

New Visions & Opportunities Unfold for Tall Pines – Strategic Plan Update Underway

by BECKY FEDAK, TPC Executive Director

There are many paths a local land trust can take to make a lasting impact in its community. The opportunities to protect land and water resources are vast, and so are the voices who care deeply about each approach. While we can't do everything, we can focus on where Tall Pines Conservancy is strongest—ensuring that the choices we make lead to the greatest impact.

Every five years, Tall Pines embraces the exciting challenge of charting its future through the development of a new strategic plan. Earlier this year, we invited your input through an online survey. Many of you took time to reflect on many important questions included in the survey, including: What role should Tall Pines play in local land conservation? Should we continue to concentrate within our current service area, or is it time to extend our reach to communities not served by other land trusts?

To guide this work, we formed a strategic plan task force. Their conversations have been thoughtful, spirited, and rooted in a shared love for the land. Drafting statements that capture our purpose and vision is not easy work, but it has sparked meaningful dialogue about how to honor the legacy of our founders, while also scaling our impact and welcoming new voices into the fold.

In August, this process came to life during a two-day workshop at the beautiful Wetland Woods in Rubicon. With expert facilitation supported by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Nonprofit Management Fund, more than 30 board and advisory board members, landowners, partners, and donors came together to help shape the next chapter of Tall Pines.



Strategic planning is never about finding a perfect answer – it's about listening, learning, and setting a strong course for the future. What we can promise is our continued commitment to protecting the landscapes that inspire us all. And while the path forward may take a few unexpected turns, together we are building a future where conservation thrives. ▲

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Ravensholme Farm Preserve Hosts an Abundance of Educational Activities

by JESSICA MYSLIWSKI, TPC Stewardship Coordinator

It was a busy spring and summer on the farm, and we were grateful to those who could make it out for a visit! Here's a recap of the events we held at Ravensholme this summer:

School Field Trips

Towards the end of the school year, we hosted students from Adeline Montessori School, KM Perform, and Waukesha North and South High Schools. Students received hands-on conservation education through activities such as oak ecosystem restoration, tree planting for our agroforestry project, and tree tube installation. Using their experience at Ravensholme, AP Environmental Studies students from Waukesha South also created a variety of projects covering topics from agroforestry, land trusts, pollinator habitat, and more! We are excited and honored to be inspiring the next generation of conservationists.

Bluebird Educational Workshop With WCLC: 4/26

In partnership with the Waukesha County Land Conservancy, we celebrated National Go Birding Day with a presentation on bluebirds, a tour of our oak ecosystem restoration project aimed at restoring bird habitat, and an option to construct and take home a bluebird box. These birds were once as common as the American robin, making education and outreach a critical part to restoring their populations.

Dig Into Soil Health: Wisconsin Farmland Protection Partnership Field Day: 6/11

In partnership with American Farmland Trust, Tall Pines hosted a soil health field day where experts explained the principles of soil, demonstrated how

different land uses impact soil, and offered examples of good soil health practices. Our 15-acre agroforestry project was highlighted by staff and the Savanna Institute. People from all over the state and of all different backgrounds attended this event.

One of the most striking demonstrations was the rainfall simulator, provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). A soil sample from a conventionally farmed corn/soybean field was compared to soil from a field that's been in cover crops for one year. An inch of simulated rainfall fell onto both samples with collection buckets showing the difference in runoff and water filtration. The buckets in the front demonstrated runoff. Most notably, the bucket from the corn field was filled with brown water, indicating significant soil loss whereas the cover crop bucket was clear.



Stewardship Society: 6/19

We celebrated members of our Stewardship Society with an evening on the farm. Guests were able to socialize with other conservation-minded folks and take in the views created by the amber sun. This night also served as the grand opening of our history exhibit inside the barn: Regional History: A Glimpse Into Waukesha County's



Agricultural History. Its purpose is to educate the community on the history of the land we work so hard to protect and steward.

