



SPRINGBOARD
for the arts

The Art of Environmental Stewardship

*An Impact Report on How Artists Help Cultivate
Sustainable, Equitable, and Creative Futures*

April 2024

A FRAMEWORK FOR **ARTISTS' IMPACT** ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

In order to move our systems towards more justice and less extraction, we can begin with broad engagement and participation of our communities in environmental stewardship. This focus on stewardship helps us **connect** to our neighbors to build power, **repair** past harms, and **reimagine** a different future. Artists' skills, processes, and creativity are vital ingredients in this process, through these three interdependent types of stewardship:



CONNECT

Artists introduce us to new experiences and skills, help us build stronger relationships with our neighbors, and inspire us to care for the places we love. These connections are integral to building shared work and solidarity among the people invested in making change.



REPAIR

Artists help us participate in community repair, showing us that change is not only possible, it's actively underway. Engaging in repair of place and land is an important way that people can reclaim power and agency over the future of their communities.



REIMAGINE

Artists help us see the places we inhabit from new perspectives and imagine new futures. To believe and see that the future can be different from the past opens up new pathways for systemic change.

About Us

Founded in 1991, Springboard for the Arts works at the intersection of arts and economic and community development, helping local artists and communities thrive together. Springboard's mission is to support artists with the tools to make a living and a life, and to build just and equitable communities full of meaning, joy, and connection.

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262 University Ave West
Saint Paul, MN 55103

FERGUS FALLS LOCATION
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Fergus Falls, MN 56537

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On Dakota and Anishinaabe land

Credits

Thank you to our Program Partners

Brownbody, Capitol Region Watershed District, Otter Tail County Solid Waste, Upstream Minnesota, West Central Initiative

Artwork by
Taylor Tinkham

Photography by
Destiny Roberts, Ne-Dah-Ness Greene, Rayshela Kamke, and Thai-Phan-Quang



Introduction

Culture and creativity are resources that exist within every community.

Just like other resources, our existing systems and structures have extracted culture and creativity from communities to build wealth for someone else. The parallels between culture and our natural environment are many, so it makes sense that the repair of these resources and action towards system change is strengthened when creativity, culture and environmental justice goals are combined.

As we face the impacts of our extractive economy on climate change, social connection, and economic inequality, it is clear that the solutions to these systemic challenges require an ecosystem approach. We'll have to work together across many different fields, imagine new worlds and build solidarity with our neighbors if we're to tackle the scale of these issues and make meaningful change.

Witnessing artists approach these challenges with love, urgency, and belief that a better, healthier, more connected world is possible is what gets me out of bed in the morning. Their work is a signal to the universe that things can be different and a joyful resistance to the people and systems that tell us we shouldn't try. I am excited to share this new framework for how artists can help lead us to greater stewardship of our places, land, and people through connection, repair and reimagination.

I hope this report provides you with inspiration to turn to, lean on and support artists, culture bearers and creative workers to lead us towards a healthy, equitable, and sustainable future.

Laura Zabel, Executive Director



SECTION I

artists help us Connect

Whether you live in a densely populated city or a remote town, the places we live have deep impacts on our lives. Across urban and rural landscapes, artists can help us see the connections between ourselves and our land more clearly.

Artists can introduce us to new experiences and skills, help us build stronger relationships with our neighbors, and inspire us to care for the places we love.

A group of Anni Zylstra's basketmaking students.



Caring for the places we love with Upstream Minnesota



In 2023 and 2024, Springboard supported Upstream Initiative in launching the *A Care for Place* fellowship, which invites artists across Minnesota to create art inspired by the natural places important to them. In 2024, the fellowship supported a cohort of 12 artists across the state to create projects that foster a deeper understanding of the places they love.

Based in the Twin Cities, **Antonio Duke** describes himself as an actor, playwright, director, and griot: a solo West African oral storyteller. Antonio used his fellowship to support new performance pieces by himself and two other Black artists, Asha Rowland and Eshay Brantley, that meditated on the prompt “home.”

Why home? “Because some of us lost it, some of us found it, some of us are still dreaming of it,” said Antonio. Each artist filmed a portion of their performance that was interwoven into a multimedia, multidisciplinary, Afro-futuristic showcase called The Ifè Lab and presented at Red Eye Theater.

