



2023–2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) envisions Southwest Wisconsin's Driftless Area to be a landscape of resilient and diverse grasslands, oak-dominated forests, pine relicts, and healthy agricultural lands that support clean water, wildlife, scenic open spaces, and rural livelihoods.

Our conservation targets are native prairie remnants, surrogate grasslands, oak-dominated savanna and forest, and pine relicts. By improving the health and resilience of these characteristic habitats of the Driftless Area, we are improving the health and resilience of all the people, plants, and animals that depend on them.



GOALS



Reduce threats to our conservation targets, particularly the threats of invasive species, lack of fire, incompatible development, and lack of resources.

Strengthen the connection between ecosystem services and human well-being by:

- Increasing agricultural systems and practices that do no harm, buffer, or improve the health of our conservation targets;
- Contributing to a thriving rural economy; and
- Growing a community that is climate-smart, protects and manages the Driftless landscape, and connects with nature in meaningful ways.

Grow and maintain sufficient organizational capacity to implement strategies that achieve our vision.

STRATEGIES

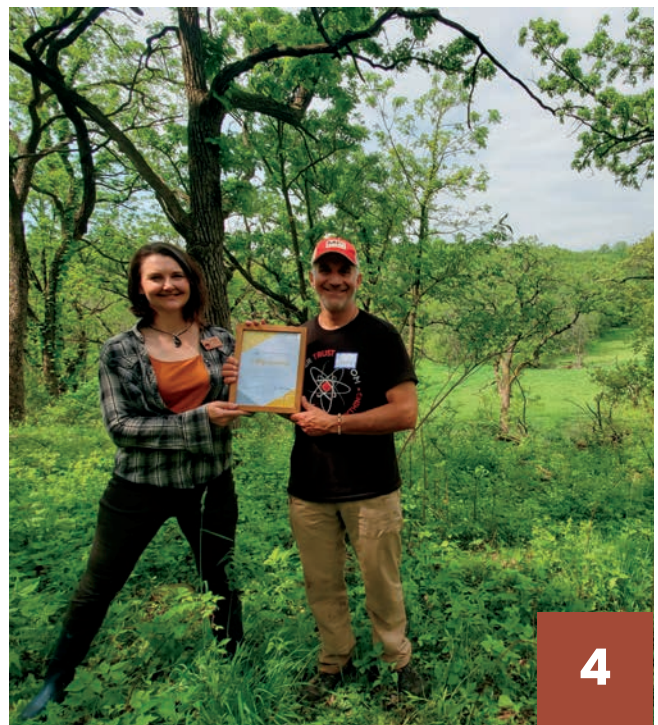
1. **Protect high-quality grasslands, oak-dominated forests, and pine relicts from incompatible development** through voluntary conservation easements with willing landowners.
2. **Manage and restore DALC-owned properties** in a manner that achieves our ecological and human well-being goals.
3. **Develop and nurture alliances and partnerships** that strengthen the efforts and outcomes of each partner organization.
4. **Grow and engage target audiences** through effective communications and outreach.
5. **Increase the capacity of landowners to implement best practices** on their property, related to our conservation targets.
6. **Promote and nurture regenerative agricultural systems** and practices that do no harm, buffer, or improve the health of Driftless Area natural systems.
7. **Continually improve organizational capacity and administration.**

5-YEAR OBJECTIVES FOR EACH STRATEGY

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Protect high-quality grasslands, oak-dominated forests, and pine relicts from incompatible development through voluntary conservation easements with willing landowners.

- Increase our pace and scale of land protection - double the acreage of protected lands to 16,000 acres by 2027.
- Defend our conservation easements by establishing good relationships with new conservation easement landowners and maintaining well-organized and updated easement documentation.



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Manage and restore DALC-owned properties in a manner that achieves our ecological and human well-being goals, creating sites that demonstrate best management practices and provide the public with opportunities to connect with nature.

