a place. It's a reminder of life's natural rhythms and the simple joy of being present. After one of my visits, I captured the sunset above, just one of the many beautiful gifts this journey has given me. I look forward to more volunteer opportunities with FSCWMD and seeing folks out on the prairie!