



CONSERVATION CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Land Resources and Environment Department

“Roots Not Iron”

The Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group (SSWIG) worked together with the Producers of Lake Redstone, Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley, and the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council to host another annual Soil Health Workshop on February 6, 2024, featuring keynote speaker Blake Vince. This event brought together 70 attendees, comprised of farmers, agency staff, community members, and industry experts, for a day of learning and networking.

Vince, a farmer from Merlin, Ontario, Canada, shared his experiences farming 1,200 acres with the goal of leaving the soil in better condition for future generations and protecting water resources. Vince also shared stories about his experiences as a Nuffield Farm Scholar and his travels worldwide learning about cover crops and the importance of biodiversity. He explained how an experience at a field day in Ohio helped start his cover crop journey. While at the field day to look at machinery, David Brandt said to Vince, "I can do more with roots than you can with that machine." After seeing Brandt's success with cover crops, learning from him, and going through the economics of the practice for his farm, Vince became a Nuffield Scholar, determined to learn more, and is now an advocate and pioneer of no-till and cover crops living by the phrase he coined, "roots not iron."

Learn more about all that these producer-led watershed protection groups are doing in our area and across the state, and connect or find a group in your area by visiting DATCP's website.



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Upcoming Events

- May 15th: [Ag Plastics Collection](#)
- May 16th: [Repka Pasture Walk](#)
- June 8th: Sauk County Dairy Breakfast
- June 11th: [Jim Gerrish Grazing Workshop](#)
- June 25th: [Soil Health Field Day](#)
- July 8-14th: [Sauk County Fair](#)
- July 17th: [Ag Plastics Collection](#)
- July 24th: [Hoppenjan Pasture Walk](#)
- August 29th: [Savanna Institute Pasture Walk](#)
- September 19th: [Miller Pasture Walk](#)

Stay Connected



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conservation@saukcountywi.gov



608-355-3245



<https://www.facebook.com/sauk.lre>



Welcome Jenn Schneiderman!

Prior to working in Sauk County as a Conservation Technician, I received my Masters' in Wildlife Ecology from UW-Madison in 2020 and worked as a landscape restoration technician throughout Southern Wisconsin. I also have a background in Agroecology and Economics from University of California at Santa Cruz. In my spare time, you can find me hiking, gardening, birding, and enjoying all kinds of nerdy hobbies.

I am thrilled to work towards human and wildlife friendly goals by working directly with landowners, Sauk County, and our local NRCS staff. Feel free to reach out regarding any wildlife, habitat, landscape conservation, or cost-share program questions you might have!

Phone: 608-477-3929 | Email: Jennifer.schneiderman@saukcountywi.gov

Cost Share Funding Available

Sauk County provides financial assistance for installation of conservation practices. These practices not only protect land and water resources but oftentimes increase farm productivity and profitability. There are several practices that can be cost shared. Visit our website below to learn more about conservation practices will work on your land.



[Sauk County
Financial Assistance](#)



Agronomy Practices

- Cover Crops
- No Till
- Nutrient Management



Livestock Facility Practices

- Manure Storage Abandonment
- Roof Runoff System (Gutters)



Rotational Grazing Infrastructure

- Fence
- Waterlines
- Seeding
- Trails & Walkways
- Winter Watering System



Lakeshore Practices

- Shoreline Protection
- Native Buffer & Rain Garden
- Fish Sticks, Diversion & Rock Infiltration

2024 Sauk County Clean Sweep and Waste Disposal Resources

SAUK COUNTY CLEAN SWEEP EVENT

The next Sauk County Clean Sweep will be hosted on Saturday, September 28 from 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. at the former Sauk County Landfill, E8795 Evergreen Lane, Baraboo. Clean Sweep is an opportunity for homeowners, agricultural enterprises, and businesses to dispose of hazardous products and items that pose an environmental risk, such as pesticides and toxic cleaning products. Household hazardous waste will be collected at no charge, however, there are fees for tires, some electronic items, and appliances. More information on this upcoming event, including an updated list of fees, will be posted closer to the event date.

Sauk County Household Hazardous Waste and Clean Sweep Alternative Disposal Guide

Find alternative disposal options to Clean Sweep and information on what do with items that cannot be taken at Clean Sweep events.



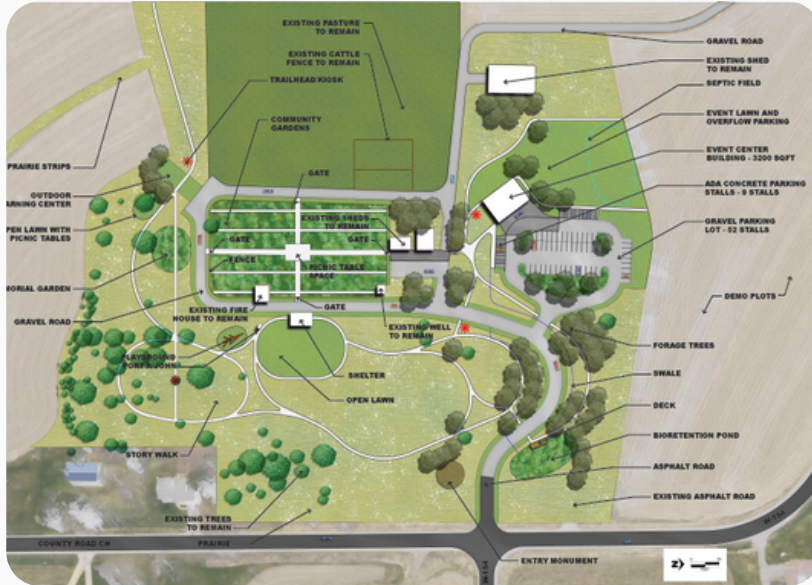
[CHECK OUT THE ONLINE GUIDE](#)

