

20 25

Impact Report

LAND CONSERVATION,
ZONING, AND SURVEYOR



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LA CROSSE COUNTY

Protecting Natural Resources

DEPARTMENT OF LAND CONSERVATION



The Department of Land Conservation had a productive 2025. We welcomed back Kaleb Schuster as our new Stormwater Specialist. Kaleb previously interned with Land Information in 2021–2022 before working as a project engineer at J.F. Brennan. We're excited to have him back on the team!

This year, we launched Phase 2 of the Bostwick Creek Targeted Runoff Management grant, working with landowners to install dams, waterways, cover crops, and other practices that reduce erosion and improve water quality.

We also completed our ARPA-funded stormwater projects, in partnership with local towns. These efforts addressed urban flooding, erosion, and infrastructure concerns—and received positive feedback from town officials.

In the fall, we partnered with the DNR to audit our Non-Metallic Mining program, reviewing permits, reclamation plans, bonds, and fees. It was a valuable opportunity to assess the program after more than a decade.

We're also modernizing our Farmland Preservation and NR151 compliance data, transitioning to ArcGIS Pro and Muncity for more mobile-friendly access.

Finally, after years of advocacy, we secured additional conservation staffing funds through the Wisconsin Soil and Water Resources Management program—bringing in an estimated \$80,000 annually starting in 2026.

Demand for our services remains high, and I want to thank our dedicated staff—and you—for your continued support in helping us protect land and water resources in La Crosse County.

Matt Hanewall, Land Conservation Director

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2025 DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Soil health, gully stabilization and streambank improvements continue to be the focus within the **Bostwick Creek Watershed**. Landowners are participating at an unprecedented rate.
- Flooding, water quality and improvements to public infrastructure have been addressed with **\$2 million** of American Rescue Plan Act funds.
- Staff worked with the WDNR and the Zoning Department on a **Non-Metallic Mining** program audit.
- **Conservation staff funding** has increased by 36% year over year through our Wisconsin Soil and Water Resources Management Program.
- New areas of **public fishing easement** have been acquired along Bostwick Creek.

5 Things to Know

1. The **Coon Creek Watershed** is our nation's first watershed (1933). To this day, Land Conservation staff continue designing and overseeing the installation of projects within this historic area.
2. 260 Farmland Preservation Program Participants earn over **\$400,000 in annual tax credits** by working with staff to meet conservation compliance requirements.
3. **30% and greater slopes** are restricted from development through the La Crosse County Erosion Control Land Disturbance Ordinance.
4. **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.
5. 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.



Future Needs and Challenges

- State and federal agencies that **oversee program implementation** and grant applications have lost key personnel. As a result, guidance from governmental partners has become more limited.
- **ArcGIS Pro and Muncity** conversions take extended time and resources to work out bugs and data conversions.
- 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.
- **Cost of living increases** continue to cause conservation project installation costs to rise.



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, local municipalities, professionals and other County Departments in 2025. 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 timely, efficient 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 again a primary theme for our department in 2025. Dale and I had interactions with several students at West Salem High School's Construction and Remodeling Class in September. We were able to share the value of land surveying and provide a deeper understanding of legal descriptions and land ownership issues and responsibilities. We even went on a field trip to find some of the markers at the corners of the high school property. 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 2025. In September, I was blessed to provide a session at the Wisconsin Counties Association annual conference at the Kalahari Resort and Conference Center in Lake Delton, Wisconsin. My session covered legal descriptions of land titled: "It's a Simple Legal Description - What Could Possibly Go Wrong?" I went over the main types of descriptions used to define land boundaries. Then, I went over examples of some solid descriptions and some "not so good" descriptions. The session was very well received and very much appreciated by those in attendance. I am very appreciative of the backing I receive from La Crosse County as I serve as a conference speaker. Thank you for the encouragement!

One thing I am particularly proud of is our collaboration with other County Departments. We have regular contact with and work with the Highway Department, the Zoning, Planning and Land Information Department, the Land Conservation Department, the Facilities Department, Register of Deeds, Corp Counsel and Treasurer. 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 in 2025. We look forward to being just as active in serving in 2026.

