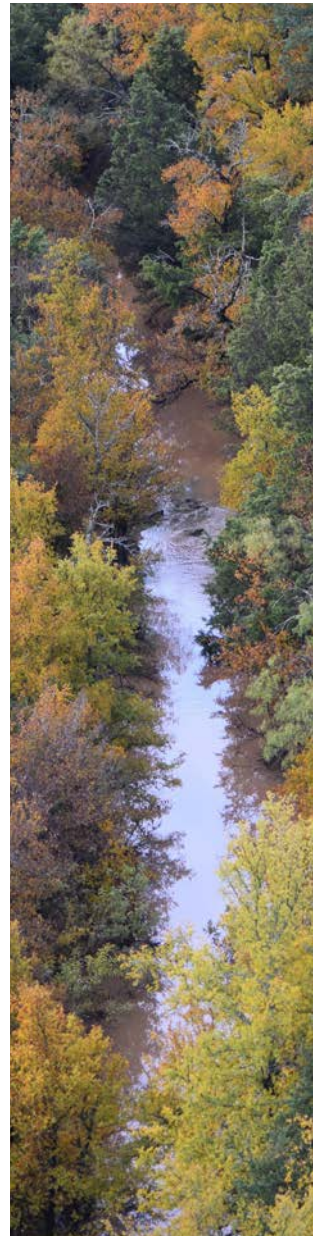




2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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.



RICHARD LYONS, 2024 ILLINOIS LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD RECIPIENT
PHOTO: KARI WEIS-ASBURY

Dear Friends,

When you think of Sand County Foundation, know that we are assisting farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners who want to do better for their land. At the same time, we're recognizing and promoting the stories of the very best land stewards in the nation.

In 2024, Sand County Foundation took on new conservation initiatives, published and reported recently completed work, and intensified our outreach on private land conservation success.

With your support, Sand County Foundation experienced exceptional growth and impact.

- *Our on-the-ground conservation research and demonstration projects engaged landowners in new regions.*
- *By sharing the stories of innovative farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners, we inspired other landowners to consider the environmental and economic benefits of conservation.*
- *We connected beginning, and underserved farmers and ranchers with technical resources and conservation mentors.*
- *We gave thousands of students hands-on conservation science experiences.*
- *Our team of professionals grew to meet the demand posed by environmental challenges across the nation.*

Thank you for being an important part of the Sand County Foundation's mission to advance a Land Ethic. We're deeply grateful for the support of donors and partners like you.

With sincere thanks,

Kevin McAleese



Kevin McAleese
President & CEO
Sand County Foundation

2024 BY THE NUMBERS



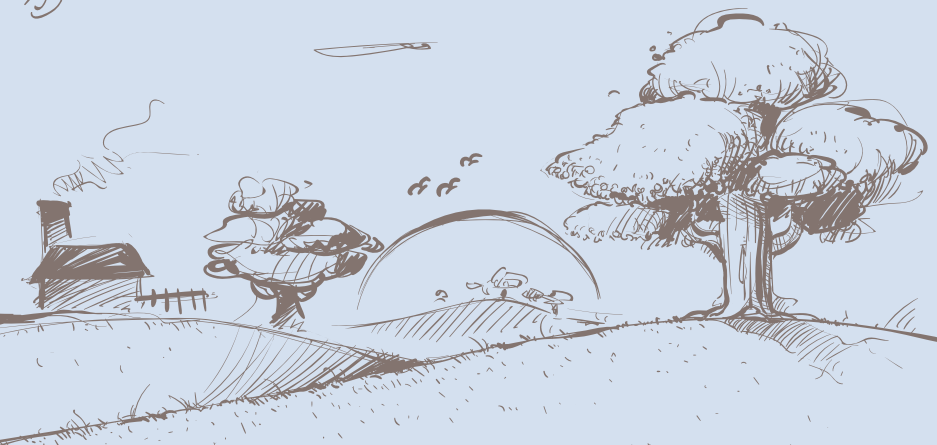
8,500 STUDENTS

EXPERIENCED HANDS-ON
LEARNING THROUGH
THE POLLINATOR
HABITAT EDUCATION
PROGRAM.



