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The Cherokee Marsh News

June / July 2020



In this edition

- [COVID-19 update](#)
- [Prairie Partner interns at work at Cherokee Marsh](#)
- [Meeting held on development proposal south of Wheeler Rd](#)
- [No dogs allowed in Madison's conservation parks](#)
- [Cherokee Marshbirds birdathon finds 141 species](#)
- [Make a difference for Wisconsin's turtles](#)
- [County Parks natural areas art fundraiser](#)
- [Jim Hughes](#)
- [Upcoming events](#)

From a black botanist

I have been put in handcuffs while being in the woods as a botanist Before I am a plant nerd or a musician or a dad, I have a dangerous looking body to people, and that has some repercussions The system that makes black male bodies vulnerable ... is the same system that makes plants that shouldn't be rare, rare.

[View video](#)



COVID-19 update

Madison Parks news

The School Road dock is in for the season.

Parks staff reports that they have been unable to open the restrooms at Cherokee Marsh - North Unit due to staffing limitations and a number of competing priorities. There is a plan for opening them and cleaning twice daily if and when the appropriate number of staff is available to do so.

Dane County Parks news

The portable toilet at Yahara Heights, Catfish Ct entrance, is available again.

Board meetings

Our board meetings may continue to be held virtually. If you are interested in attending a virtual board meeting, contact paul_noeldner@hotmail.com for details.

Latest updates on COVID-19 openings, closures, and more

[COVID-19 update from Madison Parks](#)

[Dane County Parks Changes and Updates Due to COVID-19](#)

[Public Health Madison & Dane County updates](#)



The Prairie Partners pulled this truckload of garlic mustard on their first day at Yahara Heights.

Prairie Partner interns at work at Cherokee Marsh

Mary Binkley

We are excited to announce that this summer, the Friends of Cherokee Marsh are sponsoring and supervising a group of five enthusiastic young folks, called the Prairie Partners, who work outdoors rain or shine, and are helping to improve the land at Cherokee Marsh.

The Prairie Partners are college students majoring in various environmental studies. They will work every Thursday for 12 weeks, alternating between Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park and Yahara Heights Park. On May 28, their first day with us, they worked a full 8-hour day pulling garlic mustard in all-day rain at Yahara Heights without complaint.

With over 3000 acres to work on, there is no shortage of activities for the group. Their tasks will include pulling invasive plants, helping to remove non-native woody plants,

trail improvements, collecting seeds, and erosion control. The 40 person-hours per week they provide will make a significant, positive difference in Cherokee Marsh's natural areas.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh and individual donors are paying the \$7000 cost of the interns' salaries. Mary Binkley, Timothy Baker, and other volunteers are working with Madison Parks and Dane County Parks staff to decide on projects and supervise the crew in the field.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh are partnering with Groundswell Conservancy, Madison Audubon Society, and the Friends of Pheasant Branch to provide full-time work for the group 5 days a week in different locations.



Meeting held on development proposal south of Wheeler Rd

Lesleigh Luttrell

A residential development, Union at Madison, is proposed for a 29.2-acre site south of Wheeler Rd and west of Packers Avenue. This area, currently zoned for agriculture use, is in the Town of Burke but is scheduled to be annexed by the City of Madison in the near future.

The prospective buyer is the Annex Group, an affordable housing developer based in

Indianapolis with an interest in projects based in university towns. They will ask Madison for rezoning to Suburban Residential and are planning a new neighborhood with 315 housing units, including single family, townhouses, and a variety of multi-unit buildings. The affordability goal is that people making 60% of the median income for the area can afford to live there.

The project as proposed will include stormwater basins and will meet Madison's new stricter stormwater management rules, with the water draining to Starkweather Creek. *(This means that stormwater will drain into Lake Monona, not the Cherokee Marsh watershed.)*

Internal streets will have sidewalks and will connect to the neighborhood to the south, Whitetail Ridge, as well as Wheeler Rd and Packers Ave.

The woods to the west of the parcel are not part of the proposal although a portion may be incorporated into an expanded neighborhood park. The proposal calls for a variety of "green" features including Electric Vehicle charging stations.

