

2024 Outstanding Conservationist Award

Dear nomination committee, I would like to nominate Heather Palmquist as the 2024 Outstanding Conservationist.

1. Name and Contact Information

Nominations

Name: Heather Palmquist
Department: Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department
Title: County Conservationist /Department Head
Address: 607 3rd Avenue North, Hurley, WI. 54534
Phone: 715-561-2234
Email: lakes@ironcountywi.org
Years of service: 16 years

Nominator:

Name: Zach Wilson
Department: Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department
Title: Conservation Specialist
Address: 607 3rd Avenue North, Hurley, WI. 54534
Phone: 715-561-2234
Years of Service: 9 years
Email: zach@ironcountywi.org

2. Biographical Sketch of Nominee

Heather Palmquist joined Iron County Land & Water Conservation Dept in 2008 as a seasonal employee. She was then hired full-time to create an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program for the county as well as establish the water quality testing program for the county. In 2013, she was promoted to the County Conservationist/Dept Head. In addition to administration, she runs the Native Plant Sale each year and provides technical recommendations to municipalities, farmers, and private landowners on practices to promote soil health and water quality on their property. She received her B.A. in Geography with an Environmental Concentration from UW-Parkside. She has been a lifelong resident of Mercer. In her spare time, she enjoys dog sledding, flyfishing, camping, kayaking, gardening, traveling, and music to name a few.

3. Accomplishments

The list of accomplishments for Heather is long and extensive, however there are several that stand out. I'd like to first recognize her contributions to Youth Education and overall conservation in Iron County and beyond. Heather has made education a priority in our county land and water plan and has nicely mixed the conservation needs of the county with a robust outreach and education program. She is one of the lead organizers of the Wisconsin Land and Water Association High School Conservation camp, playing a major role in overall camp functions. She often goes above and beyond, even stepping up at times as camp cook, filling the role to help save money and make sure camp runs smoothly. As the county conservationist she wears

many hats from working with landowners on shoreline habitat restorations projects, partnering up with DNR fisheries on fish passage projects, organizing the annual native plant sale, to working with the Towns on stream crossing designs, Heather has done it all. Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department has a staff of two with a land and water plan that is designed for three full time staff and has an annual budget of over \$350,000. To say that Heather wears a few hats is nothing short of the definition of going above and beyond. On top of running the department she must be at times the technician, the landowner contact and coordinator, funding and grant lead, staff supervisor for one full time Conservation Specialist and three annual Limited Term Employees. The impact of the department from Heathers leadership has provided an incredible amount of conservation projects and education to Iron County. Partnerships with the State of Wisconsin, County, Tribes, Federal agencies, nonprofits, school districts, private individuals, and local lake associations have all benefited from programs that Heather has implemented.

4. Summary (less the 500 words)

This year we would like to highlight one project, in particular. The Kaari Creek project. Heather has accomplished many projects that I would consider worthy of the "Outstanding Supervisor Award", however this project tops it all. A multiyear project of watershed scale with a completed design and a miracle request from landowners, Heather organized and coordinated a \$400,000 project that restored a class II trout stream back to its original layout. A very large and difficult accomplishment while at the same time helping the township with erosion and flooding issues. I couldn't say it better myself as stated from one of the led engineers that works with Heather, Stacy Dehne from DATCP, *"She has certainly gone above and beyond what is typically expected of a County Conservationist and Department Head and even above and beyond what a typical Technician in Land Conservation achieves! She deserves to be recognized for her willingness to take on such a large, watershed wide project. With a culvert installed under her direction in 2016 and the 8 recently installed in 2023, the entire Kaari Creek watershed sub basin has been hydrologically restored to a natural stream condition! Kudos to Heather Palmquist for her efforts and dedication to Conservation!!!"*

In addition to this large-scale watershed project Heather works with many landowners each year on conservation projects. She has developed a partnership with Townships, farmers, and private landowners implementing cost share programs, she has assisted private landowners on shoreland stabilization projects, designed and implemented raingardens, and assisted the Zoning Department on different shoreline mitigation projects all while being the Department Head, Technician, and County Conservationist. As many who know Heather will tell you, she not only takes her job seriously, but she is also a wonderful person, boss, and friend. Her determination and dedication to conservation is seen in her professional and personal life. It is my pleasure to nominate Heather Palmquist as Outstanding County Conservationist of the Year.

