

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh

Dane County receives accepted offer to obtain upper Yahara River parcel

Jan Axelson

On May 7, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced that Dane County had an accepted Offer to Purchase for a parcel bordering the upper Yahara River along HWY 19. See page 2 for a map that shows the parcel.

This is the statement of support we sent to the county board chair and to members of two committees scheduled to vote on the purchase: Environment, Agriculture, and Natural Resources and Personnel and Finance.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh enthusiastically support Dane County's proposed acquisition of 81 acres from Bollig Farm Property LLC along the upper Yahara River in the Towns of Windsor and Burke.

The Dane County 2012–2017 Parks and Open Space Plan included this parcel in the Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area due to its value as a resource at the headwaters of the Yahara chain of lakes.

The land is particularly valuable because it adjoins the WDNR's Cherokee Marsh State Fishery Area and includes river shoreline east of the Fishery Area and also upstream toward the environmental corridor of the Village of DeForest's Yahara River water trail.

The acquisition will offer opportunities for paddling, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other nature-based recreation.

Public ownership will allow restoring of shoreline buffers to reduce erosion, lessen downstream flooding, decrease phosphorus and other pollutants entering the river, and provide food and shelter for fish, birds, and other wildlife.

We ask for your support in acquiring this important property for Dane County and its waters.

Jan Axelson

on behalf of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh Board of Directors

The Environment, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Committee approved the purchase unanimously on May 26. The Personnel and Finance Committee votes on June 1. The county board must also approve the purchase.



This view of the proposed purchase is from HWY 19 looking north and east. Photo by Jan Axelson.



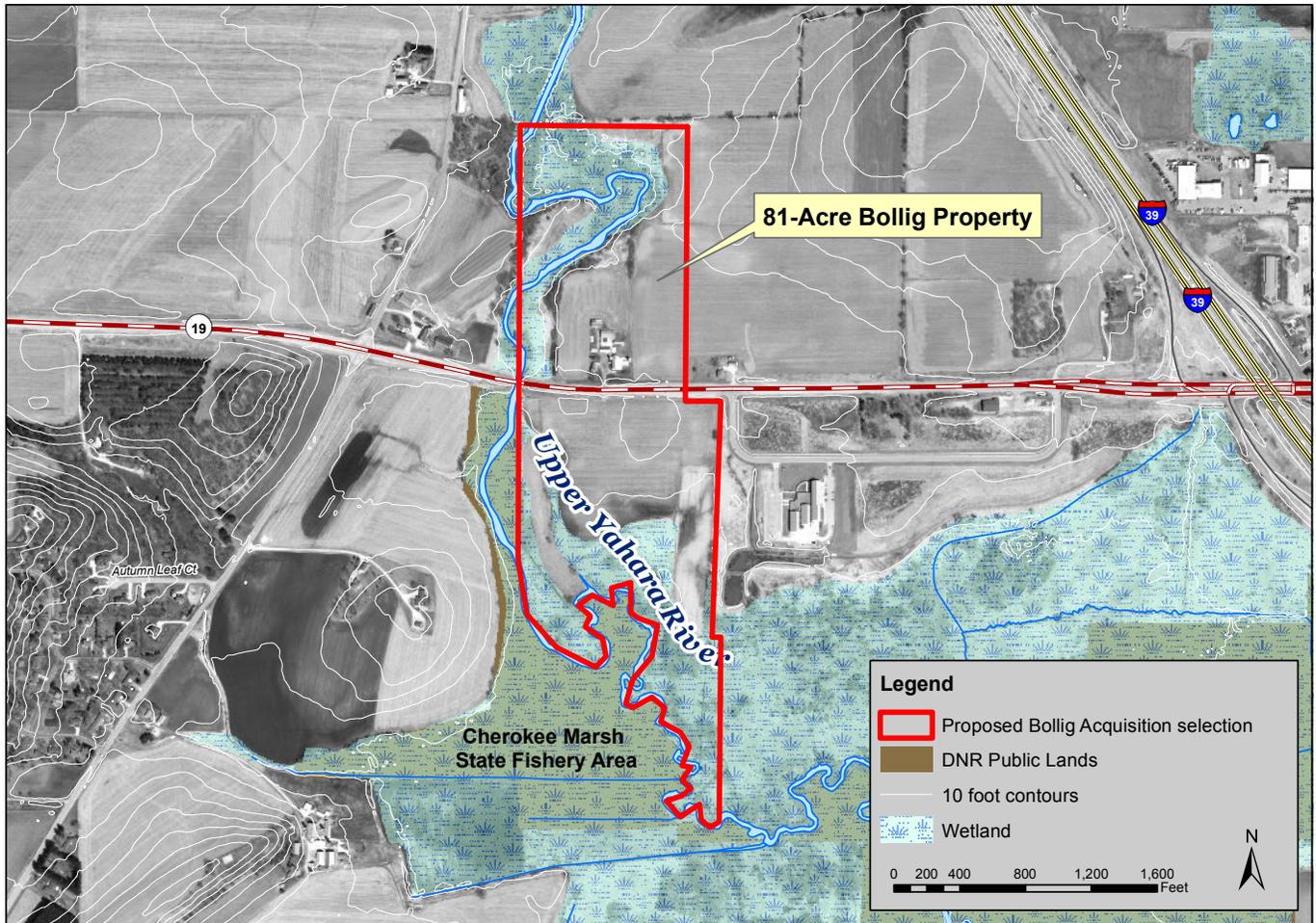
Bird and nature walk news!

