

# Making Running Water Walk

## Annual Report

*July 2021 - December 2022*



**COON CREEK COMMUNITY WATERSHED COUNCIL, INC.**

**Est. 2022**

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# *Coon Creek Community Watershed Council Vision and Mission*



Our Vision:

A watershed nurtured,  
cherished and  
flourishing

Our Mission:

To continue the historic legacy of conservation leadership  
through improving and restoring our soil, water, and air  
as stewards of the Coon Creek Watershed.



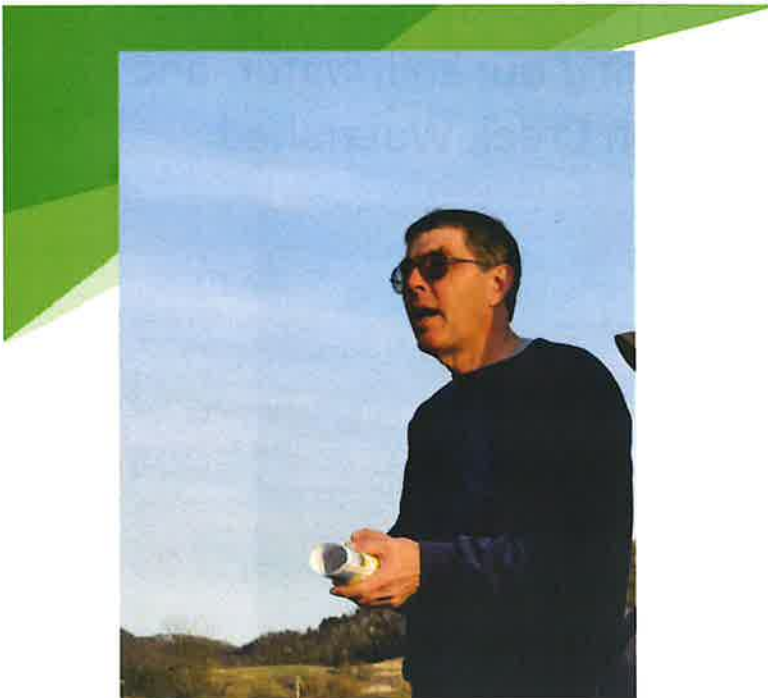


## HISTORY OF THE COON CREEK WATERSHED

The Coon Creek Community Watershed Council found its beginnings in the shadow of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp near Coon Valley. In the early 1930's, the CCC partnered with the local entrepreneurial farmers, the federal government and the University of Wisconsin-Madison to stop erosion and restore the watershed to health.

At each meeting, we pay tribute to our history through a fabulous flashback. Among other facts, we learned the legacy of involving community in conservation efforts was begun in the 1930's when the businesses in Coon Valley contributed funds to pay the rent for the CCC Camp. We also learned that we are not the first Coon Creek watershed council. The first council was formed as part of the process for building and installing the PL566 dams.

We value history and are engaged in a project to preserve our oral histories and learn lessons from them to guide our future efforts.



Our Historian, Marc Moilien, sharing information about original survey markers in the Coon Creek Watershed.

## *Review of Projects and Accomplishments*

Following repeated flooding events in 2018 and 2020, people gathered at the Coon Valley Park pavilion on July 7, 2021, to share ideas and learn about flood mitigation.

A second meeting was held in August and people decided to form a watershed group and apply for funding from the Wisconsin Department of Trade, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (DATCP).



At a meeting on September 1, 2021, after thoughtful discussion, the group chose the name Coon Creek Community Watershed Council. This name honors the historical legacy of conservation leadership in the Coon Creek Watershed and pays tribute to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), by embedding the acronym, CCC, in the name, to remember those who came to the aid of the watershed community.

Finally, it conveys the sense of (rather than convey how about embodies or integrates) community, a core value of this Council.



## Becoming a Nonprofit Organization and Electing a Board

In the spring of 2022, the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council engaged in strategic planning and determined the best path forward would be to form a nonprofit organization.

Among learning about the cover crops on the Curtis Brye farm in May, the first Board of Directors was elected. Board members serve 1-3 year long commitments and, at a minimum, meet monthly.





