

News on the Sugar

A Publication of the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association

www.ubbersugar.org



WINTER/SPRING 2025

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Sugar River at Hwy A

Exciting News: A New Chapter for the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association!

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I'm excited to share with you that as of January 1, 2025, I have transitioned into the role of Executive Director at the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association! In addition to continuing my work as the Invasive Species Program Coordinator—where I will serve in a 50% capacity—I will now take on the expanded responsibilities of Executive Director, also at 50%.

This new chapter is made possible with the continued support of the Upper Sugar River Board and Staff, and I'm deeply grateful for their trust and encouragement. With my background in natural resource management, education, and conservation, I feel well-prepared to tackle the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

In this expanded role, I'm especially looking forward to working

more closely with our dedicated community, partners, and supporters as we continue our collective efforts to care for and protect the land and water of the Upper Sugar River Watershed.

Thank you for your ongoing support! I'm eager to engage with all of you as we embark on this exciting journey together!

All the Best,

Jasmine Wyant
She/They
Executive Director, USRWA



Meet Our Newest Staff Member - Grace Martin - Invasive Species Technician

Please help us welcome Grace Martin as our new Invasive Species Technician! Grace is from central Wisconsin and grew up playing in bodies of water such as the Wisconsin River, Lake Du Bay, Buffalo Lake (near Minocqua), and Lake Michigan. Grace graduated from UW-Madison in 2022, and has worked as a political fellow at 350 Wisconsin, a software tester at Epic Systems, and farmer of organic vegetables at Troy Farm. Grace is also in school at Madison College to get their paralegal certification with the goal of having a better ability to work with the law that governs our shared natural treasures. They hope to bring a diverse skill set to the USRWA team!

Grace enjoys indoor activities such as reading, painting, crocheting, and playing Dungeons and Dragons, and outdoor activities such as skating (both 'roller' and 'ice'), birding, gardening, swimming, and foraging for plants and fungi.

Badger Mill Creek Work Continues

by Robert Bohanan

Upper Sugar staff and board members participated in a year-long stakeholder group to address issues and concerns related to the proposed elimination of treated wastewater return to Badger Mill Creek. The stakeholder group considered a variety of potential solutions to help mitigate loss of base flow.

Upper Sugar and volunteers conducted habitat assessments along the entire reach of Badger Mill Creek in fall 2023 and spring 2024 to help identify priorities for protection and restoration to inform plans.

The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association's proposal for a comprehensive watershed management plan for the Badger Mill Creek has been ranked #1, following extensive stakeholder engagement and habitat assessments aimed at addressing critical environmental concerns. The plan aims to equip decision-makers with essential data, raise community awareness and support, prioritize watershed issues across jurisdictional lines, and foster collaboration among varied groups.

Six recommended projects to enhance watershed health were submitted for funding to the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Commission in December 2024, highlighting initiatives for habitat restoration, flow management, monitoring, and phosphorus management.

These projects are listed here in order of their ranking:

- Watershed Management Plan
- Badger Mill Creek Habitat Restoration including low flow channel
- Base flow Augmentation via Goose Lake
- Additional USGS Monitoring stations
- Groundwater Recharge modeling study
- Agricultural and Residential Phosphorus Management Practices