SAUK COUNTY CLEAN SWEEP VOUCHER PROGRAM

Sauk County and Dane County are working together to provide Sauk County residents the opportunity to dispose of their household hazardous waste at the Dane County Clean Sweep facility through a voucher program. Sauk County residents who would like to participate in this program should come to the Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department, located in the West Square Building at 505 Broadway Street, Ste 248, Baraboo, to complete a voucher form to utilize the Dane County Clean Sweep facility to dispose of their household hazardous waste. Please be sure to bring all materials or complete an inventory of materials when applying for the voucher program. All materials for disposal through the voucher program need to be approved by LRE staff. Once participants receive the approved voucher from Sauk County, they are then able to attend the Dane County Clean Sweep facility. Participants with the Sauk County voucher are required to pay a \$15.00 fee upon arrival at the Dane County Clean Sweep instead of the \$75.00 fee for out-of-county participants. Learn more about the voucher program by visiting: <https://www.co.sauk.wi.us/cpz/clean-sweep-voucher-program>



Sauk County Farm Master Plan Implementation Continues



The LRE Department began implementing the Sauk County Farm Property Master Plan in 2023. We are excited to share what projects were initiated or completed last year.

Education Hub: Snyder and Associates were contracted to design the 14-acre education hub located at the front entrance of the farm where the former healthcare center was located. The Education Hub will serve as a space featuring agricultural demonstration plots, prairie restoration, an educational/event building, outdoor learning space, memorial gardens and agricultural production. Final designs were approved by the Sauk County Board in December 2023.



Demonstration Plots: The Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group (SSWIG) installed 6 demonstration plots at the county farm. The plots are planted in different crop rotations and cover crops. The goal of the project to share information on incorporating cover crops into any rotation on any farm in Sauk County.



Pasture Expansion: An additional 22 acres of pasture were established in 2023. Fence, waterlines, and pasture seeding were completed in June. The seeding did not establish well due to the dry conditions, but we plan on interseeding and grazing the expanded area in 2024.



Streambank Stabilization: A variety of projects occurred within the stream corridor at the county farm. Approximately 255 feet of streambank was stabilized including 75 feet of gabion baskets near the Highway 23 bridge. A rock lined waterway was also installed to address gully erosion leading into the stream.



Prairie Strip Installation: Contour buffer strips have been present on the county farm for over a decade. There is no longer a need for these strips; however, having a strip in place to keep the farm fields on the contour is still important. As a result, a pollinator strip was installed in 2023 and additional strips will be installed in the upcoming years.



Community Gardens: Plans are underway to develop a raised community garden bed area with ADA accessible pathways. LRE will collaborate with area Master Gardeners to provide educational initiatives.

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As we continue to work through Phase I of the master plan implementation, there are several projects planned for 2024. Additional information on the Master Plan can be found on the [Sauk County Farm StoryMap](#).



Historic Fire House Restoration: The historic fire house will be converted into a storage shed for tools and materials used by students and the public during on-site educational activities. The structure's appearance shall remain the same but the renovations will allow it to become a usable structure again.



Signage: Property signage will be installed at the entrance near the intersection of State Road 154 and County Road CH to display site name and ownership. Additional interpretive signage will be installed near the pasture, demonstration plots, and pollinator strip.

Pollinator Planting at Prairie Ridge Intermediate

Prairie Ridge Intermediate School is living up to its name with the planting of a new prairie this spring. Collaboration between the school and the Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department (LRE) began last spring to figure out how to incorporate prairie at Prairie Ridge. With the support of partners, including the Reedsburg Parent Teacher Organization, EC3 Ecological Contractors, the Sauk County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, and the Sauk County LRE department, a dream became reality. On March 1st, EC3 planted two prairie seed mixes with a no-till drill. A 1.5-acre area along the bus entrance was seeded to a prairie grass/forb mix, which will help to hold the soil on the steeper slopes and provide pollinator habitat. The larger area to the south was seeded down with a "bird and butterfly" prairie mix, which includes additional forbs for pollinators. In total, 44 species of forbs (flowers) and 15 species of grasses were planted. We are eager to see the beauty and benefits of this pollinator habitat. However, patience will be important as native prairie plantings can take 2-3 years to show themselves. Many of the seeds that germinate in the first year work to establish robust root structures before sending up much in the way of flowers, so don't be discouraged this summer if you happen to drive by the east side of Reedsburg, hoping to see a new prairie in full bloom and instead see what looks more like a mowed field. Like the young students inside those classrooms, a foundation is being established that will grow and flourish well into the future.





