The **Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh** is a 501(c)3 private, non-profit organization, incorporated with the State of Wisconsin in 2013. Its mission is to preserve, protect, and enhance the La Crosse River Marsh and serve the community through action, advocacy, and education.

The Board of Directors delivered its first annual report to the membership for the year 2015 in February 2016. In March of 2016, the Board completed a five-year strategic plan, which included five goals. It was introduced at our annual member meeting in February 2017. In subsequent annual meetings, Board members have highlighted the major activities and events of the previous year, using the five goals included in the plan as the basic outline for discussion. The annual report to members this year uses the same format: Here are the most significant activities and events of 2018 arranged according to five goals of the **Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh**.

**2016-2020 Strategic Plan – Goals**

1. **Protection and Coordination**: To protect the La Crosse River Marsh and its riparian boundaries; help direct and guide habitat management; expand wetland acres; secure the highest available level of wetland protection; oppose further development of the marsh; through partnerships enhance La Crosse River watershed services.

2. **Vegetation Restoration and Management**: To protect, enhance and restore native vegetation in the La Crosse River Marsh and its riparian boundaries to ensure a healthy marsh ecosystem, including grass cutting and brushing, invasive plant management, and habitat modification.

3. **Hydraulic and Water Quality Management**: To maintain and enhance the La Crosse River’s connectivity with the La Crosse Marsh to ensure a healthy functioning floodplain. To reduce nutrient, sediment and other
pollutant loads into the La Crosse Marsh through watershed level and local pollutant control measures. Work with local, state, and federal agencies to find opportunities for water level management and storm water management.

4. Safety: To develop a healthy, safe recreation environment. Identify opportunities to improve trail safety and, through education, promote the considerate use of trails by all users.

5. Education: To offer educational programs about the value of wetlands, the history, the hydrology, and the flora and fauna of the La Crosse River Marsh, and to emphasize the unique place this marsh holds in the life of our community. We wish to be a catalyst for continuing and expanding educational programming in the marsh, and we wish to promote the La Crosse River Marsh as one of the finest urban wetlands in the state.

2018 Annual Report

1. Protection and Coordination

- **Habitat Protection**

  In February (2/17/18), in partnership with WisCorps, volunteers participated in the Cornell University Ornithology Lab Great Backyard Bird Count, a world-wide assessment of bird populations. Nineteen volunteers recorded twenty species of birds. (See Attachment One)

  Installed four Wood Duck nesting boxes.

  In April, with the assistance of the Cub Scout, Bear Scout Den, we constructed and installed ten Black Tern nesting platforms in the east cell of the marsh.

  In partnership with WisCorps, Friends conducted four frog and toad chorus surveys in the marsh, beginning in April and ending in August. This is a citizen science project designed, together with previous surveys, to measure amphibian well-being and habitat health. At nine sites in the marsh, we gauged chorus frequency for the American Toad, Chorus Frogs, Grey Tree Frogs, Green Frogs, and Leopard Frogs. Approximately 30 volunteer hours. (See Attachment Two)
• **Coordination**

Represented the *Friends* on the Environment Leadership Forum (Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department), a body charged with trail planning and management in Hixon Forest, the blufflands, and the La Crosse River Marsh. Placed the Willow Trail and the Mitchel Red Cloud Trail on the schedule for repair.

*Watershed News* – a *Friends* synopsis of news items relating to watershed issues in Wisconsin. Two issues were sent this year to City of La Crosse staff and council people, La Crosse County Board members, and area state representatives.

The Board met with Karl Green (UW-Extension) concerning La Crosse River watershed issues and planning – these discussions are ongoing.

Coordinated meetings and communication with City of La Crosse Park and Rec and Engineering departments and WDNR regarding protection and repair of the Willow Trail, which is scheduled for this winter ($70,000 city CIP funding)

Coordinated a meeting with City of La Crosse Park and Rec, Engineering, and Water departments and WDNR regarding reconstruction of the spillway washout on the Grand Crossing Trail

Met with La Crosse Park, Recreation and Forestry staff several times regarding trail maintenance. Submitted a 2018 and 2019 trail maintenance plan outlining partnership between the *Friends* and Park and Rec.

