



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners to ethically care for the land to sustain water resources, build healthy soil, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Dear Friends,

Our Sand County Foundation team is grateful to you for being in our corner, whether recently or over decades.

As we celebrate 60 years of conservation successes next year, I'm reflecting on the time, effort, and resources that have been shared with us to generate practical and lasting conservation solutions.

With your support, we are expanding conservation research, education, and outreach into new areas across the country. For example, you'll be hearing more about a significant grassland conservation effort in partnership with ranchers across the West.

Thanks to you, we just recognized the 250th Leopold Conservation Award recipient. These remarkable land stewards inspire countless other landowners.

You've also made a difference by supporting environmental education for school children and mentorship for beginning farmers.

We are succeeding because more and more people like you believe in the power of a Land Ethic to sustain our world.

With sincere thanks,

Kevin McAleese



Kevin McAleese
President & CEO
Sand County Foundation



2025 BY THE NUMBERS



10,000
STUDENTS

EXPERIENCED HANDS-ON
LEARNING THROUGH
THE POLLINATOR
HABITAT EDUCATION
PROGRAM



Conducted grassland bird surveys
on over **5,000** acres



HELPED FARMERS PREVENT
8,000 LBS
OF PHOSPHORUS AND
1,600 TONS
OF SEDIMENT FROM
REACHING LAKE MICHIGAN



2,550

FARMERS, RANCHERS,
AND OTHERS ATTENDED
FIELD DAYS, FARM
TOURS, & WEBINARS



200

PARTNERS &
SPONSORS

MADE THE LEOPOLD
CONSERVATION
AWARD POSSIBLE

IN **28** STATES

HONORED OUR
250TH
LEOPOLD
CONSERVATION
AWARD RECIPIENT



108 FARMERS
CONDUCTED CONSERVATION
DEMONSTRATIONS WITH
OUR TEAM OF SCIENTISTS

COLLECTED
336

SOIL SAMPLES
ACROSS

56

FARMS
— IN THE —
DEEP SOUTH
AND UPPER
MIDWEST

8,313

SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS



Farmers Are Leading the Way

Farmers are joining forces to address water quality concerns in their communities through farmer-led watershed improvement groups. These groups of five or more farmers are an efficient way to encourage the adoption of conservation practices that keep soil, fertilizer, and other nutrients on the farm where they belong.

Through a major award from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Sand County Foundation is enhancing existing farmer-led groups and establishing many others in the Midwest.

In Dubuque County, Iowa, a streamlined effort to plant cover crops by drone grew significantly. With a project partner, American Farmland Trust, new groups were created in Illinois, and we helped Wisconsin farm-led groups with new cover crops projects to improve soil health and limit farm runoff.

Farmers often learn best from each other, and **farmer-led groups offer peer-to-peer learning in addition to financial and technical assistance.** This year, we're expanding beyond cover crops in response to the priorities of the groups. We'll see the adoption of no-till practices, structural erosion control, prairie strips and vegetative buffers, and pasture improvements for rotational grazing. Stay tuned!



Farmer-to-Farmer Soil Health Initiative Moves Westward

On-farm soil research that we've conducted since 2020 is confirming that agricultural management incorporating reduced tillage and use of cover crops enhance aggregate stability and microbiology. These practices also improve the soil's ability to retain water during drought conditions.

Our growing initiative pairs farmers who use soil health management with a neighboring farmer who has not integrated these principles into their land management. Soil sensors are installed to provide real-time soil moisture and temperature data, accessible directly to the farmers' cellphones or tablets.

With support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Daybreak Fund, we launched this "farmer-to-farmer soil health initiative" with **54 farmers** in the Upper Midwest. In 2022, it headed south to **26 farms** across Alabama and Mississippi. Over the past year, we began expanding into Kansas and Nebraska.

As we move westward, we're proud to also be part of **a new, landmark grasslands conservation effort** thanks to a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative. We'll be working in partnership with ranchers in **15 states** to implement regenerative agriculture across on **1 million acres**, where conservation of the nation's imperiled grasslands is needed more than ever.