Reconstruction & Reimagining of Hemlock County Park

Hemlock Dam is under construction! The reconstruction of the dam since it was damaged in the 2018 floods of the Baraboo River has been a long time in the making. This new dam will allow water levels to rise and stabilize within the wetland complex to better support the fish population. Bird monitoring will also begin this spring and continue through fall of this year to record avian species that utilize Hemlock for nesting, foraging, and habitat.

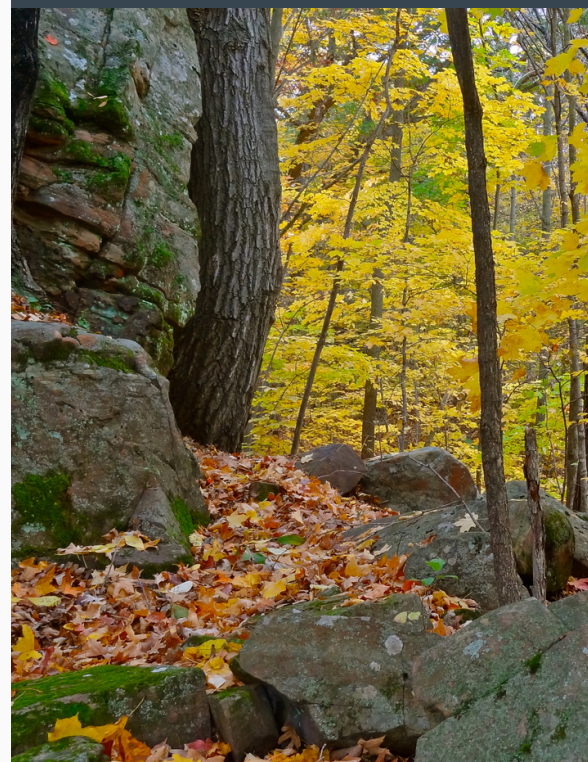


Also starting this spring the LRE Department will be seeking public input for a twenty-year master plan of Hemlock County Park. This plan will direct future park infrastructure, and conservation efforts. Hemlock County Park has been a part of the community since 1964 when the dam was originally constructed. The master plan is focused on gathering community input to continue this property's legacy, and share it for generations to come. We encourage anyone with fond memories, stories or photos to please share their stories with us. Anything shared will be collected as part of crafting the story of this beloved property. Please send anything your willing to share to Cassandra Fowler at cassandra.fowler@saukcountywi.gov or contact at (608) 355-4832. We look forward to hearing from citizens and working together to craft the future of this property!

Please share
your memories,
stories and
photos of this
beloved
community
park.

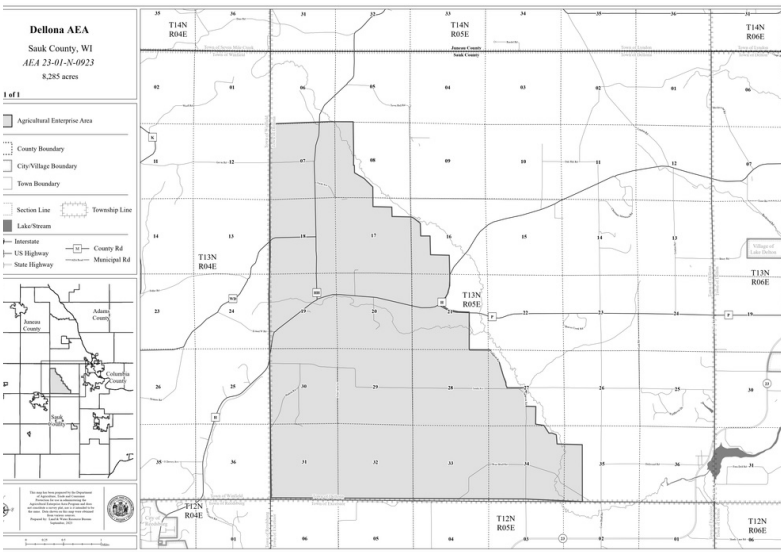


[CONTACT US](#)



DELLONA AEA DESIGNATED

Establishes the Third AEA in Sauk County



Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs) are an area of productive agriculture that has received designation from the state at the request of landowners and local governments. As a part of the state's Farmland Preservation Program (FPP), AEAs strive to **support local farmland protection goals**. AEAs can help communities **preserve agricultural land** for the future while promoting the local agro-economy and **investing in local land and water resources**. An AEA enables landowners to sign a farmland preservation agreement with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection for 10 years, agreeing to **keep land in agricultural use** and to **meet state soil and water conservation standards**. In return, the landowner may claim the **\$10/acre farmland preservation tax credit** annually.

The Dellona AEA was officially designated in 2023 and landowners within the AEA boundary (see map above) are now eligible to participate in the program and receive a tax credit. Interested participants should contact Brian Sadler at 608-355-4841 or brian.sadler@saukcountywi.gov to learn more.