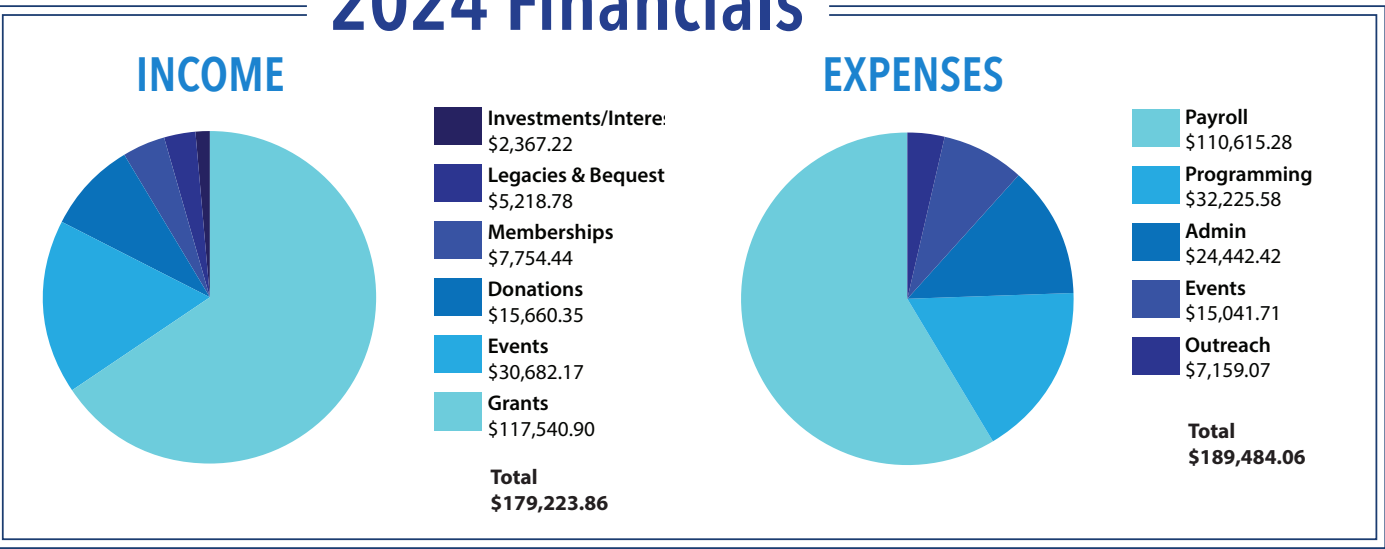
Badger Mill Creek looking south at Bruce Street in Verona.

For additional information on these projects and to follow developments regarding the progress of these projects please visit:

https://www.madsewer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/20241219_COMM_Project-Update-Badger-Mill-Creek-Stakeholder-Group-Recommended-Project-Portfolio.pdf

Upper Sugar continues to be committed to maintaining the health of Badger Mill Creek. If you are interested in volunteering with projects related to Badger Mill Creek please email us at info@uppersugar.org and let us know your area of interest (water flow, habitat, water quality, etc).

2024 Financials



The Final Ramble

We regret to announce that 2024 was our final Ramble. It has been a wonderful tradition for the past 10 years and we have thoroughly enjoyed seeing all the happy participants enjoying this adventure in the Upper Sugar River watershed. Going forward we will be focusing on offering smaller, more frequent opportunities to support Upper Sugar such as guided hikes focused on different topics in the watershed. So keep your eye out for those to appear in the near future. A huge thank you to everyone who participated in the Ramble in the past! We hope you will join us at these future events as well!



Happy participants enjoying the bike portion of the 2024 Ramble.

