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# Impact Report

LAND CONSERVATION,  
ZONING, AND SURVEYOR



**Matt Hanewall, Land Conservation**  
**Kathleen Stewart, Zoning, Planning & Land Information**  
**Bryan Meyer, Surveyor**



LA CROSSE COUNTY



# Protecting Natural Resources

## DEPARTMENT OF LAND CONSERVATION



2023 has been busy for the Department of Land Conservation. The demand for conservation practices continues to grow and we saw a record number of applications this past year. Nick Smetana was hired in April to help design and build conservation practices. In addition, the increased use and installation of cover crops, which improve soil health and store more soil water, proved to be beneficial during the drought of 2023. This past year, landowners who have been using cover crops found there to be more available water in the soil for subsequent corn and soybean crops compared to areas where cover crops had not been used. Staff helped to educate people on the benefits of rural conservation practices at our Graduate Student Field Day, Bostwick Creek/Coon Creek Cover

Crop Meetings and the Coon Creek 90th Celebration Event. Similarly, American Rescue Plan Act funding is now being used to reimburse Stormwater Grant award winners for installation of urban best management practices that address flooding, water quality and public infrastructure. Townships have commented that where urban conservation practices have been installed, they have seen reductions in erosion, flooding and stormwater runoff. Finally, we continue to work on ways to collect, manage and store data. Staff have been instrumental in the development of Muncity, our new permitting and data management system. This system will eventually make permitting and record management more flexible and transparent for us and the public. This is an exciting time for conservation! We are responding to intense weather events with better planning, increased grant funding and more conservation. I want to thank the Land Conservation staff for all their hard work and for their dedication to our mission. I also want to thank you! Your continued support and commitment to conservation make it possible for us to do the work we do!

**Matt Hanewall, Land Conservation Director**

[mhanewall@lacrossecounty.org](mailto:mhanewall@lacrossecounty.org)

## DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS



- Runoff from 1,175,626 sq ft of new imperious surface is being treated by various best management practices that are detailed in 2023 stormwater permits.
- The 90th Coon Creek Watershed Celebration honored the birthplace of our nation's first watershed and many of our prototype conservation practices. It also paid tribute to some of our past and present conservation leaders.
- Conservation staff assisted with the design and installation of 25 new conservation practices. Dams, waterways and manure storage closures accounted for most of our 2023 practices. Combined funding for all practices exceeded \$500,000.
- The University of Wisconsin – La Crosse and La Crosse County developed a new cooperative agreement to address aquatic invasive species prevention, monitoring, containment and control.
- Cover crops, dam construction and streambank improvements were highlighted at a Water Resources Management Policy Tour in the Bostwick Creek Watershed.

# 5 Things to Know

1. A total of 265 Farmland Preservation Certificates of Compliance earn area producers over \$400,000 in annual tax credits. Landowners work with staff to meet conservation compliance requirements.
2. We sample 32 watersheds twice annually for phosphorus, nitrates and fecal coliform bacteria. Samples have been collected since 1999. Watersheds are assessed and ranked based on the data.
3. The La Crosse Urban Stormwater Group, led by the Department of Land Conservation, contracts with Habitat for Humanity to promote area-wide stormwater resources and educational materials. Municipal members include: La Crosse County, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, City of La Crescent, Village of West Salem, Village of Holmen, Town of Shelby, Town of Onalaska, Town of Holland and Town of Campbell.
4. Slopes of 30% and greater are restricted from development through the La Crosse County Erosion Control Land Disturbance Ordinance.
5. Navigability determinations are being standardized and will eventually be digitized to help simplify compliance with shoreland, stormwater and erosion control rules.



