

Expanding and Defending our Right to Life

Recognizing the Rights of Nature

Forest Jahnke, CSP Coordinator

We are in a time that many now call the Anthropocene. This refers to the phenomenon that humans have become the dominant force shaping the planet. It is undeniable that we humans alone control the fate of vast swaths of the face of the Earth, which has ripple effects worldwide. We are fundamentally altering the web of life. Thus, our decisions regarding our relationship to other life and the natural resources we all rely on are extremely important.

With a global climate becoming ever-more chaotic and facing the very real prospect of losing half of the Earth's species by the middle of the century, how do we find our right relationship? How do we protect what we value?

Moral dilemmas like this force us to look at our basic values. The first basic value statement that formed this nation was the Declaration of Independence. This laid out our communities' right to govern ourselves and established a basic set of rights

to be protected. Defending these rights, according to the Declaration, was the government's only legitimate reason to exist.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Those are, at least in theory, the moral foundations of this nation. Our basic rights.

Let us explore the first, and presumably most fundamental right, the right to Life.

One way to look at this is from an individual perspective. From this stance, our right to life includes such things as our right to breathe air free of toxic fumes, our right to drink pure water, or our right to access the resources needed to provide for our basic food, shelter, and medicine.

While most believe we do have these rights, every one of them is being denied every day to millions of people right here and across the world. It is widely recognized that we have greatly overstepped some major ecological boundaries and are over-consuming at an alarming rate, threatening our future access to essential resources.

And all this, despite decades of people fighting to protect our land, air, and waters...

Some of us are coming to the conclusion that, with this limited and human-centered view of our rights, we simply do not have the tools needed to truly protect all of our rights. It is time to expand our view of who merits rights beyond sex, beyond race, and now, beyond the hu-

this concept, I spoke with Mari Margil, Associate Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), one of the leading organizations in the new and growing movement making these rights a legal reality in our communities. She helped Ecuador recognize the rights of ecosystems to "exist, thrive, and evolve" in their constitution in 2008 and is currently

"Many countries, for example, have recognized the human right to a healthy environment. Yet, that right is proving impossible to uphold and enforce, when the natural environment upon which it depends is being destroyed. Thus, the human right to a healthy environment is dependent on the health and well-being of nature itself."

~Mari Margil

man species. It is time to recognize the rights of nature, for everyone's sake.

Aldo Leopold advocated brilliantly for this with his concept of a "land ethic" in *The Sand County Almanac*, calling it an "evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity." He bemoaned that, "The land relation is still strictly economic, entail-

ing privileges but not obligations" and advocated for a land ethic that, "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land... In short, the land ethic changes the role of homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and the community as such."

To further explore

helping the Ho Chunk Nation add this into their tribal constitution right here in the Driftless. She explains how this legal paradigm works:

"Recognizing the fundamental Rights of Nature in law means placing the highest legal protection on nature, much like we've recognized the fundamental rights of people, enshrining such rights into our constitutions - which are fundamental legal structures. Many countries, for example, have recognized the human right to a healthy environment. Yet, that right is proving impossible to uphold and enforce, when the natural environment upon which it depends is being destroyed. Thus, the human right to a healthy environment is dependent on the health and well-being of nature itself."

If we want to protect our water, but are not able to prove in court that we are individually harmed by the destruction of a waterway, we have no, in legal jargon, "standing". Giving a river the

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Regional mining update

Forest Jahnke, CSP Coordinator

In 2015, Pattison Sand Company removed 24,619 cubic yards of "overburden" (everything above the sandstone layer) and extracted 186,640 tons of sand from the Bridgeport mine. A total of 7,742 trucks were used to haul this sand to the Clayton, Iowa, processing plant, then back to the Prairie du Chien loading site for transport, largely to fracking fields across the country. Though the mine is still comparatively small and demand has dropped off, this comes to an average of 21 truckloads extracted and shipped off every day.

In contrast to the events that led to a mine in Bridgeport, every single other township in Crawford County passed a moratorium on frac sand mining in addition to the 6 month county-wide moratorium that Crawford Stewardship Project urged, giving themselves more time to study the industry and come up with appropriate regulations. Currently, Prairie du Chien Township is the only township that has allowed their moratorium to end and still does not have any regulations in place.