Sincerely,





CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
Agricultural Resource Management Division

DATE: December 20, 2023

TO: Wisconsin Land & Water

FROM: Stacy Dehne, PE
Conservation Engineer, DATCP
715-492-5303

SUBJECT: Heather Palmquist Nomination

The purpose of this memo is to support the nomination for County Conservationist, Heather Palmquist of Iron County. I have had the pleasure of knowing Heather since she started with Iron County and have been lucky enough to work with her closely on designs for many years as she serves as the technician as well as the conservationist in her capacity! She is an amazing person and so very exceptional with people. Her added ability to work on the technical aspect of projects is certainly an amazing feat given the demands of the department head position as well! She meets the challenge with enthusiasm and unwavering ambition!

I believe her nomination stems from a large scale project we worked on and she actually accomplished installing in 2023! The Kaari Creek project started out as a typical Town of Kimball request to Heather at the Land Conservation Department to help them with erosion in their road ditch. It was a relatively steep grade and also had steep side slopes adjacent to the roadway. Spring runoff flows were causing some deepening and widening of the ditch and causes some erosion along the road embankment in many areas. We have worked with rock linings and/or some ditch checks in the past to alleviate the velocities and erosive forces, but we learned early on that no typical practices in this ditch would be appropriate as it was no ordinary road ditch – it transported a Class II trout stream with a native brook trout population! It needed some special treatment!

Heather soon learned that the stream history of the creek showed it crossing Stateline Road twice in the past but at some point it had been rerouted along the west side of the road instead- eliminating what must have been two culverts from the roadway. Aerial photos confirmed evidence of where an old channel used to exist, so we set about trying to make plans to restore the trout stream to its original channel.

A couple years with some failed attempts at securing funding sources went by until Heather mentioned it to Zach Lawson, the WDNR fisheries biologist that serves her area. She and Zach were successful in getting funding approved from Trout Stamp Dollars and then the real work began! Heather needed to coordinate with multiple landowners in addition to the Town. She needed to shepherd the funding sources through her County administratively, and she had to be not just the Conservationist but also the Technician for Iron County as per usual- she has always worn these two hats extremely successfully! Furthermore, she had to do all the legwork and

contacts with permitting agencies such as WDNR and the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE).

This was a huge feat to sum it up! Heather worked with DATCP to survey three days straight, walking over 1 mile of stream corridor from start of project limits to end of Kaari Creek at the Montreal River. Design consisted of 8 stream crossing culverts (6 on Town right of way and 2 on private driveways). One culvert remains at the northern most end which will be completed in 2024. Permission was gained from 4 private landowners for access to their property, including one landowner who had to agree to allow the trout stream to be rerouted back onto her private parcel (this took some convincing). Heather was amazing at working with landowners and being transparent and patient with questions and answers. She also was successful in acquiring all the permits after delays that still allowed the project to move forward and be constructed before the September 15th deadline for work in a trout stream.

Planning and design and efforts leading up to the construction was a huge undertaking, but construction trumped the level of effort even still! Heather worked with the Town to order and get all 8 pipes delivered and dropped off at locations in the field where they would be ready and available for placement. The phone calls and coordination was tremendous! Construction started on August 15th and all work in the stream corridor was completed by the September 15th deadline. Additional work continued on the road and ditch beyond this date with no permit restrictions. In addition to the 8 stream crossings installed, there was over 800 feet of new channel created to welcome the trout stream back to its original location with some extra meandering designed in for stream length and gradient reduction. Heather deserves an award for her steadfast, unwavering support and effort in seeing this project through to a successful completion!