The developers are working with Madison-based Urban Assets to assist with planning and public outreach. An initial virtual neighborhood meeting to present the plans was held May 21. That presentation can be seen online at the project site, unionatmadison.com, and will also be available at Lakeview Library. Continuing community engagement will include a focus group and at least two more community meetings.



No dogs allowed in Madison's conservation parks

In early 2020, the Madison Common Council approved revised ordinances (MGO 8.19 and 23.32) allowing leashed, licensed dogs with permits in most Madison parks.

For parks designated Conservation Parks, there is no change - **dogs are prohibited in all conservation parks** including Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's North, South, and Mendota Units and Meadow Ridge Conservation Park. The prohibition includes the entrance roads in the North and South Units.

Leashed, licensed dogs with permits are welcome at Yahara Heights and other Dane County parks and wildlife areas.

[Madison dogs in parks page](#)

[Madison conservation parks](#)

[Dane County dogs in parks page](#)



Marcus Brown

Cherokee Marshbirds birdathon finds 141 species

Jan Axelson

The Natural Resources Foundation's Great Wisconsin Birdathon is the largest fundraiser for bird conservation in Wisconsin, uniting hundreds of bird enthusiasts each spring with the goal of finding as many species possible in one day while raising funds to support priority bird conservation projects.

On May 15, the Cherokee Marshbirds birdathon team woke to a foggy morning that quickly turned into a bright, sunny day with light winds. Birding on their own or with household members, the team focused on areas in and around the Cherokee Marsh watershed, including Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, Yahara Heights and Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area, Token Creek Park, and Culver Wetlands Conservancy. Team members also visited Governor Nelson State Park, Patrick Marsh, and the ponds on HWY V.

Our total for the day was a grand 141 species.

Our rarest find was the neotropic cormorant IDed by Kyle at Patrick Marsh.

Other good birds were an olive-sided flycatcher and red-headed woodpecker (both are species of special concern in Wisconsin); Henslow's sparrow (threatened in Wisconsin); Caspian, Forster's, common, and black terns (all are endangered in Wisconsin), and ruddy turnstone.

The team received 22 pledges totaling \$1,218.75. Half of the funds raised will go to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Fund support conservation at Cherokee Marsh and half will go to the Natural Resource Foundation's Bird Protection Fund.

Big thanks to fellow team members Timothy and Della Baker, Mary Binkley, Marcus Brown, Jim Hughes, Sheila Leary, Kyle Lindemer, and James Mand for going out and finding all of those birds and raising funds for bird conservation.

Thanks to Craig Myrbo for his donation in the name of Jessica Myrbo of \$25 in honor of her birthday.



Make a difference for Wisconsin's turtles

From our friends at the DNR

The Wisconsin Turtle Conservation Program (WTCP) is a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) citizen-based monitoring program aimed to better catalog species' statewide distributions and to document high turtle mortality infrastructure locations to better manage and conserve Wisconsin's turtles. The WTCP further encourages citizens to proactively conserve turtles in their neighborhoods by protecting turtle nests by building and installing nest cages.

[Learn more and report turtle sightings](#)



County Parks natural areas art fundraiser

From our friends at County Parks, a new fundraiser specifically to benefit Dane County's natural areas:

Dane County Parks manages over 13,000 acres of habitat comprised of prairie, oak savanna, woodlands, and wetlands that support thousands of species of wildlife, many of which have become threatened or endangered with extinction. The Natural Areas Program maintains and restores these habitats and encourages children and adults to explore and appreciate these areas.

Dane County Parks is raising money for this important program by selling 5 inch stickers, magnets and window clings featuring winning artwork from the Natural Areas Art Contest. With each \$20 donation, you can request one item (or three items for a \$50 donation). All funds raised will be used to support land management in Dane County Natural Areas, including, prairie plantings, staff support, and restoration efforts.

[Learn more and buy or donate](#)



Jim Hughes single-handedly restored this oak opening at Yahara Heights.

Jim Hughes

Janet Battista

Sadly, we have lost our friend and inspiration Jim Hughes, who died from suicide on Tuesday, May 19. Many Dane County Parks, Madison Parks, and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff members, local environmental activists and natural area volunteers knew and respected Jim.