Many communities surrounding us have also implemented regulations, with strategic assistance from CSP. Most recently, Bloom Township joined the vast majority of Richland County in implementing protections in 2016 through a licensing ordinance. We have managed to protect these commonsense community standards from many state attempts at preemption and will continue to defend democracy and local control.

Even in Clayton, Iowa, Pattison Sand's home turf, the mining company's recent requests for a re-zoning of an additional 746 acres from "Agricultural" to "Heavy Industrial" are running into citizen concerns. Crawford Stewardship Project is glad to see the local government forming a study committee and having pub-

Heartfelt thanks

Another year and another mountain of gratitude for our wonderful volunteers and project collaborators. Crawford Stewardship Project would not be who we are, or be able to do even a fraction of what we do, without all the help and support that flows from this generous community. Thank you.

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Friends of the Lower Wisconsin
Gays Mills Public Library
Legion GIS

Leuther Laboratories
Midwest Environmental
Advocates

Soldiers Grove Public Library
Sustain Rural Wisconsin Network
Valley Stewardship Network

Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters

Looking to plug in?

Do you care about wildlife, fish, and how the DNR manages all of our natural resources? We are looking for a motivated team of volunteers in Crawford County to take the lead with us on the Annual Conservation Congress. These take place in all Wisconsin counties every

April. This is the time when any citizen can vote on DNR policy changes and can even stand up and make their voice heard through a resolution to be voted on by other attendees and potentially implemented as policy. It is an important exercise in citizen democracy and a

formal poll of We the People on many conservation issues.

We also need letter to the editor writers, cookie bakers, legislative trackers... there are many ways to contribute beyond money. That said, monetary contributions are also fantastic!

Have you tested your well?

Marinella Pro, CSP Coordinator

Access to safe, clean water for drinking, cooking, bathing and washing is one of the most important family health issues today. Municipal water utilities test their water regularly to ensure that it is safe, but it is up to private well owners to test their well water annually.

Two important tests for well owners are for bacteria and nitrates. Coliform bacteria are microorganisms that can be found in human and animal waste, in soil, on vegetation and in the surface water runoff. If coliform bacteria are present in your well water, other bacteria, viruses and parasites that can make you sick may also be present and further testing is recommended. Coliform and other bacteria can enter drinking water through poorly constructed or unsealed wells, fractured rock outcroppings, sinkholes, coarse soils and quarries.

Especially if there are infants less than six months of age or pregnant women drinking the well water, you should also test for nitrates. Nitrates interfere with the blood's ability to carry oxygen, thus causing symptoms of suffocation or "blue baby syndrome" in infants. Nitrate can enter drinking water from many sources, including fertilizer, animal feedlots, sewage systems, municipal and industrial wastewater, urban drainage and decaying plant debris.

You can make the testing part of your normal springtime routine, like planting flowers and resetting your clock for daylight savings time. Water should also be tested after flooding or if you notice any change in taste, odor or appearance. It's important to test well water annually. You can contact your county health department for information on well testing.

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Forest Jahnke

Marinella Pro

Right to Life *Continued from page 1*

right to exist as a functioning, living, river gives concerned citizens the legal ability to “stand” and speak for that river (or aquifer, or rainforest, or lake...) and all who depend on it.

Bill Greendeer, a Ho Chunk elder and valued ally of Crawford Stewardship Project, has been watching the destruction of the natural world he cares so deeply about for a long time, and it's been worse than ever in the last decade. When he heard about the rights of nature being recognized in Ecuador, he contacted Mari and CELDF.

“I didn't mind a couple for glass or gravel or whatever other local uses there were, but I was tired of seeing more and more sand mines popping up, just piling up trees and burning them with no regard. They are a lot bigger now and are taking whole hills and drilling high capacity wells, sometimes without even permits. I've had discharge water filled with silica and who-knows-what run onto my wild-life preserve.”

