

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh

Wheeler Road Ponds Will Filter Stormwater

Jan Axelson

If you've traveled recently on Wheeler Rd. between Comanche Way and School Rd., you've likely noticed the construction activity going on just north of Wheeler Rd. The City of Madison's Engineering Division, in cooperation with the Parks Division, is supervising the creation of two ponds and the restoration of an open oak woods and a wetland on the land. The project will also extend Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's trail system into the area.

The need for the ponds dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, when two large ditches were cut to carry stormwater from neighborhood streets to the upper Yahara River. The stormwater brings with it sand, salt, leaves, grass clippings, fertilizer, oil and other pollution from vehicles, and whatever else gets picked up along the way.

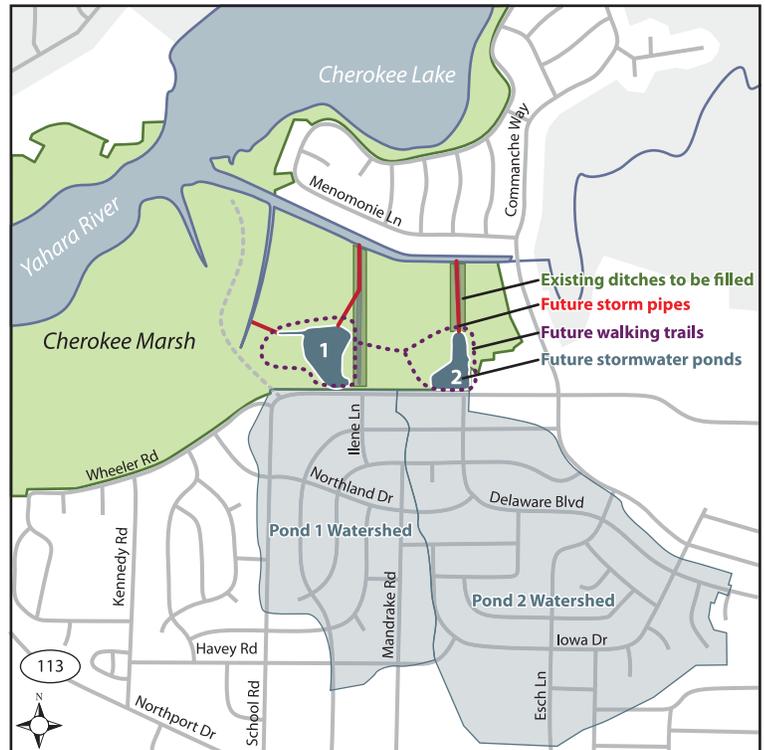
For years, the ditches have dumped their loads directly into a canal that feeds into the Yahara River, which in turn flows into Lake Mendota.

The new ponds will capture the sediments and other pollution before it reaches the river. To maintain the ponds, the City will remove the collected sediments about every ten years.

The opportunity to put in the ponds arose when the City acquired the property from former owner Cherokee Park, Inc. in 2009. The Common Council approved the project in June, 2012. The ponds will help bring Madison into compliance with its stormwater management permit from the Department of Natural Resources.

In the shallows of the ponds, Parks will plant bulrushes, burr-reed, duck potato, and other wetland plants. Deeper water will hold white water lily, long leaf pond plant, and sago pond plant. The edges will be ringed with native prairie plants and shrubs such as buttonbush, dogwoods, and elderberry.

A grove of mature white oaks will remain on the site. Cottonwood and ash trees and invasive shrubs are being removed to free the oaks and restore a more open



The new ponds will filter the stormwater from uphill neighborhoods before sending the water to the Yahara River. Map courtesy of the City of Madison's Engineering Division.

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Why We Volunteer in Cherokee Marsh Natural Areas

Janet Battista

Volunteers have been out in force this summer working to eradicate giant reed grass from the Cherokee Marsh State Natural area. Why do we spend the time and energy? Here's some background:

When mile-high ice left Dane County 12,000-13,000 years ago it left a vast barren landscape. Birds, insects, all manner of land creatures and the wind brought in seeds and spores that grew and multiplied. After thousands of years of periodic floods and drought, extreme heat and extreme cold, diverse, stable ecosystems developed here. People of the First Nations honored and nurtured these ecosystems and left a rich, productive landscape underlain with fertile soils, teeming with wildlife.