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Proposed Bollig Farm Property LLC Acquisition



This map shows the 81-acre parcel proposed for purchase by Dane County. Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park is downstream from the parcel. Map courtesy of Dane County.

Bird and nature walks to feature naturalist guides

This month begins a new era in our monthly bird and nature walks. Starting in June, each walk will have a trained naturalist guide or other expert leading the walk.

As we've reported, in January, 2014, we began a program of monthly walks at Cherokee Marsh. The brainchild of Friends Director Paul Noeldner, the walks have become a popular way to explore the marsh with folks who share an interest in the birds and nature or just like to get outdoors and explore.

(The program, tied to the City of Madison's Bird City initiative, includes walks at three other parks as well, with more to come; see the Madison Parks website for more information.)

Thus far, our walks have been led by volunteers who know the marsh and its wildlife. To add variety and new sources of knowledge, each walk will now have an additional expert guide. For many of the walks, we are tapping into the pool of the Madison Metropolitan School District's trained naturalist guides.

All walks are the **first Sunday of the month at 1:30 pm** at **Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit, 6098 N. Sherman Ave.** Here is the lineup for June and July.

Restoring for red-headed woodpeckers with Russ Hefty
(June 7) In 2014, three pairs of red-headed woodpeckers nested in recently restored oak savanna at Cherokee Marsh, and the birds have been spotted again this year. View the nesting sites and learn about the restoration project that attracted these colorful birds. Russ Hefty has been involved in Madison Parks Conservation for 30 years and has helped restore native habitat with innovative techniques.

Frogs at Oak Pond with Nelson Eisman
(July 5) Look for frogs at Oak Pond, which features a "belly board" for up-close encounters with marsh life. Take dip samples to see what other amazing creatures make their home in the marsh's wetlands. Nelson Eisman is a Madison Metropolitan School District naturalist guide who leads schoolchildren in field studies at Cherokee Marsh.

Explore Yahara Heights Park with new brochure

Erika Zar

Grab your hiking shoes and explore Yahara Heights County Park with a new trail guide! The tri-fold brochure and map, which includes interpretive notes and park highlights, was the capstone project of my Wisconsin Master Naturalist certification. I completed both the trail guide and the class in mid-April.

The map is arriving just in time for summer recreation season, but seeds for the project were planted in winter, after I relocated from downtown to the north side. As a newcomer to the community, I was eager to explore my marsh-adjacent neighborhood for good birding spots and happened upon Yahara Heights while out on a chilly walk in January.

To my delight the park includes an out-and-back hiking trail through prairie, woodland and wetland areas—perfect for some well-rounded nature therapy, and only a mile from my doorstep.

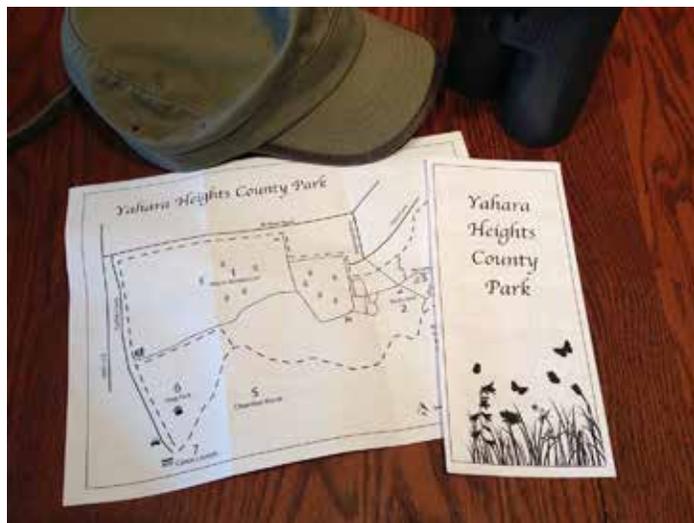
Around the same time as this discovery I began a several-months-long project to become a certified Wisconsin Master Naturalist. I was already a volunteer with Madison Audubon, but a friend alerted me to this certification, which would undoubtedly take my volunteer career to the next level.