Natural Resources Foundation Field Trip: 7/12

We had the honor of hosting our very first Natural Resources Foundation (NRF) field trip at Ravensholme! This gave us an opportunity to share our conservation projects with a wider audience.



The field trip started in the historic barn with introductions from staff, background on Tall Pines, and education on agroforestry. Participants were given the option to browse the history exhibit before a tour of the property which began with the pollinator garden. Folks wandered through bright yellow and vivid purple flowers as staff shared their experience with converting turf grass to a native prairie planting. This opened a dialogue for fellow conservationists to share their knowledge, ask questions, and provide helpful resources.

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Restoring Saeger Creek for the Future of Lac La Belle

by PAUL MEUER, TPC Land Protection Manager

Tall Pines Conservancy (TPC) is excited to share updates on the ongoing restoration planning for Saeger Creek, a vital tributary to the Oconomowoc River and Lac La Belle. Earlier this year, TPC and the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program (OWPP) joined ecological consultants from Stantec to conduct an initial survey and design study of the creek. The vision is to restore Saeger Creek back to more natural wetland conditions, thereby improving water quality, strengthening wildlife habitat, and enhancing the scenic beauty of this special place for the Lac La Belle community.



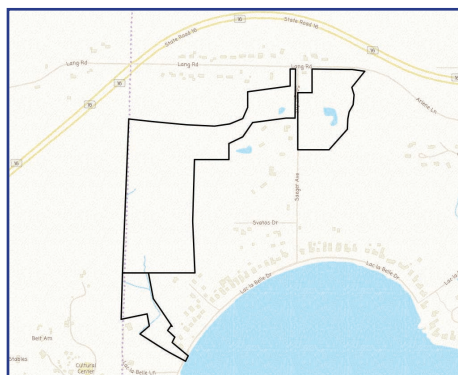
Environmental consultants and engineers with Stantec were accompanied by Erik Joost, OWPP and Paul Meuer, TPC to conduct a preliminary survey of Saeger Creek that will be used to determine comprehensive restoration plans.

In 2024, TPC purchased the Saeger West (62.35 acres) and Saeger East (13.56 acres) parcels from the Village of Lac La Belle, permanently protecting 75.9 acres and 0.86 miles of Saeger Creek. Much of the downstream portion of the creek within Saeger West has been historically ditched and channelized, resulting in eroded streambanks and a loss of connection to its natural floodplain wetlands. Today, the area includes degraded hardwood swamp, wet meadow, and emergent marsh communities, surrounded by residential properties and offsite wetlands to the west.

The Saeger West parcel, comprised primarily of wetlands, is the current focus of restoration planning. These wetlands already play an important role in filtering pollutants from the surrounding watershed and providing open space for quiet, nature-based recreation. With stream and wetland restoration, the site will offer even greater benefits, including:

- Stabilizing degraded streambanks
- Reconnecting floodplain wetlands to improve hydrology
- Creating habitat for native fish, aquatic life, and pollinators
- Enhancing water quality downstream in Lac La Belle

This project is part of a larger, multi-phase effort supported by a Wisconsin DNR Surface Water Grant. The current phase will develop 60% design plans for the restoration, incorporating detailed topographic survey data and grading concepts. Native wetland plant species will replace invasive vegetation, helping to diversify habitat and build resilience.



Map of Saeger Preserve depicting the location of Saeger Creek in the south and open water ponds in the northern portions of the preserve. Saeger East and Saeger West are defined by Saeger Avenue, which separates the two areas.



Saeger Creek as it flows into Lac La Belle is a severely degraded and historically channelized stream. Restoring the floodplain and surrounding wetlands will greatly improve water quality, wildlife habitat, and visual aesthetics of the land.

Final design is anticipated in 2026, followed by permitting, construction, and community engagement opportunities.

Public participation is a core part of the process. TPC and OWPP will host outreach events to share design plans and gather community input, including direct outreach to neighboring landowners and groups, such as the Lac La Belle Management District, to ensure local voices are included every step of the way.