## BOARD of DIRECTORS

Ashley Olson



Monique Hassman



Debbie Andre  
*Treasurer*

Kevin Traastad



Tucker Gretebeck  
*Vice President*



Zachary King

Marc Moilien

Nancy Wedwick  
*President*



Maggie Traastad  
*Secretary*



*Accomplishments of a Community of  
Volunteers and Partnerships*





# *Ways We Are Learning to Make Running Water Walk*



## Conservation Practices

- No Till
- Cover Crops
- Prairie Strips
- Grassed Waterways
- Contour Strips
- Crop Rotation
- Rotational/Managed Grazing
- Silvopasture
- Drone Seeding
- Grade Stabilization Structures
- Healthy Forests



## Collaborations

- La Crosse County
- Monroe County
- Vernon County
- Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council
- Bad Axe Farmer-Led Watershed Council
- Rush Creek Conservation Watershed Council
- Valley Stewardship Network
- Coon Valley Conservation Club
- Coon Valley Business Association
- Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- University of Wisconsin-La Crosse



## Outreach

- Word of Mouth
- Facebook Postings
- Email List
- DATCP Annual Workshop
- Joint Watershed Council Meetings
- Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Presentation
- Life Hacks Over Lunch Panel
- University of Minnesota--Institute for Advanced Study Panel Discussion
- Conservation on Tap Presentation

*Surveys of our members revealed topics of interest for each meeting. Those topics are listed in the Conservation Practices above. Our list of collaborators is long and growing as we continue to build relationships to foster a culture of climate resilience in the Coon Creek Watershed. Outreach efforts to grow our organization are gaining momentum.*



## 1936 Dam Constructed by the CCC

On July 7, 2022, Alan and Pam Seelow graciously hosted a CCCWC meeting and tour of their farm.

We were treated to a hayride and visited the grade stabilization structure constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of the Coon Creek Watershed Project in the 1930's. This structure is still in service today.

We are thankful for the opportunity to see this history of the Coon Creek Watershed.

## Oral Narrative Project

Early in 2022, our UW-Madison Greener Pastures partners, Dr. Caroline Gottschalk-Druschke and Dr. Anna Andrzejewski, applied on our behalf for grants to fund the beginning of an oral narrative project in the Coon Creek Watershed. The purpose of the oral narrative project is to capture the history and experiences of people in the Coon Creek Watershed on the land and in communities, and to use the lessons learned from those narratives to guide the future actions of the CCCWC.

The oral narrative project began in September of 2022. To date, 37 interviews have been recorded by UW-Madison students and professors. Those will be archived at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Oral History Project.

Throughout 2023, the Council will receive projects created by the students about the Coon Creek Watershed and the CCCWC. By midyear of 2023, students will have transcribed the interviews drawing out the themes and lessons to share with this Council.

Our sincere thanks to Dr. Gottschalk-Druschke, Dr. Andrzejewski Sydney Widell and all the wonderful and caring students who began this project.

## *Funding Opportunities and Requests - 2022*

In 2022, we submitted applications for 4 grants and one pre-application grant proposal, listed below.

### **DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant**

We requested \$40,000 for cover crops, perennial cover crops, education, demonstrations, tours and work plan development. We were awarded \$30,800 for 2023.

### **DNR Surface Water Grant:**

We requested \$10,000 to develop a nine-element watershed plan to identify watershed stakeholders, compile watershed research, set goals and develop plans to restore and improve the Coon Creek Watershed. We expect award decisions in early 2023.

### **Wisconsin Idea Collaboration Grant:**

In partnership with UW-Madison, we submitted a request for \$60,000 to collaborate with UW-Madison, UW-Extension, and our sister watershed councils to build organizational capacity, advance leadership opportunities and skills, and to fund the first steps in developing a watershed plan.

### **Advancing Climate Readiness and Rural Economic Opportunity—Vernon & Monroe County Pilot Project:**

In partnership with Monroe County, we applied for funding to provide technical assistance for on-the-ground projects in the Coon Creek Watershed, and funding for continued promotion, education, outreach and website development for the CCCWC.

### **Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Grant Pre-Application Proposal:**

In partnership with UW-Madison, we submitted a pre-application proposal to apply for \$120,000 to continue the oral narrative project, develop public facing educational materials including a podcast, and further develop our website. The pre-application proposal was accepted, and we have been invited to apply for the grant.