Promoting Pollinators

Insect pollinators are essential for food production and ecological diversity, but their populations are at risk. Our **Pollinator Habitat Education Program** is getting students out of the classroom and giving them hands-on experience growing and planting pollinator-friendly habitat while learning about conservation careers.

Our "Seed Starter" activity for K-12 students involved **120 schools** throughout Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Students sowed native wildflower seeds over the winter to transplant them outdoors in the spring as an experiential learning opportunity.



.....
**WE PROVIDED
CURRICULUM,
TEACHER TRAINING,
GRANTS &**
.....

**1,000
PACKETS
OF PERENNIAL NATIVE
WILDFLOWER
SEEDS
TO SCHOOLS**
.....

“ I think this is an awesome project and I am grateful for being able to work with your organization. It got me and my students outside during the school day and we made, what should be, a lasting impact on the environment within our space.





Sand County Foundation launched the Leopold Conservation Award more than **20 years ago** to honor farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land. These innovators inspire other landowners to consider conservation opportunities on their own land.

With our national sponsor, American Farmland Trust, and more than **200 state partners** and **sponsors**, we now present Leopold Conservation Awards in **28 states**.

Last year, another diverse and inspiring group of award recipients joined the Leopold Conservation Award alumni network of **250 families** across the country. The newest award recipients include landowners who grow organic grains in New York, milk cows in North Carolina, raise pastured pork in California, and steward healthy forests in Mississippi.

Their efforts stand out as they prove that **soil-building, water-protecting agriculture can be practical, profitable, and worth replicating.**



READ AND WATCH

the stories of each 2025

Leopold Conservation Award recipient at sandcountyfoundation.org/LCA25



Cotter Farm was the first in its county to be certified as a Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Farm for using farming practices that far exceed regulatory requirements. Combining cover crops with no-till and livestock grazing was a game changer for the farm. Soil sensors provide data on water infiltration rates that inform Tom Cotter's day-to-day decision making. Tom is a vocal advocate for practices that improve water quality, enhance biodiversity, boost farm resilience, ensure financial viability, and revitalize rural communities. He says this type of farming tugs at his heart and stimulates his mind.



Norah Lake is on a mission to choose the practices that make the most sense for the forests, pastures, and cropland at Sweetland Farm. Extensive wildlife corridors are part of the thoughtful layout of its vegetable fields, pasture fencing, and orchards. In addition to nesting boxes for bats, songbirds, raptors, and ducks, more than eight acres of riparian trees and shrubs were planted for wildlife. The New England Leopold Conservation Award recipient also protects areas where threatened wood turtles and orchids have been identified.



Faced with yield losses from disease in their chili pepper fields, the **Viramontes family** began hosting research trials to examine their soil's biology. By experimenting with bacteria, brewed compost teas, and fungi products, Ray and Cole Viramontes have cut their crop losses every growing season since.

The New Mexico Leopold Conservation Award recipients gained an appreciation for how what happens beneath the ground impacts everything above it. They now employ a more holistic approach to growing crops of peppers, onions, cotton, pecans, and pumpkins.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LORENZO DOMINGUEZ, MENTEE

Building Relationships. Improving the Land.

Launched in 2020 by Sand County Foundation, the **Land Ethic Mentorship** program supports beginning and other historically underserved farmers by connecting them with trusted mentors, a peer network, and conservation resources including technical assistance. By ensuring mentees have someone to turn to for conservation guidance, the program builds confidence while creating healthier land, stronger farms, and more resilient rural communities.

Nearly 150 mentees are enrolled in the program across 34 states. They are farmers working at different scales with different challenges. What unites them is a shared belief that producing food, fuel, and fiber should not come at the cost of the land.

We are excited to expand the program in the coming year with peer-learning cohorts, guided by three farmers recognized by the Leopold Conservation Award.

Donor Profile: Lynn Scarlett

As an avid birder and hiker, Lynn Scarlett's passion for environmental improvement has been demonstrated in leadership roles throughout her accomplished career.