2. **Vegetation Restoration and Management**

• **Planting and Seeding**: planted along the south end of the marsh and along the Cottonwood Trail.

3 river birch 5-6 ft  
9 American Cranberry 18-24in  
9 Sand Cherry 18-24in  
9 Serviceberry 18-24in  
9 Silky dogwood 18-24 in  
9 Nannyberry 18-24  

Some of these were potted up and planted in the fall, others held over for planting this coming spring.
Planted 3 American Elm and 3 Swamp White Oak trees along the Jim Asfoor trail November 1st.

Planted about a dozen containerized trees (4-6 ft tall) last fall along the Grand Crossing Trail, Willow Trail and southern end of the marsh (east of dog park). These included Swamp White Oak, Eastern Cottonwood, American Elm and Silver Maple.

¼ lb of of forbs and grass seed – a detention basin/bioswale seed mix -- along the south end of the Cottonwood Trail in October.

Lakeshore buffer plants – 32 small potted plants consisting of 10 species (forbs) were planted in the second bend of the Cottonwood Trail restoration. This area was supplemented with about 80 perennial plants grown from seed (milkweeds, sunflowers, native grasses, blue lobelia, coneflowers, cup plant, black-eyed susan and other plants).

- **Buckthorn/Honeysuckle Removal** – 5 work outings along the southern edge of the marsh and the southern end of the Grand Crossing trail. Approximately 110 volunteer hours.

- **Phragmites** – Completion of the Stry Foundation funded project to manage a large stand of phragmites – contracted with WisCorps to do the work – estimated 60-70% effective.

- **Trailside tree and shrub trimming** – 4 work outings. Approximately 90 volunteer hours.

- **Garlic mustard eradication** – 2 work outings along the Veterans Trail. Approximately 25 volunteer hours.

- **Trailside mowing** – Coordinated trailside mowing with Property Reliance LLC and the city Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department, mowing the edges of the Cottonwood Trail, Grand Crossing Trail (south of the footbridge) and Jim Asfoor Trail

3. **Hydraulic and Water Quality Management**

- **Hydraulic Enhancement Project Recommendations** -- A plan was prepared and discussed with the City and DNR. Currently, the city is considering the installation of a bridge or culvert opening in the Far West Cell of the marsh along the Jim Asfoor Trail to improve the hydraulic connectivity with the river and enhance flood water storage. Water level monitoring was initiated in this cell in
March to document fluctuations and its relation to the La Crosse and Mississippi River water levels.

- **Water Quality Monitoring** -- Biweekly water quality surveys were conducted throughout 2018 to evaluate temporal and spatial water quality and limnological conditions in the marsh.

- **Grand Crossing Trail Spillway** -- Small trees, shrubs and other woody debris were removed from the spillway area to enhance water flow during periods of flooding.

4. **Safety**

- **Willow Trail** -- Coordinated meetings with city Park and Recreation and Engineering departments and the DNR to develop a plan to save the Willow Trail, which is being undermined by the La Crosse River. An RFP was issued by Engineering and a contract let to rip rap the southern bank of the river proximate to the trail.


- **Trail Head Kiosks** -- To replace damaged and out of date trail signs and to add contact information, trail courtesy rules and possibly other information, we proposed new kiosks placed at the four trailheads. *Friends* will build the kiosks and Park and Recreation will provide the signage.

- **Trail Repair** -- Occasional repair of washouts along the marsh trails due to high water.

- **Trail-Side Benches** -- To better serve walkers and bikers, several benches were constructed and installed along the marsh trails.
  9 Leopold Benches (3 made by UWL Habitat for Humanity) (2 of these are memorial benches)
  2 Flat Benches

5. **Education**
• **Envirowednesdays – 2018** -- In partnership with WisCorps, a series of free, public programs were offered at the Myrick Park Center the first Wednesday of every month. 7:00 pm.