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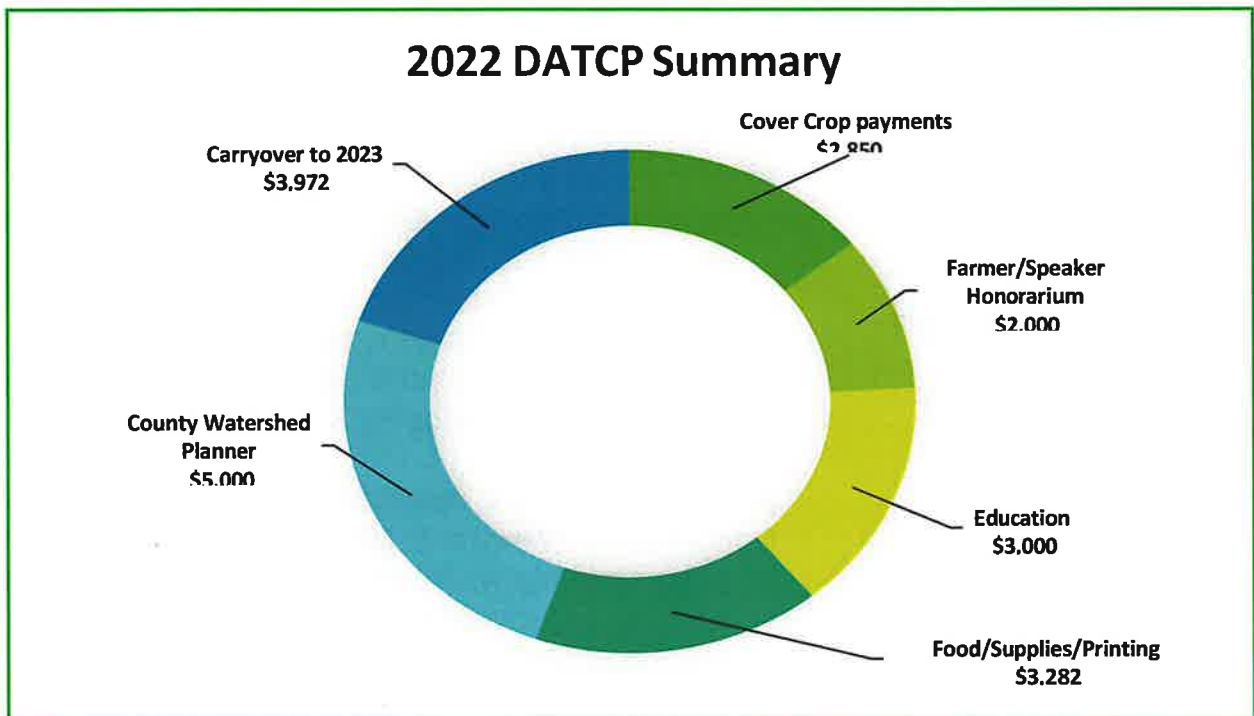
## Financial Reports

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### Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Watershed Protection Grant (DATCP)\*

For 2022, DATCP awarded the CCCWC \$15,105 and Vernon County Land and Water Department received \$5000. Vernon County LWCD is the fiscal manager of this grant. Below is an overview of the DATCP expenditures during the year.