These days, Lynn is a busy volunteer since retiring as Chief External Affairs Officer at The Nature Conservancy, where she influenced climate and conservation policy in the United States and more than 70 other countries and territories. Prior to that, she was the U.S. Department of the Interior's Deputy Secretary/Chief Operating Officer, and Acting Secretary of the Interior.

Lynn has been a supporter of Sand County Foundation for many years and recently completed a term on our board of directors. Her influence and guidance will have a long-lasting impact on our work. We asked Lynn what she would tell others about why she supports Sand County Foundation's mission.



“ I have long admired and championed the work of the Sand County Foundation, propelled by a mission of working with farmers and ranchers to advance land stewardship informed by science and a spirit of collaboration.

Recipients of the Leopold Conservation Award exemplify the spirit and realities of land stewardship envisioned by conservation visionary Aldo Leopold. I love learning from these award recipients and others who partner with the Sand County Foundation. Above all, this work is inspiring!

Thank you to our 2025 Donors and Partners!

Donors support Sand County Foundation's work to advance voluntary conservation on private land and find solutions to some of the most pressing environmental issues we face. We gratefully acknowledge those who generously donated in 2025 and those who have continually supported us over the years.

AgriBusiness Association of Kentucky
AgWest Farm Credit
Alabama Ag Credit
Alexander Foundation
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
American Ag Credit
American Farmland Trust
American Farmland Trust - New England
Ascendium Education Group, Inc.
Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Audubon Great Plains
Audubon Upper Mississippi River
Bad River Ranches
BASF
Basin Electric Power Cooperative
Ramona and Lee Bass
Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Blue Bell Ranch
Jimmy Bramblett
Bowles Farming Company

Dawn and Grant Breitreutz
Nancy Bruins
Homer and Darla Buell
Indy C. Burke
Burleigh County Soil Conservation District
Thomas Caldwell
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Rangeland Trust
Cammack Ranch
Cargill
Matt C. Carlson
Cass County Soil Conservation District
Dick and Kim Cates
Guy and Beth Choiniere
Brenda Christensen and Tom Barry
Odin Christensen
CIBO Technologies, Inc.
CoBank
Caty Coleman
Steve Coleman
Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust

Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Department of Agriculture
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Compeer Financial
Conservation Technology Information Center
Cornell University Extension
Cow Chip Ranch
CropX
Culver's
Scott Dahlberg
Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin
Daybreak Fund
Daybreak Ranch
Delmarva Chicken Association
Nancy and Marc DeLong
Delta Waterfowl
Diane Derouen and Glenn Chambliss
Linn A. Duesterbeck
John P. Duncan and Anita Sarafa
E Resources Group, LLC
Jimmy Emmons

Emmons County Soil Conservation District
Enel - North America
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Farm Credit
Farm Credit East
Farm Credit Illinois
Farm Credit Mid-America
Farm Credit of Southern Colorado
Farm Credit Services of America
Farm Families of Mississippi
Field to Market
First Dakota National Bank
Blair and Joseph Fitzsimons
Tom and Leslie Foley
John J. Frautschi Family Foundation
Dennis Frey
Frontier Farm Credit / Farm Credit Associations of Kansas
General Mills
Green Cover Seed
Brent Haglund and Dayle Keitel Haglund
Kurt Haglund
George Hall
Alan Haney
Bryan Hanson
Dave Hanson and Linda Bochert
Victor L. Harris
Meghan Hauser

Lewis and Sherry Heaton
Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation
Hinrichs Foundation
Horizon Farm Credit
Kyle Hutchison
IL Corn
Illinois Soybean Association
Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership
David and Ann Ingram
Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance
Iowa Farmers Union
Iowa Soybean Association
Iowa State University
Linda Irving
ISG Inc
ITC Great Plains
Scott Johnson
Tom Johnson
Johnsonville LLC
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
Kansas Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Conservation
Kansas Ducks Unlimited
Kansas Farm Bureau
Kansas Forest Service
Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition
Bill and Laurie Keitel

