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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



The Land Conservation family has grown in 2024. Not only did we welcome Jarod Schamaun in March as our new stormwater specialist, but staff welcomed home baby Eva and baby Max. Congrats to the parents and siblings of these two infant conservationists! The demand for rural conservation practices remains high and we continue to review more project proposals than we can install. Cover crops, which improve soil health, increase soil organic matter and retain soil water once again proved to be beneficial in 2024. Likewise, the construction of new conservation systems, that include dams and waterways, help to slow down runoff, prevent erosion and improve water quality. On the urban side, we have been overseeing the installation of ARPA Stormwater Grant projects.

These projects have also been designed to reduce flooding, improve water quality and repair 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 plan and collaborate with our community. This past summer we completed a 5-year review of our Land and Water Plan; developed Erosion Control Service Contracts with the towns of Bangor and Washington; and accepted a \$600,000 Bostwick Creek Phase II Targeted Runoff Management (TRM) grant. We continue to fight for our land and water resources. 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

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2024 DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS



- Staff have been instrumental in the implementation of Muncity, our new permitting and data management system. This system has made permitting and record management more flexible and transparent for us and the public.
- Urban staff worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Highway Department on a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit audit.
- La Crosse, Vernon and Monroe counties have passed resolutions to authorize PL-566 dam decommissioning design work to begin in the Coon Creek Watershed.
- Conservation staff have assisted with a record number of cover crop contracts. More than 70 million square feet of green cover crops were planted this fall.
- Land Conservation and Zoning reviewed and approved the Livestock Facility Siting Expansion (ATCP 51 permit) for 2,639 milk cows at Creamery Creek Holsteins.

5 Things to Know

1. Bice County Forest offers over 5 miles of maintained trails for hiking, biking and cross-country skiing. The trails are groomed for skiing in the winter.
2. 30% and greater slopes are restricted from development through the La Crosse County Erosion Control Land Disturbance Ordinance.
3. 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.
4. 32 watersheds are sampled twice annually for phosphorus, nitrates and fecal coliform bacteria. Samples have been collected since 1999. Watersheds are assessed and ranked based on the data.
5. 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.



Future Needs and Challenges

- 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.
- 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 storm volumes and/or help to build organic matter in our soils requires additional time and money. Selling partners and clients on the long-term commitment to conservation can sometimes be difficult.
- Some conservation standards have become overly complex and very costly to implement. Additional time, training and money will be needed to implement certain practices in the future.



Adapting to Change

LA CROSSE COUNTY SURVEYOR



The La Crosse County Surveyor's Office continued to provide a wide range of services to members of the public and other County Departments in 2024. Transfers of land occur regularly here in La Crosse County and our review of survey maps, filing of survey maps and maintenance of the corners of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), provides a solid platform for those transfers. 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. We regularly interact with landowners, other County Departments, municipalities, private sector surveyors, attorneys, real estate agents, and title people as surveys and land transactions transpire. We frequently answer land

surveying and land ownership questions. Those interactions take place via emails, telephone conversations and face to face visits.

Education was a central theme for our department in 2024. We had interactions with several 4H, high school and college students. We were able to share the value of land surveying and provide a deeper understanding of legal descriptions and land ownership issues and responsibilities. Dale and I are always happy to respond to requests from local instructors and do our best to serve as a valuable resource.

Our office also represented La Crosse County well at the state level during 2024. I was blessed to serve as the Keynote Address Speaker at the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors (WSLS) 75th annual three-day conference at the Kalahari Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells in January. My speech touched on the history of land surveying conferences in Wisconsin. I also touched on topics of faith, family, forgiveness, and thankfulness. My address was well received by the audience and several colleagues reached out with words of thanks and appreciation for my message. Earlier in January, I was elected as President of the Western Chapter of WSLS. In January of 2025, I will step down from the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin County Surveyors Association (WCSA). I served in the capacity of Past-President for the past four years following nearly two decades on the Board. I am very appreciative of the backing I receive from La Crosse County as I served in these roles. Thank you for the encouragement!

One thing I am particularly proud of is our collaborations with other County Departments. We have regular contact with the Zoning, Planning and Land Information Department, the Land Conservation Department, the Facilities Department, Register of Deeds and Treasurer and I can honestly say it is one of the best parts of my position. We have some wonderful people serving in these departments and we continue to work well together to serve La Crosse County taxpayers. Dale and I are truly grateful to have had the opportunity to actively serve the residents of La Crosse County 2024. We look forward to being just as active in serving in 2025.