## Future Needs and Challenges

- State agencies that oversee program implementation and grant applications have lost key personnel. As a result, communication and guidance from governmental partners has become more limited.
- Continued extreme weather events cause severe erosion, place stress on our cropping systems and overwhelm existing infrastructure. Designing conservation practices that accommodate larger volumes of water and build organic matter in our soils requires additional time and money. Selling people and municipal partners on the long-term commitment to conservation can be difficult.
- Training and alignment of our new permitting system (Municipity) with other county systems that collect, manage and store data (ie. New World) will be challenging.
- Cost of living increases continue to cause conservation project installation costs to rise. Existing grant awards and other conservation funding sources are not keeping pace. Additional funding sources will be needed to meet future demands.





# Serving the Public

## DEPARTMENT OF ZONING & LAND INFORMATION



The Zoning, Planning & Land Information Department is responsible for a managing several diverse functions and programs, everything from overseeing zoning and planning work, economic and community development to land information, including real property and GIS. Our department aspires to engage our entire community and interests cooperatively and positively, always aiming to successfully resolve routine and complex challenges.

Our department recognizes results are important in everything we do. Results come from effective time management, focusing on the highest priorities, professional staff contributions, high standards, staff focus, building and maintaining trust, competence, and character of team. We focus on high-quality

customer service and recognize that because change happens, we need to keep things moving forward. This year our department adopted the following mission and value statement.

**VISION:** *Creating a collaborative space where your vision is our inspiration.*

**MISSION:** *To bring people, partnerships, and possibilities together for a strong and vibrant La Crosse County.*

All of our important work happens thanks to the team of dedicated professionals who I am proud to work alongside. If you have questions about my department of any kind, please do not hesitate to reach out.

**Kathleen Stewart, Director, Zoning, Planning and Land Information**

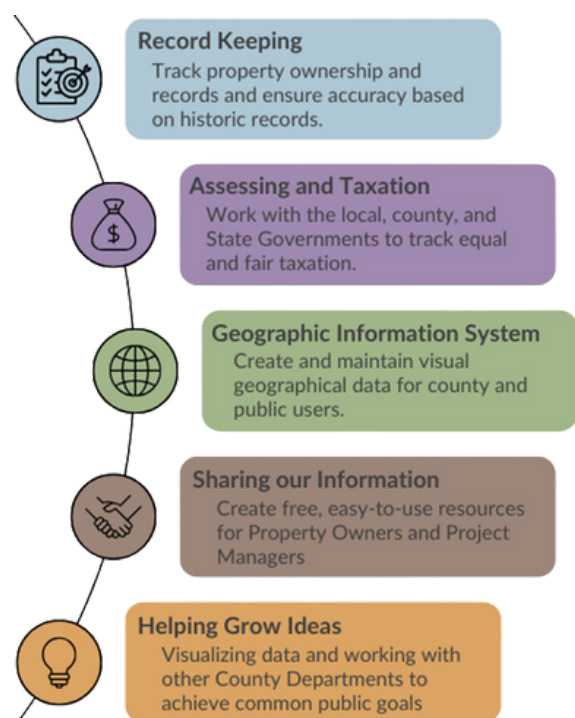
[kstewart@lacrossecounty.org](mailto:kstewart@lacrossecounty.org)

## DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Completed Phase I of Climate Action Plan.
- Revised county Short-Term Rental rules.
- Became a Broadband forward Community and established a Broadband Committee.
- Provided 32 grants totaling \$499,861 supporting local childcare providers with funding to perform capital improvements.
- Awarded \$895,050 in Acquisition and Demolition grants, resulting in a potential of 577 new housing units (combination of single-family and multi-family).
- In coordination with IT, Health and Land Conservation, implementation of a New Permitting System
- Conducted six substantial damage inspections following May 2023 flooding.
- Drone surveys of 14 permitted non-metallic mines to determine the area being mined (expansions or areas of reclamation).

### La Crosse County Land Information

How we maintain and benefit information for the benefit of La Crosse County.



# GIS/Land Information

**LiDAR:** LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology has been used in Wisconsin since the early 2000s for high accuracy elevation mapping. The last time LiDAR imaging data was obtained in La Crosse County was 2017, but a new flight is planned in 2024 that will help capture the changes to La Crosse County's landscape. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) will be the project lead and is committing more than half of the project funds. Data from the flight will benefit many county departments and outside organizations.