Sharon Nordrum’s project is called *Inawendiwag*, or “They are all related to each other.” Her paintings tell stories about the plants and animals who surround her home in Laporte, MN—an area home to a rich array of ecosystems including wetlands, hardwood forests, lakes, streams, and rivers. Sharon’s paintings combine traditional Native woodland floral designs with more realistic depictions of birch trees, skunks, spiderwebs, and hazelnut bushes

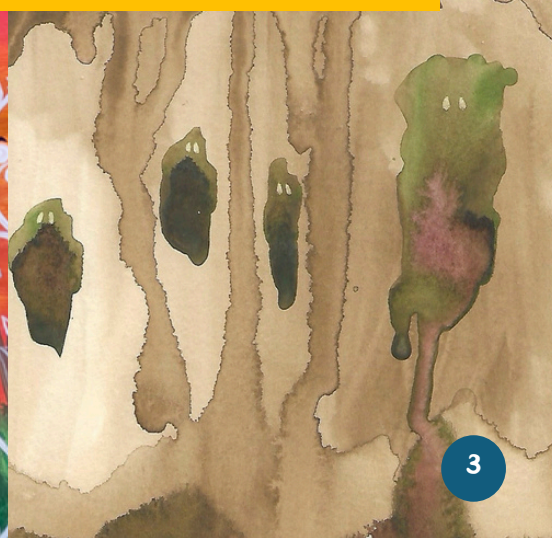
Sharon, an enrolled member of the Red Lake Nation, says she finds inspiration “in all of the creation around me.” She hopes her paintings help people see their connection to other beings through a different lens. “We are all connected. We all have a spirit and right to co-mingle on this earth. We all have a purpose.”

Stephani Pescitelli’s project, *meet me in the bog*, explores stories, memories, and meanings of the 3,700 year-old Quaking Bog—the last remaining tamarack bog in Minneapolis—and asks what wisdom this special place might have to share. Stephani invited fellow artists, friends, and community members on daily walks around the bog, made watercolor paintings using bog water, and created a bog “divination deck” inspired by the plants, beings, and stories they encountered in the bog.

“I’m growing a network of friends and other bog lovers, advocates, and artists who are interested in engaging with the bog and creating new meanings and stories about this special place.”

—Stephani Pescitelli
Artist and Upstream fellow

Meet the 2023 and 2024 Upstream Artist Fellows.



From left: *Ifè Lab* at Red Eye Theater, artwork by Sharon Nordrum, and artwork by Stephani Pescitelli.

Singing songs for climate justice with the Minneapolis Choir Co-op

The Minneapolis Choir Co-op has a multi-faceted mission: giving up and coming performers opportunities to hone their craft, premiering new works by local composers, and giving conductors opportunities to work in front of an ensemble.

“It’s hard to get opportunities when you’re just starting out,” says founder and Artistic Director Alex Rack.

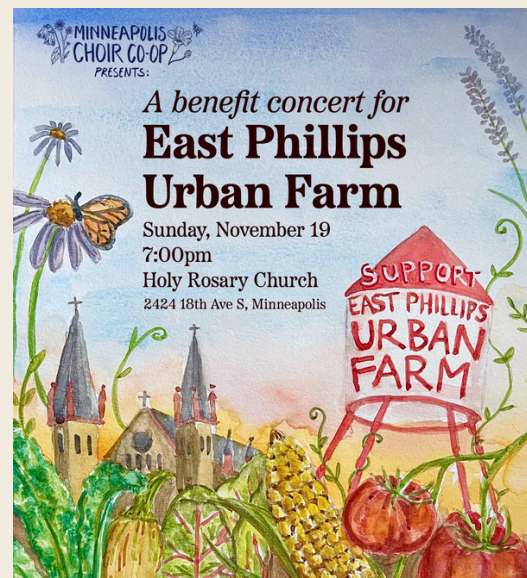
The Minneapolis Choir Co-op also has an explicit focus on climate justice. The choir hosts benefit concerts for local climate justice organizations and invites composers to write new pieces about climate justice. “It’s a budding genre within the choral world,” says Rack. “It’s still relatively new and under-discussed.”

Rack became interested in the intersection of choral music and the environment out of his own fear, observations of the world changing, and lack of actions from legislators. “I was trying to find a way that I could apply my own talents and artistic background to climate justice,” he said. “Also trying to help [connect] other people who feel similarly to local climate organizations through performances and collaborations.”

The Choir Co-op has built an ongoing partnership with the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute (EPNI), an organization focused on advancing the personal, social, environmental, and economic health of Minneapolis’ East Phillips neighborhood.

In May 2023, after 10 years of organizing, EPNI won the chance to convert an industrial roof depot—one of several air polluters that has caused generations of harmful health outcomes in East Phillips—into a cooperatively-owned community hub with an indoor farm and housing.

