

Friends of Cherokee Marsh Newsletter Feb / Mar 2018

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The Cherokee Marsh News

Feb / Mar 2018



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31 acres to be added to Cherokee Marsh

Conservation Park

Here is an updated version of the information provided to all of our members last month.

On January 16, the Madison Common Council passed a resolution to buy 31 acres to add to Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. The parcel is north of Wheeler Rd between N. Sherman Ave and HWY CV. The land is currently leased as cropland with a small woods in the northwest corner.

We have previously advocated to preserve this land because of its valuable location as upland that is adjacent to over 200 acres of City-owned wetlands to the north. Planting the land to prairie as planned will:

- reduce excess nutrients and other pollution carried by stormwater into the wetlands, Yahara River, and downstream lakes
- provide important habitat for wildlife that needs both wetland and upland for food and shelter
- offer a new opportunity for access and enjoyment of Cherokee Marsh by the public.

About the purchase

18th district Alder Rebecca Kemble provided this additional information to us from Madison Parks:

Jim Welsh of the Natural Heritage Land Trust (now Groundswell Conservancy) contacted the City of Madison last year after he was contacted by Bill White, Dennis Tiziani's attorney. Dennis was interested in selling about 30 acres of his property known as the Hornung Range (north of Wheeler Road, along the southern edge of Cherokee Marsh). This would be an opportunity to acquire land along the last remaining undeveloped portion of the edge of Cherokee Marsh within City limits. The acquisition will provide a valuable buffer to good quality sedge meadow habitat that occurs in the park, while reducing ecological impacts from nearby planned development. In addition, it will improve public access to the marsh, providing an ideal site for an observation platform and access to a short interpretive trail.

Several staff walked the property, including Parks Conservation Supervisor Paul Quinlan. The property includes a block of woodland with a canopy dominated by very large oaks, walnuts and cottonwoods. The remaining area is currently occupied by a cornfield bounded by a hedgerow to the north. This area could easily be restored to tallgrass prairie and native shrubland that naturally transitions to the sedge meadow in the existing park. The putting green on the driving range to the west, and a large soil stockpile to the east will remain outside of the proposed area to be acquired.

Working with the City, the Natural Heritage Land Trust hired an appraiser to value the property. The appraisal was reviewed by City Real Estate. Next step was to come to an agreement on the division between what Cherokee Park, Inc., would retain and what the City would purchase. The division of the parcel will require a certified survey map (CSM), so that will also be going through the City process in the not too distant future. With the approval of the budget amendment and purchase and sale agreement and the CSM, we'll hopefully have everything we need to go to closing.

After closing and once the property is in the City's ownership, we'll probably continue to lease the property to a farmer to keep the invasives at bay while we plan and budget for future improvements. Similar to other recent Cherokee Marsh improvements, we'll hold a neighborhood meeting to gain input prior to moving forward. In general, the goal for the property would be to plant the cropland to native grassland, restore some of the woodland, and create a trail and possibly an observation point, allowing the public to access the property from Wheeler Road.

What's next

On February 19, as part of the process to finalize the acquisition, the Plan Commission will consider a resolution to divide the existing parcel into two lots: one for existing golf-club-related uses and one to be purchased for public park land.

Our thanks to Alder Rebecca Kemble and Mayor Paul Soglin for sponsoring the resolution to acquire this valuable land.



Native "herps" featured at annual meeting

Did you know that Wisconsin has 22 species of snakes but only one toad? Or that Wisconsin is home to four types of lizards, including the slender glass lizard, which resembles a snake? Or that snakes don't have eyelids? Instead, a snake's eyes are covered by a scale that is replaced when the snake sheds its skin.

These are just a few of the many things we learned about Wisconsin's many reptiles and amphibians at our annual meeting. Thanks to Eric Roscoe and helpers from the Madison Area Herpetological Society for a great presentation about our native "herps," followed by a look at some live animals.



Preceding the presentation, Director Dana Erlandsen reviewed 2017 and gave a look ahead to the future, and Lesleigh Luttrell gave the Treasurer's report.

The members elected directors to serve in 2018-2019: Jan Axelson, Mary Binkley, Jim Krause, Paul Noeldner, and Anita Weier. Continuing directors in the middle of their two-year terms are Timothy Baker, Janet Battista, Dana Erlandsen, Russ Hefty, Lesleigh Luttrell, and Mary Manering.

After the member meeting and presentation, the directors met briefly to elect officers for the coming year: President Jan Axelson, Vice President Timothy Baker, Secretary Janet Battista and Treasurer Lesleigh Luttrell.