Together, we are ensuring that Saeger Creek and Lac La Belle remain healthy, vibrant, and protected for generations to come. If you are interested in becoming involved as a volunteer or would like to make a donation to support this work, please reach out to Paul Meuer, Land Protection Manager at paul@tallpinesconservancy.org or Jessica Mysliwski, Stewardship Coordinator at jessica@tallpinesconservancy.org. ▲

Ride to the Barns

by BETH HOEFER-JEZO,
TPC Director of Outreach & Development

It was in 2009 that the first Ride to the Barns was held. It was a relatively simple affair, held on an afternoon in September, with 15- and 30-mile route options. Riders departed and returned to the Tall Pines' property on Hwy. C where they enjoyed a happy hour featuring local food and drink.



By year two, the event had grown to more than 100 registrants and the start and finish was moved to Camp Quad. The routes were longer, the rest stop offerings were more extensive (yet still local!), and the post-ride party buffet made its first appearance. In 2013, attendance soared, for the first time, to the 500 mark.

This year, we can say with some certainty, had to be the hottest yet, making those scenic hills even more menacing. As before, the riders proved they were up to the challenge!

Ride to the Barns has been generously supported by our riders, sponsors, hosts, and volunteers for 17 years. Thank you! It's been quite a journey. ▲



2026 Luminary Walk at Camp Quad Saturday, February 7th

candlelit stroll

**gourmet chili &
cornbread by Chef Earl
Gesling of The Natural
Way of Mayville**

hot apple cider & s'mores

outdoor bonfire

**Adults: \$10 • 12 yrs & under: \$5
2 yrs & under: free**

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tallpinesconservancy.org
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Thank You to Our Ride to the Barns Sponsors



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Thank You to Our Volunteers & Hosts: Dukelow Family | Koepke Family | Monis Family | Schultz Family | Quad | Zwieg Family

Land Conservation Trends & Takeaways From Rally 2025

by GATHERING WATERS

Wisconsin was well represented at the Land Trust Alliance's Annual Rally Conference, held in Cleveland, Ohio in early September.

Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts sent four staff members to the national conference this year. Here is an insider's look at what we learned at the conference, including trends in the land trust community and key takeaways that are relevant to Wisconsin land trusts.



This Rally was noteworthy because it was the first with Ashley Demosthenes at the helm as the CEO of the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). Ashley went out of her way to be present and engaged throughout the conference. For her keynote address, she stepped out from behind the podium and her remarks came across as heartfelt and authentic. We're excited for a new chapter at LTA and a renewed sense of collaboration.

It was also noteworthy to hear from the hometown land trust, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which was formed in 2006 through the merger of eight local land trusts-the largest merger of land trusts anywhere in the country. Since then, another five land trusts have combined with the organization. Today, their vision is to create thriving, prosperous communities nourished by

vibrant natural lands, working farms, and healthy cities in northeast Ohio. The organization was honored with the 2025 National Land Trust Excellence Award.

One of our staff attended a field trip that visited two signature preserves located in the Grand River lowlands. The tour focused on the value of partnerships between land trusts and other organizations like zoos, universities, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These partnerships can open up opportunities to protect more land and conduct vital research on ecological restoration and endangered species.

We all gained a lot of information and insights from attending sessions. Some session highlights include a renewable energy summit, which covered the drivers and risks of renewable energy on a national scale and presented solutions from California and Maine. Members of the Land Trust Alliance's Conservation Defense Network talked with attendees and brainstormed ways the Alliance can continue to provide support on this trending topic.

Another area of focus was complex legal issues, particularly new Treasury regulations on "material advisors." These rules target abusive syndicated easements but also increase compliance risks for land trusts acting in good faith. Gathering Waters is working to distill this information into practical guidance for Wisconsin land trusts.

And finally, our staff spent time networking with national experts. We met with session presenters and are thinking through how Gathering Waters can offer some of the same content we learned to our land trusts in Wisconsin

when we convene for the Wisconsin Land Trust Conference from March 11-13, 2026 in Milwaukee.

