

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh



Russ Hefty retires from career with Madison Parks

Anita Weier

As Conservation Resource Supervisor for Madison Parks, Russ Hefty aggressively managed conservation areas. Recently retired from the post after 25 years, he can't stop himself from continuing his dedicated work as a volunteer for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at its Mt. Vernon property. He also plans to do some work at Donald Park near Mt. Vernon. And in January, he was elected to the board of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Russ additionally has changed the "lollypop landscaping" around his recently purchased home by adding rain gardens and native plants to the quarter-acre site. Hiring a contractor to do much of the work, he also dug up a clay area and added sand to create a sand prairie.

"These are all native plants to attract birds, butterflies and pollinators," he said. "A couple of neighbors have asked for advice on plantings. I enjoy in-person conservation and teaching people."

He also organizes outings for the Madison Area Outdoor Group, a meet-up organization.

"I live four blocks from the Badger State Trail, so I can travel around by bike. That and gardening keep me out of trouble," Russ said.

Russ's interest in plant restoration began long ago and never wavered. By the time he graduated from Verona High School, he had decided on a major in horticulture with an emphasis on natural resources at the UW-Madison. In the summers, he served as a Madison Audubon Society intern for prairie restorations at Goose Pond. After receiving a B.A. in 1980, he was hired by Si Widstrand as a seasonal conservation ranger for Madison Parks for three seasons. He became a conservation lead worker when another employee left, but later bumping by those with more seniority sent him to the Madison Water Utility as a water meter installer and then a laborer, jobs not nearly as enjoyable to Russ.

But Si was ultimately able to create a full-time conservation maintenance position that Russ filled. And when Si became Parks Planner, Russ became Conservation Resource Supervisor. Russ was hired in that position in



Russ shares his knowledge of wetlands on one of many tours he led (and continues to lead) at Cherokee Marsh. Photo by Janet Battista.

1991, and retired in January 2016 with the same title. He also was a caretaker at Owen Conservation Park for 22 years.

"We were able to be more focused and aggressive in land management of conservation areas," Russ said. "We made good progress as we embraced the use of mechanical equipment," he recalled. As more money was put in the Parks Department budget for this work, Russ was proud to

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Russ Hefty *(continued from page 1)*

be able to do habitat remediation in Cherokee Marsh.

Recently, he was able to create nesting places for red-headed woodpeckers though a few people have criticized his use of lopped off trees to do so. However, Russ said the birding community was thrilled and he personally received no negative comments.

Another measure criticized by some park users was ripping up a popular wooden boardwalk in the North Unit of Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. The boardwalk was ultimately replaced with two shorter and more easily maintained metal walkways while eliminating the middle, connecting portion to protect existing and newly established wetland plants.

Russ also was proud to be able to close drainage ditches in an area of the Cherokee Marsh, to restore the natural hydrology by raising the water table. He regards that measure as closing up “a bunch of wounds.”

Additionally, periodic burns in the Cherokee conservation area also have helped to restore an oak savanna and keep it healthy.

In Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park’s South Unit, the city has put in two stormwater ponds and is planning another. “We got rid of invasive plants and stopped erosion and flooding in what had been a sand and gravel quarry,” he said. “Thousands of wetland plants were put in with the help of volunteers in an Earth Day project.”

Russ remains frustrated by high water levels in the Yahara Lakes, which he said led to erosion so that peat bogs broke off from the shoreline and floated away. “Sedge meadows



At 2015’s Bird City Celebration, Paul Noeldner (left) recognized Russ on behalf of the Bird City partners for his many achievements. (Photo by Barb Noeldner)

were floating. That was not normal.” He said. “From the mouth of the Yahara River to Cherokee, records show that more than one square mile of wetland disappeared since 1850.”

Russ and his crews have established native plants to hold soil, but he says that lake levels must be lowered. “We need leadership from the university community so that we can experiment by lowering water levels slightly in the summertime,” he said. “If we don’t do something, more wetland will be lost.”



The Parks conservation crew conducted a successful prescribed prairie burn in the North Unit on March 21. Photo by Jan Axelson.



On March 29, the crew again took advantage of favorable conditions and burned in the South Unit around the stormwater ponds. Photo by Jan Axelson.

Housing Approved next to Cherokee Golf Course

Jan Axelson

On March 1, the Madison Common Council approved a plat for a new 6-acre development just north of the entrance to the Cherokee Country Club's clubhouse. The development, from Cherokee Park, Inc. (CPI), will be called The Turn at Cherokee and will have 16 residential lots along a new street that will extend from the clubhouse entrance road on the south end to N. Sherman Ave. on the north end.

The residences are expected to average 1900 sq ft with 600-sq-ft garages. CPI intends to develop the site this spring. The proposed development is consistent with the Cherokee Special Area Plan passed by the Common Council in 2007.

Just north of the development, a new pond will capture stormwater runoff from the development to allow sand, dirt, and other pollutants to settle out. The City of Madison plans to route storm water from the wetlands east of N. Sherman Ave. into the pond as well. The pond will drain



The development will be just off N. Sherman Ave., next to the Cherokee clubhouse and golf course. Photo by Jan Axelson.

into the golf course's ditch system, which in turn drains into the upper Yahara River. The final storm water plan must be approved by the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission.

New stormwater pond proposed

The Madison Engineering Division, in cooperation with Madison Parks, has proposed a new stormwater pond just north of Wheeler Rd. at Bonner Rd. The pond will be similar to, but smaller than, the ponds recently added north of Wheeler Rd at Ilene Ln and Delawere Blvd.

The pond will capture stormwater from the neighborhoods to the south and will drain into the existing ditch system in the conservation park and then into the Yahara River. The project will also restore a wetland area adjacent to the pond. The existing trail in that area will remain.