In the past hundred years or so, habitat loss through land development, soil erosion and invasive species have taken a terrible toll on these native communities. Today scattered throughout the County small native populations struggle to survive. Cherokee Marsh holds many such natural areas including riverine wetland, fen, upland woodland, prairie, and wet meadow.

These natural areas hold the genetic legacy passed down to us from presettlement times and they support a wide variety of birds, insects, snakes, frogs and mammals, some so rare they are classified as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. When the last populations of these are gone, they are gone forever.

An ancient Indian woman told author William Least Heat-Moon "the white man took the prairies, but he didn't get the operating instructions." Conservation biologists Matt Zine of the State Natural Areas program, Wayne Pauly of Dane County and Russ Hefty of City of Madison Parks are developing the operating instructions needed to maintain and restore our natural areas in the 21st century, and Cherokee volunteers are helping to put them in place.

In spring, volunteers remove invasive garlic mustard whose roots secrete chemicals that kill nearby plants. In early summer, we try to eliminate burdock whose leaves smother native plants and whose burs trap and kill small

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Wheeler Road Ponds

landscape of flowers and grasses. The area may look rough during construction, but the payoff will be a cleaner river and lakes, a restored open oak woods, prairie, and wetlands, and new trails to enjoy.

To learn more about the project, click News at cherokeemarsh.org

A version of this article appeared in the Oct/Nov 2012 Northside News.



Volunteers Paul Noeldner, Tim Nelson, Jim Hughes, and Jan Axelson take a break while helping out in the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area. Photo by Janet Battista.

birds, bats, and butterflies. In late summer and fall we collect ripe native seeds such as the seed of boneset and Joe-pye weed. These we spread later in areas newly prepared by City parks staff.

Recently, volunteers have been removing giant reed grass, a clonal species with extensive root systems that choke out native wetland plants. All year volunteers tackle invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle, shrubs that stress our native canopy trees by sapping their moisture and degrading the favorable soil structure they need.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh, like many other volunteer groups, welcome your help. Look for workday event notices on the Friends website: cherokeemarsh.org, or on our group Facebook page, and join in. You'll learn about a natural area in a whole new way!

This article is adapted from an article in the Oct/Nov 2012 Northside News.

Keep in touch!

Email group - news and discussion

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/cherokeemarsh

Facebook page - news

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

Facebook group - photos, open discussion

www.facebook.com/groups/cherokee.marsh

Ditch Filling Project Continues in East Marsh

After good results with last year's pilot project, Madison Parks is expanding its ditch filling in the "east marsh" wetlands that lie east of N. Sherman Ave., across the road from the Cherokee Golf Course. As reported in the Oct/Nov 2011 Friends newsletter, this area has long had a network of ditches that drained the wetland and funneled stormwater toward the Yahara River.

Using funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a contractor has filled additional ditches with sod scraped from the ditches' banks. Filling ditches is the first step in restoring the land to wetland as it was before the ditches were dug.

Parks staff and volunteers are seeding native grasses and flowers in the project area.

The City of Madison acquired this 238-acre parcel of mostly wetlands in 2008 with help from Dane County's Conservation Fund, the WDNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, and the Natural Heritage Land Trust of Wisconsin.



A volunteer spreads seed in one of the recently filled ditches in the east marsh. Photo by Paul Noeldner.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh have joined the Clean Lakes Alliance, a non-profit organization devoted to the water quality of area lakes, streams and wetlands in the Yahara River Watershed. The Alliance works to raise community awareness of the issues facing our waterways and to raise funds to assist with the efforts to clean and protect those waterways. Find out more at

cleanlakesalliance.com

Volunteers Remove Invasive Giant Reed Grass

62,000 square feet of phragmites vanquished in the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area.

That's what 13 volunteers accomplished this summer with:
4000 bundles
3 miles of twine
and
over 200 hours.

The Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area is a 325-acre parcel of high-quality, diverse sedge meadow, wet prairie, shrubs, and fen (an alkaline, calcium-rich wetland). The area is just west of County HWY CV. The WDNR manages the area, but the City of Madison, Dane County, and the WDNR each own a portion of the land.

When the Friends asked the WDNR if there were any projects we could help with, volunteer coordinator Jared Urban showed us a 1.5-acre patch of invasive giant reed grass (phragmites).