USDA-FSA News



The following deadlines or program sign-ups are approaching at the Sauk County FSA office in Baraboo:

- April 29, 2024 - 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) enrollment ends
- June 15, 2024 - begin accepting COC election nominations in Local Administrative Area (LAA) #1
- July 15, 2024 - 2024 acreage reporting deadline for spring seeded crops, hay, etc.
- July 31, 2024 - Continuous Conservation Reserve Program sign up deadline

For more information, please contact the Sauk County FSA Office at (608) 355-4420, ext. 2.





SCHLUPP HONORED WITH COUNTY CONSERVATIONIST AWARD

Sauk County Conservation Manager, Melissa Schlupp, was awarded the 2024 Outstanding Conservation Employee - County Conservationist at the annual Wisconsin Land+Water Conference.

Melissa is a graduate of UW-Platteville with a degree in biology and a chemistry minor. Prior to joining Sauk County in 2013, Melissa worked with various state, federal, and nonprofit organizations assisting private landowners with establishing wildlife habitat and conservation practices on their land.

Melissa might be most renowned for her organization, a trait needed to juggle the wide array of programs and projects she oversees. She welcomes and encourages input from her team, seeing and treating them as equals. She displays an incredible amount of patience and flexibility. There has yet to be a challenge that has come up that she has not been willing to tackle, like assuming the role of Interim Director of the Sauk County LRE Department in Fall 2023.

Melissa’s outstanding contributions to better public understanding of natural resource conservation were on display at the 2023 Farm Tech Days in Sauk County. This event took months to plan and attracted thousands of attendees. She also serves on the WI Land+Water Legislative and Administrative committee, presents at the annual conference, and testifies to the state legislature to gain support for all Land Conservation Departments.

Sauk County is incredibly lucky to have a Conservation Manager who advocates for the work of the LRE department and the people behind the projects. Well-deserved Melissa!

“A mark of an effective leader is their ability to spotlight their vulnerability and fallibility in front of their employees. Melissa routinely practices this habit, and we love her for it!”
- Serge Koenig

“Melissa’s door is always open, whether it’s discussing professional ideas or sharing personal matters with her. Having that level of trust in your boss is hard to come by.”-
Brian Sadler

“Melissa continuously encourages staff to follow their passions or interests when it comes to conservation projects and programs. Her trust and belief in herself and her coworkers have made such a positive impact on the natural resources of Sauk County.” - Gus Johnson



Rabies Awareness

Contributed By Public Health Sauk County

Spring is when many animals start to come out of hibernation, search for food, and begin mating. Because of this, they may be more aggressive in protecting themselves, their space, and their young. As we start to get outside and see more wildlife this spring, it is important to know the diseases that wild animals can carry, including rabies.

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus found in the saliva of infected mammals. It is passed onto pets and humans by bites that break the skin or when an open cut touches the saliva of an infected animal. It can be deadly and should be taken seriously. In Wisconsin, skunks and bats are the animals that are most likely to carry the rabies virus. Dogs, cats, foxes, raccoons, and livestock can also carry it.[1]

Anyone who has been bitten, scratched, or touched the saliva of a wild animal should take the following steps:

1. Wash the wound right away with soap and running water for at least five minutes.
2. Contact your doctor right away, even for small wounds.
3. Do not try to catch the animal unless you are sure you can without getting hurt.
4. Do not harm or kill the animal.
5. Call the local police department or the Sauk County Sheriff's Department.

If an animal suspected of having rabies cannot be watched or tested, or if it tests positive for rabies, the bite victim will need to be treated right away with a series of vaccines.

For more information on rabies, please visit <https://www.co.sauk.wi.us/environmental-health/rabies>.

[1]Rabies in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2022, August 25). <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/rabies/data.htm>

Public Health Sauk County supports the well-being of all people in our community. Through wellness programs, environmental health initiatives and a focus on creating systemic change, we cultivate healthier places and people so that Sauk County can thrive.



**PUBLIC HEALTH
SAUK COUNTY**
WISCONSIN
Together we thrive



Photo Credit: WiWiC

Wisconsin Women in Conservation Comes to Sauk County

Contributed By Allison Crook

“Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) is a broad state-wide coalition of organizations dedicated to sustainable agriculture and conservation education, led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, in partnership with the Wisconsin Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, Marbleseed, and E Resources Group. Support for the project comes from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

This unique initiative has been working across the state in 19 counties over the past three years, building women networks and creating conservation plans for women landowners. WiWiC has achieved so much since launching in 2021, reaching over 3,000 participants, and is thrilled to announce that we are embarking on a new phase of the project- launching programming in four new tri-county regions across the state:

- Central: Green Lake, Sauk, Columbia
- South Central: Rock, Dane, Jefferson
- West Central: Trempealeau, LaCrosse, Monroe
- Northwest: Eau Claire, Chippewa, Clark



Allison Crook, Regional Coordinator with Wisconsin Farmers Union, will be supporting the new “Central” tri-county cluster of Green Lake, Sauk, and Columbia counties. She will be working alongside the following community leaders, serving as WiWiC Conservation Coaches: Maureen Bula (Bulas Pleasant Valley Farm), Shelly Rothman (Good Trouble Grove), and Erin Schneider (Hilltop Community Farm).