Then Bill gets to the heart of the matter, “They believe that everything is property, but you can't own the land. It's ultimately the spirits who will take care of us for the next seven generations.” From this perspective, recognizing the rights of nature is no more than common sense.

After getting the idea rolling with a core group, Bill says, “the idea caught on like a snowball going downhill.” By the time a resolution was formally written, the tribal attorney was on board. When it came to a vote at the general council (where the whole tribe gets to vote), over 70% voted to add the rights of nature to their constitution.

“The Ho Chunk, in order to

live in a colonized society, had to adapt. We had to have a constitution, but this did not hold our beliefs and traditions. We have to start thinking about giving rights back to nature like it once was a long time ago.” The wording is now being finalized and should be officially in place in the next couple months.

CELDf has also developed, and other organizations such as Community Rights Ground-Work are helping promote and spread, a legal framework for municipalities known as the Community Bill of Rights. Communities across the U.S. are now advancing these bills of rights into law to secure community and nature's rights, address corporate so-called “rights,” and resist state preemption.

Certain established legal interpretations tell us that we do not have this basic authority. Some of us believe that these legal interpretations violate our fundamental rights established under the Declaration of Independence. As a self-governing people, we would ask ourselves what we want to see for our communities.

After all, what could be more important than our right to life? We cannot protect the natural world if we do not recognize that it has a right to exist. And, of course, we cannot exist without it. In order to give ourselves the legal tools to protect the magnificent diverse and interconnected world that we all depend on, we must recognize that all parts have the right to a place at the table. This is what ancient indigenous knowledge teaches us. It is our responsibility to the future.

If you are interested in moving this work forward in your community, please contact us!

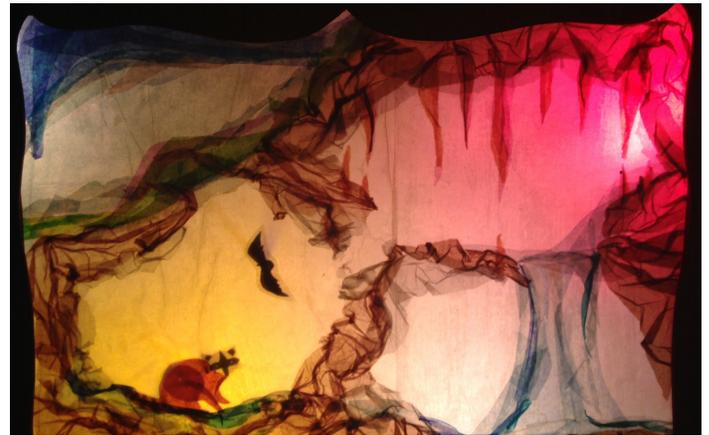
Karst education campaign

Forest Jahnke, CSP Coordinator

There are some basic understandings required to make good decisions about our relationship with the planet.

In our ancient Driftless landscape, weathered and crumbled by 500 million years of natural processes, this understanding of the ground beneath our feet is all the more complicated and important. And yet, this basic knowledge seems lost on many people.

We are ready to change that.



The Underground World comes out of the shadows...and into the schools!

Our newly-released shadow-puppet play, *The Underground World*, has already been performed publicly twice as well as at a handful of schools in the region. Building on these successes, we hope to keep reaching out to more schools, libraries, summer camps, and other areas where children can appreciate the artistry and lessons we offer.

This engaging and beautiful play follows a curious little raccoon who discovers the karst geology of Southwest Wisconsin by toppling through a trash-filled sinkhole and into a cave! But don't worry, a wise bat teaches raccoon (and all in attendance) about the tunnels and underground rivers of the Driftless region and all ends well, with raccoon and our children having learned some valuable lessons about the world under our feet.

Please contact us if you know any teachers who would be interested in inviting us into their classrooms, libraries that want to offer a theatrical production, or any other venues where this seems appropriate. We want to get these important and enjoyable lessons out to children of all ages and have crafted lesson plans and activities to go with the play.

Mining *Continued from page 2*

lic hearings. We will continue to assist the local citizens with information and hope that if the mine is allowed to expand, this time there will at least be some conditions on the permits that will address the neighbors' issues. With the sad state of the industry, it seems a poor time to allow a mine

of that scale to double in size.