Bryan H. Meyer, County Surveyor

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DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- **Assistant County Surveyor Dale Hewitt** earned his Professional Land Surveying license from the State of Wisconsin! After months of diligent study, he passed two National exams and one State exam. Dale then submitted his test results and his years of surveying experience documentation to the Department of Safety and Professional Services. Shortly after, Dale received a notification that he had earned his license. His license number is S-4062 and he is delighted to sign his emails and professional documents with Dale E. Hewitt, Professional Land Surveyor. I am truly happy for Dale. I witnessed firsthand Dale's dedication and hard work to achieve this milestone. I am proud of his work and dedication to La Crosse County and to have him as a colleague in the land surveying profession.

- Dale and I were asked to perform survey work on **Vet's Pond in Veterans Park** in West Salem in January. Working in cooperation with the Facilities Department, we created a bathymetric map (contour map) of the bottom of the pond. The Facilities team drilled hundreds of holes in the ice. Dale and I then took measurements at those locations. The collected data was then disseminated and analyzed. The final map was produced and used to determine what steps might be necessary to improve the pond.
- Our office reviewed **55 Certified Survey Maps (CSMs)** submitted for review by Professional Land Surveyors in 2025. We check these maps



for compliance with State Statutes and Administrative Code. Once approved, those maps are recorded in the La Crosse County Register of Deeds Office. We also took in 178 Plat of Survey maps submitted by Professional Land Surveyors. These maps are then indexed, filed in the County Surveyor files and made available online.



- We performed maintenance work on **73 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.
- Part of our work requires that we preserve the location of survey monuments along road improvement projects. In 2025, we preserved the location of monuments along a project for STH 162 in the **Town of Washington**. Once the work was completed in late October, we returned to replace any monuments which were destroyed during the project.

5 Things to Know

1. Assistant County Surveyor **Dale Hewitt** is an award-winning cartographer. Dale recently created a map illustrating the vacation of a portion of a town road in the Town of Washington. He submitted the map in the Miscellaneous Map category at the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors' annual conference in January. After careful review, the judges selected Dale's map as the winner. It was a true honor for both of us to hear his name announced in front of more than 1,000 colleagues. Dale's map was then sent on to the National Society of Professional Surveyors map competition. Dale was thrilled to find out that his map received 2nd place honors. Dale takes great pride in his work and these awards at both the State and National level are an indication that he has some amazing mapping skills.
2. Our work often involves **collaboration** with other County departments. We regularly coordinate with Land Conservation, Land Information, Zoning, and Planning on matters related to land surveying, land ownership, and parcel splits. We also provide support to the Highway Department, Facilities Department, Treasurer's Office, Register of Deeds, and Corporation Counsel.
3. The Western Chapter of the **Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors** meets quarterly in Room 1107 of the La Crosse County Administrative Center. These purposeful gatherings foster meaningful conversations about the surveying profession and promote strong communication among surveyors working in the La Crosse County area. I'm proud to serve as President of this chapter.
4. Another important—but often overlooked—aspect of our work involves regular **interaction with landowners**. Since land transactions are not something most people deal with frequently, our office serves as a resource for guidance on property transfers and land divisions. We also assist with property line disputes, whether through in-person visits, phone calls, or email.
5. We are also custodians of a large collection of highway **right-of-way maps**, which show roadway alignments and widths. These hand-drafted maps, created by County Highway Department staff from the 1940s through the 1970s, have been scanned and are available on the County Surveyor section of the County website.

Future Needs and Challenges

A growing concern in the land surveying profession is the **shortage of available professionals**. Many landowners in need of survey work are unable to find a surveyor who can take on their project in a timely manner. Across Wisconsin, surveyors often report backlogs of three months or more.

Like many skilled trades, land surveying is facing a workforce gap. The average age of a land surveyor in Wisconsin is around 60, and as these experienced professionals retire, there's an urgent need to bring in a new generation.

Dale and I are committed to addressing this challenge by actively engaging with students. We speak at high school career days and visit local trades classes to encourage young people to consider land surveying as a career. These **outreach efforts** are already making an impact—two students have chosen to pursue surveying as a result of our presentations, and Dale is doing an excellent job mentoring them. We hope our continued efforts will inspire even more individuals to explore this rewarding and essential profession.

