



Dane County Land & Water Resources Department  
Parks Division

Joleen Stinson, Interim Parks Director  
Laura M. Hicklin, Director  
Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

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March 16, 2022

Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts  
211 S Paterson St. Suite 270  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Selection Committee:

Please accept this letter of my support to award the Benedictine Women of Madison the Land Legacy Conservation Leadership Award.

The Benedictine Women of Madison have been an invaluable partner in the restoration and stewardship of Dane County lands for many years. Monastery staff and volunteers conduct all the necessary work to maintain Dane County's North Mendota Wildlife Area that lies adjacent to restored prairies and woodlands at Holy Wisdom Monastery. Their commitment to the stewardship of this wildlife area and monastery lands has created and sustained a diverse and thriving landscape that provides many benefits to the community. Furthermore, Dane County Parks and Benedictine Women of Madison partner each fall to hold volunteer seed collection events on restored prairies at the Monastery and various Dane County sites. These cooperative events have generated hundreds of pounds of native seed for dozens of restoration sites for the county, the monastery, and partner organizations throughout the region.

The Benedictine Women of Madison have gone above and beyond to sustain the ecological and recreational value of county lands and their adjacent monastery grounds. Their partnership in helping to collect native seed has provided seed for hundreds of acres of restored lands. Their generosity and leadership in conservation is inspiring and worthy of recognition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lars Higdon".

Lars Higdon, Botanist/Naturalist

[Higdon.lars@countyofdane.com](mailto:Higdon.lars@countyofdane.com)

608-286-9497

March 15, 2022

Selection Committee  
Gathering Waters  
211 S Patterson St Suite 270  
Madison WI 53703

Dear Selection Committee:

I strongly endorse the nomination of the Benedictine Women of Madison for Gathering Waters' 2022 Land Legacy Conservation Leadership Award.

Care for the Land is an integral component of the vision and reality at the campus of Holy Wisdom Monastery on the north side of Lake Mendota in the Town of Westport in Dane County. The Sisters who make up Benedictine Women of Madison have embraced stewardship of the land as an equal part of their ministry of worship, hospitality, retreats, and education.

The Monastery has created an active ecological restoration program involving many community volunteers to restore prairie, savanna, and oak woodland communities. In collaboration with Dane County, the Monastery has worked to eliminate runoff into nearby Lake Mendota and has set aside land for a planned segment of the North Mendota bike/hike path connecting to Gov. Nelson State Park on the north side of the Lake.

More than 20 years ago, the Monastery began restoration of Lost Lake by the removal of sediment, greatly improving habitat for amphibians and migratory waterfowl. In 2012, the Monastery boldly purchased 53 acres of land that had been slated for development. Ecological restoration across the campus is supported by the volunteers of Friends of Wisdom Prairie. As part of the Monastery's ministry of hospitality, the public is welcome to visit the campus. The Monastery offers field trips, speakers, and events to inform and educate everyone about the land.

The Benedictine Women of Madison are strongly deserving of the 2022 Land Legacy Conservation Leadership Award.

Sincerely,

Jim Welsh  
170 Dunning Street  
Madison, WI 53704



March 22, 2022

Gathering Waters  
211 S Patterson St Suite 270  
Madison WI 53703

Attn: Selection Committee

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to offer my support for the nomination of the Benedictine Women of Madison for the Land Legacy Conservation Leadership Award.

I have been working with the Sisters for at least ten years as a resource for ecological restoration. My initial meeting with them was to discuss the seeding of a prairie on their property and it was then that I was introduced to their process of thinking about the land and their place within it. I was immediately impressed with their questions about the restoration process and their concern about how this prairie would fit into not only the larger ecological landscape but also the cultural landscape. The land and natural resources at Holy Wisdom Monastery are vitally important to the ministry and those who are seeking solitude or contemplation.

As a neighbor to state, county, and private lands they understand the role their stewardship plays as an ecological connection, and they also understand the role that they play as a societal connection. The Sisters do an incredible job of sustaining the balance of being a large landowner and land steward in an area with high land values, desirable lakefront homes, and increased development pressure. They are well-respected by town and county government and important collaborators in local land use planning. They lead by example.

The Sisters are very thoughtful in their decision making and contemplate not only the immediate impact of their actions but also the long-term impact. Their commitment to the land and acknowledgement of their role as humans on the land and land community is a mission and core belief and they go beyond upholding it. I greatly respect their work and respect them as individuals.

I highly recommend the Benedictine Women of Madison for this Gathering Waters award and feel they exemplify the qualities of an award winner.

Regards,

Darcy Kind  
Conservation Biologist  
WDNR



## *Holy Wisdom Monastery*

*Weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth  
into a shared way of life*

March 14, 2022

Gathering Waters  
211 S Patterson St Suite 270  
Madison WI 53703

Dear Selection Committee,

Please accept this letter nominating the Benedictine Women of Madison for the Land Legacy Award category in the 2022 Land Conservation Leadership Awards.

The Benedictine Women of Madison (BWM) are a monastic community of five women who live and work at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Middleton. A core part of their mission is active restoration of 191 acres that includes prairies, woodlands, wetlands and a glacial lake. Since 1953, the BWM have been dedicated stewards of the land. Early stewardship projects focused on planting gardens, orchards and trees on the property.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the BWM expanded their stewardship to include landscape-scale ecological restoration. For example, in 1996, the BWM embarked on a three-year project restoring Lost Lake, a glacial lake that had been almost entirely silted in by erosion from adjacent agricultural and residential land. Eighty-five thousand cubic yards of accumulated silt were removed from the lake and the shoreline was planted with native species. Restored to near its original depth, Lost Lake once again provides retention and filtration for stormwater that would otherwise wash into Lake Mendota.

In the next decade, the BWM continued their stewardship work by planting more than 120 acres of prairie. These highly diverse plantings primarily consisted of seeds collected or donated by volunteers. With most of the prairie habitat planted, recent conservation efforts have focused on restoring oak savannas and woodlands. In a wonderful testament to the quality of the land protection efforts, numerous threatened and endangered species – including Red-headed Woodpecker, Rusty-patched Bumblebee and Regal Fritillary – have been documented at Holy Wisdom.

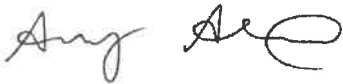
After restoring much of the land, the BWM decided to decommission their old, energy-inefficient building. The new building opened in 2009 and the U.S. Green Building Council awarded it a Platinum rating; earning 63 out of a possible 69 points under the LEED-New Construction rubric, the new monastery building was the highest-rated LEED building in the United States when it opened. In 2014, the BWM further improved their sustainability by

installing 463 new solar panels that provide approximately 60% of the monastery building's energy use. BWM's goal is to generate 100% of their energy needs onsite within the next two years.

The Benedictine Women of Madison are deserving and inspiring recipients for the 2022 Land Legacy Award. For seven decades, they have demonstrated courage and leadership in their commitment to protecting their land. And by generously sharing their property with the public, they ensure that their land serves as a place of healing, connection and renewal for people as well as nature.

Thank you for considering this nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Alstad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Alstad".

Amy Alstad  
Director of Land Management & Environmental Education  
Holy Wisdom Monastery  
4200 County Road M  
Middleton WI 53562  
608-836-1631 x123