We monitored grassland birds on **28** farms

OUR PROJECTS PUT
CONSERVATION PRACTICES ON
25,000
ACRES



1,700

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



200

PARTNERS &
SPONSORS

MADE THE LEOPOLD
CONSERVATION
AWARD POSSIBLE

IN **28** STATES

LEOPOLD
CONSERVATION
AWARD RECIPIENTS
NOW MANAGE NEARLY
4 MILLION
ACRES



150 FARMERS

CONDUCTED CONSERVATION
DEMONSTRATIONS WITH
OUR TEAM OF SCIENTISTS



450

SOIL SAMPLES
TAKEN IN THE DEEP
SOUTH AND UPPER
MIDWEST

7,007

SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS



Sand County Foundation's team of scientists partners with farmers, ranchers, and forestland managers to conduct applied research and field demonstrations on working land, to explore how innovative conservation management can increase farm resilience and protect the environment.

One significant demonstration project focuses on **healthy soil**, the foundation of productive agriculture. Farmers facing the challenges of extreme weather are working with Sand County Foundation to explore soil management techniques that can improve their long-term farm resilience in the face of drought or heavy precipitation.

We launched our **“farmer-to-farmer soil health initiative”** with **30 farmers** in the Upper Mississippi River Basin of Minnesota & Wisconsin. The program expanded to **24 more sites** in Wisconsin's Lake Michigan Basin. Later, we brought the program to **26 farms across Mississippi and Alabama**.

Farmers already managing their land with soil health in mind were paired with a neighboring farmer who had not yet integrated soil health principles into their farm management.



We installed soil moisture and temperature sensors in each of their fields, and collected annual soil health samples. The sensors deliver real-time data to farmers through their cellphone or tablet so they can make in-season management decisions like when to irrigate, plant, or apply fertilizer based on soil conditions.

By comparing data collected on the paired fields, farmers can better understand how soil health management can improve water infiltration and storage, while also observing which soil properties are critical to farm resilience.

450 soil samples later, the results show that adopting reduced tillage, cover crops, and diverse cropping systems enhances soil health and microbiology. These practices also improve the soil's ability to retain water longer through drought conditions when it's critical for crop growth and development.

Not only have **80 farmers** directly engaged in this on-farm research, but they're sharing their experience with others to scale up the impact. The study results are also reaching other landowners through videos, academic journal articles, and technical presentations.

A true partnership, this initiative is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, private foundations, and more than **15 other collaborating organizations**.



What's Good for the Herd is Good for the Bird

Healthy grasslands are not only important to farmers and their livestock, they're important habitats for birds and other wildlife. Monitoring grasslands for bird species that depend on these open spaces can tell us a lot about the health of the land. By considering the timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing, farmers can create healthy grasslands that support rapidly declining grassland bird species while also optimizing livestock health. Our grazing specialist is leading an effort with Audubon Great Lakes to provide bird monitoring for landowners whose pastures are home to grassland species.

“We stand guard over works of art, but species representing the work of aeons are stolen from under our noses.”

- Aldo Leopold
A Sand County Almanac



Advancing Farmer-led Groups at the Watershed Scale

Many farmers are eager to play a role in addressing water quality concerns in their communities through an efficient, low-cost approach to conservation: farmer-led watershed groups. Sand County Foundation is working to initiate these groups in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Because farmers learn best from other farmers, farmer-led groups offer peer-to-peer learning, in addition to financial and technical assistance to encourage conservation practices that keep soil and nutrients on the farm. This work is primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.



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.

We launched the new “**Seed Starter**” activity for K-12 students to expand upon a program of delivering pollinator education grants to high school agriculture and science teachers. Seed starting kits were awarded to nearly 70 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.





Sand County Foundation launched the Leopold Conservation Award more than **20 years ago** in Colorado 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**. The award expanded to Minnesota and Mississippi in 2024.

Last year, another diverse and inspiring group of award recipients joined the Leopold Conservation Award alumni network of more than **250 families** across the country. The newest award recipients include landowners who raise cantaloupes in California, milk cows in New York, graze cattle on the Great Plains, and grow healthy forests in Maine.



READ AND WATCH

the stories of each 2024 Leopold Conservation Award recipient at sandcountyfoundation.org/LCA24

Land Ethic Mentorship

Our growing **Land Ethic Mentorship** program now serves beginning and other historically underserved farmers and ranchers from **34 states** and the District of Columbia. This free program fills a conservation technical assistance gap for growers who often farm on environmentally sensitive land.

More than **120 mentees** have had opportunities to connect with Leopold Conservation Award recipient mentors and engage with a range of other conservation leaders through webinars and field days. Last year, we hosted field day events in Virginia, Mississippi, and Georgia.