It seems a new sand mine closes or scales back every month these days, cutting short all those jobs promised. With the low price of oil, in the last year, most hydraulic fracturing operations are going bankrupt, losing money, and/or are cutting back severely to

keep costs down. This has shattered the demand for frac sand proppants and the sand industry's claims of sustained prosperity for our communities.

That said, speculation in new land for future mines continues in hopes of a second fracking boom. Those concerned with the spread of this industry should not

let down our guards, but rather take this as an opportunity to get our houses in order. Communities across Minnesota, seeing the disruptive boom and bust here in Wisconsin, are opting for banning the industry outright, in favor of more stable and sustainable economies.

I'm just a bill...

Marinella Pro, CSP Coordinator

On January 5, I was at the Capitol in Madison to attend a hearing on Assembly Bill 600 (AB600), also labeled the "polluter grab-bag." There were many representatives of allied groups across Wisconsin who spoke eloquently against the bill as well as a handful of lobbyists in support.

Though a long and exhausting day, I found the experience incredibly interesting. It was exciting to see democracy at work, and it inspired me to investigate the legislative process and understand how people like me and you can, and will, make a difference.

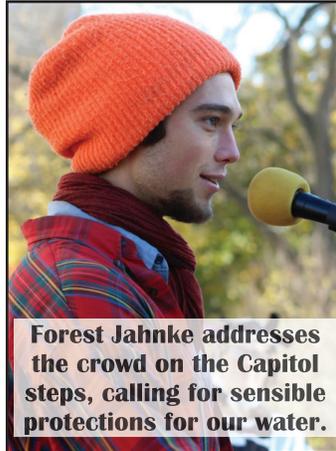
Every new bill must be read in front of the legislative body on three separate occasions before it can be passed.

After the first reading, the legislature sends the bill to a relevant committee to be analyzed (in this case, the Assembly Committee on Environment and Forestry) who then hold public hearings.

This is the time when lobbyists, representatives of concerned groups and members of the public can voice their support for or opposition to the legislation. Amendments can be offered and testimony is also given "for information only", like the DNR is restricted to doing these days. In response to research and input from the hearing, a committee may amend a bill. If a majority of the committee votes in favor of the bill, it moves forward.

The bill is then read a second time before the full legislative body. Amendments can still be proposed at this time, and it is still a good time to ask legislators from your home districts

and those on the committee to amend, support, or oppose the bill.



Forest Jahnke addresses the crowd on the Capitol steps, calling for sensible protections for our water.

If the bill makes it through this whole process, the bill is then read a third and final time before the full chamber. At this point the chamber votes on the bill. Bills that are approved move to the other chamber, where they undergo the same process.

If amendments are made in the second chamber, the bill is sent back to the first to make sure that both drafts are identical. The bill some of our allies named "death by a thousand straws" involving ground-water

Assembly had already passed its counterpart, AB 875. The bill never passed because the drafts could not be harmonized before the session ended. We fully expect to see that bill again.

When a bill has passed both houses, it is sent to the Governor, who may sign or veto it. When the bill is passed, it becomes an act, and its changes are added into the statutes as law. Once an act is in the statutes, it can be amended further, and the process starts again.

During the 2015-2016 legislative session, which ended in March, we saw more attacks on our air, land and water than ever before. While it is easy to focus on all the bad proposals offered and the hard-fought battles over what should be common sense protection, it is important to remember how much has been accomplished thanks to the hard work and advocacy of organizations such as Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Midwest Environmental Advocates, CSP and citizens like you.

This legislative session would have been much worse without all the letters to news-

In fact, the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters tells us that 28,996 messages were sent to the Capitol during this legislative session.

Crawford Stewardship Project showed up and spoke to, wrote letters about, and/or organized people to write in about many of the proposed bills relating to local control or changing our land and water stewardship in the state. CSP supporters initiated conversations in townships, with officials sending concerns about some of the legislation that diminished local control.

Bills such as AB600 would have drastically altered how Wisconsin deals with certain permitted activities in waterways. By working with legislators, local governments, and citizen organizations, CSP helped secure changes to the bill that significantly improved it with respect to treatment of navigable waters.