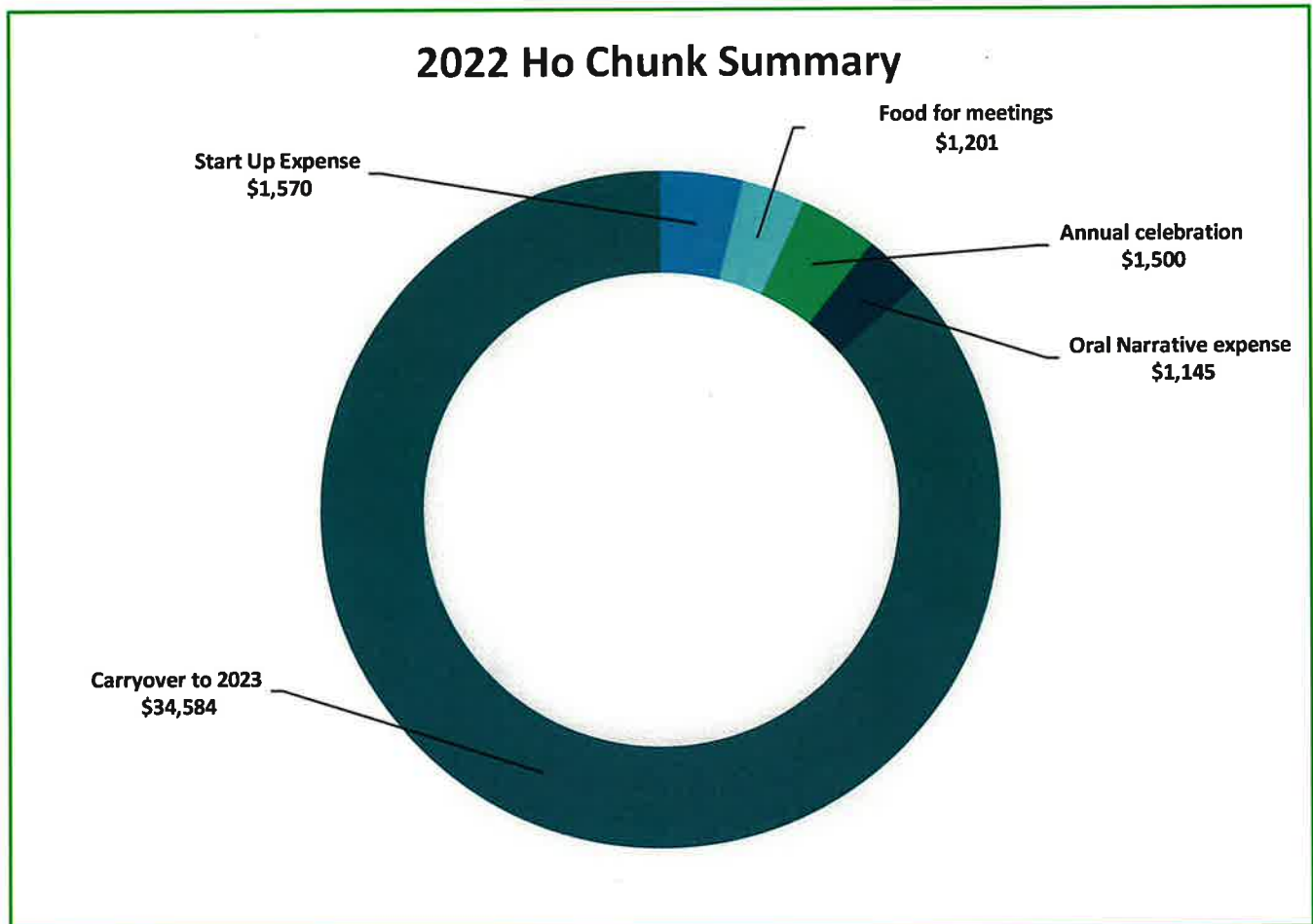


- ✓ Six farmers took advantage of the Cover Crop program for a total of \$2,850 in payments.
- ✓ A total of \$2,000 was paid directly to producers and farmers in speaker honorariums.
- ✓ The education funds were used to purchase *Historical Agriculture and Soil Erosion in the Upper Mississippi Valley Hill Country*, by Stanley Trimble, and gave copies away to those that attended our first annual celebration.
- ✓ We carry over \$3,972 into 2023 for perennial cover crops, and general supplies, and dinners at our monthly meetings.

\*Vernon County LWCD receives and accounts for the 2022 DATCP funding and these figures represent the information reported to the CCCWC from Vernon County.

## Funding Through Vernon County from the Ho-Chunk Nation\*

The CCCWC was allotted \$40,000 from the Vernon County Ho-Chunk fund account with Vernon County as the fiscal manager. Funds are expended on an 18-month cycle beginning January 2022 through June 2023. Below is a summary of the expenditures through the end of 2022.



- ✓ These funds were used to help with our startup costs including fees to become a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, general liability and director and officer liability insurance for a nonprofit, filing, and website domain purchase.
- ✓ The Ho-Chunk funds paid for food at meetings and events, and our first annual celebration in September, a way involve and educate the community on conservation efforts in the Coon Creek Watershed.
- ✓ These funds also covered initial oral narrative expenses.

\*Vernon County receives and accounts for the Ho-Chunk funding and these figures represent the information reported to the CCCWC from Vernon County.

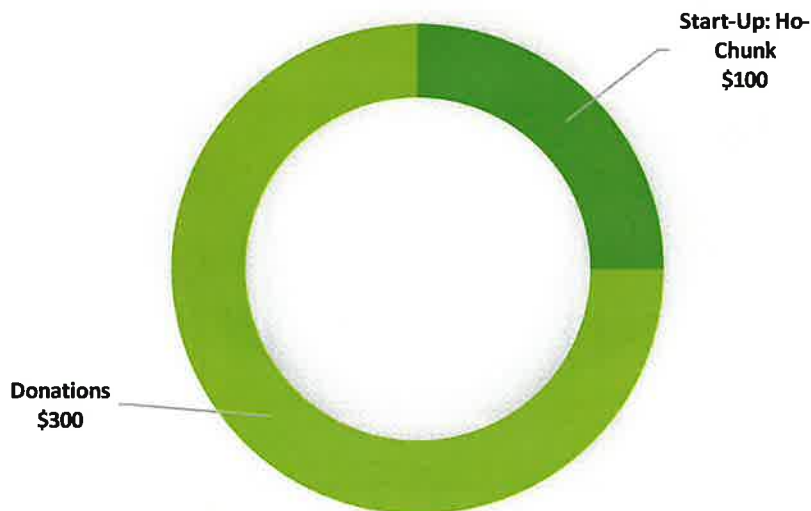
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## Coon Creek Community Watershed Council Account

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In 2022, after the CCCWC was granted nonprofit status, the organization opened a checking account at River Bank in Coon Valley, Wisconsin. The account was opened with an initial deposit from the Ho-Chunk funds of \$100. During the oral narrative project, participants were given \$50 for telling their experiences in the interviews. Some volunteers chose to generously donate their payment that amounted to \$300 being donated back to CCCWC. As a result, we ended the year with a bank balance of \$400.