**ORTHOIMAGERY:** In the spring of 2023 4-band orthoimagery at 3-inch pixel resolution was flown across 543 square miles (countywide). Deliverables include custom mosaics for three municipalities (La Crosse, Onalaska, and Holmen). The orthoimagery will be developed from aerial imagery acquired using a digital mapping camera during leaf-off and cloud-free spring conditions. Integration into the current web map applications will be early in 2024.

**NEW TAX SYSTEM:** In 2021, the county began the search to replace the existing Tax Management Software, and we found the solution with Catalis Tax-Land Nav. This new Land Nav system allows for increased efficiency for private landowners to access their property records, while also increasing access for local governments. We plan to launch the software in 2024 with a new and improved tax bill format.

**NEXT GENERATION 911:** La Crosse County Zoning and Land Information was awarded a second grant from the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs, Office of Emergency Communications for 911 data improvements in preparation for implementation of Next Generation 911. The 2024 grant provides nearly \$50,000 for improvements to the address point data, road centerline data and procedures for maintaining the data.



## Planning and Economic Development

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Joined Wisconsin Local Governments Climate Coalition.
- Towns of Bangor, Barre, and Hamilton Comp plan amendments
- Drafted minor plan amendment to include future land use changes from some towns and some minor clean up and clarification since adoption.

### SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES:

- Two free county fleet assessments vehicle use cost-benefit analyses and evaluated the feasibility of transitioning some vehicles to EV or other alternative fuels.
- Employee commute survey/Green House Gas assessment added to annual Sustainability Indicators Report.
- Created County Sustainability webpage and solar energy installation guide.
- Established Staff Advisory Team to provide review and feedback on proposed Climate Action Plan for County operations that aims to reduce emissions and operating costs while increasing efficiency.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Completed Business Retention and Expansion survey in partnership with six community organizations.
- Awarded \$40,000 in Innovation and Diversification grants supporting five local small businesses.
- Awarded \$10,000 in Arts and Culture grants to local projects.
- Provided 32 grants totaling \$499,861 supporting local childcare providers with funding to perform capital improvement investments in their businesses
- Signed contract with Design Nine to work on broadband plan/awarded BEAD Planning Grant to be used for broadband planning related expenses
- Sold 13.5-acre parcel at Lakeview Parcel for development of Performance Food Group plant.

# Adapting to Change

## LA CROSSE COUNTY SURVEYOR



The La Crosse County Surveyor's Office remained abundantly active in 2023, serving La Crosse County taxpayers in several positive ways. The sale and purchase of land happens on a regular basis and land surveying is at the heart of many of those transactions. While we don't do surveying for private individuals, we have regular interactions with the local land surveyors who do. We also interact with other County Departments, municipalities, attorneys, real estate agents, title people and the public as surveys and land transactions transpire. Our review of maps, filing of maps, maintenance of the corners of the Public Land Survey System, provides a platform for that survey work to take place and it is central to what we do. Assistant County Surveyor Dale Hewitt and I make it our goal to provide efficient, timely responses to everyone's submittals, questions, and concerns.

Our office also represented La Crosse County well at the state level. I had an article published in the February 2023 edition of Wisconsin Counties magazine titled "County Surveyors - What Do They Do?" I was also privileged to speak at a session of the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) at their annual conference in Wisconsin Dells in September. My session was titled "County Surveyors and the Important Work They Do for Wisconsin" and was well received by the audience.

In January I completed my term as President of the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors (WSLS). I still serve on the Board of Directors for that group as past President. WSLS is an organization of over 1000 surveyors, which promotes the land surveying profession. My involvement on the Board will come to an end at the WSLS annual conference in January 2024. Being President of WSLS has been a highlight of my career and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. I am also very appreciative of the backing I received from La Crosse County. Thank you!