Meanwhile, we're thrilled to watch participants form a trusted agricultural conservation network that has them continuously learning important lessons from one another based on their own experiences.

Learn more about becoming a mentor, mentee or sponsor at sandcountyfoundation.org/mentorship.

“As a farmer in an urban area, Sand County Foundation's Land Ethic Mentorship connected me with a wonderful conservation mentor who has taught me so much about managing this special piece of land that is helping to feed my community.”

- Carmen McKee
Gary, Indiana



Coming Together for Conservation

2024 marked a year of events that brought farmers, ranchers, forestland managers, and other private landowners together for learning and networking.



- 📍 More than 140 Leopold Conservation Award recipients and other conservation leaders from across the nation came to Madison, Wisconsin for our “Innovations on the Land” **national conservation symposium**. Many visited Aldo Leopold’s famous Shack.
- 📍 We played host to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief and other conservation leaders for a **roundtable discussion** on emerging issues.
- 📍 A **field day in Georgia** for our Land Ethic Mentorship mentees brought 80 people together to learn more about innovation and conservation at any scale. Participants learned about soil health concepts, permaculture, and hoop house production, while building new regional connections.



- 📍 Last spring, we partnered with the **American Bird Conservancy, and Southern Wisconsin Land Conservancy** to deliver a **workshop demonstrating oak savanna restoration** to Wisconsin and Illinois landowners.

Donor Profile

Brenda Christensen, with her siblings, Kurt Haglund and Lana Mulder, established Sand County Foundation’s Haglund Ecology Fund, named for their brother Brent who led Sand County Foundation for more than 30 years, and remains a board member.



Brenda, as a donor, what do you appreciate about Sand County Foundation’s work?

Sand County Foundation is led by principled, educated, science-based staff who influence and support landowners in their management of our natural resources. We love reading and viewing the stories of the Leopold Conservation Award recipients because these are the people who are making a difference. Sand County Foundation’s recognition of them is inspiring to other landowners.

With your family, you created a special fund, The Haglund Ecology Fund, to support Sand County Foundation. What was the purpose?

Our brother, Brent Haglund, was strongly influenced by Aldo Leopold’s “A Sand County Almanac,” which was given to him by the science teacher in our little town of 500 people in Minnesota. Aldo Leopold’s idea of the Land Ethic impacted our lives from then on. The primary purpose of establishing the Haglund Ecology Fund was to support and inspire science and agricultural teachers so they in turn connect with the next generation of Brent Haglunds who are in their classrooms. We hope these young people will carry on with conservation and science as Brent has done.

Is the Haglund Ecology Fund doing what you intended it to do?

We are so pleased with the first program funded, and that is the Pollinator Habitat Education program that teaches students about the importance of pollinators through hands-on science lessons. We receive reports of continuing requests to participate from very diverse schools. Children and young people are so wanting to help heal this earth crisis we are in. This program gives them a way to contribute. We look forward to future programs the Haglund Ecology Fund will support.

What would you tell others considering a gift to Sand County Foundation?

The funds are managed with the highest standards of philanthropy, and Sand County Foundation always seems to have a multiplier impact for any contribution. We are assured that our donations have impact. The broad community of Sand County Foundation donors can be too.

Thank you to our 2024 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 2024 and those who have continually supported us over the years.

AgGeorgia Farm Credit

AgLaunch

AgriBusiness Association of Kentucky

AgSouth Farm Credit

AgWest Farm Credit

Alexander Foundation

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Alliance for the Future of Agriculture
in Nebraska

American Ag Credit

American Coalition for Ethanol

American Farmland Trust

American Farmland Trust - New England

ANB Bank

APEX Clean Energy

Ascendium Education Group, Inc.

Audubon Great Plains

Audubon Minnesota

Bad River Ranches

BASF

Basin Electric Power Cooperative

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Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Blair Brothers Angus Ranch

Thomas Bliss & Debra Jackson-Bliss

Blue Bell Ranch

Brenda Boydston

Jimmy Bramblett

Nancy & James Bruins

Homer & Darla Buell

Ingrid C. Burke

Burleigh County Soil Conservation
District

Caerus Foundation

California Farm Bureau Federation

Cammack Ranch

The Keith Campbell Foundation for the
Environment

Candle Cocoon

Cargill

Matthew C. Carlson

Carolina Farm Trust

Cass County Soil Conservation District

Dick & Kim Cates

Brenda Christensen & Tom Barry

Odin Christensen & Phyllis Lucas

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CoBank

Coboss Consulting, Inc.