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“ Women are nurturers... of their families, of their land, of the Earth. Women are also change makers and transformers for which not much credit is given to them. I am excited about this project because this focuses on women... and what they can do!” ”

- Dr. Ester Shekinah, WiWiC Program Director and research agronomist at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute.

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Crook adds, “The WiWiC project is so important- it is implementing needed conservation practices on the land while simultaneously building a network of support among women landowners and conservation professionals across the state. I’m honored to walk alongside these women leaders across the state, and to witness the impact they are having in their communities.”

The program will kick off with Regional Learning Circles in Spring 2024 in each of the tri-county clusters, followed by Summer Field Days and Fall Learning Circles. These are in person events to promote relationship building, and as always with WiWiC, women landowners will receive mentorship and conservation plan development support. Please encourage women landowners in your area to sign up for our newsletter on our website wiwic.org, attend one of our events, and join our WiWiC listserv for more information and resource connections. To join the listserv simply email info@wiwic.org and say “add me to the listserv!”

Save the dates

- Spring Learning Circle at the [MacKenzie Nature Center](#) on Tuesday, May 7th
- Summer Field Day at [Bulas Pleasant Valley Farm](#) on Monday, June 10th
- Fall Learning Circle at [Vines and Rushes Winery](#) on Sunday, October 20th

For more information about the WiWiC program and our upcoming workshops, contact Allison Crook at acrook@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 608-851-0518.

Sign up for workshops or the newsletter at wiwic.org, and follow the group on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Pinterest](#).



Allison Crook is the regional Coordinator for WiWiC covering Sauk, Green Lake, and Columbia Counties. Photo Credit: WiWiC

Kestrel Box at the Sauk County Farm

Thanks to the [Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance](#) (formerly Madison Audubon), Sauk County is excited to announce the first American Kestrel nest box at the Sauk County Farm! American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) are North America’s smallest falcon, a welcome sight over the open fields and agricultural areas in Sauk County. These grassland birds are experiencing severe decline due to habitat loss in addition to competition for cavities to nest in. By providing kestrels with a safe place to nest, they are more likely to successfully raise chicks and give them the best start in life. Kestrels feed on small rodents, insects, even lizards and frogs, providing pest control in agricultural and grassland habitats. The Sauk County Farm is excited to host American Kestrels as part of the goal to further regenerative agricultural and integrated pest management strategies. To construct your own Kestrel Box, consult the SoWBA’s [Kestrel Website](#) and participate in their January volunteer training.



SAUK COUNTY TRANSECT SURVEY: A 10-YEAR SUMMARY

Introduction

Since 1999, Sauk County LRE has conducted an annual transect survey. A transect survey method is designed to gather information on tillage and crop residue management systems. The purpose of the survey is threefold: (1) to provide information that can be used by the LRE and other agencies to establish priorities for educational programs, (2) to evaluate progress in reaching the goals in the LRE's Land and Water Resources Management plan, and (3) to provide accurate data on the adoption of conservation systems. This makes the transect survey an ideal tool for assessment as well as measuring progress for locally led conservation.

Crops, soils, and climate interaction dictate to some degree the adoption of high residue systems. Adoption of soil health practices like no-till, cover crops, and rotationally grazing dramatically reduce nonpoint pollution, enhance soil quality, and increases carbon accumulation in the soil.



Step 1 - Establishing and Marking the Route

The transect route was established in 1999 utilizing a method developed by Purdue University. The route was developed to account for all soil types and slopes across the county. The route meanders through every township and is driven each year. There are over 700 observation points that can be seen from the public roadway. At each of these observation points staff gather information on tillage, crops, and conservation practices.

Step 2 - Collecting the Survey Data

The Transect survey occurs in the spring after the majority of the crops have been planted but prior to the crop canopy closing. The route is done again in the fall in order to capture the fall tillage systems and cover crops and fall seeded small grain crops. The survey team takes a laptop with mapping and data collection programs to aid in conducting the survey data. The survey team stops at over 700 points to document the different crops, tillage, and residue conditions.

Step 3 - Survey Data Entry

The data is entered into SnapPlus. SnapPlus is Wisconsin's nutrient management planning software. For the transect Survey, SnapPlus is used to calculate soil loss and rotational Phosphorus Index values and to analyze tillage and cropping practices.