Water Action Volunteers Collect Valuable Data

by Heather Hasenstein

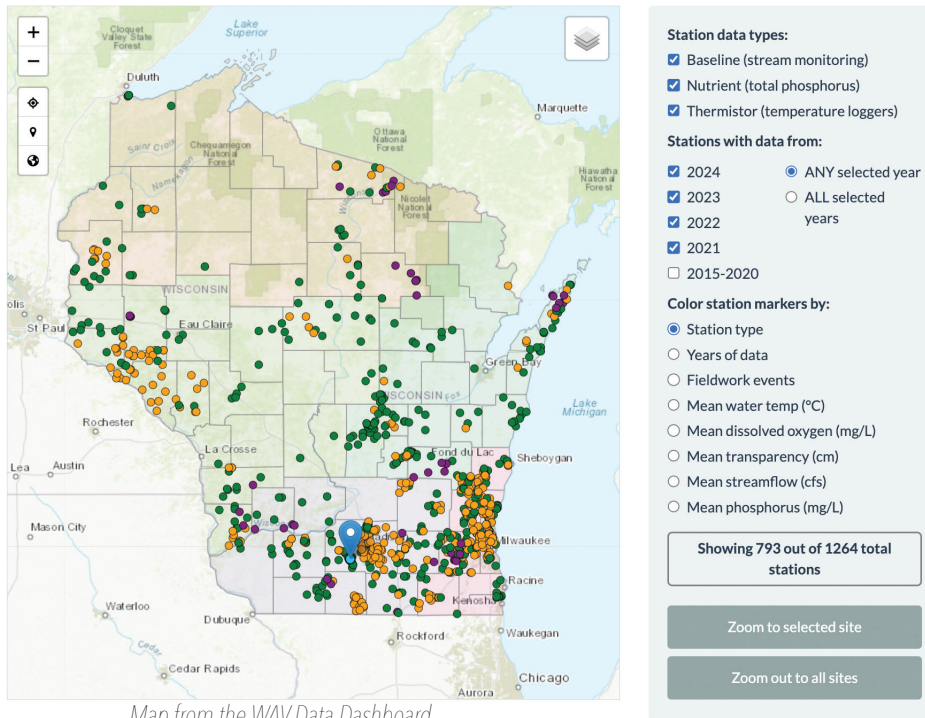
We had both a challenging and a productive WAV monitoring season in 2024. The spring brought many very heavy storms combined with wind. This created flooded streams and rivers that were difficult to monitor. Our intrepid volunteers worked with Mother Nature though and either adjusted their monitoring day accordingly or they collected only the data they could safely collect if a reschedule was not possible. One volunteer even had to be assigned a new site as a fallen tree made her usual monitoring site unsuitable. As the season rolled on the weather stabilized and monitoring returned to its usual ebb and flow.

An exciting new tool from WAV was introduced this year - the WAV Data Dashboard. This dashboard lets anyone from the public easily access the data that our WAV volunteers collect. You simply select a site from the map and it displays the data for that site below the map in easy to understand graphs and charts. You can download the data either as a spreadsheet or as a PDF. This allows anyone to see the health of any river or stream in the state, and then use that information to help demonstrate to townships, counties or industry the need for any conservation efforts that they wish to see happen. Check out this fantastic and easy to use tool at: <https://connect.doit.wisc.edu/wav-dashboard/>

We also had a few new volunteers join our ranks this year. Welcome and a huge thank you to Tim and Lynne Mero (who are also newly certified Master Naturalists), Kamryn & Kai Leeder, and Brigitte Bocher & Juniper Weier. Your time and effort helped us

Stream Monitoring Data Dashboard

Baseline stations are shown in **green**, total phosphorus monitoring stations in **orange**, and temperature logging stations in **purple** (stations may have more than one type of data). Currently selected station is shown in **blue**. Click on any station to select it, or choose from the list below the map.



Map from the WAV Data Dashboard.

collect data from three new sites, adding to a deeper knowledge of our river. We look forward to working with you this coming year!

I would also like to thank our dedicated volunteers who tirelessly return year after year: Claudia Campbell, Bill & Lisa Keen, Dave Laufenberg, Luke Metolik, Susan Moran, Zach Topel, and Dick Wieboldt. Your continued efforts have allowed us to collect many consecutive years of data, giving us information about changes that happen both naturally and as a result of human influences from year to year. WAV data from multiple years was also used to help demonstrate the need for continued outflow from MMSD to Badger Mill Creek (see pg. 3). Your help is invaluable to the Upper Sugar River!!

If you would like to become a WAV volunteer please contact Heather Hasenstein at heather@uppersugar.org.



Purple Loosestrife: Providing Space For Native Species In Wetlands With Bio-control

by Jasmine Wyant

2024 was a successful year in terms of the management of the invasive wetland plant Purple Loosestrife via bio-control in our region! Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is a beautiful but invasive plant that has become a significant threat to wetlands across Wisconsin. Known for its bright purple spikes of flowers, purple loosestrife is a major disruptor of wetland ecosystems. Once it establishes itself in wetland habitats, it often out-competes native plants, altering the structure of the ecosystem and reducing the survival of many species that depend on these wetlands for food, shelter, and breeding grounds.