In November 2023, the Choir Co-op hosted a benefit concert in East Phillips to raise money for EPNI as they begin construction on the urban farm and community hub and continue other advocacy efforts to support the health and vibrancy of their neighborhood.



“[This concert] helps people focus their efforts on creating something together rather than just fretting. It also helps people learn more about local efforts to improve our environment.”

—Alex Rack

Founder and Artistic Director of Minneapolis Choir Co-op

Artist-led projects across MN

The Minneapolis Choir Co-op is part of **Incubator**, Springboard’s fiscal sponsorship program that allows Minnesota-based arts organizations and individual projects to receive grants and tax-deductible donations without needing to become a tax-exempt nonprofit. **Browse the directory** of over 160 Incubator projects.



Photo by Sam Wagner.

Anni Zylstra



On any given day, you might find Anni Zylstra tromping through a marsh to harvest willow, shaping it into intricately woven baskets, or herding unruly ducks around their farm. The folk singer, basketmaker, agroforester, and organizer lives and works in southern Wisconsin, the traditional homelands of the Oceti Sakowin and Ho-chunk people.

“Put quite simply, I am my place,” says Anni. “I believe that despite modernity and settler colonialism’s violent attempt to separate us (and especially Indigenous people) from the land and from the larger ecological community we live among, we are still completely made up of and a reflection of the soil, water, air, plants, and other beings that coexist in our ecosystems.”

This strong connection to the land guides Anni throughout all their work, including their practice of basketmaking. Basketry involves more than weaving—it requires intimate knowledge of the land and actively caring for its long-term health.

“Frankly I wanted to develop an art practice that didn’t require ordering industrially produced materials from faraway places, made with processes I could never really know for sure are not exploiting workers or the land,” said Anni, who grows and cares for the willow plants that they weave into baskets.

In 2023, Anni joined a cohort of 12 artists in the Rural Regenerator Fellowship, a program led by Springboard that supports and connects rural artists and changemakers. “The Rural Regenerator Fellowship has been a really wonderful affirmation of the work I’ve been doing for the last several years,” said Anni.

In the fall of 2023, they used the momentum and resources provided by the fellowship to travel to the homeland of many of the traditional techniques Anni uses in their basketry work—the Celtic Isles. Anni spent three weeks in a seaside town in Wales taking lessons with high level basketmakers and learning new techniques.

After returning from the trip, Anni taught 22 new beginner basketry students using the skills they learned in Wales. “Ensuring I’m passing on this cultural knowledge which comes from a specific lineage and has been passed down for hundreds of years through teachers before me in a sound way to my students is very important to me,” said Anni.

“Because of [the Rural Regenerator] fellowship, dozens of new—especially young and queer folks—are learning a heritage craft which supports regenerative agriculture and connects folks with the land.”

—Anni Zylstra

Artist, Rural Regenerator Fellow, and co-founder of Queer Farmer Network

Seeding change across the Upper Midwest

Launched in 2021, Springboard’s Rural Regenerator Fellowship brings together artists, culture bearers, and other rural changemakers for two years of peer learning and exchange.

Learn more and meet the current fellows.



Photo courtesy of the artist.

Building community and combating isolation among queer farmers



Anni Zylstra is also a co-founder of the Queer Farmer Network, a grassroots organization of current and aspiring LGBTQIA2S+ farmers, gardeners, growers, caretakers, of the land, food revolutionaries, and more spread across the so-called USA.

“The Queer Farmer Network is a project that started in 2018 as a result of myself and other friends in the upper midwest responding to the isolation experienced by many rural and farming queer folks in our region and beyond,” said Anni. “We wanted to create a set of tools and avenues to find one another, support each other’s work, and affirm our ability to occupy a space that’s been historically very unwelcoming to LGBTQIA folks.”

Today, the Queer Farmer Network includes **over 200 queer-owned or run farms**, a **national job board**, an **open listserv with 2,000 members** across multiple countries, and multiple **in-person yearly gatherings**. “Our primary work as an organization is to support queer farmers in connecting and finding one another,” said Anni. The Network hosts in-person gatherings called Queer Farmer Convergences, to provide connection, rest, and respite to farmers during the stressful growing season.

At the gatherings, participants and organizers eat food together; make arts and crafts; have dance parties; engage in co-education around agricultural topics; tackle big questions around settler colonialism, land access, and racism in agriculture; and strategize for movement building.

“These gatherings are often the highlight of my year,” said Anni. “A big driver of my continued work with the QFN is wanting this to be available to all queers and queer farming folk everywhere!”



Photo of the Queer Farmer Network by Rory Photography.

