

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh

If you restore it, they will come: red-headed woodpeckers nesting in restored oak savanna

Reprinted with permission from Come Out and Play, Madison Parks' newsletter.

Madison Parks' initiative to restore the oak savannas in Cherokee Marsh is proving to be successful.

In 2011, Madison Parks staff embarked on an ambitious oak savanna restoration project in Cherokee Marsh. The goal of the project is to restore the savanna to a scattering of oak trees, recreating the ecology that the Native Americans who lived on the land centuries ago would have experienced. By reducing the canopy coverage from 100% to 50–75%, positive results are already being seen.

Another goal of the project was to create an environment that would attract animals, like the red-headed woodpecker, which were incapable of living in the oak woodlands at Cherokee Marsh prior to the project. Due to decreased cattle grazing in the area, the habitat of the redheaded woodpecker had been lost, resulting in a 70% population decline. The red-headed woodpecker is listed as a species of concern in Wisconsin, making the success of this project even more notable.

The altered canopy coverage resulting from the project's harvest has created an environment with everything the woodpeckers need to thrive. The open canopy allows them to fly through the trees to catch insects, and the open understory allows them to feed on the ground. The trees that were saved from being cut serve as great nesting and perching sites for the woodpeckers as well. Red-headed woodpeckers nesting in the oak savannas have been the greatest sign of the restoration's success, especially so early in the project. Due to the increased amount of light reaching the ground, wildflowers are thriving in this area. Cranes and bluebirds have also been spotted due to the newly enriched ecology of the oak savanna.

After putting forth a plan to the Madison Parks Commission, Madison Parks was awarded an \$18,000 grant from the Madison Community Foundation in 2012. This is part of a total \$120,000 put forward to restore a total of 40 acres of land throughout Madison. Madison Parks worked with a conservation crew from Operation Fresh Start,



A red-headed woodpecker brings a bug to the nest cavity.
Photo by Arlene Koziol.

an organization that employs youth and adults to work on conservation projects and build new homes in Dane County, while they develop useful career skills.

The process of restoring the savanna at Cherokee Marsh began with eliminating exotic shrubs from the savanna using forestry mowers. Because this process doesn't kill the plants, the area also needs to be treated with an herbicide to remove the unwanted plants.

continued on page 2

Inside This Issue

If you restore it, they will come: red-headed woodpeckers nesting in restored oak savanna	1
Friends are volunteer stewards for Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area	2
Butterflies don't disappoint on field trip	3
Operation Fresh Start crew completes term	3
Events calendar	4
Membership and contribution form	5

Woodpeckers

Continued from page 1

The next step in the project was to go through the area during the winter to mechanically harvest any trees that were bigger than 4 inches in diameter, but smaller than 14–16 inches. Using heavy machinery, park contractors harvested trees that fell in this range, cutting from the top down. Then, using a wood chipper, the trees were chopped into small pieces and spread over the ground. Sapling hickories and oaks that were reproducing were saved, as well as native Hawthorn shrubs. Large oaks and standing dead trees were also saved because they are an important part of the wildlife’s habitat, creating homes for birds.

The savanna was then set on fire in a controlled burn to eliminate unwanted plants. The Oaks are able to survive the burn, due to their thick bark. Burning the savanna also benefits native plants as they are able to grow back, unlike exotic plants which are eliminated, making Cherokee Marsh look more like it would have centuries ago to the Native Americans on the land.

The last step in the process is to treat the exotic plants that remained with an herbicide treatment. These treatments will continue this year and possibly through next year until the exotic shrubs are under control, before planting in new shrubs and plants.



Red-headed woodpeckers favor open woods like this area in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. Photo by Arlene Koziol.

A similar process has been done previously in other Madison parks, but this project was the first one to use tree-harvesting equipment. Based on the success of this project, Madison Parks is hoping to implement restoration projects in other parks throughout Madison.

Friends are volunteer stewards for Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) designates 325 acres in Cherokee Marsh as the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area (SNA) because it is an outstanding example of one of Wisconsin’s native landscapes of natural communities.

Friends of Cherokee Marsh volunteers have been working in the Cherokee Marsh SNA since 2012. Now it’s official—we’ve signed an agreement with the WDNR to be the SNA’s volunteer stewards. Our activities will include removing invasive plants such as giant reed grass (phragmites), aspen, and purple loosestrife from the high-quality wetlands of the SNA.

The WDNR, Dane County, and City of Madison each own a portion of the SNA. To view the Cherokee Marsh SNA from Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park’s North Unit, climb the hill to the concrete pad and look east toward HWY CV.

If you’re interested in helping out with volunteer activities in the SNA, contact Jan at info@cherokeemarsh.org or 608 215 0426.



Volunteers Jim Hughes, Jim Krause, and Jan Axelson take a break from girdling aspen in the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area. Photo by Janet Battista.

Butterflies don't disappoint on field trip

Reprinted with permission from the Badger Butterflyer, the newsletter of the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association.