Concerns with Purple Loosestrife

Purple loosestrife has a number of traits that make it particularly troublesome. Its dense growth can crowd out native wetland plants, such as cattails, bulrushes, and sedges. This reduces biodiversity and limits available food and habitat for wildlife like birds, amphibians, and insects. As a result, wetlands become less productive and less resilient, impacting water quality, flood control, and the overall health of these ecosystems.

How can bio-control help?

To reduce the advantage of this invasive plant, the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association and other partners throughout Wisconsin and the Midwest have implemented a bio-control program. Bio-control involves using natural predators to reduce the population of an invasive species. For purple loosestrife, we rely on a specific beetle species, *Galerucella californiensis*, (Affectionately called cella beetles because they are pretty darn cute!) which has been shown to feed on the leaves, stems, and flowers of purple loosestrife without causing harm to native plants or other species in the environment.

The bio-control beetles are carefully released in wetland areas where purple loosestrife is a problem. As the beetles feed on the plant, they weaken its ability to thrive and reproduce, which in turn reduces the competitive advantage of purple loosestrife. Over time, this allows native wetland plants to regain their space

and flourish, supporting the diversity and health of the entire ecosystem. See the picture of Native Marsh Marigold below that is able to flourish at a site that uses Purple Loosestrife bio-control.

Benefits to Wisconsin's Wetlands

By using bio-control, we're able to address the purple loosestrife problem in a way that doesn't require the use of chemicals or intense manual labor. The bio-control beetles are highly effective and continue to support the restoration of native wetland plants year after year.



Native Marsh Marigold

With this bio-control program, we help ensure that our wetlands remain rich in biodiversity and continue to provide crucial ecosystem services. These wetlands are vital for water filtration, flood mitigation, carbon storage, and serving as habitat for countless species of wildlife.

How You Can Help

You can play an important role in supporting efforts to protect Wisconsin's wetlands! If you come across purple loosestrife in your area, report it to us at Upper Sugar (info@uppersugar.org) or the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Invasives/report>).

Every year we have individuals and community groups that partner with us to raise the bio-control cella beetles to ensure that we have a healthy population in the areas where new or growing populations of the invasive purple loosestrife plants may be. If you would like to be a part of the rearing of the cella beetles to help continue the purple loosestrife bio-control program in our region please reach out to Jasmine (jasmine@uppersugar.org) or Grace (grace@uppersugar.org).

Purple loosestrife may be a challenging invasive species, but with the support of bio-control and community engagement, we're making strides in safeguarding the future of Wisconsin's wetlands. Thank you for your continued support in our collective efforts to protect and restore these valuable ecosystems!

Burning Troll's Outstanding Second Year

by Heather Hasenstein

Upper Sugar was privileged to be the benefiting charity for Burning Troll again in 2024! If you haven't attended a Burning Troll event, it is a fantastic day filled with bands, artworks, performers, and of course a towering burning troll - all held at beautiful Donald Park Farm. The event is sponsored by Brix Cider in Mt. Horeb. Upper Sugar participated by selling Brix Hard Ciders and various non-alcoholic beverages during the event. All the proceeds from these beverage sales then went to us at Upper Sugar.

The day began with gorgeously blue skies, perfect temperatures, and a verdant hayfield filled with revelers. Many talented local bands played from noon onward, providing the soundscape for the event. Sculptures by a local artist

lined the path of the nearby prairie walk. A performance by Cycropia entertained the crowd with their daring feats of acrobatics on high. The climax of the evening was the lighting of the massive troll head that had been crafted from trees culled to improve the nearby oak woods. Drummers, fire jugglers, and stilt walkers all added to the energy as the flames leapt into the night sky. It was truly a sight to behold!

A huge thank you to Brix Cider for choosing Upper Sugar to partner with them at Burning Troll. And last but definitely not least, thank you to the volunteers who helped us serve the beverages and accept payments. We had an excellent time and hope to partner with Brix again in the future, as well as see you all there next year!