The work happening across our state is both inspiring and impactful, and it is clear that our priorities-building capacity, expanding funding tools, and strengthening public support-align closely with national conversations. We left the Rally encouraged that Wisconsin land trusts are well positioned to continue leading by example within the broader conservation movement. ▲



Oconomowoc River Conservancy Park

Did you know? Thanks to Tall Pines' partnership with the town of Merton, an outdoor classroom crafted from local Lannon stone has been integrated into the landscape of Oconomowoc River Conservancy Park. And it's just steps away from a thriving native prairie. This passive park also features an awe-inspiring observation deck, in memory of Hunt Eldridge, that is situated on the second-highest point in Waukesha County. There's even a connector to the Ice Age Trail! The classroom was dedicated on July 10th as part of Gathering Waters' Land Trust Days. The park is located at W307 N8280 Laskin Road. ▲

TPC Expands Local Conservation Impact with New Easements & Preserve Acquisition

by PAUL MEUER, TPC Land Protection Manager

Tall Pines Conservancy is proud to announce several exciting milestones that further strengthen our mission to protect farmland, water resources, and natural areas for generations to come.

This year, we celebrated the permanent protection of three remarkable properties through conservation easements: Lake Five, the Monis Family Farm, and the Leonard property. Each of these easements represents more than acres on a map – they represent those who choose to honor their land and ensure it remains a source of beauty, productivity, and habitat forever. From fertile farmland that supports local food systems to wetlands that protect and improve water quality, these easements strengthen the foundation of a healthy future for generations to come.



George and Elaine Monis chose to protect their 1867 farm forever through a conservation easement with Tall Pines Conservancy. The easement was made possible through the Wisconsin Farmland Protection Partnership program supported in part by USDA-NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program and American Farmland Trust.

Image courtesy of American Farmland Trust

In addition to these easements, Tall Pines Conservancy completed the acquisition of the 83-acre K. Redmond Family Preserve, located directly adjacent to Lapham Peak. This scenic property features a mix of mature oak woodlands and sedge meadow wetlands set within dramatic moraine topography and



The Jesuits USA Midwest Province have been the long-time stewards of the Lake Five easement property. Featuring expansive views of wetlands and woodlands and steep kettles along Lake Five, the Jesuits decided to protect the land as a testament to their spiritual faith.

will serve as an important buffer and extension of one of Waukesha County's most beloved public recreation areas. Its protection enhances ecological connectivity, supports diverse plant and animal life, and provides new opportunities for community enjoyment and future conservation initiatives. Stay tuned for more details and announcements regarding this exciting acquisition.

"These conservation successes represent the very heart of our mission," said Paul Meuer, Land Protection Manager with Tall Pines Conservancy. "They highlight the vision and generosity of landowners who are committed to leaving a lasting legacy, while also expanding opportunities for our community to connect with the land."

At Tall Pines Conservancy, we believe conservation is a community effort – and every easement, every acre, and every preserve protected is a gift to all who

live, work, and play here. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Midwest Jesuits as well as the Monis, Leonard, Bugbee, and Redmond families for their partnership and stewardship. Together, we are building a legacy of conservation that will endure for generations. ▲



The Leonard's decision to protect their property was in part due to the loss of natural areas that they had observed occurring along the Bark River, where their property is situated. Protecting their land means more space for plants such as this native skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) to grow.



The Ice Age National Scenic Trail winds through the K. Redmond Family Preserve, offering hikers, runners, birders, and outdoor enthusiasts new opportunities to experience the natural beauty of the Lapham Peak area, now protected forever.

Volunteer Spotlight

by SHANTELLE SCHMIDT

Hi, my name is Shantelle and I'm grateful to strengthen the efforts of Tall Pines Conservancy. I've helped at several events, but most recently the Ride to the Barns fundraiser. It's an honor to join TPC staff, the riders/donors, those who generously share their farms, and the other wonderful volunteers in this annual event. TPC has a long-term vision which is essential for sustainable conservation efforts, and it shows! It's proof to our communities and future generations when I see the impact of TPC contributions to agroforestry, natural resources education, land acquisitions and easements to restrict development... plus, the amazing partnerships between others who share the same commitments to a greener future. Protecting these valuable open spaces and preserves are paramount to our lifelines.