Even with all her other commitments and demands, she was on site each and every day of construction to oversee the work and make sure things were going smoothly. She has certainly gone above and beyond what is typically expected of a County Conservationist and Department Head and even above and beyond what a typical Technician in Land Conservation achieves! She deserves to be recognized for her willingness to take on such a large, watershed wide project. With a culvert installed under her direction in 2016 and the 8 recently installed in 2023, the entire Kaari Creek watershed sub basin has been hydrologically restored to a natural stream condition!

Heather could be nominated for the technician of the year as well as the conservationist of the year!!! I work in multiple counties in Northern Wisconsin assisting them technically. It is unbelievable the amount of conservation she accomplishes for Iron County and our State with a Department of 2 staff members!

Kudos to Heather Palmquist for her efforts and dedication to Conservation!!!



To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing for your consideration of Heather Palmquist for the 2024 Outstanding Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Employee. Through my professional experiences working with Heather since 2014, I've had the pleasure of realizing the impact of her tireless conservation efforts to better the resources in Iron County, Wisconsin. Through the years, Heather has served a critical role in a multitude of collaborative habitat projects and outreach efforts with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Through carrying the Iron County LWCD mission forward, Heather has become an integral component for us carrying the Department's mission forward as well. Heather's exceptional personal skills, meticulous organization, strong communication, and endless dedication has developed bonded partnerships with stakeholders and collaborators to accomplish difficult and important on-the-ground habitat conservation projects while educating the public on the importance of these and related objectives.

Conducting impactful conservation work requires strong partnerships. Heather's approachability, open-mindedness, active listening, and delicate yet effective communication skills allow her to easily cultivate new relationships. These attributes along with her reliability and dedication often weld those relationships into partnerships. For example, in 2023 the WDNR partnered with Heather on a large, expensive, difficult, and contentious stream connectivity and rehabilitation project on Kaari Creek. The project proposal brought great consternation from the Town due to potential infrastructure impacts, downstream landowners due to potential flooding impacts, multiple private riparians as much of the work would need to be done on their land, and the general community due to uncertainty and the overall change to the area. Heather masterfully educated the Town and local community on the ecological benefits of the project, quelled concerns of many downstream landowners, gained permission to conduct the work on necessary private lands, assembled a team of collaborators, designed and successfully completed the project all within a year's time. Not surprisingly, I've seen Heather develop and maintain ironclad partnerships from the individual to the agency level on issues ranging from invasive species data collection to habitat construction projects.

Relatedly, Heather's voice carries beyond the partnerships she's formed. As a successful conservation program requires a dedicated outreach and public education campaign, Heather has a far-reaching audience throughout the area. Not only does she effectively disseminate information on behalf of LWCD initiatives, but strategically aligns her message with related partner objectives. In doing so, it is apparent how many more people turn from listening to engaging, or from engaging to becoming a future partner in conservation efforts. For years, as the local fisheries biologist I struggled attempting to "re-train" stakeholders to think about the shoreline when thinking about fish habitat. After partnering with Heather on a few local issues, she began working fish habitat benefits (i.e. littoral substrate protection, erosion control, coarse woody habitat recruitment, etc.) into conversations with lakeshore riparians, public outreach meetings, lake association meetings, and other outreach efforts related to land use and shoreline management. Since then, I've noticed a marked shift in public perception of what fish habitat looks like, who is interested in shoreline rehabilitation efforts, and how many more stakeholders are having conversations about shoreline management. The public contacts that return to me on this topic alone speak to Heather's creativity in messaging, devotion to public outreach, and the broad audience that she reaches, even if they are not directly working with her.

Moreover, Heather has been a wonderful partner to WDNR Fisheries Management, and has accounted for many important habitat conservation projects that benefit the entire ecosystem, fish included. Her productivity and quality of work speak to a longer list of appreciable qualities, but her ability to educate and create productive partnerships is an asset to conservation efforts in Iron County and sets a standard that other conservation professionals should strive for.