We want to thank the many Northside businesses and others who helped make our event a success by generously donating door prizes:

Ale Asylum Brewery

Benvenuto's Italian Grill

D&S Bait, Tackle, and Archery

Don Hammes

DuWayne's Salon

Jim Krause

Jung's Garden Center

Lesleigh Luttrell

Madison Mallards Baseball

Manna Cafe

Mielke's Northside True Value Hardware

Steve Lang

Thanks also to Mary Binkley, Dana Erlandsen, Katie Krause, Lesleigh Luttrell, and Anita Weier for bringing cookies, gummy frogs and worms, and real cream for coffee. We very much appreciate having the Warner Park Community and Recreation Center nearby to provide a space (and coffee) for our gathering.

Those aged 2 to 13 who submitted an entry for the a children's door prize were asked to name a favorite bird or animal found in a wetland. A few chose birds (cranes and bald eagle), one voted for fox, but not surprisingly considering the topic presented by our speaker, the rest chose amphibians and reptiles including frogs, snakes, salamanders and snapping turtles.



Increased water clarity in the upper Yahara has many possible reasons

Mary Manering

Paddlers love the stretch of the Yahara River that meanders through Cherokee Marsh, and this past summer and fall, they encountered an additional treat — the water was exceptionally clear. Casual observations by paddlers were confirmed by myself and Dennis Tande, who have been monitoring stream health along this stretch of the Yahara River since 2014.

Citizen monitors confirm water clarity

Our monitoring effort is part of a larger team of citizen scientists who volunteer with the Rock River Coalition to collect critical information on stream health at 53 locations throughout the Yahara River Watershed. The project is funded by the Yahara Watershed Improvement Network (Yahara WINS), a collaboration of community partners led by the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District to achieve clean water goals for the Yahara watershed.

Every month from April through November, we monitor at two locations: the School Road boat landing and the HWY 113 bridge. To measure water clarity, we use a 120-cm transparent tube. At the bottom of the tube is a black and white patterned disk called a Secchi disk.

We fill the tube with water from the river, then observe from the top of the tube

while using a valve to slowly release the water. When we can see the Secchi disk, we record the water depth in the tube. The higher the reading, the clearer the water. A reading of 120 cm (47 inches), the highest we can measure, occurs when we can see the disk before releasing any water.

In 2017, at the boat landing, we had readings of 120 in four of the eight months of testing (June plus Sept–Nov) plus a bonus reading we did in December for fun. The August reading was also high at 110. The results were similar at HWY 113, with readings of 114.5 in August and 120 from Sept–Dec.

Compared to previous years, high readings that extend over so many months are unusual, though 2016 had readings of 115–120 from April–Aug.

Why the increase in water clarity?

The remarkably clear water has prompted many conversations in an effort to identify the underlying reason(s). Perhaps it's the result of multiple factors:

Establishment of large beds of aquatic plants. Aquatic plants capture organic and other matter that clouds the water, allowing the matter to settle as sediments on the bottom. The plants also reduce wave action that stirs up sediments and can even result in pieces of shoreline breaking off and disintegrating as they float downstream.



In recent years, the river has seen a big increase in beds of the showy American lotus as well as more inconspicuous submergent (underwater) plants such as Sago pondweed, elodea, and coontail. All of these plants are native to

our area. The American lotus was established due to efforts by Madison Parks, while the submersive plants increased on their own after the lotus became established.

Greatly reduced numbers of carp. Carp are a non-native fish that burrow into river and lake bottoms in search of seeds and insect larvae. In doing so, the fish stir up sediments and uproot aquatic plants.



A biomass estimate performed in 2013 placed the total amount of carp in Cherokee Lake at 400,000 lbs. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reports that since 2013, an astounding 300,000 lbs of carp have been removed by commercial fishing in the Cherokee Lake area. In 2017, the fisherman with the DNR contract to remove carp couldn't find a harvestable population!

Lack of big storm events. Intense rainfall produces greater stormwater runoff from farms and urban areas, which in turn leads to more sediment in the river. The Yahara River originates in marshy areas of Columbia County and flows as a small, meandering creek through extensively farmed land upstream and adjacent to Cherokee Marsh before emptying into Lake Mendota. The marsh also receives stormwater from urban areas on Madison's North Side.

The recorded rainfall for August, September, and November in 2017 was lower than average. September was the eighth driest on record with just 0.55 inches of rain, compared to an average of 3.15 inches. During 2012's drought, observers noted much clearer water than usual.