Just a few of the pets surrendered at the Exotic Pet Surrender Events - left to right: bearded dragon, Jasmine Wyant holding a ball python, and an axolotl.

Exotic Pet Surrender Events A Success in 2024

by Jasmine Wyant

In 2024, the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association partnered with R&R Aquatic Animal Rescue, UW-Platteville Animal House, the Aldo Leopold Center, Three Waters Reserve, and Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center to facilitate four successful Exotic Pet Surrender events in our region, providing a safe, non-judgmental opportunity for community members to surrender their exotic pets. These events are part of our ongoing efforts to promote responsible pet ownership and protect local ecosystems.

Why You Should Never Release Pets into the Wild

Did you know that releasing pets like fish, reptiles, or small mammals into the wild can have negative effects on local ecosystems? When non-native species are introduced into new environments, they can become invasive, disrupting the balance of nature and threatening native species. Here's why it's so important to never release a pet into the wild:

- 1) **Disruption of Ecosystems:** Pets from other regions might not have natural predators, which can allow their population

to grow unchecked, possibly leading them to out-compete native species.

- 2) **Spread of Diseases:** Non-native pets can carry diseases that local wildlife is not equipped to handle, potentially causing widespread health issues for native animals.
- 3) **Unprepared for Survival:** Most pets aren't adapted to survive in the wild. Without proper food, shelter, or survival skills, they often face a difficult and early demise.
- 4) **Threat to Conservation Efforts:** Invasive species can destroy habitats and threaten the survival of endangered species, undermining conservation efforts in our region.

Instead of releasing pets into the wild, consider adopting, re-homing, or finding a proper sanctuary or rescue for them. You may also join us at one of our 2025 surrender events. Check out the Upper Sugar Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/UpperSugar/>) for event locations and details. Together, we can protect local wildlife and keep our ecosystems healthy!



Youth Education Days

by Jasmine Wyant

One of our favorite initiatives at the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association is our Education Days program, where we partner with Southwest Wisconsin counties to provide hands-on learning about invasive species and water invertebrate sampling. These events are always a highlight for us, as we get to bring middle school students outdoors to explore the beauty of our region and help them to gain a deeper understanding of the environment but also learn practical ways they and their families can actively contribute to caring for and protecting their natural community.

We currently partner with Iowa, Green, and Sauk counties to provide these opportunities to students and we will continue this partnership into 2025. These Youth Education Days are a wonderful reminder of how we can all make a difference in safeguarding the land, water, and wildlife we hold dear by learning just a bit more about the fellow species that live in our communities. We look forward to reaching more students and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards!

Get Involved in Snapshot Day: Protecting Wisconsin's Waters

by Jasmine Wyant

Snapshot Day is a statewide initiative aimed at protecting Wisconsin's streams, lakes, and wetlands by monitoring for invasive species that negatively impact our wildlife and water ecosystems. It's a vital effort to ensure the health and sustainability of our aquatic environments for years to come.

In 2024, volunteers had the opportunity to join this important cause by participating in hands-on monitoring of designated sites. Whether you're new to invasive species identification or already experienced, Snapshot Day offers a chance to make a direct impact.

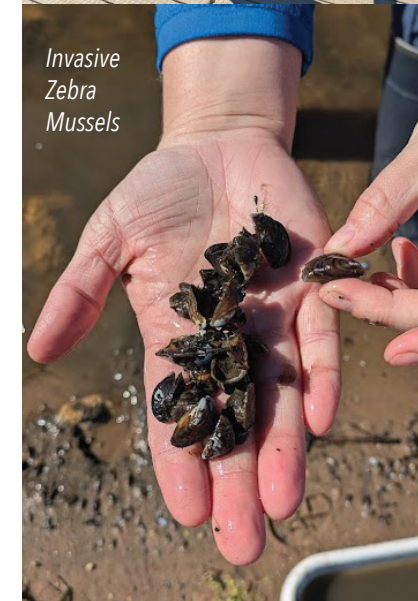
How It Works:

Volunteers meet at a local training site near them, where they'll receive the tools and training needed to identify invasive plants and animals. Once trained, participants will head out to designated monitoring sites alongside event partners to look for invasive species that could potentially harm the ecosystem.

