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STATE SENATOR

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Building Healthy and Resilient Soil

Growing up on the farm, my grandpa and dad always told me that the healthier the soil the higher the crop yield.

Keeping the soil intact also provides a number of other important impacts; including less erosion, greater compaction, water retention, and fertility. That is why it is important that we continue to invest in locally-driven land and water consideration efforts.

As a state, we've made and need to continue to make investments in conservation efforts led by our farmers and landowners. I'm a proud supporter of our many producer-led watershed groups in Wisconsin, which drive locally-based conservation projects. In the Driftless Region, we have three that stretch across portions of Vernon, Crawford, La Crosse, and Monroe counties.

No two watersheds in Wisconsin are identical. What works for watersheds in the Driftless may not work for watersheds in the Fox Valley, so it is vital that we ensure our locally-focused groups continue have the autonomy and support to address their unique landscapes.

Producer-led watershed protection grants have given these farmers and landowners resources on the local-level to advance both proven and innovative practices to strengthen their watersheds, and in turn their communities.

Funding for practices like planting cover crops and programs that focus on nitrogen optimization have also strengthened our land. By providing rebates for cover crops, we enhance the tools farmers have to manage and improve their soil.

Wisconsin's family farmers have taken part in conservation efforts for decades. The Farmland Preservation Program has incentivized farmers and eligible landowners to use reliable conservation practices for more than 40 years by giving them a per-acre tax credit. Programs like this are a win-win – a win for our environment and a win for production agriculture.

With our unique topography of rolling hills, coulees and valleys, the need to protect and build healthier and more resilient soils is even more important.

We have seen concerning weather trends over the last decade, with 100 year floods occurring all too often. As our climate evolves and changes, we need to continue to support local watershed groups and conservation efforts that seek to mitigate flooding and other harmful impacts.

Despite the challenges we face, western Wisconsin remains resilient and a national leader in conservation. Our region's history in conservation leadership dates back to the time of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt presidency.

In fact, the Coon Creek Watershed in Vernon County was the home of the country's first erosion control project in the early 1930s. This incredibly successful project was led by state conservationists, the U.S. Soil Erosion Service, and FDR's New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps on local farmland in Coon Valley. Using the tools and methods applied in Coon Valley, farmers and landowners across the country learned how to better care for and protect our land from erosion.

These efforts started by the FDR administration continue today. Producer-led watershed groups, like the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council, partner on the local level with federal and state agencies to enhance our land and water.

On September 9th, the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council will be holding a community celebration to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the Coon Creek Watershed Project. The event will showcase the history of the project, including structures implemented by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. I'm proud to represent a region that recognizes the importance of conserving and improving our land, and I encourage everyone to enjoy the 90th Anniversary Celebration.

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.