“Gathering on the land for no purpose other than to be in joyful comradeship and slow time with fellow queer folks creates an atmosphere that’s indescribably magical.”

—Anni Zylstra

Artist, Rural Regenerator Fellow, and co-founder of Queer Farmer Network

Connect to the Queer Farmer Network!

Formed in 2018, the Queer Farmer Network is a not-for-profit grassroots organization and support resource for queer farmers to help build community & combat isolation among rural and queer farmers, while interrupting heteropatriarchal, capitalist, and racist legacies in agriculture.





SECTION II

artists help us Repair

Artists play a central role in the repair of a place. From public art installations utilizing recycled materials to partnerships with environmental organizations on conservation initiatives, artists lift up important stories, shape narratives, and inspire action.

Artists help us understand that repair is a community effort. Change is not only possible, it's actively underway.



Precious Plastics Lab: A rural hub for creative reuse & innovation



The Otter Tail County Solid Waste facility sits on the northern edge of Fergus Falls, MN, its large, black, all-caps letters boldly spelling out "OTTER TAIL COUNTY" against the backdrop of white siding. Above the entrance door, a smaller sign reads "Recycling Redemption."

For those seeking redemption from their consumption habits, this facility offers a promising starting point.

Walking past the mountains of sorted metals, cardboard, and plastics, is a corner room with high ceilings, open windows, and the faint aroma of warm plastic. Shelves of clear containers full of tiny plastic pieces (arranged by color: aqua, magenta, and more) line one wall; along another wall is a playful gallery of artful and sculptural plastic projects, from coiled baskets and fishing lures, to light switch plates and bird-shaped holiday ornaments.

Welcome to the **Lakes Area Precious Plastic Lab**, brought to life in 2021 through a Springboard-supported artist residency with Alo Osberg, in collaboration with Otter Tail County Solid Waste, and with generous backing from West Central Initiative and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Precious Plastics is an international alternative recycling movement that provides open-source technology to help people and communities establish locally-rooted, micro recycling networks.

The concept is simple:
plastic is a precious resource.

With the effort put into creating petroleum products, only to be discarded after a single or a few uses, how can communities take a creative approach to recycling into their own hands?

The Lakes Area Precious Plastic Lab is one answer to this question. The Lab houses a plastics shredder, an extruder, a compression oven, and two injection machines. Paired with additional accessories, tools, and training, the possibilities are endless for what can be created with plastic materials otherwise destined for the landfill. The plastic composition of Rubbermaid-style totes, for example, make them unsuitable for traditional recycling but find new life in the Lab.



1862 Bison was created by artists Jess Torgerson, Erika Frikken, and Erik Peterson using trash and found materials, including chicken wire and memorial flowers discarded from local cemeteries, as well as plastic sculptural components created in the Precious Plastics lab.

The Precious Plastics Lab serves as both a micro-recycler and an educational hub on the creative reuse of plastic, with county staff engaging with thousands of students, community members, and artists annually.

As a result, this creative workspace has become embedded in the cultural identity of the community. Local artists integrate plastic into jewelry pieces for sale in shops along Lincoln Avenue in downtown Fergus Falls, while also contributing to larger scale public art projects and installations that provoke thought about consumption, repair, and care for rural places.

"It has been a dream come true to see artists working with waste. It's a way to elevate the topic, inviting people to slow down and think more consciously about what they consume and how they use their resources."

—Cedar Walters

Former staff member at Otter Tail County Solid Waste & Founder of Lakes Area Precious Plastic Lab



Laura Youngbird



In 2022, Springboard for the Arts and the Lakes Area Precious Plastic Lab participated in the first 4Ground Land Art Tour coordinated by Franconia Sculpture Park. Three local teams of artists created three *Future Fossils* themed art installations that were on public view in downtown Fergus Falls in summer 2022.

Local artists **Laura Youngbird**, **Katy Olson** and **Eric Peterson** teamed up to create an ambitious sculpture, *Mishipechu Water Protector Panther*.

"Mishipechu is a powerful and important underwater creature," said Laura Youngbird, a visual artist based in Breckenridge and enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa, Grand Portage Band. *"To the Anishinabe, Ottawa, Menominee, Shawnee, and Cree tribes, Mishipechu is also known as the Great Lynx with the head and paws of a great cat, a lizard-like body, covered in scales with spikes along its back and tail."*

Sitting at more than **20 feet long** and **6 feet high**, and inviting curious explorers to sit inside its belly, *Mishipechu* was created with extruded recycled plastic rods, PVC pipe, plastic netting, snow fencing, melted plastic drink lids, detergent bottles, blue boat wrap, ground up recycled plastic, and zip ties. More than **3,000 recycled plastic scales** were created in the Precious Plastic Lab.