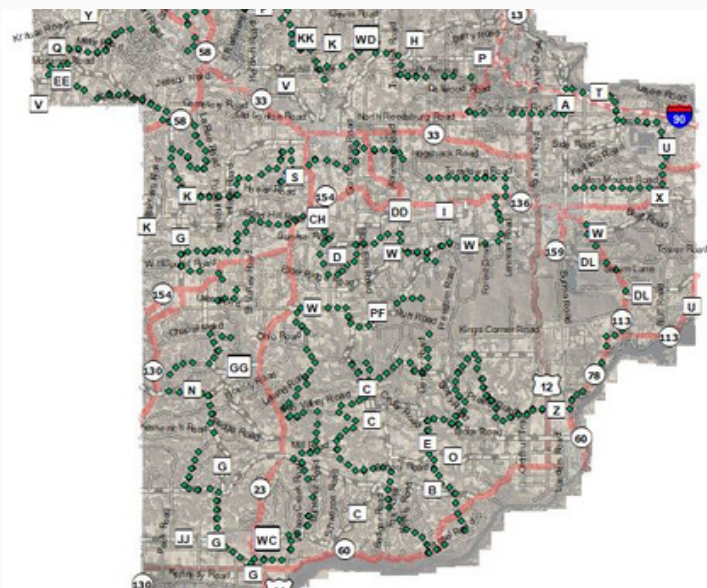


Figure 1: Sauk County Transect Survey Points & Route

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Step 4- Calculating Results

Reports are generated in SnapPlus that summarize the annual cropping data, tillage, cover crops and rotationally grazed pastures. Survey results have shown that the transect method can produce a high level of reliability combined with a relatively short data collection process. When conducted properly, this cropland survey can provide 90 percent or more confidence in the accuracy of the results.

2023 Transect Survey Summary by Watershed

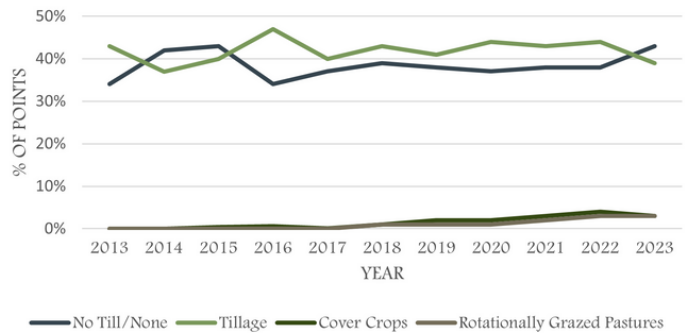
Watershed	Average Soil Loss (T/ac)	Transect Points	Percent of Survey
Bear Creek	4.5	70	10%
Crossman Creek and Little Baraboo River	4.0	133	19%
Dell Creek	1.6	29	4%
Honey Creek	3.8	206	30%
Lake Wisconsin	1.8	25	4%
Lower Baraboo River	1.7	47	7%
Narrows Creek and Baraboo River	2.3	188	27%
Total	3.2	698	100%



Survey Highlights

- In 2023, the average soil loss was 3.2 Tons/Acre with Bear Creek and Crossman Creek/Little Baraboo Watersheds having over 4 Tons/Acre average soil loss. Most soils in Sauk County have tolerable soil loss rates of 3-5 Tons/Acre which means soil losses greater than those values will result in loss of productivity. The remedy to the loss of productivity is increased fertilizer inputs.
- From 2013-2023, there has been an increase in the percentage of points utilizing cover crops as well as the percentage of point converted to rotational grazing. This is likely due to the significant funding available for implementing these two practices since 2015.
- The percentage of points that are no tilled has remained steady with the ten-year average of 38% of points falling into this category.

Sauk County Transect Survey Trends 2013-2023



Transect Survey Summary 2013-2023

Year	No Till/None	Tillage	Cover Crops	Rotationally Grazed Pastures
2013	34%	43%	0%	0%
2014	42%	37%	0%	0%
2015	43%	40%	0.4%	0%
2016	34%	47%	0.6%	0%
2017	37%	40%	0.1%	0%
2018	39%	43%	1%	1%
2019	38%	41%	2%	1%
2020	37%	44%	2%	1%
2021	38%	43%	3%	2%
2022	38%	44%	4%	3%
2023	43%	39%	3%	3%

2024 SAUK COUNTY NACD CONSERVATION AWARENESS POSTER CONTEST RESULTS



1st place poster for the Sauk County Contest for grades 10-12 submitted by Ashlyn Lichman.

One hundred and twenty-seven Sauk County students in grades K-12 created posters for the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Conservation Awareness Poster competition. The Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department sponsored the program locally, encouraging students to submit unique artwork to address this year's theme, "May the Forest Be with You Always."

The first-place poster from each grade division moves on to regional, state, and national competitions. Students receive prizes and awards at each level where their posters compete and win. Sauk County awarded a special prize for the classroom with the most student participation at the local level. Our winners received Amazon gift cards, reusable water bottles, coloring books, and custard coupons this year. The first-place winners were also awarded a Sauk County Parks annual pass.



Poster by Lynnette Herrild awarded 2nd place for grades K-1 at the State Contest

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Awards for the Primary Division for grades K-1st went to Lynnette Herrild, 1st Place; Jenell Bindl, 2nd Place; and Nova Tanner, 3rd Place. An honorable mention award was awarded to Mylah Reynolds. Lynnette's poster moved on to compete at the Southern Area Regional Competition, taking home the first-place award. Lynnette's poster advanced on to compete at the State Competition where she was awarded 2nd place.

In the Elementary Division for grades 2-3, awards went to Mackenna Herrild, 1st Place; Castiel Schultz, 2nd Place; and Molly Philo, 3rd Place. Mackenna's poster moved on to compete at the Southern Area Regional Competition, where she won second place!

Awards for the Middle Division for grades 4-6 went to Kallie Sadler, 1st Place; Harper Koch, 2nd Place; and Itzel Vazquez, 3rd Place. Judges also awarded an honorable mention award to Bella Berg. Kallie's poster moved on to compete at the Southern Area Regional competition, winning another first-place award, and also competed at the State Competition.