Presence of zebra mussels. Zebra mussels filter water as they feed on microscopic plants, animals, and debris. The filtering action increases water clarity. Native to Europe and Asia, zebra mussels are considered invasive in Wisconsin because they attach to and smother native mussels and they

deplete the food supply for fish and other aquatic life. The mussels can also create problems when large numbers attach to water intake valves and other underwater structures.

Most of the river bottom at Cherokee Marsh is loose muck, and zebra mussels prefer to attach to hard materials, though they will at times attach to plants. We are not aware of any reports of invasive zebra mussels in the marsh, but they may be present.

What have been your observations?

Do you have your own thoughts about why the water was so clear in Cherokee Marsh this year?

With the help of over 100 volunteers working in the Yahara River watershed, the Rock River Coalition will continue monitoring stream health in 2018. As always, the Friends of Cherokee Marsh will be closely assessing the marsh as part of our ongoing efforts to protect and preserve the marsh and the upper Yahara River watershed. If you are interested in becoming a stream monitor or learning more about the Rock River Coalition, visit their website (below).

[Citizen-based stream monitoring program](#) (Rock River Coalition)

[Stream monitoring data](#)



Earthen mounds reveal culture of early inhabitants

A version of this article appeared in the Feb / Mar 2018 Northside News

Jan Axelson

Cherokee Marsh is privileged to be home to multiple sites that contain earthen mounds constructed 1000 or more years ago. Some of the mounds are effigies in the shapes of animals, while two have conical shapes.

Using radiocarbon dating, researchers have placed construction of the mounds in our area at around 700 – 1100 A.D. The Ho-Chunk people were living in this area when European settlers arrived, and it is believed that present day Ho-Chunk are among the descendants of the mound builders.

The mounds are often located in groups and near large bodies of water or springs. Many mounds contain human remains, and the sites likely served as sacred ceremonial centers. In the past, many mounds were destroyed by farming and other development, but state law now forbids disturbance or destruction of burial sites, including mounds.

Where to see mounds

Yahara Heights Park has a 208-ft water spirit, or panther, mound and a bear mound remaining from a larger group lost to farming. Many know Yahara Heights as the “dog park” on HWY 113, but the mounds are in the portion of the park that extends to the east along the north shore of the upper Yahara River. The water spirit overlooks the river, and the bear mound is nearby, further inland. The mounds are unmarked but easily viewable thanks to brush clearing by volunteers. (We sponsored a guided walk to these mounds in the fall of 2017.)

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park’s North Unit has two conical mounds, one near the river and one on the hilltop.

At Meadow Ridge Conservation Park, a bear mound is now more easily visible, again thanks to brush removal by volunteers from the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

If you visit the mounds, remember to respect them as burial sites and valued pieces of history. At Cherokee Marsh and Meadow Ridge Conservation Parks,

please stay on the trails.

To learn more about mounds, two excellent books are available from bookstores and the Lakeview Library. *Spirits of Earth* by Robert A. Birmingham, former Wisconsin State Archaeologist, focuses on the mounds of Madison and the Four Lakes region. *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, in a new second edition by Birmingham and Wisconsin archaeologist Amy L. Rosebrough, includes information from recent research and imaging.

Directions

Yahara Heights Park, Catfish Ct. Take Northport Dr (HWY 113) north. At the stoplights about 1/3 mile past HWY M, turn right onto River Rd and take an immediate right onto Catfish Ct. From the small, off-road parking area and trailhead sign, walk past the dog exercise area and continue following the trails along the shoreline for about a mile to the mounds.

Meadow Ridge Conservation Park, 4002 Meadow Valley Dr. Take Troy Dr north, continue on Green Ave, and turn onto Meadow Ridge Ln. Where the road ends, turn right onto Meadow Valley Dr, and the park will be on your left. Take the trail that climbs the hill through the woods. The mound is at the top of the hill.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit, 6098 N. Sherman Ave. Take N. Sherman Ave. to the parking area at the end of the gravel road. See the trail map in the park for mound locations.



2017 financial report

Lesleigh Luttrell, Treasurer

As you can see in the statement below, the income side of our 2017 financial report is very positive. Thanks to our more than 100 members and donors, we received more than \$3400 in regular contributions. A dozen people gave additional support for bringing children to Cherokee Marsh for environmental education. Our fundraiser at Benevento's and all profits from T-shirt sales also supported environmental education.

Thanks also to those who gave additional donations for the Cherokee Marsh Conservation fund (19 donors) and in honor or memory of a loved one. We received two extraordinary donations in 2017 – a \$2500 retirement fund distribution and a donation of \$5000 to support the endowment fund and acknowledge our volunteers.