### 2022 Banking Summary



## To Our Producers and Farmers

In his book, *Historical Agriculture and Soil Erosion in the Upper Mississippi Valley Hill Country*, Stanley Trimble writes, "The village of Coon Valley was literally saved by soil conservation" (p.131). During the past year and a half, we have learned from our producers and farmers about the conservation practices that are part of their systems, from no till and cover crops to managed grazing and grade stabilization structures.

These are on-the-ground conservationists, putting words into action every day, increasing water infiltration and mitigating flooding. To them we owe our thanks, deepest appreciation and gratitude for doing all that they can to make running water walk in the Coon Creek Watershed.



*Grassed waterways and spillway overflowing on the Moilien Farm at the top of the watershed during August 7, 2021, flood.*



*Grassed waterways and pond on the Moilien Farm on August 7, 2021.*

## *With Gratitude*

### To The Ho-Chunk Nation

When the first Europeans arrived in the Coon Creek Watershed, they found a beautiful and bountiful land. We acknowledge this area is the ancestral homelands of the Ho-Chunk Nation. It is to them we give our respect, thanks and gratitude for our place here today. The harmony in which they live with nature is why the Northern European immigrants found such rich soils, clear streams and abundant wildlife. We also thank them for funding the work of the CCCWC in the spirit of involving community and improving the environment. Our gratitude and thankfulness run deep.

### To Our Volunteers

Our volunteers are the heart of the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council. Volunteers created this grassroots organization from the desire to restore and improve our watershed. From the start, this has been a community-led effort, involving all facets of the community, landowners, producers, business owners, and others encompassing a wide range of occupations and professions dedicated to building climate resilience in the Coon Creek Watershed. As each need arises, someone steps forward bringing the knowledge and skills to meet the challenge. Their passion, inspiration and action, drives the success of this organization. We are very thankful and appreciative of our volunteers and give them our deepest gratitude.

## To Our Sister Watershed Councils

On July 7, 2021, the **Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council** stepped forward to show us the way to becoming a watershed council. They offered their insights and knowledge and spent their time teaching us and offering the lessons they have learned. Tainter Creek led the way with encouragement and support. To them we give our appreciation and gratitude. The **Bad Axe Farmer-Led Watershed Council** began at the same time as our Council. We have grown and learned together and continue to share ideas and lessons. More recently, the **Rush Creek Conservation Watershed Council** established as our newest council in this area. We have been happy to mentor Rush Creek as we have been mentored by Tainter Creek, and to learn from Rush Creek as they become established and grow. We are thankful to have our sister watersheds as counsel.

## To Our Partners

We are fortunate to have many organizations with which to collaborate on this most important work. Each in their way, offer their knowledge and capabilities to strengthen this Council, build its capacity and amplify the voice of this community. They give of their own time also to help us strengthen the resilience of the Coon Creek Watershed. We offer our deepest thanks and gratitude for their work, passion and involvement in this Council.

## *Remembering Ernest Haugen*

We owe a debt of gratitude, likely beyond our current understanding, to Ernest Haugen, a lifetime resident of the Coon Creek Watershed, for inspiring the title of this report. The Haugen family farm on South Ridge, near Coon Valley, Wisconsin, was one of the first farms in the area to implement soil conservation practices as part of the Coon Creek Watershed Project begun in 1933. Ernest and his brother Joseph maintained those conservation practices throughout their lives and the original terraces are still visible and in use today.

All during his life, Ernest was a strong and vocal advocate of conservation. When he was 13 years old, a teacher in school asked about the conservation practices and what the farmers were trying to accomplish. Ernest's answer was simple. He said, "We make running water walk." We are deeply thankful to Ernest for his lifetime of environmental stewardship and for his plain and profound answer that heartens and encourages us in our task today.



# *Where Are We Going?*

Build and strengthen relationships, grow membership, continue outreach and increase funding

Continue to engage in strategic planning and workplan development

Increase regenerative practices in the Coon Creek Watershed

Collaborate with Norskedalen on a Conservation Education Curriculum

Continue to apply for funding to develop a watershed plan

Continue interviews for the Oral Narratives Project

Plan for the centennial celebration of the Coon Creek Watershed