Awards for the Junior Division for grades 7-9 went to Hannah Burchfield, 1st Place; Kyllie Smith, 2nd Place; and Gavin Abbott, 3rd Place. Judges awarded an honorable mention award to Makenzie Weaver. Hannah's poster moved on to compete at the Southern Area Regional competition to win a first-place award. Hannah's poster continued on to compete at the State Competition as well, winning the 2nd place award for the Junior Division!

For the Senior Division for grades 10-12, the winning posters were awarded to Ashlyn Lichman, 1st Place; Taitym Spencer, 2nd Place; and Kaden Plumley, 3rd Place. Judges awarded an honorable mention award to Brady Favreau. Ashlyn's poster went on to win first place at the Southern Area Regional Competition.


Ashlyn's poster joined Lynnette Herrild's, Kallie Sadler's, and Hannah Burchfield's posters competing in their respective grade division at the Wisconsin State competition at the 71st annual WI Land + Water Conference, where conservation professionals from around the state voted on the top posters for each grade division.



Congratulations to all the talented students from Sauk County for taking the time to create thoughtful and detailed pieces of art to raise awareness on important conservation issues.

To see the 2024 winning posters for Sauk County, visit the [Sauk County LRE Website](#). For the 2024 state competition results, you can visit the [WI Land & Water Website](#) for all the details.

Information and registration forms for the 2025 NACD Conservation Poster Contest will be made available on our website this fall. If you would like to participate or have questions about this program, contact us at 608-355-3245 or conservation@saukcountywi.gov.



Giving Back to the Guardian Oaks

Contributed By Mike Mossman
([Badger History Group](#)) & Grace Vosen
([Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance](#))

Spend enough time among the wild grasses, shrubs and woodlands of the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area, and you may hear the old voices. A moccasined hunter whispering to his son. The faint, deep booming of prairie chickens displaying on a distant prairie knoll. In the evening, an immigrant settler beckoning her cattle in Low German. Lipsticked workers laughing in the morning as they leave their 3rd-shift stations at the powder plant.

Where better to hear and ponder these voices than beneath one of the massive oak trees that are dispersed along the margins of the old Sauk Prairie, and over the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant? Landmark trees like these have spread their limbs wide over this expanse of grassland, watching over people and animals for thousands of years. Some that now stand are over 200 years old, pre-dating European settlement—and they could last another 200.

These gnarly oldtimers captured the attention of Dan Halling, a retired history teacher and current board member of the Badger History Group. But what started as a solitary mission to locate champion oaks has grown into a historical preservation project. For without help, these icons of our natural and cultural heritage will disappear.

When the oldest of these oaks sprouted from acorns, this part of Sauk County was prairie and savanna, where scattered oaks could grow huge in the open air, unlike the narrower, upward-reaching forms of forest trees. The thick-barked and massive-rooted bur, black and white oaks were resistant to fire, which periodically swept this landscape, holding back their woody competition over the centuries. With European settlement, many of the oaks were cut and grubbed out, but others survived, and some new ones sprung from acorns or old roots along the roadsides, hedgerows, pastures and homesteads. Many survived the conversion to a massive propellant factory during WWII, for there were large spaces buffering the buildings, disturbed only by grazing cattle, which replaced fire as a force against brush invasion. But in non-production areas that were ungrazed, or converted to pine or walnut plantations, the old savanna-grown oaks gradually became overtaken by faster-growing, more shade-tolerant trees and tall shrubs.

This trend accelerated during the early 2000s as deconstruction precluded grazing over most of the Plant. As oaks became shaded from below and their perimeters, their lower limbs died, heart rot ensued, their vigor declined, and most slowly succumbed. Their bulky skeletons can be found, hidden within the abundant young woods that have overtaken much of Badger—grim reminders of the vanished prairies, savannas and pastures of long ago. A few still survive.