In 2012, DALC acquired our first preserve – the 220-acre Erickson Conservation Area in Argyle. This was a turning point in our history. The ability to own and manage our own land indicates a maturing organization with the ability to take on this responsibility. We now manage nearly 800 acres of land open to the public at 5 preserves. Our primary goals in owning land are to protect biodiversity through land management and connect people to nature.

- Refine management plans, priority work units, and annual project planning for our preserves, including written burn plans, invasive species management, and floral and faunal inventories.
- Continue to collaborate with Iowa County Recreation and Prairie Restoration (ICRPR) to draft and execute annual management plans for the Bloomfield Prairie.
- Restore the native habitats at Sardeson, Morrison, and Erickson by clearing invasive brush. Move these preserves from the restoration phase to a management phase by 2027.
- Facilitate creation of a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) for Southwest Wisconsin -- a partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, individuals and various interested groups that work together to control invasive species in a particular region
- Create a resilient volunteer network based around each site. Provide resources and training to foster volunteer groups, encouraging community stewardship.

Develop and nurture alliances and partnerships that strengthen the efforts and outcomes of each partner organization.

DALC's role in coordinating and developing partnerships has grown organically since 2014, when a group of landowners and farmers looked to us to facilitate a more formal partnership in the Lowery Creek Watershed.

Driftless Trail

- Route and mostly complete the Driftless Trail from Tower Hill State Park to Governor Dodge State Park by 2027; open at least one new segment per year.
- Complete at least one Driftless Trail segment near Blue Mound State Park.
- Grow usage, enjoyment, and regular maintenance of completed trail segments through: tracking trail usage and collecting feedback; a website with real-time trail conditions and access information; a growing core of trail angels (volunteers to help with trail maintenance); a promotional marketing plan that guides wayfinding; and interpretive signage and community outreach.
- Grow our capacity (staff, volunteers, training, equipment) to develop and maintain the trail in balance with the increasing length of finished trail.



Driftless Trail – A DALC project to create a ~50-mile walking path connecting state parks and natural areas in northeast Iowa County. DALC relies on advisors, willing private landowner hosts, contractors, and volunteers.

Lowery Creek Watershed Initiative

- Review and implement the Lowery Creek Watershed Initiative partnership's strategic plan annually, with an in-depth revision in 2024.
- Coordinate five monthly Evenings Afield sessions (125-150 participants), two land management workshops (30 participants), and four partner gatherings each year.
- Continue to secure grants and gifts to support 100% of the coordinator's role.

Lowery Creek Watershed Initiative – A community of farmers, landowners, and individuals working together to care for the beautiful and bountiful watershed known for its aesthetics, progressive agriculture, rich biodiversity, and cultural tourism. DALC serves as part-time coordinator, fiscal agent, and fundraiser.



Southern Driftless Grasslands

- Over the next 5 years, the Southern Driftless Grasslands partnership will remain focused on bringing willing landowners together to manage their land for grassland habitat; providing technical and financial assistance to enable more management and restoration of prairie remnants; and growing our ability to protect core grassland corridors from incompatible development.
- Establish and annually review a partnership agreement that contains the partnership vision, scope, goals, objectives, and strategy for dissolving upon meeting the goals of the project. This agreement will be established in December 2022 and reviewed each December by organizations involved.



Southern Driftless Grasslands –

An alliance of public agencies, universities, and nonprofit conservation organizations working to support the conservation of grasslands in Southwest Wisconsin to benefit wildlife, water, farms, and communities. The SDG Project Manager works for DALC and reports to the SDG steering committee.

Cardinal-Hickory Creek Opposition

- Stop the Cardinal-Hickory Creek project from being completed.
- Create an archival case study summary of DALC's involvement in Cardinal-Hickory Creek.