Steve Coleman

Colorado Cattlemen's Association

Colorado Cattlemen's Association Land
Trust

Colorado Department of Agriculture

Colorado Parks & Wildlife

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Cow Chip Ranch

Culver's

Scott Dahlberg & Laurel Campbell

Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin

Daybreak Fund

Delmarva Chicken Association

Nancy & Marc DeLong

Delta Waterfowl

Diane Derouen & Glenn Chambliss

The Dixon Water Foundation

Dubuque County - Iowa

Linn A. & Ann Duesterbeck

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Gerald & Signe Emmerich

Emmons County Soil Conservation
District

Emmons Family

Enel - North America

Farm Credit

Farm Credit Associations of Kansas

Farm Credit East

Farm Credit Illinois

Farm Credit Mid-America

Farm Credit of Southern Colorado

Farm Credit Services of America

Farm Families of Mississippi

Jim & Carol Faulstich

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Kentucky Association of Conservation
Districts

Kentucky Cattlemen's Association

Kentucky Corn Growers Association

Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife
Resources

Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation

Kentucky Pork Producers

Kentucky Soybean Promotion Board

Kentucky Tree Farm Committee

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Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
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Maryland Department of Agriculture
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Minnesota Ducks Unlimited
Minnesota Farm Bureau
Minnesota Farm Bureau Foundation
Minnesota Farmers Union
Minnesota Pheasants Forever
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition
Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council
Minnesota State Cattlemen’s Association
Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council
Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Mississippi Soil & Water Conservation Commission
Mississippi State University
Modoc RCD
Monarch Joint Venture
Montana Chapter, Soil & Water Conservation Society
Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation
Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
Montana Rangeland Resources Program
Al Montna
Dina & Mark Moore
Robin Moore
Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative
Todd Mortenson Family
Terry Mulcahy
Lana H. Mulder
Myers Family Farm
Myrin Ranch
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
National Grazing Lands Coalition
National Instruments
National Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Cattlemen
Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Nebraska Land Trust
Nebraska Partners for Fish and Wildlife
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Nestle Purina
New England Forestry Foundation
New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau
New York Farm Bureau
New York State Agribusiness Association
New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets
Nancy Sugden & Robert Newbery
Martha & Joseph Nielsen
Noble Research Institute
North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education
North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts
North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society

North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality
North Dakota Ducks Unlimited
North Dakota Game & Fish
North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition
North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
North Dakota Pheasants Forever
North Dakota Stockmen’s Association
Nutrien
Scott O’Brien
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Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture
Dave & Diane Olenchek
Scott Park
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Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
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South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association
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South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks
South Dakota Ducks Unlimited
South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Grassland Coalition
South Dakota Pheasants Forever
South Dakota Soil Health Coalition
South Dakota Soybean Association
South Dakota State University Foundation
Southern AgCredit
Southwest Georgia Farm Credit
Jim & Jo Stanko
Starion Bank
Rob & Mary Stroud
Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education
Sustainable Conservation

Sustainable Food Lab
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Utah Association of Conservation Districts
Utah Cattlemen’s Association
Utah Department of Agriculture & Food
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Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
World Wildlife Fund - Northern Great Plains Program
Yale School of the Environment
Tom Zale

**Gold
Transparency
2025**

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

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Some people love art, some love numbers...
...here’s a little of both!

This original cheese painting by Mike Geno was auctioned off last year to benefit Sand County Foundation thanks to Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin and SAVEUR magazine.



PHOTO: LUCY HEWETT

ASSETS	
Cash	904,502
Accounts Receivable	105,257
Promises to Give	734,821
Prepaid Expenses	26,560
Long-term Investments	10,762,920
Property & Equipment - Net	0
Operating Lease	384,450
TOTAL ASSETS	\$12,918,510

LIABILITIES	
Accounts Payable	87,463
Grants Payable	10,803
Accrued Vacation & Wages	50,436
Operating Lease	409,583
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$558,285

NET ASSETS	
Without Donor Restrictions	8,313,696
With Donor Restrictions	4,046,529
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$12,360,225

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$12,918,510
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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, 2024 audited financial statements and our 2024 tax return are available at sandcountyfoundation.org

Sand County Foundation has an operating budget of approximately \$6.5 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, America's foremost conservation thinker and author of "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 THIS
QR CODE
TO DONATE.**



FREY FAMILY FARMS, 2023 ILLINOIS LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD RECIPIENT

PHOTO: KARI WEIS-ASBURY