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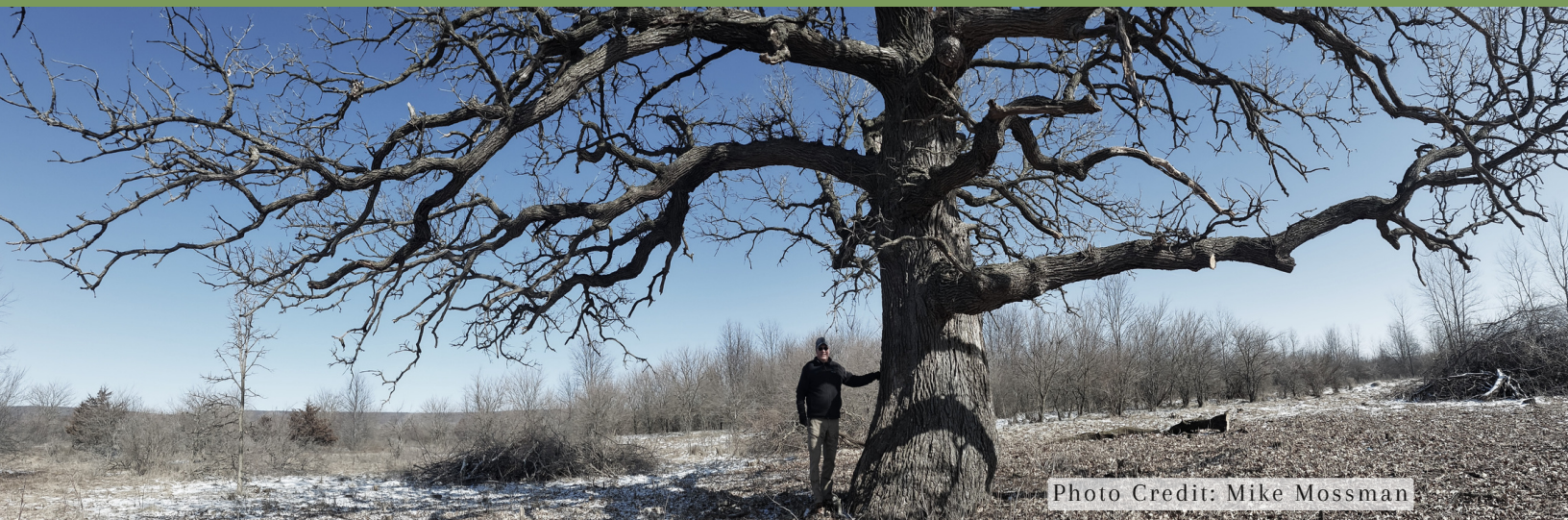


Photo Credit: Mike Mossman

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But wait, here comes Dan, leading a crew of volunteers from the Badger History Group and the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance. They fell trees, lop off invasive shrubs and saplings, treat their stumps, and pile them far from the old oak, to be burned later. They stand back, admire the ancient and strong grandmother with her arms widespread. They promise to attend her until DNR land managers can mow the surrounding brush, and run fire across the land as lightning and indigenous peoples did for millennia. We hope she will be here, speaking to all who will listen for many decades to come.

And what inspires Dan?

“My rambles at Badger have become one of the most rewarding and meaningful projects of my life. I have a greater affinity with the land and those who came before thanks to these relic trees. My hope is that by contributing to their health and longevity, others will have a similar experience.”

BHG and SPCA have freed 5 old “savanna” oaks at Badger—preserving history while increasing the health of the trees and their ecosystems. Follow either group on Facebook or the web, to learn how you can help.



Photo Credit: Dory Owen



Farmland Preservation Tax Credit Increases for 2023

Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) is a tool that farmers and local governments can use to preserve farmland, protect soil and water resources, and minimize land use conflicts. Through participation in the program:

- Agricultural landowners can preserve their productive farmlands and participate through locally adopted farmland preservation zoning ordinances or by signing farmland preservation agreements in locally petitioned Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs).
- Participating landowners who meet the state soil and water conservation standards are not only protecting their agricultural and natural resources, but are also eligible to claim the tax credit.

Beginning with the 2023 tax year, participants located in a certified farmland preservation zoning district or an AEA are eligible to receive a \$10 per acre tax credit for qualifying acres.

Approximately 373 landowners in Sauk County participated in the FPP in 2023 representing over 75,000 acres and \$707,960 in tax credits.

Those interested in participating in the Farmland Preservation Program can contact Brian Sadler at 608-355-4841 or brian.sadler@saukcountywi.gov.

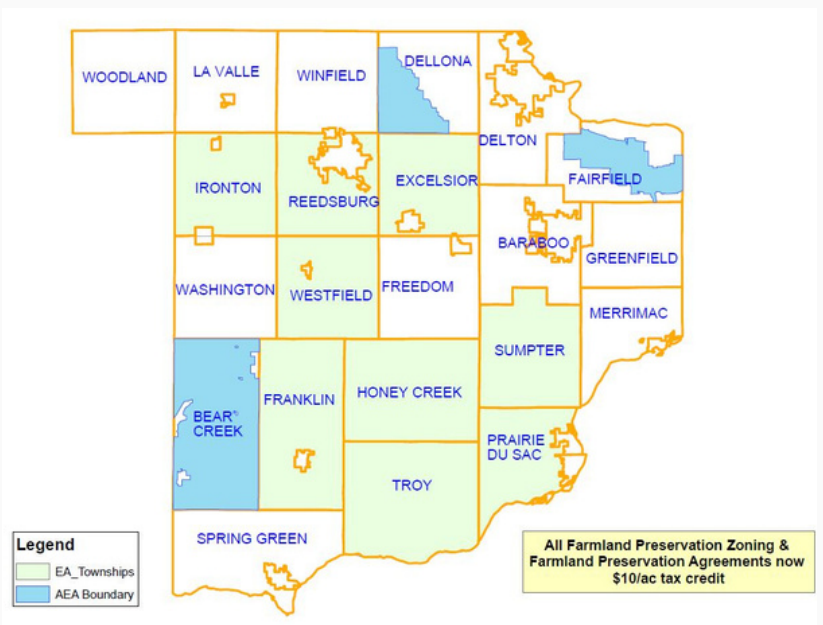


Figure: Map identifying eligible FPP zoning districts.