February 7: FOM Annual Meeting

March 7: Perspectives of Nature: Scientifically Romantic and Experiential Poetry with Paul Kosir

April 4: Bow Hunting and Conservation in the Driftless with Chris West, Bowhunting and Wildlife Enthusiast

May 2: Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey with Andrew Badje, WI DNR Herpetologist

June 6: Why Are Native Prairies So Difficult to Reconstruct? with Jim Rogala, The Prairie Enthusiasts

July 4: Holiday, no program

August 1: Peregrines and Power Plants: Dairyland Power Cooperative’s Peregrine Falcon Restoration Program with Ben Campbell, Biologist

September 5: Leave No Trace: Environmental Awareness Workshop

October 3: Myrick Park Center Urban Storm Water: Impact and Mitigation and the La Crosse River Marsh with Bernie Lenz, City of La Crosse Utilities Manager

November 7: Turtle Talk with Andrew Badje, WI DNR Herpetologist

December 5: Film, “Chasing Ice”

• **Outreach**

*Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh Newsletter* An occasional email newsletter sent to members. There were two issues this year: the January issue included reminders of ways to stay in touch with our organization; in September member Dave Skoloda wrote about the Jim Asfoor Trail crew cleaning up trash along that trail.

2/3/18 Staffed our table display at the “Progresstival,” a community environmental and political action festival.
2/6/18 *Friends of the Marsh* annual meeting

2/17/18 Coulee Region Climate Change, a panel at the La Crosse Public Library, Main Branch, hosted by the Coulee Region Climate Change Lobby.

3/1/18 Aldo Leopold Day – The *Friends* is a partner in planning this annual state wide celebration of Aldo Leopold. The 'Ethics of Hunting," a talk by outdoorsman and author Steven Rinella. Rinella, the host of the TV show MeatEater, spoke at 7 p.m. in the Fine Arts Center Main Theatre at Viterbo.

3/3/18 The Leopold event continued on Saturday at the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Visitor Center with childrens activities, comments by Rick Kyte on Leopold and the ethics of hunting, and readings from *A Sand County Almanac*.


3/3/18 Staffed our table display at Coulee Region Climate Change Lobby event at the First Congregational Church

4/28/18 Helped organize and members worked the Earth Day trail clean up along the marsh trails and the marsh periphery.

4/29/18 Staffed our table display at the Earth Fair, and led a marsh walk.

9/2/18 Staffed our table display at the Open Streets festival.

10/9/18 Led the Gundersen Brain Trauma Support Group on a walk in the marsh.

**Marsh Matters series – La Crosse Tribune**

*Messengers of Spring* – John Sullivan - 3/2/2018

*La Crosse River Marsh Remains Active in Winter* -- Nancy Heerens-Knutson – 1/14/18
**Facebook Page** and **Facebook Group**

The *Friends Facebook Page* is the principal means of communication between the Board and membership and between members and the public. It provides wetland information and education. Currently, we have 1,200 Page “likes.” Through this social media platform, for example, members record observations of significant phenological events in the marsh. (See Attachment Three)

The *Friends Facebook Group* is primarily a photo-sharing network. Group members post photos and marsh observations to this site. Currently it has 325 members.
## Friends of the La Crosse Marsh Financial Statement - December 31, 2018

**Balance December 31, 2017**  
6,727.67

### Income - 2018

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Donations-gage</td>
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<td>Donations - Trees</td>
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### Expenses - 2018

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**Balance Dec 20, 2018**  
7,809.90

**State Bank Statement 12/31/2018**  
7,809.90

### Other notes:

- Total Tree & Shrub Donations = $1,750.00
- Total Tree & Shrub purchases = $1,190.64
- Balance = $559.36