"Mishipechu is the embodiment of power with the dual role of protector and destroyer, known for protecting the water and guarding vast amounts of copper," said Laura. *"They are said to live in the deepest parts of lakes and rivers, where they can cause storms. There are consequences for misusing resources."*



Mishipechu was exhibited for three months near the Court Street Bridge over the Otter Tail River in Fergus Falls. Alongside the 1862 *Bison* sculpture by Jess Torgerson and Erika Frikken, and the *Kingdom of Fungi, Forever and Ever, Amen* installation by Nancy X Valentine and Chelsey Beilhartz, these sculptures initiated dialogues about water stewardship during a pivotal period of riverfront development in Fergus Falls.

"Mishipechu is the embodiment of power with the dual role of protector and destroyer[...] There are consequences for misusing resources."

—Laura Youngbird

Artist, *Mishipechu Water Protector Panther*

More about Precious Plastic

Precious Plastic is an open source global community of innovators who enable others to participate in local grassroots recycling by transforming ordinary plastic items into useful products and art. Fergus Falls, MN is the home of the Lakes Area Precious Plastics Lab.



Sustainable papermaking meets prairie education



The process of making handmade paper takes time and expertise. Traditional papermaking studios require unique equipment—from paper beaters, which process paper fibers and water into the pulp that ultimately makes the paper, to equipment for pressing and drying.

Anna Haglin and James Kleiner have it down to a science—and an art.

In 2019, they created Paper Plains, a socially-engaged mobile papermaking studio that turns invasive plant fibers into handmade paper. Paper Plains is a project of Springboard’s Ready Go program, which connects artmaking experiences to communities through 20 artist-created mobile studios. The development of Paper Plains was supported by West Central Initiative, as part of their Live Wide Open program promoting belonging, stewardship, and pride of place in West Central Minnesota.

This is not your average paper: Anna and James make pulp from invasive grass. They harvest it from local parks, destroy the seeds and roots, then use the stems and leaves to make paper pulp. Finally, they add native prairie seeds to the mix on site at each event.

The ultimate product is a sheet of paper that can be directly planted in the ground—laying the groundwork for a tiny patch of prairie.

Before launching Paper Plains, Anna and James’s research led them to more fully learn about the impact of settler-colonialism on the prairie landscape.

“I did not understand the ethnobotany of a prairie and how destructive it was, how invasive species take over as a result of land clearing,” said Anna, referring to the practice of European colonizers clearing the prairies’ native species and introducing invasive plants.



Learn more about Paper Plains at [Ready Go](#).

“Part of [the work] of Paper Plains is to repair the harm done to Indigenous communities and honor the knowledge of those communities who have tended to these practices over centuries.”

—Anna Haglin

Artist and co-founder of Paper Plains

Repair also comes in the form of rural and urban solidarity work. Though Anna and James are now based out of the Twin Cities, they prioritize scheduling community events in rural communities. “I grew up in St. Peter—not tiny, but small enough and far away [from the Twin Cities], and my art center meant everything to me growing up. I’ve become a rural advocate. My job as an artist is to foster empathy for others. This project is a great way to learn about each other’s humanity.”

Ready Go

Ready Go is a resource from Springboard for the Arts that connects neighborhoods, non-profits, businesses and individuals to artist-created, mobile tools that are purpose-built to pique curiosity and prompt interaction. We’re grateful to count Paper Plains as a longtime member of our artist-led roster!



How artists repair the places we work and gather

Springboard for the Arts is rooted in place. As stewards of properties in both rural and urban communities, we seek to create and support environmentally healthy and community relevant spaces.

In 2021, Springboard opened its new Saint Paul building to the public, which sits within one of the most racially and economically diverse areas of the city.

Race and socioeconomic status play a central role in exacerbating environmental health disparities, including air quality, water quality, and access to green space. For example, in the immediate area where Springboard is located, the “tree equity” score is 44 out of 100, much lower than surrounding neighborhoods and one of the lowest scores in Saint Paul as a whole.

We are committed to being a part of reversing these trends. During the process of renovating what was once a former used car dealership into our office space and a multi-use community hall, we also installed solar panels on the roof and turned the former 50-car parking lot into a public green space with a pocket park, walking path, and a rainwater harvesting tank and system to conserve and tend our natural resources. Throughout our site, the work of artists are central to telling the story of this transformation.



Photo portraits on the Community Hall door by Ne-dah-ness Greene showcase each of the 11 Native nations that share Minnesota’s geography, including the Dakota and Anishinaabe communities who are the original stewards of this land.