Democracy requires participation, as a friend of mine once told me, "Democracy is a muscle and it needs to be used in order for it to work." It can be complicated to follow bills, current events, and environmental issues and at times we can feel overwhelmed, but change starts with us and our willingness to get involved.

In this time when money seems to be the main driving force of our political leaders, it is important not to fall into apathy. Remember that organized people power can and does overcome the power of money. Join us, show up, express your opinion, and together we can make our democracy work for us all.

Your voice counts!



and high capacity well deregulation, SB 239, was changed by the Senate after the

pers, phone calls and messages made to the decision makers inside the Capitol.

Regional industrial agriculture update

Forest Jahnke, CSP Coordinator

As more farmers are forced out of business by the rigged and wildly fluctuating agricultural economy, or are told they must grow to make up for slim margins producing commodities, we are facing a future where industrial agri-business could become the norm and family farms the rarity.

So far, Roth Feeder Pig in Wauzeka is Crawford County's only Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), with 1679 "animal units" (a standard measure equating 1 with a half-ton steer, while a hog is .4, a chicken .01, etc.) Because of the sheer quantity of manure produced, limited spreading acreage, and issues in surrounding waterways leading into the Wisconsin River, CSP reviews the "Nutrient Management Plans" of this large animal feeding operation annually to double-check that our overwhelmed DNR and County Conservation Department are aware of potential issues.

We only have to look west across the Mississippi to Iowa and the 3,800 CAFOs operating there to see that possible future. Iowa has widespread water contamination, EPA crackdowns on an overwhelmed and non-compliant Iowa DNR, and communities sick of being told they must accept ever-more animals and manure, while losing valued farm families.

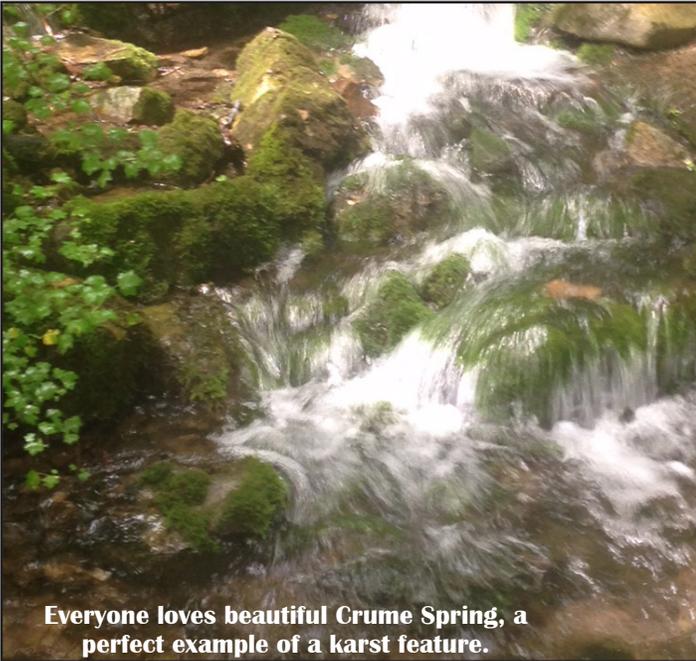
We could also look to the northeast, to Kewaunee County, Wisconsin, with similar fractured and permeable karst geology to what we have here in southwest Wisconsin. There, over a third of wells tested produce undrinkable water due to nitrates, coliform bacteria, and/or viruses, all three of their rivers are listed as "impaired," and smelly algae chokes out the life on the shores of Lake Michigan, closing once-popular beaches and driving out local businesses.

To top it off, the Wisconsin DNR has already begun approving aerial spraying of manure as an acceptable way for factory farms to empty their manure lagoons. Meanwhile, some forward-thinking municipalities put ordinances in place prohibiting the practice. Spraying manure was widely used in North Carolina until they banned any further permits for spraying manure in 2007 due to environmental and community health impacts. The Wisconsin UW Extension created a Manure Irrigation Workgroup to study some of these impacts, but apparently the state feels no obligation to wait for its own recommendations, expected to be available this month.