When he retired from the DNR as an engineer and manager, Jim began a second career as a volunteer and part-time LTE with Dane County Parks. But Jim was no ordinary volunteer. With his extensive skill set and knowledge of the natural world he poured his heart and soul into the restoration of degraded conservation parks and natural areas.

Visitors to Yahara Heights may not be aware of the hundreds of hours Jim spent clearing invasive brush to free up its historic native oaks, Indian mounds, and native understory. Among other activities, this required felling large out-of-place trees, cutting and treating invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle, and stacking and burning many, many large brush piles.

Those who value Cherokee Marsh may not be aware of the acres and acres of prime sedge wetland Jim cleared of invasive phragmites and aspen in the DNR's State Natural Area (SNA) portion of the marsh. Jim led teams of volunteers into the nearly inaccessible, hummocky wetland and showed them how to bundle, clip and treat the giant reed grass, and how to handily girdle the aspen trees there.

Jim could manage a prairie burn, identify and collect prairie seed, deftly wield a chain saw, and fell large hazard trees. And he didn't ignore the unromantic tasks, like pulling horrid sweetclover and cutting down reed canary grass. At any season of the year, one could find Jim working tirelessly, and often alone, or sometimes with the Dane County chainsaw crew at one of the county's conservation parks such as Lake View Hill and Indian Lake.

For years, unbeknownst to many, and without fanfare or acknowledgement, Jim maintained the Friends' membership rolls and sent out the newsletter.

Jim was also an experienced birder who, with his wife, Jan Axelson, routinely monitored the Cherokee Marsh stretch of the Yahara River for birds and waterfowl and traveled widely birding, canoeing, kayaking, and hiking.

Always friendly and helpful, Jim is the one who, in pioneer days, would have helped you raise your barn, and would have known how to build it too.

Jim's passing is not so much a loss as a gaping wound to our hearts.

Tim Nelson

I will always have the greatest respect and admiration for Jim. He thought before he spoke and when he said something it always seemed reasonable. He was smart.

When he was in the Cherokee Marsh working on a project he gave it his all. One winter day I helped him do some chainsawing in the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area. We had to pull our equipment on sleds through deep snow to get to the trees we were cutting. I eventually tired out and went home. He kept working. I collapsed on the sofa and didn't move for several hours. Later I told him about that and he seemed to be mildly amused.

The phragmites cutting project out there was a testament to his work ethic. It was incredible how he kept after it for all those years. And, he picked up candles after the night snowshoe walks faster than anybody.

I am thankful for knowing him.

Alex Singer

I didn't hear Jim speak for the longest time, and I always ascribed it to Jan being so chatty. But after spending time with him on some backbreaking outdoors chore or other, or driving long distances to attend some function, I learned that he had a quiet wit, the "right" politics, and a desire to make the world around him a better place – which he did.

Lars Higdon

Just wanted to share a memory about Jim. I was always impressed at his work ethic and tolerance for working in terrible conditions. He was regularly involved in projects to control invasive species at Yahara Heights working in the most extreme conditions.

Last summer he spent an entire day cutting down sweet clover when it was 100 degrees. He was determined to get the job done. He would also walk out into the deep muck in the marsh to work on reed canary grass and phragmites control, where no one else would even consider working. Despite the conditions, his efforts were successful.

It's hard to find people willing to do this kind of work but Jim had a real love for the land and I know this stewardship brought him joy.

Wayne Pauly

When Jim first volunteered with the County Park chainsaw crew I knew that when he retired, he had taken down urban trees using ropes and climbing equipment. So when I assigned him to drop a few trees in the natural areas on a Friday workday he surprised me by saying he had never felled a tree with his feet on the ground only in

the air from the top down.

He was always one of the last to leave and at mid-morning break I usually had to track him down to get him to rest. He also had an amazing ability to talk with anyone who disagreed with the natural area management we were doing without rancor, just thoughtful conversation. Although afterwards he might comment on what a bonehead the person might be. I will sorely miss the long conversations we had around the burn piles long after everyone else left. Goodbye, Jim.



Sheila Leary

Upcoming events

[See full calendar](#) for latest information or [sign up](#) to receive notices about events and volunteer opportunities.

Receive notices about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities

Our newsletter comes out 6 times per year. You can also 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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