The work of artists is represented throughout Springboard’s Saint Paul site and environmental footprint.



A community beacon

Artists **Ash Kubesh** and **Kao Lee Thao** repurposed the original Ford dealership sign that was destined for the landfill. Etched with a kaleidoscope of patterns, the Gathering Tree’s column and sign illuminate at night for neighbors along University Avenue.



Water collectors

Rooftop sculptures by Fergus Falls-based artist **Blayze Buseth**, founder and creator of the **Creation Shop**, depict playful original characters, called “Tom”, pouring water into basins together.



Welcome pathway

Artist **Sarah Agaton Howes** (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe) painted a sidewalk mural featuring Ojibwe floral designs. The mural mirrors the art around Springboard’s building, co-created with **Holly Young** (Dakota), incorporating Dakota and Ojibwe floral imagery.



Generating power

Springboard installed a second solar panel array in 2023, increasing the site’s capacity to provide 130% of the building’s electricity needs. **Surplus power goes back to the grid**, a symbol and act of renewal.

Cross sector partnerships engage artists as allies in water protection

Embedded within the mission of the Capitol Region Watershed District (CRWD) is an important reminder: "Everything drains to the Mississippi." This ethos guides CRWD's efforts to safeguard, manage, and enhance water resources within the District and the broader Mississippi River watershed.

Collaborating with CRWD, Springboard embarked on a project aimed at integrating sustainable water management practices into its new Saint Paul site, including the installation of a water cistern and rain garden.

CRWD's objective is to render water visible, as much of its urban watershed protection work occurs out of sight, underground, through storm sewers. By bringing water systems to the surface through various means, CRWD seeks to raise awareness of their importance.

"In our urban neighborhoods, we're actually much closer to water than many realize," shares Lindsay Schwantes, CRWD's Community Engagement Program Manager. "Our streets serve as conduits, essentially acting as streams that channel water into lakes and rivers. Unfortunately, they also transport pollution."

Through CRWD's Partner Grant program, artists and artist-led projects can play a role in education and outreach.

"Art can speak to people's beliefs and values and can be interpreted in many ways," shares Lindsay. "Artists can help us engage in new and creative ways that support our local water resources."



Acrylic water droplets designed by Ua Si Creative trace the path of water through Springboard's Community Hall.

"By nurturing a deeper connection between residents and their immediate water sources, we can inspire meaningful action and stewardship within our communities."

—Lindsay Schwantes

Community Engagement Program Manager at
Capitol Region Watershed District



Adopt a Drain

Storm drains flow directly to local lakes, rivers, and wetlands, acting as a conduit for trash and organic pollutants. **Adopt-a-Drain** asks Minnesota residents to adopt a storm drain in their neighborhood and keep it clear of leaves, trash, and other debris to reduce water pollution.



Sticker design by Sam Williams.

Artists shed light on water systems and sovereignty

Through a Partner Grant with Capitol Region Watershed District, Springboard worked with a team of artists to design and debut *Refraction*. Inspired by the movement of water, light, and water’s cultural significance, *Refraction* consists of three installations at Springboard’s Saint Paul site and an experiential film documenting a ceremonial water walk led by Sharon Day.

Each installation marks the path of rainwater as it collects and flows through Springboard’s rainwater harvesting system.

Ua Si Creative invited graphic designer, artist and environmentalist **Aleksandra Gurneau** (Stockbridge Munsee Ojibwe) to design and paint a mural on Springboard’s water cistern, which can store up to 3,400 gallons of rainwater and irrigates the landscape.

Aleksandra’s design highlights the Mississippi and Great Lakes riverways by interweaving Dakota star patterns and Anishinaabe floral patchwork conveying how the homelands of these Native tribes transcends so called state lines of Minnesota and Wisconsin and beyond. The patterning around the waterways shows Indigenous plants significant to both tribes.



The water cistern outside Springboard’s Saint Paul office.



Community elder Sharon Day leads the 2019 Water Walk, immersing community members in ways of holding sacred land, water, and our roles as relatives.



Regenerating prairie

Made by Paper Plains artists **Anna Haglin** and **James Kleiner**, each seed ball contains a mixture of handmade paper pulp and native seeds.



Making water visible

This set of stickers promote water conservation, stewardship, and protection, and were created by **Sam Williams** and **Jesus Ramirez**.



Finding your watershed

Sophie Wang’s zine illustrates the role and importance of watersheds and what we can do to promote and maintain them. [Download the zine!](#)



Mapping waterways

Last year, community members made paint from the Mississippi River bluffs and added plantable paper artwork to a pop-up wall installation of the local watershed.