The pond's purpose is to capture stormwater to allow soil, leaves, sand, grass clippings, and other pollutants to settle out, resulting in cleaner water in the Yahara River and downstream lakes.

Find out more at the public information session:

Monday, April 11, 6:00 pm

Black Hawk Middle School, Library Media Center (LMC)
1402 Wyoming Way

Thank you

Our thanks to member Jeff Havens for his donation of \$25 in memory of Dan Miller.

Bird and Nature Festival to feature live birds

See a live snowy owl and a peregrine falcon from Hoo's Woods Raptor Center at the 2016 Madison FUN Bird and Nature Festival.

Also: take a hayride, go on a bird and nature walk, help plant a tree, explore pond life, play bird bingo, bouncy house, musical entertainment, and more. We'll be there along with other local nature-focused groups with information and activities.

Sunday, April 17, 1 pm – 4 pm (live birds of prey 1 – 2 pm)

Warner Park Shelter, 1625 Northport Dr

cityofmadison.com/parks/activities/BirdCity.cfm

A few spots remain on our tour, **Paddle the Upper Yahara River in Cherokee Marsh, Saturday, May 21, 8–11 am.** Paddle from the upper Yahara River downstream into Lake Mendota, looking for birds and learning about the natural history. Explore springs, sunken tamarack forests and floating sedge meadows along the way. You must bring your own canoe or kayak. Leader: Russ Hefty. Cost is \$20 + membership in the Natural Resources Foundation (discount for new members). A portion of the fee benefits the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund. To register, visit: wisconservation.org

Events calendar

Don't miss out on last-minute events that don't make it into this calendar. To receive updates about events and volunteer opportunities, sign up at:

CherokeeMarsh.org

Bird and nature walks

Sunday, April 3 with Naturalist Guide Dale Grimm **AND**
Sunday, May 1 with Naturalist Guide Nelson Eisman **AND**
First Sunday of EVERY month
ALWAYS 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit.

Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, Madison Parks, and Madison Audubon Society. If you have questions, contact Paul Noeldner at (608) 698-0104 or paul_noeldner@hotmail.com.

Evening at Cherokee Marsh

Friday, April 15, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

We are likely to see cranes, observe the courtship flight of woodcock and snipe, and see several spring migrants. Binoculars recommended. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and Madison Audubon Society.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Garlic mustard pull

Saturday, April 9, 10 am - 1 pm

Make room for native wildflowers by helping to pull garlic mustard on the hill. No experience needed. Sponsored by the Madison Area Weed Warriors.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Help with a prescribed burn

Tues, April 12, fire starts at 10 am, get there early, may work through lunch

Bring drinking water. Wear fire-safe clothing (no synthetics) and a hat. Sign up and check for cancellation and rain date information by calling Wayne Pauly's voice mail at 608-245-6898. Sponsored by Dane County Parks.

Yahara Heights Park, Caton Ln entrance.

FUN Bird and Nature Festival

Sunday, April 17, 1 pm – 4 pm

Details on page 3

Warbler walks

Wed., May 4, 6 am – 8 am

AND

Wed., May 11, 6 am – 8 am

Our warbler walks are so much fun we've scheduled two of them this year. Join us for an early morning walk to look for colorful warblers and other spring migrants. Binoculars recommended. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and Madison Audubon Society.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Butterflies of Cherokee Marsh

Saturday, June 25, 10:00 am – 12:00 noon

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Tour the marsh by canoe

Saturday, July 9, 9 am – noon

mscr.org/our-programs/outdoor-adventures

Locations

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit. 6098 N. Sherman Ave. Travel north on N. Sherman Ave to the main parking lot at the end of the gravel road.

Yahara Heights Park, Caton Lane entrance. Heading north on HWY 113/Northport Dr., just past HWY M, turn right on River Rd., then right on Riverview Dr., which dead-ends at Caton Ln. For volunteer events only, drive into the park from the end of Caton Ln.



Friends of Cherokee Marsh

PO Box 3390

Madison WI 53704

info@CherokeeMarsh.org

CherokeeMarsh.org

To protect, preserve, and restore the beauty, value, and health of the Cherokee Marsh and upper Yahara River watershed.

Directors

Jan Axelson (President)

Timothy Baker (Vice President)

Janet Battista (Secretary)

Dana Erlandsen

Russ Hefty

Jim Krause

Lesleigh Luttrell (Treasurer)

Paul Noeldner

Justin Sargent

Dick Walker

Anita Weier

Dorothy Wheeler

Advisor

Don Hammes

Membership and contribution form

YES! I want to be a Friend of Cherokee Marsh.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh are dedicated to protecting, preserving, and restoring the beauty, value, and health of Cherokee Marsh and the upper Yahara River watershed. Your contribution of time, talent, or funds will help preserve and restore the crucial wetland ecosystem of Cherokee Marsh.

Memberships are per calendar year. New memberships paid after June 30 are valid through the current and following year.

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Mallard \$50
- Osprey \$100
- Sandhill Crane \$250
- Great Blue Heron \$500

Additional donation \$ _____

Additional donation \$ _____ in honor of _____

Additional donation \$ _____ in memory of _____

Additional donation to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund:

- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- \$ _____

Find out more about the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund at CherokeeMarsh.org/conserve

Additional donation to fund transportation to bring schoolchildren to the marsh for field studies:

- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- \$ _____

Name _____

Family member(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____ Second (family member) Email _____

Phone _____ Don't publicize my financial support.

I'm interested in helping with: Field work Publicity Tours Education Board/Committees

Other _____

Please mail this form and payment to:

Friends of Cherokee Marsh, PO Box 3390, Madison WI 53704

Thank you for joining us in our effort to protect this valuable resource!

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh is a Federal tax-exempt charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.