The patch was expanding into an area of native sedges and wildflowers. To stop the invasion, we gathered the stalks into bundles, tied them with twine, and cut and treated the tops. The job took close to two months of Friday mornings (our scheduled workday) plus volunteers who worked on other days, sometimes several times per week.

The Friends thank the VFW's Truax-Longmire Post on HWY CV for allowing volunteers to park in their lot for the project. We enjoyed stopping in for lemonade and other refreshments after a morning's work!

If you are interested in helping out with future projects in the State Natural Area, contact Jan at info@CherokeeMarsh.org or 241-5828.

To learn more about the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area, see:

dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=130

Bat Walk Yields Two Species

On our September 22 bat walk, we detected two bat species: little brown bats, which prefer to roost near water, and silver-haired bats, a bat of the forest. Thanks to our leader Andria Blattner, for coming to the park with the bat-detector and for answering the many questions we had about these interesting mammals.

Did you know that Wisconsin has a dedicated bat conservation fund? To donate or find out more, go to

wisconservation.org

Events Calendar

Directions to locations follow the event listings.

Fall Color Walk

Wednesday, October 10, 5:30 – 7:00 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

Enjoy the fall colors and learn how fire and brush removal help the prairies and oak openings thrive. Our guide will be Madison Parks' Conservation Resource Supervisor Russ Hefty. This is a joint trip with Madison Parks and Madison Audubon.

Hayrides and Hikes

Saturday, October 20, 1 – 4 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

Ride in a tractor-pulled hay wagon through the park, take a guided trail hike, or do both. Cost for the hayride is \$2/person. No reservations needed. Hayrides and hikes will leave the main parking lot from 1 to 3 pm. Sponsored by Madison Parks and the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Funds Donated for School Field Studies

Thanks to Friends members Sally Bowers and Howard Fewton, the Madison Area School District's naturalist program will have \$1000 to help bring schoolchildren to Cherokee Marsh for field studies.

Sally and Howard belong to a social justice covenant group, SisBros, that awards small grants. Sally contacted us to say they wanted to recommend a donation that would support children and youth being educated about Cherokee Marsh habitat.

The Madison Metropolitan School District provides trained naturalist educators to lead field studies in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. The popular field studies offer guided, hands-on exploration where students can expand their knowledge and appreciation of natural communities close to home.

However, the School District doesn't fund transportation to the park, and this lack of funding keeps many classes from participating.

We suggested making a donation to support transportation for field studies, and this fall we learned that the group had awarded the grant. We thank Sally and Howard for thinking of Cherokee Marsh in their donation.

If you are interested in donating to support field studies in Cherokee Marsh or to find out more about the program, contact Jan Axelson at 608-241-5828 or info@cherokeemarsh.org.

You can also book your own hayride. These rides are perfect for scout troops, church groups, birthday parties, and neighborhood groups. Each event is one hour: 30 minute ride, 30 minute campfire and s'mores. Cost is \$85.00 + tax per group (1-24 people). Dates for Cherokee Marsh are Oct 13, 14, and 21. To schedule, call Madison Parks at (608) 266-4711.

Candlelight Ski

Coming this winter! In cooperation with Madison Parks, the first candlelight ski in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's South Unit. Details to come.

Directions

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

6098 N. Sherman Ave. Head north on N. Sherman Ave to the parking lot at the end of the road.



Friends of Cherokee Marsh

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Madison WI 53704

info@CherokeeMarsh.org

www.CherokeeMarsh.org

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

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Janet Battista (Vice President)

Dana Erlandsen

Lesleigh Luttrell (Treasurer)

Lydia Maurer

Justin Sargent

Muriel Simms

Dick Walker

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Advisor (non-voting)

Don Hammes

Membership Form

Join or renew online at CherokeeMarsh.org

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

Your contribution of time, talent, or funds will help preserve and restore the crucial wetland ecosystem of Cherokee Marsh.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Osprey \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sandhill Crane \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mallard \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron \$500 |

- Additional donation \$ _____
- Additional donation \$ _____ in honor of _____
- Additional donation \$ _____ in memory of _____

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

In addition to my contribution, I can help with

- Field work Publicity Tours Education Board/Committees

Other _____

Name _____

Family member(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____ Second Email _____

We won't sell or distribute your email address.

- Don't publicize my financial support.

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!

www.CherokeeMarsh.org

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.

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