I have earned degrees in Forestry Management and Natural Resources Environmental Education from Michigan State University (a long time ago..lol) and have held positions in the US Forest Service, UW-Extension, municipal forestry programs, Johnson's Nursery and the Milwaukee Public Museum. So, I am eager to contribute in ways that foster and support the efforts of TPC and meet like-minded folks. The most rewarding job is VOLLUNTEERING!

My husband Andy (a retired equine veterinarian) also believes in the mission of TPC and is a volunteer. Currently, Andy and I have been steadily working on our shoreline restoration project on the Oconomowoc River. Our priority was to remove invasive species, and to alleviate erosion by installing both riprap and native plants into coir logs. Our first phase was done in 2020 with the support and guidance of the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program and Tall Pines. The second phase has the same goals and will be completed in September 2025. Thanks to OWPP for continued dedication of resources, and thanks to TPC in helping with the plant selection and picking them up from the nursery for us! ▲

Koepke Farms Sesquicentennial Celebration

On September 27th, the Koepke family marked the sesquicentennial of Pleasant View Farm with a community celebration that included tours, music, Farmers for Lake Country programming, children's activities, historical displays and a buffet dinner. The property has been under continuous operation with the family for 150 years. It was permanently protected under a conservation easement with Tall Pines Conservancy in 2013. ▲



Photo by Helen Holtz

Ravensholme Farm Preserve Hosts... (from PAGE 2)

A tour of the 15-acre agroforestry project followed where discussions of cover crops and soil health emerged. Participants of all ages were able to walk around the field to see our cover crops for themselves, search for the newly planted tree saplings, and observe the tubes used to protect the trees.

The final stop on the tour was of the oak ecosystem restoration project along the Fox River. Folks were able to see the effects of buckthorn on native birds and oak trees, learn about different buckthorn management practices, and see the newly opened viewshed to the Fox River.

Bats of Wisconsin With WCLC: 7/18

Tall Pines Conservancy and Waukesha County Land Conservancy were excited to welcome community members to Ravensholme for a special Bats of Wisconsin program. Families and nature



enthusiasts gathered to learn about the vital role bats play in keeping our ecosystems healthy, discover fun facts about these fascinating nighttime flyers, and even experience the preserve at dusk when bats are most active. It was a great evening of education, discovery, and connection with nature.

Missed out on the fun-filled farm activities this summer? No worries! We still have events and volunteer workshops this fall. Visit our website and social media for more information. ▲



OWPP Paddle

The OWPP Paddle began its annual journey at the recently upgraded **carry-in launch** located at 1050 S. Concord Road and concluded with a paddle up the Oconomowoc Wastewater Treatment Plant effluent channel! Afterwards, participants enjoyed a picnic lunch and a tour of the Treatment Plant that proved to be quite popular. Cosponsored by the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program and Tall Pines Conservancy, this event is now in its 11th year! ▲

Make a Difference Today!

This year's annual appeal is your opportunity to save local farmland and help farm families remain in agriculture – now and for generations into the future.

Permanently protected, well-managed farmland also provides essential habitat for wildlife, supports conservation of vulnerable wetlands, and safeguards the quality of our lakes, rivers and streams.

Development pressures are continuing to grow – and with it, the cost of protecting local farmland. Your donation will give more farmers the support they need to secure a sound future – not only for their families, but for our entire community.

Will You Help?

Please make your year-end contribution using the enclosed envelope. Or, provide your donation to Tall Pines Conservancy by credit card. You can make a one-time online donation or arrange for a monthly contribution of support. Simply visit tallpinesconservancy.org and click on the **green** donate button. **Thank You!** ▲



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