Pick up these new resources at our Saint Paul & Fergus Falls offices and year-round events!

SECTION III

artists help us Reimagine

In addition to repairing past harms and connecting more closely with our places, artists help us see the places we inhabit from new perspectives and imagine new futures. What happens when we imagine? We gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the local ecosystems we interact with every day. And we become better stewards of the land so we can continue to care for the places we love, generation after generation.



Extraction to possibility: Reimagining a parking lot as a stage for connection

Springboard on Ice is an annual series of free artist-led winter events that transform a former parking lot into a public space for connection, joy, and community.

Led by founder and Artistic Director Deneane Richburg, **Brownbody** offers performances and skating lessons that aim to make ice skating more accessible Black audiences.

In the winter of 2023, Brownbody teamed up with Springboard for the Arts to bring ice skating to a new destination—a mini ice rink outside what was once a used car lot and is now home to Springboard’s Saint Paul offices and community space.

Springboard on Ice offers skaters of all ages and experience levels free skate rentals and free drop-in ice skating lessons from Brownbody’s instructors. The events also feature interactive artist-led activities like lessons with **Twin Cities Native Lacrosse** and metalworking with **WOW Mobile Metal Lab**.

“The community ice rink gives people a safe environment to try that’s close to them, and they don’t have to pay anything,” said Karyn Wilson, Brownbody’s Learn to Skate Director and Administrative and Operations Coordinator.



An instructor from Brownbody performing at *Springboard on Ice*, 2024.
Photo by Thai Phan-Quang.

"I think art expands possibilities. Ice is something that we see constantly in the winter here, but it can be used to make art too, right?"

—Karyn Wilson

Learn to Skate Director & Administrative and Operations Coordinator at Brownbody



Spotlighting Black artistry

Brownbody liberates Black artistry through dance, theater, and figure skating. Since 2007, they have created artistic work that offers honest and nuanced stories rooted in Blackness.



Passing on traditions

During the 2024 *Springboard on Ice* series, John Hunter from **Twin Cities Native Lacrosse** taught drop-in lacrosse mini-sessions.



Turning metal into art

WOW Mobile Metal Lab brought the heat in 2024 with metalworking lessons! Artist **Sara Hanson** transformed a former Metro Transit City Bus into a traveling foundry.



Inspiring wonder

In 2024, Minneapolis-based artist **Andrew Bentley** displayed his ice sculpture “Crystal Trail” at *Springboard on Ice*, featuring 30 ice plants made with molds and innovative welding techniques.



Sparking sustainability: Mending, fermentation, and trash as fashion

Sustainability starts with small actions. Through partnerships with Springboard’s rural office, artists sparked conversations around consumption, waste, and creative sustainable practices in Fergus Falls.

To bring awareness to the fast fashion industry and showcase community creativity, Springboard partnered with The Kaddatz Galleries, and Otter Tail County Solid Waste in 2019 to host the first ever **Trashion Fashion show** in Fergus Falls, MN.

Teams were invited to design a garment out of trash and recycling items—then model it, runway style, during a public event—with prizes awarded for First Place, Audience Choice, Best Dressed, and more.

In 2022 and 2023, Springboard developed and launched a seven-workshop series called **Sustainability Studios** presented in partnership with Otter Tail County Solid Waste and the West Central Initiative. Seven Otter Tail County artists and community workers facilitated workshops in Springboard’s downtown Fergus Falls space that invited community members to learn small but significant skills that promote sustainability.



Photos from the first annual Trashion Fashion Show, 2019.



Creative mending

Fiber artist **Kristi Kuder** gave examples of how to creatively mend, reimagine, and refurbish clothing or other fabric items.



Preserving local food

Local "fermentista" **Katy Olson** demonstrated how preserve fresh produce by making gut-healthy foods like Kimchee, Sriracha, Basil Ferment and sauerkraut.



Making cleaning more green

Cedar Walters shared how to properly use household chemicals and mix up non-toxic cleaners with common pantry ingredients.



Transforming old materials

Participants traded supplies at this community craft swap, and local artist **Amanda Callahan** showed folks how to reuse materials for Valentine's.

Jess Torgerson



Jess Torgerson is a visual artist who works with trash as their primary medium. Formerly trained as a printmaker and tattoo artist, Jess transitioned to working with trash as they became more involved with the Precious Plastics Lab.

Reflecting on the power of art in their own life, Jess emphasizes the role artists play in conveying intricate concepts in relatable ways.