I was the main author of a document that has been distributed state-wide regarding the dangers of using a cell phone to attempt to locate property lines. I crafted the original document and sought input from the WSLS Board of Directors and the Wisconsin County Surveyors Association (WCSA) Board of Directors. The document was unanimously approved by both WSLS and WCSA is now in use state-wide and has been published in several locations. The document can be found here: [Cell Phone Apps White Paper V.8.pdf \(wsls.org\)](#)

Dale and I are truly grateful for the opportunity to actively serve La Crosse County taxpayers in 2023. We look forward to being just as active in serving in 2024.

**Bryan H. Meyer, County Surveyor**

[bmeyer@lacrossecounty.org](mailto:bmeyer@lacrossecounty.org)

## DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Assistant County Surveyor Dale Hewitt and I spoke to the Building Trades class at West Salem High School in October. We talked about the work that land surveyors perform and took students on a "field trip" to look for property corners on the school boundaries.
- Our office reviewed 64 Certified Survey Maps (CSMs) submitted for review by Professional Land Surveyors in 2023. Once approved, those maps are recorded in the La Crosse County Register of Deeds Office. We also took in 177 Plat of Survey maps submitted by Professional Land Surveyors. These maps are filed in the County Surveyor files and made available online.
- Performed maintenance work on 74 Public Land Survey System corners.
- Preserved the location of survey marker monuments (property corners) along a repaving project for County Trunk Highway M between CTH W and CTH D in the North central part of the County.





# 5 Things to Know



1. Dale has been studying diligently in recent months and has all the educational and experience requirements to become a Wisconsin licensed Professional Land Surveyor. He is now readying to pass a three-part examination. Dale has personally invested heavily in several books and a highly specialized calculator to prepare himself for the exams. Once he passes those tests, Dale can apply to the State of Wisconsin for his license.

2. Much of our work has us working with several other County Departments. We work closely with the Land Conservation, Land Information, Zoning and Planning Departments with questions on land surveying, land ownership and parcel splits. We also provide assistance and guidance to the Highway Department, Facilities Department, Treasurer, Register of Deeds and Corporation Counsel. As an example, we wrote and/or clarified legal descriptions on tax delinquent properties for the County Treasurer's Office. Corporation Counsel uses the updated descriptions on new deeds when La Crosse County sells these properties.
3. The Western Chapter of the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors meets four times per year in room 1107 of the La Crosse County Administrative Center. These purposeful gatherings generate some great conversation about the surveying profession and aides in good communication amongst surveyors who work in the La Crosse County area.
4. A largely overlooked area of our work has to do with the regular interactions that we have with landowners. A land transaction is not something most folks deal with on a regular basis. Our office serves as a resource regarding next steps and processes when it comes to the transfer of property and/or dividing land. We also do what we can to assist landowners when it comes to property line conflicts. Those interactions occur in face-to-face visits, phone conversations or e-mail.
5. The Public Land Survey System is a network of corners that were established in Wisconsin between 1832 and 1866. That work occurred in what would become La Crosse County between 1844 and 1847. La Crosse County has 1,405 PLSS corner locations. Several years ago, La Crosse County invested heavily to re-establish modern monuments at those corner locations. One of the primary responsibilities of our office is to maintain this network of corner monuments which is vital to accomplishing any private sector survey work that is done in La Crosse County. Our department goal is to maintain 5% of those markers (71 corner locations).



## Future Needs and Challenges



The overriding concern for the land surveying profession is that landowners in need of survey work are unable to find a professional land surveyor to come and do needed work in a timely fashion. Many Wisconsin surveyors indicate that they often have a backlog of work for three months or more. The Profession of Land Surveying, like so many trades is in need of new surveyors. The average age of a land surveyor in Wisconsin is about 60. As those seasoned veterans move off into retirement, we are in need of a new generation of land surveyors to take their place. Dale and I attempt to make the most of every opportunity to reach out to the next generation by speaking and presenting at high school career days and visiting local high school trades classes to ask students to consider land surveying as a career choice. We hope that those interactions will inspire young folks to consider land surveying as a career.



# LA CROSSE COUNTY

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