KEM Electric Cooperative
Kentucky Agricultural Council
Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts
Kentucky Cattlemen's Association
Kentucky Corn Promotion Council
Kentucky Department of Agriculture
Kentucky Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Resources
Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation
Kentucky Small Grain Promotion Council
Kentucky Soybean Promotion Board and Soybean Association
Kentucky Tree Farm Committee
Kentucky Wildflower Farm
Kentucky Woodland Owners Foundation
Kim and John Koepke
Jim Kopriva
LandVest
Lanford Livestock
Myrna and David Langford
Jesper Lauritzen
Leopold Landscape Alliance
Ruth Linnemann
Jen Livsey
Richard Lyons
John Magnuson
Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts

Maryland Department of Agriculture
Terry K. Maxwell
Kevin McAleese and Tricia Wheeler
Craig McNamara
Mike McNerney
James Middleton
Millborn
Milwaukee Metro Sewerage District
Minnesota Corn
Minnesota Farm Bureau
Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation
Minnesota Foundation for Agriculture
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition
Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association
Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council
Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission
Mississippi State University
Montana Chapter, Soil and Water Conservation Society
Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Farm Bureau Federation
Montana Grazing Lands Coalition
Montana Rangeland Resources Program
Al Montna
Dina and Mark Moore
Robin Moore

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative
Tracy Moskovitz and Bambi Jones
Tim Munns
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Cattlemen, Inc.
Nebraska Environmental Trust
Nelnet Foundation
Nestle Purina
New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau
New York State Agribusiness Association
New York State Department of Ag and Markets
Martha Nielsen
Noble Research Institute
North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts
North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society
North Dakota Ducks Unlimited
North Dakota Game & Fish Department
North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition
North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
North Dakota Stockmen's Association
Nutrien
Thor Oechsner
Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts
Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture

Dave and Diane Olenchek
Scott Park
Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission
Bob Perschel
Rex and Nancy Peterson
Rolf Peterson
Pheasants Forever South Dakota
Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Polk Soil & Water Conservation District
Premier Farm Credit
Gary and Sue Price
Quivira Coalition
Ranchers Stewardship Alliance
Ranchland Trust of Kansas
Lee A. Riordan
Kurt Rongstad
Roughrider Electric Cooperative
Robert Sanders
Sandhills Task Force
Lynn Scarlett
SER Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter
ShoreRivers
Sibanye Stillwater
Dale Sievert
Alice Sittler
Eric Sjostrom
Slope Electric

Dave B. Smith
Rod Snyder
Soil Regen
Harvey L. & Maud C. Sorensen Foundation
South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust
South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Department of Ag and Natural Resources
South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks
South Dakota Ducks Unlimited
South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Grasslands Coalition
South Dakota Soil Health Coalition
South Dakota Soybean Association
South Dakota State University College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences
Jo and Jim Stanko
Emily Stanley
Starion Bank
Loran and Brenda Steinlage
Rob Stroud
Nancy Sugden
Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE)
Sustainable Conservation
Syngenta Crop Protection, LLC

Jay Tanner
Target Corporation
Richard Taylor and Suzie Paris
Stanley Temple
Mike and Mary Terry
Texas Parks & Wildlife
The Campbell Foundation
The Dixon Water Foundation
The Farm Credit Council
The Heinz Endowments
The Ida and Robert Gordon Family Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
Marcus Trapp
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
University of Georgia Research Foundation
University of Nebraska - Lincoln
University of Vermont - College of Ag and Life Sciences
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife
Utah Association of Conservation Districts
Utah Cattlemen's Association
Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
Utah Department of Natural Resources
Utah Farm Bureau Federation
Utah Partners for Fish and Wildlife
Valley Stewardship Network
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Wagner Land & Livestock

Walmart Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
Ed Warner and Jackie Erickson
Washington County Wisconsin
We Energies Foundation
Western AgCredit
Western Landowners Alliance
Western Sustainability Exchange
Beau Winston
Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
Wisconsin Corn Promotion Board
Wisconsin Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Protection
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association
World Wildlife Fund - Northern Great Plains Program
Tom Zale

**Gold
Transparency
2026**

Candid.