Serving the Public

DEPT OF ZONING, PLANNING & LAND INFORMATION



As we reflect on 2025, I am proud to share the progress and accomplishments of the La Crosse County Zoning, Planning, and Land Information Department. This year has been marked by innovation, collaboration, and forward-thinking initiatives that strengthen our community and support sustainable growth.

One of our major achievements this year was the adoption of the updated Chapter 17 Zoning Ordinance, ensuring that our regulations reflect modern land use practices while balancing growth and preservation. In addition, we reviewed the Chapter 20 Shoreland Ordinance, continuing our commitment to protect our waterways and sensitive natural areas.

Our focus on sustainability and climate resilience took a significant step forward with the completion of La Crosse County's first Climate Action Plan. Alongside this, we earned SolSmart Gold Certification, recognizing our efforts to reduce barriers to the construction of solar energy systems and encourage clean energy adoption throughout the county. In partnership with the City of La Crosse and Western Technical College, we also completed a grant-funded microgrid feasibility study aimed at improving energy efficiency and grid resilience downtown. These projects position La Crosse County as a leader in sustainable, resilient infrastructure.

Technology and accessibility were also priorities in 2025. We successfully onboarded our new public permitting portal, Municipity Connect, streamlining processes for residents and businesses alike. We also worked to integrate Land Nav, our new property tax software, into our systems. Supporting local planning, we updated the Town of Barre's Comprehensive Plan and created an Electric Vehicle Procurement Cost Benefit Analysis Tool.

Housing remains a critical focus for our department. This year, we were awarded \$1 million in CDBG Housing Regions funds for mobile home renovation and replacement projects across southwestern Wisconsin and distributed \$260,000 in additional housing grants.

We issued 377 zoning permits—10% more than the same period in 2024—reflecting strong development activity. To better understand community needs, we began a data-driven, county-wide housing study and market analysis of County-owned land, laying the groundwork for informed, strategic growth.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our team and the strength of our partnerships across municipalities, educational institutions, and community organizations. Every project, study, and initiative is guided by a shared vision: a La Crosse County that is thriving, resilient, and sustainable for generations to come.

I am grateful to our staff, partners, and community members for their continued support and collaboration. Together, we are building a stronger, smarter, and more sustainable La Crosse County.

Kathleen Stewart, Director, Zoning, Planning and Land Information

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COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2025, La Crosse County made significant strides in **economic development**, positioning the region for growth and resilience over the next five years. Key accomplishments include:

- Completed the La Crosse County **Economic Development Strategic Plan (2025–2030)**: A roadmap for sustainable growth, community support, and business opportunity across the county.
- Received the **2025 APA-Wisconsin Economic Development Award**: Recognition for excellence in planning and innovation.

Grant Highlights:

- Neighborhood Revitalization Acquisition and Demolition Grants:
 - **2122 Craig Road, Onalaska**: \$30,000 awarded for demolition and site prep following a fire.
 - **823 Avon Street, La Crosse**: \$25,000 awarded to support acquisition of a new single-family home.
- Innovation and Diversification Grants:
 - **Markos Apparel**: \$10,000 to support business expansion in Downtown La Crosse.
 - **Priya's Spice Bazaar**: \$10,000 to assist with the move to a new stand-alone location.
- Arts and Culture Grant:
 - **The Board Store**: \$5,000 awarded to fund a mural installation.
- Small Business Development Grant:
 - \$30,000 match provided to support a new program administered by the **Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission**, aimed at strengthening local small businesses.

LAND INFORMATION

GIS Division Highlights

The GIS Division advanced La Crosse County's land information systems in 2025 through updated planning, improved data accuracy, and strong departmental coordination.

Land Information Plan

In December 2024, the Land Information Council approved a new three-year Land Information Plan, outlining 15 projects and initiatives that will guide modernization of the county's mapping, land records, and data communication systems.

Real Property Division

After the 2024 tax cycle, staff managed two primary issues:

- A backlog of recorded documents delaying updates
- Confusion around reports sent to municipalities and escrow data companies

The division worked to resolve these challenges quickly and restore accuracy in property records and reporting.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2026

- Chapter 16 Floodplain Ordinance Update
- Chapter 17 Zoning Ordinance Farmland Preservation Recertification.
- County Farm discussion
- Housing Study results and discussion
- Marketing La Crosse County as a great place to do business



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