The course was a welcome way to stay connected to nature during the dark winter months. Our class of 12 students met with instructor Jared McGovern at the UW Platteville campus for four sessions of eight hours each. Classes focused on Wisconsin ecosystems and natural history and included exciting field trips in and around the driftless area and Mississippi River. We touched on citizen science, interpretive techniques, and stewardship practices by trying a little of each.

Over the course of the class I needed to complete a final project to become officially certified. When the instructor mentioned we could choose interpretive education such as brochures, my mind leapt immediately to Yahara Heights County Park. Maybe I could create an interpretive guide for my favorite new neighborhood park!

A search online found no mention of a map, and upon reaching out to the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, president Jan Axelson greeted me with cheerful enthusiasm for the project.

One sunny March Saturday, Jan Axelson and Jim Hughes took me on a tour of the trails, generously donating their afternoon to pointing out highlights and sharing stories of the park's history. They also outlined the recent prairie restoration efforts led by County Naturalist Wayne Pauly and introduced me to the woodland section which includes two prehistoric spirit mounds—only recently made visible by thicket removal by volunteers.



This new brochure for Yahara Heights County Park includes a trail map and more. Photo by Erika Zar.

After the tour, Jim and Jan sent me related maps including hand drawn diagrams and coordinates for the mounds. With a few more visits on my own, walking the trail using GPS, and learning how to examine the park's features with Google Earth, I began to sketch the map and compile a list of highlights. The brochure was designed to include a trail map; locations for the dog park, parking, and canoe launch; diagrams and locations of the mounds; and a few nature notes for good measure.

A few revisions later, with more help from Jan and Jim, I sent a copy to County Parks, who responded with their blessing and some high-resolution image files to give the brochure a more professional look.

The final product, which will be updated as the park expands and changes over time, is available for download at cherokeemarsh.org/visit

Information about the Wisconsin Master Naturalist program can be found at wimasternaturalist.org

To visit Yahara Heights, travel north from Madison on HWY 113/Northport Dr. Just past the intersection with HWY M in Westport, turn right onto River Rd then immediate right onto Catfish Ct. A sign marks the trailhead.



Look for the trailhead sign off Catfish Ct at Yahara Heights. Photo by Erika Zar.

Token Creek project improves water quality

Jim Krause

The Token Creek watershed is a 27 square mile area that extends north to the Dane-Columbia County border, east to Sun Prairie, and south to Cherokee Marsh. Token Creek is the single largest source of water to Lake Mendota, flowing into the Yahara River through Cherokee Marsh.

The headwaters of Token Creek are located at the Town of Windsor's Elmer and Edna Culver Springs Conservancy and consist of a series of several large springs and boils, with the creek meandering some 7 miles into the Dane County Token Creek Park. These are the largest natural springs in southern Wisconsin, and they discharge pure cold water at a flow rate of 3300 gallons per minute and as such, provide an ideal habitat for brook trout if allowed to flow unimpeded.

In 1861, Token Creek was dammed to power a grist mill to grind wheat for area farmers, and the mill was closed in 1945. The dam broke in 1994, and as a result of the dedication of many local and state wide stakeholders, a restoration project was planned, funded, and partially executed.

The initial stages of the Token Creek restoration project involved removing the dam from Token Creek to eliminate the fish barrier and re-meandering the stream over a 5-year period to establish an active brook trout fishery.



Boils and springs are visible immediately south of the Token Creek headwaters. Photo by Jim Krause.

The restoration project also funded work on redirecting the Token Creek headwater spring flow of Culver Springs from its impounded state to a free-flowing cascade into Token Creek via re-shaping of existing berms. The headwaters site was cleared of scrub trees and extensive

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The streambanks above the original grist mill location have been restored. On the left is a recent restoration. On the right is a more mature restoration. Photos by Jim Krause.

Token Creek *(continued from page 4)*

undergrowth, and the banks were stabilized, seeded, and mulched. A 3000 cubic yard capacity silt trap was created within the Dane County Token Park in order to capture sediment that was mobilized from dam removal.