Bryan H. Meyer, County Surveyor

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DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Assistant County Surveyor Dale Hewitt and I spoke to the University of La Crosse Real Estate Principles class in April. Dale and I provided a PowerPoint session on the value of land surveying and the work of a County Surveyor.
- Dale and I also did a presentation for 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.
- In February, Dale and I took part in the 4H Clover College at Bangor Elementary School, providing a class on land surveying.
- We provided the land surveying work and generated a Certified Survey Map for four parcels of land at the old County Farm in West Salem. The map was approved by the La Crosse County Board and the Village of West Salem. The sale of a 10-acre parcel moved forward based on our survey.
- Our office reviewed 74 Certified Survey Maps (CSMs) submitted for review by Professional Land Surveyors in 2024. We also took in 233 Plat of Survey maps submitted by Professional Land Surveyors.
- We performed maintenance work on 75 Public Land Survey System corner markers, checking for monument stability and making sure reference ties are still in place. We then generate updated tie sheets which shows the monument at the PLSS corner and accessory ties.



3 Things to Know

1. One overlooked aspect of our efforts is the work we do to preserve survey markers along county roads that are being upgraded. Landowners often pay to have surveys performed to determine the location of property lines. These lines are marked with metal markers in the ground. When a highway improvement project takes place, sometimes those markers are in danger of being disturbed or destroyed. Our job is to protect those marker locations. In 2024, we preserved the location of monuments along a repaving project for County Highway W, and CTH JJ.
2. Our efforts often have us working with other county departments. We work closely with the Land Conservation and Zoning departments with questions on land surveying, landownership, and parcel splits. We also provide assistance to the Highway Department, Facilities Department, Treasurer, Register of Deeds and Corporation Counsel. As an example, we often write and/or clarify legal descriptions on tax delinquent properties for the Treasurer's Office. Corporation Counsel uses the updated descriptions on new deeds when La Crosse County sells these properties.
3. Another largely overlooked area of our work has to do with the regular interactions we have with landowners. Our office serves as a resource regarding next steps 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.

Serving the Public

DEPT OF ZONING, PLANNING & LAND INFORMATION



This year, our department achieved several remarkable milestones! One of the most significant successes was the implementation of a new tax software system. After 27 years of relying on an in-house program, our Land Information team spearheaded the successful transition to a modern, efficient platform. The new system offers enhanced functionality, robust support, and ensures we continue providing excellent service to our community.

Our Real Property team has been instrumental in navigating this major change, tackling the challenges of adopting a new system with exceptional dedication. Their responsibilities include collecting assessment data, managing land transfers, training municipal staff, running tax calculations, printing tax bills, and handling countless other intricate tasks. Their hard work ensures that every landowner

receives an accurate tax bill with the correct valuation.

The GIS team has also played a critical role in this initiative. Tax parcel boundaries are a core element of mapping and GIS data management, creating essential connections between the new tax software and our GIS systems. The seamless collaboration between the GIS and Real Property teams is a testament to the strength and efficiency of our Land Information department.

This achievement would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our IT Department and the Treasurer's Office. Together, this dedicated group of professionals devoted countless hours to developing the best possible system for La Crosse County and its residents.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this extraordinary effort! Your commitment ensures our continued ability to serve our community with excellence and innovation.

Kathleen Stewart, Director, Zoning, Planning and Land Information

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2024 DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Drafted an Economic Development Strategic Plan for 2025-2030
- Completed and adopted La Crosse County Broadband Plan and hired Broadband Specialist
- Earned SolSmart Silver Certification by reducing barriers to construction of solar energy systems
- Sold 45.42 acres in Lakeview Business Park to First Supply for a new automated distribution center
- Received a \$100,000 grant for a microgrid feasibility study to increase the County's energy efficiency and improve grid resilience.
- Awarded \$115,000 in Neighborhood Revitalization grants that is anticipated to result in \$1,245,700 in new tax base and four new residential units
- Completed WEDC Certified Sites for North Holmen Business Park
- Awarded \$10,000 Innovation and Diversification grant to a start-up business in La Crosse County
- Awarded \$7,500 Arts & Culture grants to support two projects
- Review Chapter 17, Zoning Ordinance
- Zoning has completed the permitting software program transition to Municipity5, this is the software the department uses to compile and generate permits and to file historical permitting.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2025

- Comprehensive Plan annual review and potential updates
- Implementation of the Climate Action Plan
- Launch housing study
- Adoption and implementation of the Economic Development Strategic Plan
- Completion and adoption of Chapter 17, Zoning Ordinance Amendments, Chapter 16, Floodplain Ordinance Amendment and Chapter 20, Shoreland Update
- As part of our new permit software, a public user will be allowed to view the permit history of a parcel, apply for, and receive a new permit, and communicate with department staff completely online in one central application.





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