Sand County Foundation is a Gold Level Candid participant. This means we are committed to demonstrating transparency and accountability to our donors. View Sand County Foundation's profile on Candid's website to find details about our financials, program activities and impact.

FOUNDATION STAFF

Kevin McAleese
President & CEO

Lance Irving
Vice President - Leopold Conservation Award

Heidi Peterson, Ph.D.
Vice President - Agricultural Research & Conservation

Christina Schellpfeffer
Vice President - External Relations

Alice Canchola Fenochio
Administrative Coordinator

Nikki D'Adamo-Damery
Conservation Outreach & Equity Director

Alex Erickson
Associate Director - Leopold Conservation Award

Craig Ficenec
Senior Director - Agricultural Conservation

Eli Halverson
Agricultural Field Specialist

Liina Keerd
Program Relations Coordinator

Samuel Kwakye, Ph.D.
Agricultural Field Data Scientist

Casey Langan
Communications Director

Stacy Lischka, Ph.D.
Western Director - Leopold Conservation Award

Haley Mikkelsen
Education and Outreach Specialist

Greg Olson
Field Projects Director

Holly Perrotti
Director of Finance & Operations

Briana Schnelle
Agricultural Conservation Specialist

Haleigh Summers, Ph.D.
Agricultural Geospatial Data Scientist

Tricia Verville
Director of Agricultural Systems

Katie Ziemer
Soil Conservationist



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIRMAN
Homer Buell
Nebraska

VICE CHAIR
David J. Hanson
Wisconsin

SECRETARY
Nancy DeLong
Iowa

TREASURER
Thomas D. Zale
Wisconsin

Jimmy Bramblett
Georgia

Dick Cates, Ph.D.
Wisconsin

John P. C. Duncan
Illinois

Sally Flis, Ph.D.
New York

Tom Foley
Connecticut

Brent Haglund, Ph.D.
Wisconsin

Victor L. Harris
North Carolina

Kevin McAleese
Wisconsin

Bob Perschel
Massachusetts

Rod Snyder
West Virginia

Stanley A. Temple, Ph.D.
Wisconsin

Edward M. Warner
Colorado

DIRECTORS EMERITAE
Indy Burke, Ph.D.
Blair Calvert Fitzsimons
Lynne Sherrod

ASSETS

Cash	647,712
Accounts Receivable	11,853
Promises to Give	1,628,400
Prepaid Expenses	30,880
Long-term Investments	11,056,093
Property & Equipment - Net	0
Operating Lease	346,576
TOTAL ASSETS	\$13,721,514

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	25,810
Grants Payable	729,001
Accrued Vacation & Wages	48,677
Operating Lease	374,105
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$1,177,593

NET ASSETS

Without Donor Restrictions	8,555,515
With Donor Restrictions	3,988,406
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$12,543,921
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$13,721,514

Sand County Foundation is committed to financial transparency. The Foundation is classified as a 501 (c) (3) Public Charity under IRS code. The final report of an independent auditor, 2025 audited financial statements and our 2025 tax return are available at sandcountyfoundation.org

Sand County Foundation has an operating budget of approximately \$7.7 million. Within our net assets are various funds we use to fund operations, invest in high-impact conservation partnerships and expand outreach.

Sand County Foundation was built nearly 60 years ago on an idea advanced by Aldo Leopold, the visionary conservation thinker who authored "A Sand County Almanac."

Leopold inspired landowners to adopt what he called a land ethic - a personal responsibility to treat land, water, and wildlife with respect.

Express your land ethic. Donate today!

Explore ways to give at
sandcountyfoundation.org/donate



**SCAN HERE
TO DONATE.**

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION
44 East Mifflin Street, Suite 1005 * Madison, WI 53703
sandcountyfoundation.org

ON THE COVER: 2025 CALIFORNIA LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD RECIPIENT,
LOREN PONCIA OF STEMPLE CREEK RANCH PHOTO: PAIGE GREEN