This is a fantastic opportunity to contribute to Wisconsin's environmental stewardship, learn more about local ecosystems, and help prevent the spread of harmful invasive species.

Be sure to follow us on Facebook (@UpperSugar) or Instagram (#uppersugar) for details about our 2025 Snapshot Day on Aug 9th! Bring your family or friends and spend a summer morning in and around our Wisconsin waters helping to provide information and explore our natural community.

Please email Invasive Species Program Coordinator Jasmine Wyant (jasmine@uppersugar.org) or Invasive Species Program Technician Grace Martin (grace@uppersugar.org) with any questions or if you would like to sign up to participate in the 2025 Snapshot Day event!



Invasive Zebra Mussels

Clean Boats Clean Waters

by Jasmine Wyant

We have another successful Clean Boats Clean Waters Season under our belts. In 2024, Upper Sugar continued our Clean Boats Clean Water outreach and education program and thanks to the dedication of our intern, Ellie Zimmerman, who contributed over 300 hours of outreach to boaters, anglers, and paddlers in our region's waters. Through this program, Ellie and our team worked to educate water recreationists on how to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS), which pose a significant threat to the health of our waterways.

By engaging with the public directly, we were able to raise awareness about the importance of cleaning boats, trailers, and equipment before and after entering different

water bodies, as well as other simple steps that help prevent the unintentional spread of invasive species. This hands-on education is critical to maintaining the integrity of our local ecosystems and ensuring that our waterways remain healthy and accessible for generations to come.

If you'd like to learn more about how to prevent the spread of invasive species while enjoying our waters, or if you're interested in volunteering for the Clean Boats Clean Water program, please reach out to Jasmine or Grace. We would love to have you involved in these efforts!

Contact:

Jasmine Wyant - jasmine@uppersugar.org
Grace Martin - grace@uppersugar.org



Ellie at Yellowstone Lake State Park, Lafayette County



Become A Board Member

Becoming a board member of the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association (USRWA) offers several personal and professional benefits while contributing to the health of the local environment. Here are some compelling reasons to join:

- **Impact on Local Environment:** By serving on the board, you'll directly contribute to protecting and improving the watershed. This includes preserving water quality, protecting biodiversity, and addressing challenges and threats to unique natural resources.
- **Community Engagement:** The USRWA focuses on local engagement, making a meaningful difference in your community. As a board member, you'll have the chance to collaborate with people who care about the same environmental issues and work toward tangible solutions.
- **Leadership Development:** Being part of an environmental nonprofit offers opportunities to develop your leadership and organizational skills. You'll gain experience in strategic planning, fundraising, and advocacy, which can be valuable both professionally and personally.
- **Networking:** You'll have the chance to network with other professionals, conservationists, local government representatives, and stakeholders interested in environmental protection.
- **Advocacy for Sustainable Practices:** As a board member, you'll be in a position to influence local policy and promote sustainable practices in land use, water conservation, and ecosystem management.
- **Educational Opportunities:** Working with the USRWA will deepen your understanding of watershed management,



Board Members Kelly Maynard and Bill Roznik at Burning Troll 2024.

local ecosystems, and environmental challenges. You'll also have the chance to share that knowledge with others and promote environmental stewardship in the community.

- **Personal Fulfillment:** Many people find deep satisfaction in knowing they've contributed to something larger than themselves, especially when it comes to preserving natural resources for future generations.

In short, serving on the board of USRWA provides the opportunity to have a lasting positive effect on the environment while developing valuable skills and fostering community connections.

Upper Sugar Website Gets A Refresh!

When you visit our website next, you will find a fresh new look! We took some time in the winter season to update our look and make navigating the site easier. We hope you enjoy the results!