We provided \$1200 to the Madison Metropolitan School District for environmental education support (and have already sent a similar amount for 2018.) Our expenses included supplies and other support for events, including Naturalist Guides for our first Sunday of the month outings and annual meeting expenses.

We renewed our memberships in the Clean Lakes Alliance, River Alliance of Wisconsin, and Groundswell Conservancy to support environmental education and action in our watershed. In addition, we worked with Groundswell Conservancy to help pay for an appraisal of a parcel that is in our watershed and available for public purchase.

We have still in our account over \$5000 of dedicated funds to be sent to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin to add to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund. At the end of 2017, the fund balance was more than \$28,000 with the official total to be provided later this year. As reported at our annual meeting, we are hoping the fund will top \$35,000 soon and our new goal is to aim a bit higher – can we do \$40,000?

Only a few 10th anniversary T-shirts remain; contact me at Info2@cherokeemarsh.org for available sizes

[View PDF version](#)

Friends of Cherokee Marsh
2017 Financial Statement

Income

Contributions	\$1,734.65
Member Dues	\$1,723.21
Memorial/Honor Donations	\$70.00
Endowment	\$1,000.66
Field Trip Transportation	\$320.00
Fundraising - field trip transportation	\$175.00
Fundraising - Endowment	\$270.00
Major Donations	\$7,500.00
Interest	\$3.41
T-shirt sales	\$402.50
Total	\$13,199.43

Expenses

Display/Equipment	\$54.61
Education (transport)	\$1,200.00
Endowment (to Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund)	\$1,445.00
Events - annual meeting, FUN Festival	\$427.00
Events - walks	\$488.34
Fees - domain name registration, WI corp fee	\$75.00
Insurance	\$403.00
Mailing/PO Box Rental	\$249.29
Organization Dues	\$250.00
Printing	\$166.80
Special Project - appraisal for public land purchase	\$825.00
T-shirts	\$616.12
Total	\$6,200.16

Thanks for renewing

Thanks to all who have renewed their memberships or recently joined.

If you haven't renewed, would like to become a member, or would like to join our volunteer team, please visit Cherokeemarsh.org to renew or join online or download a form to mail.



Upcoming events

[See full calendar](#)

Bird and nature outings

Sun, Feb 4, 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm, Explore the beauty of the trails in winter with Master Naturalist Alex Singer. Learn about the magic flow of sap rising in maples and other trees with the lengthening of days and how sap is gathered and made into syrup.

AND

Sun, Mar 4, 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm, Cranes and badgers with naturalist guide Paul Noeldner.

AND

first Sunday of EVERY month, year-round, ALWAYS 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Family-friendly bird and nature walks led by naturalist guides and other local experts.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit, 6098 N. Sherman Ave.
Follow N. Sherman Ave. north to the parking lot at the end of the gravel road.
([map](#))

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

or paul_noeldner@hotmail.com

[Madison Parks Bird and Nature Outings page](#)

Candlelight walk

Sat, Feb 17, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit, 6098 N. Sherman Ave.
Follow N. Sherman Ave. north to the parking lot at the end of the gravel road.
([map](#))

Tour the marsh by candlelight, then warm up with hot cocoa by the fire. This event will take place with or without snow cover. Bring your own snowshoes or wear winter boots. Three lighted loops, arrive any time, walk at your own pace. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and Madison Parks. If you have questions or would like to help set up for this event, contact janaxelson@gmail.com or call (608) 215-0426.

This event is rescheduled from Jan 27. If we need to cancel, we will post on our [website](#) by 3:00 pm on Feb 16.

Tree and brush removal

Fri, March 9, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

AND

Fri, March 16, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Yahara Heights County Park, Caton Ln entrance.

[Get details and sign up](#)

Board meetings

Wed, Feb 21, 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm

Wed, Mar 21, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Members and the public are welcome at our monthly board meetings. Occasionally we reschedule, so contact us to confirm: (608) 215-0426, janaxelson@gmail.com

Warner Park Community Recreation Center, 1625 Northport Dr

Save the date - Ale Asylum fundraiser

Mon, April 16, 3:00 - 9:00 pm

Join us at Ale Asylum for "Karmic Maintenance Monday." **For every pint sold, Ale Asylum will donate \$1** to the Friends of Cherokee Marsh. One day only.

Ale Asylum, 2002 Pankratz St, Madison

Receive notices about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities

Our newsletter comes out six times / year. You can sign up to receive timely notices and reminders, including announcements for last-minute events and volunteer opportunities that don't make it into the newsletter.

[Sign up](#) to receive notices about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities.

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