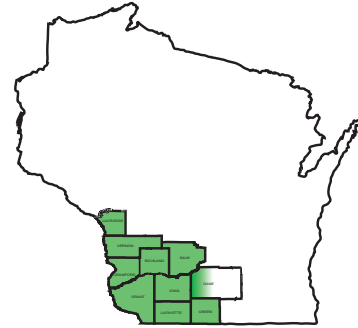


# SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN

Southwest Wisconsin is in the heart of the unglaciated Driftless Area. The region is characterized by steep to rolling hills bisected by small streams. Over 75% of the cropland in the area is defined as highly erodible land by the NRCS. In addition, the area has one of the highest levels of sediment and phosphorus loading of any ecoregion in the state.



## *Southwest Badger RC&D Council*

Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council is a nonprofit natural resource conservation and community development organization serving southwest Wisconsin. Our mission is to support natural resource conservation, managed growth, and sustainable rural economic development in the region. While Southwest Badger is not currently focusing on a particular watershed, the Council is always working to promote conservation and protect water quality and soil health in the region. The Council works closely with local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations.

## *Strategies*

### Perennial Biomass

Partners in the region have explored various biomass energy crops. Southwest Badger has conducted demonstrations projects looking at multiple varieties of switchgrass, miscanthus, and prairie grasses. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners recently completed a 3 year demonstration project exploring prairie as a biomass fuel. The project added 500 acres of new prairie to the landscape so that it is in place when the market for grass biomass develops.



Southwest Badger and the Driftless Area Initiative with support from Alliant Energy and the U.S. Forest Service also looked at the costs of sustainably harvesting woody biomass in the Driftless Area of the Upper Midwest. The project looked at harvest costs and yields at 30 demonstration sites covering almost 1,000 acres.

Lastly, in 2011, the Southwest Badger planted approximately 6 acres of dedicated woody biomass crops. Multiple species and

varieties (i.e., hybrid poplar, willow, and cottonwood) were planted at three demonstration sites, survival, growth rates, and Btu potential will be measured.

Southwest Badger, TNC, and other partners remain engaged with public and private organizations and agencies regarding trends and policy related to renewable energy.

### Perennial Forage

Due to the steep slopes in the region, grazing is a good fit and is promoted fairly heavily. Grazing technical assistance is available through Southwest Badger, NRCS, and UW- Extension. These organizations and others regularly hold pasture walks and field days to promote the benefits of grazing. The Nature Conservancy believes that grazing provides a great opportunity for conservation organizations to work with farmers and plans to have over 1,000 acres of TNC owned land available for grazing.



In addition, the 493,000 acre Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area (SWGSCA) is located in Southwest Wisconsin. The SWGSCA is unique for its high number of prairie remnants, extensive surrogate grasslands, exceptional populations of grassland birds, and spring-fed streams all set within a working agricultural landscape. The SWGSCA Partners are working on a pilot project to promote grazing through a Grazing Broker. The Grazing Broker will help connect landowners with grasslands to agricultural producers looking for grazing land, facilitate access to government resources for developing pastures, write grazing management plans, and provide technical advice to both livestock producers and non-agricultural landowners regarding all aspects of grazing. The broker will assist both parties in establishing a lease agreement based on the grazing management plan. The SWGSCA and Partners are also hosting a patch burn grazing workshop this fall.

Lastly, Trout Unlimited's Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE) is working with Valley Stewardship Network on a pilot project through the Pasture Project to promote grass-fed beef and grazing in the Kickapoo watershed.

### Agroforestry



Southwest Badger and partners have hosted several agroforestry conferences over that past decade. Partners have worked on projects that promote tree crops as viable alternatives to traditional agricultural crops, produced the Hybrid Hazelnut Handbook in 2002, and implemented a silvopasture demonstration project in Grant County in 2008. In addition, the Restoration Agriculture Institute and several private landowners are practicing and promoting restoration agriculture. Restoration Agriculture seeks to mimic the structure and function of natural ecosystems by utilizing commercial-scale polycultures of perennial plants (trees, shrubs, vines, canes, forbs, and fungi) resembling native ecosystems. These systems are self-reliant in terms of water, fertility, and fuel and actually build soils, sequester atmospheric carbon, recharge groundwater reserves, and foster biodiversity.

### Cover Crops

Cover crops are just beginning to take off in southwest Wisconsin. The Grant County Land Conservation Department offers a cost share program for cover crops in which the county covers

up to 50% of the seed bill buy to \$1,000. In 2012, 4 producers used the program putting in 449 acres of cover crops. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is working with UW-Madison and Dane County on a project in the Pecatonica watershed that is testing cover crops as a BMP to reduce phosphorus loading on targeted farms.

***Partners***

American Forest Foundation  
County Economic Development Corps.  
County Land & Water Conservation Depts.  
Driftless Area Initiative  
Farm Service Agency  
Green Lands, Blue Waters  
Land Trust Organizations  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Pheasants Forever  
Prairie Enthusiasts  
Regional Planning Commissions  
Restoration Agriculture Institute

The Nature Conservancy  
Trout Unlimited  
SW Badger RC&D Council  
WI Dept. of Agriculture  
WI Dept. of Natural Resources  
Wisconsin Woodland Owners' Association  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife  
U.S. Forest Service  
University of Wisconsin  
University Wisconsin Extension Service