Sincerely,

Zach Lawson
Fisheries Biologist
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
2501 Golf Course Road
Ashland, WI 54806
Zachary.Lawson@Wisconsin.gov
Phone: (715) 492-5276

SHAWANO



COUNTY

LAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

311 N MAIN STREET – COURTHOUSE
SHAWANO, WI 54166-2145
Phone (715) 526-4820
<https://www.co.shawano.wi.us>

December 26, 2023

WI Land+Water Conservation Association
121 S. Pinckney St. Suite #420
Madison, WI 53703

Dear WI Land+Water Professional Improvement Committee:

While working for the Land Conservation Department (LCD), I have had the great fortune to work with many resource protection minded individuals and organizations over the years. As a fellow County Conservationist, I know the many different roles or “hats” we must wear to be successful in our job.

In 2012 I got to meet Heather Palmquist, before she was county conservationist, as she assisted with a few environmental education activities at Youth Conservation Camp (then held at Trees For Tomorrow in Eagle River). Heather is a natural leader which was evident early on when seeing her give instructions for canoeing at camp (see picture on next page). In talking with Heather, I learned about some of the aquatic invasive species and environmental education programming she was doing for Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD). I was able to see her passion of educating in action.

Sharing of knowledge and resources is key to being an effective conservationist. Heather was instrumental as part of the team of natural resource professionals that created Shoreland Stabilization – A Guide for Homeowners and Conservationists on Inland Lakes & Flowages (2021).

Another example of leadership is finding ways to get the work done with limited financial resources and time constraints in a LWCD with only two full-time staff. Heather knows the value of LTE (seasonal) staff positions both in getting work done and providing a quality career building experience for them. Every year in late winter I expect to see an advertisement for seasonal employment with the Iron County LWCD. It takes strong leadership and dedication to secure/maintain funding to effectively bring on seasonal staff. I have got to meet some of those staff over the years through incorporation of their work and the youth conservation camp activities.

It has been a pleasure getting to know and working with Heather the past 11+ years. Her passion for educating and leading those about our environment has stood out to me since we first met. For all her efforts I have noted above I cannot think of a better person than Heather Palmquist for WI Land+Water Conservation Association’s 2024 Outstanding Conservationist Award.

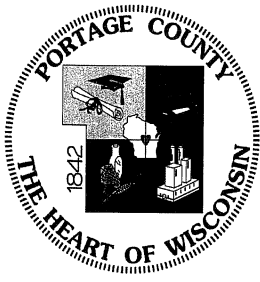
Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott M. Frank". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Scott M. Frank
County Conservationist
Shawano County LCD
(715) 526-4632
scott.frank@shawanocountywi.gov



Heather Palmquist (center with canoe paddle out to her side) leading canoeing lesson at Youth Conservation Camp.



PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

1462 STRONGS AVENUE, STEVENS POINT, WI 54481 • PHONE: 715-346-1334 • FAX: 715-346-1677

WI Land+Water Awards Committee,

I would like to provide a letter of support for the nomination of Heather Palmquist for the 2024 Outstanding County Conservationist Award.

Heather Palmquist leads a small department but the things they can accomplish are due to great teamwork, leadership and the utmost respect for each other. Heather is not afraid to charge into a challenge and doesn't consider a project complete until it's to her standards. She continues to be an extremely valuable resource for many of her conservation colleagues across the State. With her diverse background and extensive connections, she can tackle a wide range of conservation concerns/projects across Iron County.

Heather has been a counselor at Conservation camp for decades. She strives to teach the next generation how to care for the resources. She can lead programs from t-rescues in canoes to engineered practices to stabilize shorelines. During free time at camp, she will engage with campers, learn their interest and tweak the programs in order to give the campers the best experience possible.

Being on Heather's team means you better be ready to give it 100% everyday. Being on Heather's team means you can ask questions and she will teach you along the way. Being on Heather's team motivates you to be successful.

Sincerely,

Tracy Arnold

Tracy Arnold
Conservation Technician
Portage County Land and Water Conservation
715-346-1326
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