Cardinal-Hickory Creek Opposition Campaign – In 2016, DALC responded to a rallying cry of our community, and to the potential threat to land we have protected by this massive 125-mile transmission line through the Driftless Area. Working with the experienced team of renewable energy experts at the Environmental Law and Policy Center, we determined that there are viable and less environmentally destructive alternatives to this transmission line. In 2021 we successfully blocked the line from crossing the Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, and - alongside the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, the Town of Montfort, the Village of Wyoming, Dane County, Iowa County, and hundreds of Driftless Area residents - continue to fight to prevent this unnecessary transmission line.

Iowa County Clean Local Energy Alliance – Now (CLEA-N)

- Transition CLEA-N from its status as a DALC project to become an independent entity.
- Develop and maintain relationships with area school districts to help facilitate clean energy transitions in school districts.

CLEA-N – Growing from our opposition to the CHC transmission line, this partnership promotes the clean and locally produced renewable energy that will aid in a better transition away from fossil fuels. CLEA-N is modeled after successful local energy districts in Iowa. DALC facilitates this partnership of citizens in Iowa County to promote local green energy solutions.

- In collaboration with the Wisconsin Climate Table, create opportunities to expand public knowledge about the Wisconsin Clean Energy Plan.

Grow and engage target audiences through effective communications and outreach.

DALC's outreach and communications strategy is intended to support our goals by inspiring, equipping, and empowering people to do their part in caring for the Driftless Area landscape. Our key messages are:

- Be climate smart.
- Protect the land you manage and manage the land you protect.
- Connect with the Driftless Landscape.

Our priority audiences are landowners, conservation partners, community leaders and influencers, and residents of Southwest Wisconsin.

- Help landowners with conservation easements manage their protected land through the creation of peer networks and connections with organizations/individuals who can provide technical and financial assistance (see Strategy 5).
- Strive for a minimum of 8 “touches” per year with members of the DALC community, e.g. 2 paper newsletters, annual report, holiday post card, field trip mailers, fundraising appeals.
- Double the number of individuals actively engaged with DALC from ~2,500 to 5,000, and have plans in place to keep new members engaged, with opportunities to volunteer, attend events, and connect to nature.
- Explore strategies to engage DALC's community with our key messages via earned media and paid media (e.g. Facebook campaigns).
- Increase awareness and understanding of what conservation easements are, and are not, with our partners, community leaders, and allies in real estate and estate planning.



Increase the capacity of landowners to implement best practices on their property, related to our conservation targets.

- Develop and pilot two communities of practice [i.e. “Neighbors Helping Nature/Neighbors” co-ops] centered around a DALC preserve or cluster of conservation easements where trainings, funding, equipment access, and other resources can be strategically focused to inspire land management across 2,000 acres of private land.
- By the end of 2025, complete assessments of 48 conservation easements currently held by DALC for current or future management opportunities.
- Continue to host popular chainsaw training workshops and trail building workshops.
- Distribute critical printed resources to all conservation easement landowners including, but not limited to, the Southern Driftless Grassland’s *Partnerships and Programs Guide*, DALC’s *Climate Smart Land Management Guide*, and TNC’s *Climate Change Field Guide for Southern Wisconsin Forests*.



Promote and nurture regenerative agricultural systems and practices that do no harm, buffer, or improve the health of Driftless Area natural systems.

- Explore potential strategies for DALC contribution to improving and expanding conservation-compatible agriculture, as well as land access for new farmers and historically disadvantaged people (work in 2025-2027).
- Explore and potentially pilot emerging conservation finance mechanisms to acquire agricultural properties for multiple priorities (e.g. the purchase-protect-resell model using blended finance such as low-interest debt, grassland carbon, walnut timber sales, and hunting leases).
- Promote partner organizations' regenerative agriculture programing, especially programming with Savanna Institute and the Southern Driftless Grasslands Partnership.
- Facilitate written, multi-year leases requiring appropriate conservation practices on all active "ag zones" of DALC conservation easements, and encourage CRP where particularly appropriate.



None of DALC's programmatic work is possible without a healthy and strong foundation. DALC must have talented and diverse leadership in its executive staff and Board of Directors. We must be able to attract and retain passionate and talented staff. We must follow sound financial and legal principles. And we must continue to raise sufficient funding to enable all of our work!