“I’m a different person because of the art that I’ve experienced over my lifetime. Artists have a unique ability to address complex ideas and make them more approachable and understand them from a different perspective.”

The idea that art can catalyze repair is woven into Jess’s creative practice. “I hope that when people view trash sculptures, that they rethink what they throw away. I hope [my work] inspires people to be more thoughtful about what they buy in the first place.”

Jess is an active member of an artist cohort dedicated to crafting projects that uplift the narrative and significance of guaranteed income, particularly for rural artists.

Teaming up with fellow artist Erika Frikken, Jess spearheaded *For the Birds*, an artistic installation showcasing a striking 4-foot black bird sculpted from repurposed materials, including vibrant red vinyl records for its eyes, alongside a collection of 60 birdhouses crafted from locally salvaged wood.



“For the Birds: a means to create, not waste” on view at Kaddatz Galleries in Fergus Falls, MN. 2024.

“As an artist, I stopped making art out of virgin materials. I can practice and experiment more without worrying that I’m wasting material if something doesn’t turn out quite right. It’s freeing.”

—Jess Torgerson

Artist and Artists Respond cohort member

Artists at the center of narrative change

Another way artists create change is by shifting narratives. To learn about artists’ work helping to engage communities, change behaviors, and uplift new perspectives, visit [Artists Respond](#).



Artwork by Kandace Creel Falcón.



“Year of Play” on Lake Alice, Fergus Falls, MN.

A Path Forward

Reconnecting with our landscapes, repairing our relationship with consumption, and reimagining the places we love are all big undertakings that start with small, but powerful, actions.

At Springboard, one of our guiding principles is “think big, start small.” We are optimistic in the belief that the boldness and creativity of artists can address our communities’ most pressing challenges. And we know that this work starts through lots of little projects in our own neighborhoods and communities.

We hope that the stories in this report have provided you with inspiration for how small, local actions can add up to powerful change. We all have a role in this work. Whether you are an artist, community organizer, teacher, thinker, caretaker, or neighbor, we can all actively tend to the places we love.

Artists’ skills, processes, and creativity are vital ingredients to this work. No matter how you choose to get involved, each of our actions helps us build towards a healthier, more vibrant, and more sustainable future.

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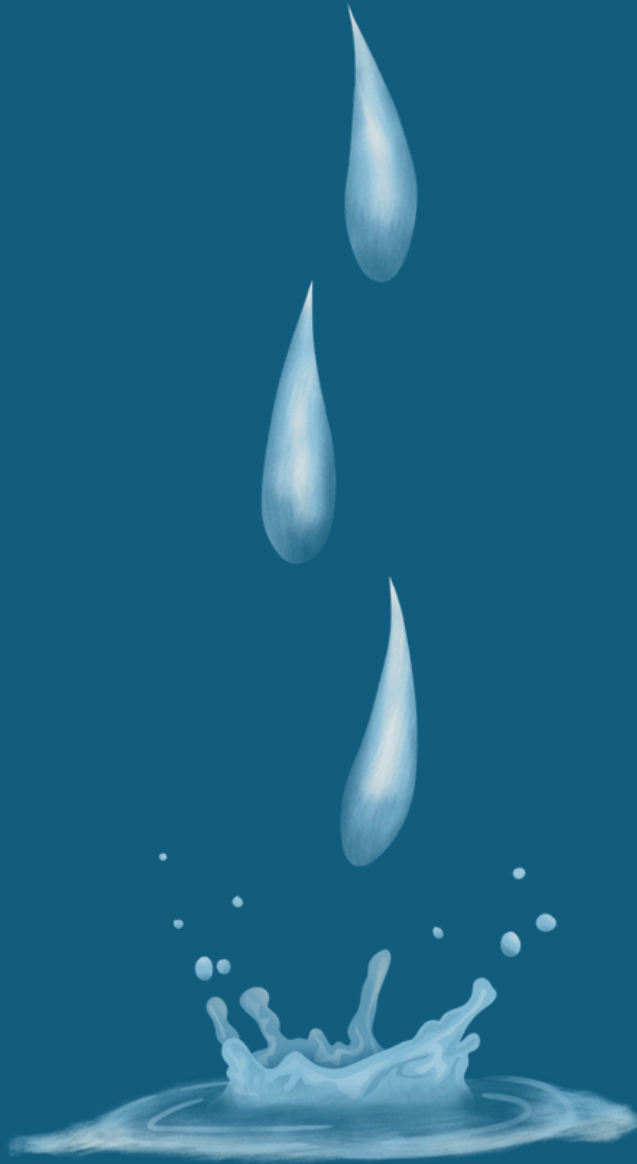


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