On June 28's butterfly walk, 25 participants observed 17 species. We found several Baltimore Checkerspot, Bronze Copper, Banded Hairstreaks and Hackberry Emperor. The Emperor landed on one participant (as they often do). A Wandering Glider (dragonfly) flew overhead. They are the world champion insect migrant (traveling 12,000 miles in 4 generations in a yearly round-trip between India and South Africa over the Indian Ocean!) Thanks to Stan Rehm for spotting butterflies and providing a photo of the Bronze Copper.

Thanks also to Jan Axelson for information about Cherokee Marsh and the prairies. Leader Karl Legler rescued a Baltimore from a spider web. When the butterfly was released it flew up, touched the leader's nose then flew off. That was a real "butterfly-kiss"!



A Bronze Copper butterfly feeds on brown-eyed Susan at Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. Photo courtesy of the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association.

Operation Fresh Start crew completes term

Maybe you've seen the youths hard at work in the park. Once again this year, a crew from Operation Fresh Start (OFS) worked all summer at Cherokee Marsh and other conservation parks around Madison. Their work at Cherokee Marsh included girdling aspen trees, pulling garlic mustard, and repairing boardwalks. The crew's final day is August 5.

OFS is a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive employment and training services to local youth. A partnership with the City of Madison funds the crew at Cherokee Marsh.



The boardwalk and belly boards at the north end of the North Unit were suffering serious frost heave before Operation Fresh Start's repair work. Photo by Jan Axelson

Learn about the Yahara watershed and its future

The Water Sustainability and Climate project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has a new blog about the Yahara watershed and the interactions among its people, land, water, and climate. Find it at yaharawsc.wordpress.com

Keep in touch!

"Like" our Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/friends.of.cherokee.marsh

Join our email group:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/cherokeemarsh



If you hear wichety-wichety-wichety, look for a common yellowthroat like this one. These warblers, which nest in Cherokee Marsh, favor wet areas with thick, shrubby vegetation. Photo by Arlene Koziol.

Events calendar

Don't miss out on last-minute events that don't make it into this calendar. For the latest event information, *Like* us on Facebook, join our email group, or visit **CherokeeMarsh.org**.

If you want to be added to our email notification list for volunteer events, email info@cherokeemarsh.org.

Upper Yahara River paddle tour

Saturday, August 2, 8:00 am - 11 am

Bring your paddlecraft and tour the upper Yahara River at Cherokee Marsh. Paddle through the fragrant thickets of American Lotus looking for a variety of wetland birds and other wildlife. Led by Russ Hefty, Conservation Resource Supervisor for Madison Parks. Sponsored by Madison Parks, the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, and Madison Audubon.

School Road Boat Landing, 5002 School Rd. Heading north from Madison on Northport Drive/HWY 113, turn right onto School Rd. Where the road curves right onto Wheeler Rd. take an immediate left into Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. Follow the gravel road to the boat landing.

Monthly bird and nature walks

Sunday, Aug 3, 1:30 – 3:00 pm

Sunday, Sept 7, 1:30 – 3:00 pm

AND

First Sunday of every month

Free, family-friendly bird and nature walks. On the August 3 walk, enjoy summer prairie blossoms and learn about the bluebird trail and help look for nesting bluebirds and other birds that benefit from habitat restoration and nest box projects.

Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, Madison Parks, and Madison Audubon Society. Contact Paul Noeldner at 608-698-0104

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.

Prairie seed collecting

Thursday, Sept 18, 9 am - noon

Help collect seeds of prairie flowers for use in restorations in county parks. Wear long pants and long sleeved shirt. Bring drinking water. Gloves and pruning shears will be available; bring your own if you prefer. Contact Ron Endres, 608 224-3601. Sponsored by Dane County Parks.

Yahara Heights County Park, Caton Ln entrance. Heading north from downtown Madison on HWY 113/Northport Dr., just past HWY M, turn right on River Rd., then right on Riverview Dr., and right on Caton Ln. For volunteer events only, drive into the park from the end of Caton Ln.

Phragmites bundling

Bundle and cut invasive giant reed grass in the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area, Friday mornings, mid-Aug through Sept. For details, contact Jan at info@cherokeemarsh.org or 608 215-0426.

Thank you to Anna Spengler for her gift of \$50 to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund in memory of Andrew Inman.

To donate or find out more about the Cherokee Marsh Conservation fund, see

CherokeeMarsh.org/conserve



Friends of Cherokee Marsh

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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

Janet Battista (Vice President)

Dana Erlandsen

Kyle Lindemer

Lesleigh Luttrell (Treasurer)

Paul Noeldner

Justin Sargent

Muriel Simms

Dick Walker

Dorothy Wheeler (Secretary)

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 Osprey \$100
 Family \$25 Sandhill Crane \$250
 Mallard \$50 Great Blue Heron \$500
 Additional donation \$ _____
 Additional donation \$ _____ in honor of _____
 Additional donation \$ _____ in memory of _____

Here is my additional donation to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund.

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

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

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.