And where do we look for a brighter vision for our communities? Well, just look around you! We look to the many inspiring examples of innovative and regenerative family farms plus new farms popping up across the countryside. We look to cover cropping of fields between harvests and rotational grazing. We look forward to more contour, prairie, and pollinator strips. We look to all the citizen groups that have sprung up to promote this style of agriculture and protect the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural health of our communities. And of course, we organize ourselves.

Sustain Rural Wisconsin Network (SRWN) is a statewide coalition of these inspirational groups, farms, and individuals that Crawford Stewardship spearheaded in 2009. After some years as a loose support network of independent groups, SRWN has seen things in this state go backwards for too long and has re-organized, re-energized, and is ready to lead.

Under this inclusive banner we hope to assist and organize more grassroots groups across the state. We will hold our regulators accountable for protecting our resources, and begin to move back to an agriculture that works for all farmers and our communities.



Everyone loves beautiful Crume Spring, a perfect example of a karst feature.

Driftless karst landscape study

For adults, organizations, and municipalities, we have another exciting project underway. After trying unsuccessfully for years to interest various agencies and groups with the task of studying, compiling, and mapping out data on the sensitive karst topography of southwest Wisconsin, Crawford Stewardship Project has partnered with Valley Stewardship Network to do just that. We are looking for partners to join us in our study of Crawford and Vernon Counties' fascinating, complicated, and vulnerable geology.

Along with our Legion GIS collaborators, we will be compiling existing publicly available data and maps, using historical documents to generate more useful data, and working to provide a relevant and useful tool for municipalities, farmers, or other landowners. This study would be supplemented with a long-term interactive platform for continually adding and improving information.

We see this as an important asset of, by, and for the community, and we hope it will be used as such. Please contact us if you want to help, as some of this data collection could be done in groups, and we are interested in more partners in this project.

As the available data has grown, so has our need to understand and share the information in order to make smart decisions about

Funds available for local conservation

Kathy Byrne, CSP Board Secretary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced a special Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding opportunity for agricultural producers and landowners under the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) to improve water quality in the Kickapoo River Watershed and ultimately, the Mississippi River. The special signup is made available through an NRCS partnership with the Crawford and Vernon County Land Conservation Departments and others. NRCS plans to invest \$847,000 in fiscal year 2016 as part of a \$5.3 million commitment in the watershed over four years. Landowners interested in applying should contact their local NRCS office at the USDA Service Center in their county. For more information, visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov.

Crawford Stewardship Project
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**Crawford Stewardship Project
based in Gays Mills, WI,
is seeking a part-time paid coordinator.**

This position supports ongoing efforts of the Crawford Stewardship Project to protect the environment and promote sustainable land use, local control of natural resources, and environmental justice. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), frac sand mining, and water quality monitoring are among the issues CSP is working on with citizen participation. This position involves sharing responsibilities with co-worker to:

- Coordinate volunteers and water quality monitoring projects
- Organize events including staffing information tables
- Write for news media and newsletters
- Attend meetings locally and regionally
- Network with people in other groups and organizations
- Updates and outreach through social media
- Work hours usually flexible, while sometimes need to respond to short notice situation
- Occasional evening and weekend hours

Need reliable transportation and home office with suitable computer capabilities and skills. Send resume with letter of interest to: CSPjob@outlook.com by April 30, 2016 or until the position is filled.

Karst Field Trip June 25, 1 - 4pm

Have you ever seen a karst tower? Do you know how to spot a sinkhole? Why do some springs flow out of hillsides, only to disappear soon afterwards as if swallowed back by the earth? How did all these features develop on our landscape anyway?

Join us this summer to learn the answers to these questions from a resident expert, Professor Emeritus Kelvin Rodolfo, and see some striking examples of our karst topography for yourself!

Kelvin Rodolfo and Kathy Crittenden have kindly invited us to join them in their lovely home at Pheasant Walk Permaculture (E8022 Bakkom Road, Viroqua) for a presentation before we head out for a loop of notable local karst features in the area.