Fundraising

Diverse, predictable, and sustainable revenue to support the organization.

- Grow operating budget by 80%, to \$1.35 million through a mixture of annual giving, grants, and sustaining revenue sources.
- Increase unrestricted giving by 15% per year and double the number of active donors.
- Research a major fundraising campaign effort.
- Grow the Driftless Conservation Impact Fund to \$5 million. This fund, currently at \$2 million, provides DALC with funding to implement catalytic conservation projects, and also provides sustaining revenue, forever.



Financial and Legal Management

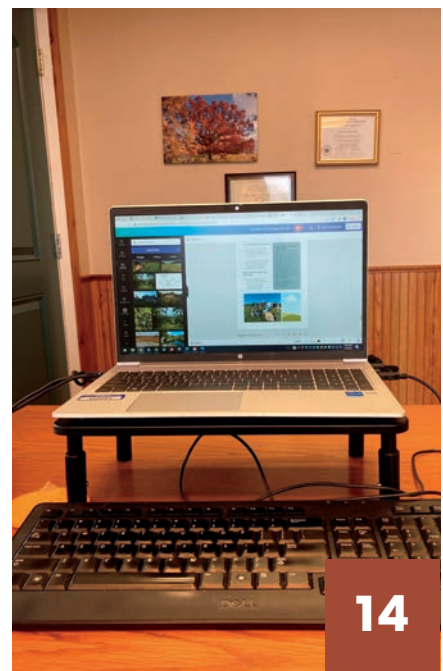
- Continually improve financial tracking as our budgets and balance sheets necessarily grow in complexity.
- Continue to follow the Standards and Practices set by the Land Trust Alliance and maintain professional accreditation.

Organizational Facilities and Technology

- Maintain a healthy work environment and improve energy efficiency of the DALC office building.
- Keep up to date with information technology and cyber-security.

Growth Stages of Nonprofit Organizations

Experts agree that a critical transition in any nonprofit's growth is when the Board hires the first staff person, thus initiating a transition from "working board" to "governing board". As staff capability and competency grows, it is important for the Board to be less "boots on the ground" and more focused on the big picture and working as a collective governing body.



People: Board of Directors & Staff

- Complete and implement a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice plan, beginning with the exploration of DEIJ issues, defining DALC's values, and defining the value of DEIJ to DALC.
- Board continues to transition from “working” to “governing” as the organization grows by focusing on Board Governance, Board Recruitment, and Board Training.
 - Board Recruitment: In parallel with DEIJ work, create more opportunities for community members interested in Board service to get to know DALC, i.e. build and maintain a “pipeline” for new board members.
 - Board Training: Continue to offer a baseline of board and staff training opportunities on topics fundamental to land trust mission and governance.
- Improve staff retention and job satisfaction by focusing on fair compensation, flexible working environment, and opportunities for individual development.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice

Staff began this work through a series of internal conversations in 2021. Our initial conversations led us to understand the need to infuse diverse socio-economics, physical abilities, gender, age, race, and ethnicities into the traditionally white-dominated world of conservation and land ownerships. Over the next few years we will expand the conversation with the Board, and create a plan for action. Having an organization and workplace where all feel welcome to participate strengthens DALC's foundation, and provides avenues for us to serve our whole community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the 2022 board members, staff, community members, and facilitators who participated in strategic planning.

Board:

Dale Moody
Lauren Rosenthal
Troy Maggied
Carol Lind
Dick Cates
Doug Caves
Tim Connor
Mark Hirsch
Harald "Jordy" Jordahl
Mark Mittelstadt
Yasi Rezai
Grace Trenkamp
Peter Vanderloo

Staff:

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Cindy Becker
Stephanie Judge
Emilee Martell
Zach Pacana
Natasha Rank
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Community Members:

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John Morton

Facilitators:

Arlyne Johnson
Cindy Becker



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AREA LAND CONSERVANCY