At this year's Annual Meeting of the Token Creek Watershed Association (TCWA) held on April 22, Scot Stewart, fisheries biologist from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), reviewed the history of the restoration project and provided an update on recent activity. From a fisheries biology perspective, the restoration project has already been a success as there is a significant brook trout population that arose from 10 years of planting of fish hatchery brook trout brood stock.

Storm water runoff and sediment control are key for the future of the Token Creek Watershed. Additional habitat restoration is important as well. In 2011, the County of Dane prepared a Master Plan for Token Creek County Park (7 year horizon) that involves creek and habitat improvement and other park upgrades, citing an opportunity to "remove dredge ponds and narrow stream near entrance" to enhance this portion of Token Creek.

The Token Creek Watershed Association has worked with the WDNR, Dane County, and several municipalities in and around the surrounding area to remove dams and establish conservancies along Token Creek. This purchase of and repurposing of land is crucial for a suburban watershed that impacts the water quality of Lake Mendota and our other Madison area lakes.

Collaborative efforts like these by several environmental and other interested groups throughout the Madison area promote the value of the entire Madison Lakes watershed to landowners, other stakeholders and to the general public.

Token Creek is on the Yahara Headwaters Trail for paddlers. To reach Token Creek from Cherokee Marsh, paddle upstream on the upper Yahara River from Cherokee Lake and look for the trail sign for Token Creek. You can also launch paddlecraft from the pond at Token Creek Park but will need to make your way over a small rock dam in the park.

Token Creek County Park

6200 US HWY 51, DeForest

countyofdane.com/lwrp/parks/token_creek.aspx

Token Creek Watershed Association

tokencreek.org

Master Plan for Token Creek County Park

countyofdane.com/lwrp/parks/planning.aspx

Yahara Headwaters Trail

capitolwatertrails.org/maps.php

Old Mill Site and Elmer & Edna Culver Wetlands Conservancy (Culver Springs)

From Madison, head north on HWY 51 and turn right onto HWY 19. After 1.5 miles, turn left onto Portage Rd. In 500 ft, look for the Old Mill Site on your right. Continue on Portage Rd for 0.4 mile and turn right onto Egge Rd. After about 0.8 mile, turn right to enter Culver Wetlands Conservancy.

Want to know more about Token Creek? A longer version of this article is at Cherokeemarsh.org/news

Parks attends working meeting with volunteers

On May 1, at Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, Madison Parks Director Eric Knepp and Conservation Resource Supervisor Russ Hefty met with volunteers from different areas around the city to share ideas about how Parks staff and volunteers can work together to restore the natural areas in city parks.

It was a working meeting—the attendees pulled garlic mustard in two areas. As a token of thanks, Parks treated the volunteers to pizza.

Everyone enjoyed seeing the restorations at Cherokee and getting to know each other as they worked. Thanks to volunteer Si Widstrand for arranging the meeting.



Volunteers from across the city met at Cherokee Marsh to talk with parks staff and help out. Photo by Paul Noeldner.

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.

Monthly bird and nature walks

Sunday, June 7 AND

Sunday, July 5, AND

First Sunday of EVERY month

ALWAYS 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Free, monthly, family-friendly bird and nature walks. See page 2 for more information.

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

Tour the North Unit restoration

Wednesday, June 17, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Diverse natural habitats in a large landscape provide a mecca for birds and other wildlife. Walk through a large oak savanna restoration which attracted 3 nesting pairs of red-headed woodpeckers in 2014. Sponsored by Madison Parks and Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Tour the marsh by canoe

Saturday, June 27, 9 am – noon

Take a quiet, relaxing trip through Cherokee Marsh. Enjoy wildlife and a possible trip to Token Creek or the upper Yahara River. Ages 16 and older. Canoes provided. Cost \$30. Sponsored by Madison School & Community Recreation. More information and registration at mscr.org/our-programs/outdoor-adventures

Butterflies of Cherokee Marsh

Saturday, June 27, 10:00 am – noon

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit

Observe and learn about butterflies, those small but exquisitely beautiful creatures that dance about our ankles in summer. Observe a variety of butterflies as they take nectar from wildflowers, and learn about their identification, behavior, and lifestyle. Bring binoculars if you have them, but a few extra pairs of binoculars will be available. Sponsored by the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association, Madison Audubon Society, and Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Upper Yahara River paddle trip

Saturday, August 8, 8:00 am – 11:00 am

School Rd. Boat Landing

Bring your own paddle craft to paddle through fragrant thickets of American Lotus looking for a variety of wetland birds and other wildlife. Sponsored by Madison Parks and Friends of Cherokee Marsh

Locations and directions

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.

School Road Boat Landing. 5002 School Rd. Heading north from downtown 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



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.

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