

Friends of Cherokee Marsh

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The Friends of Cherokee Marsh appreciate this chance to comment on Dane County's 2012-2017 Parks and Open Space Plan. Below are our recommendations for the updated plan.

1. Give priority to relocating the entry road access and parking area for Yahara Heights from Catfish Court to River Road.

The 2006-2011 Parks and Open Space Plan recommended moving the entry point and parking for Yahara Heights, but no action has been taken.

Parks staff need to know the location of the new parking lot so they can plan the remainder of the prairie restoration and the location of the Upper Yahara River Trail proposed in the Dane County 2006-2011 Regional Trail Map.

From the new entry point, visitors would also have more direct access to the park's natural areas. The current parking lot serves the dog exercise area and canoe landing, but reaching the prairie and woodlands is inconvenient. Most park visitors and nearby residents don't know that the park's 140 acres include woodland, wetlands, two Indian mounds, and restored prairie.

2. Continue to work to acquire land in the Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area.

Cherokee Marsh is Dane County's largest remaining wetland. Located upstream of Lake Mendota, Cherokee Marsh affects the health of the entire Yahara chain of lakes by tempering flood events, providing clean groundwater from springs, and filtering stormwater.

The County has demonstrated its commitment to Cherokee Marsh by providing funds to help place into public ownership hundred of acres of wetlands and nearby uplands in the Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area. Public management of this land and its stormwater will help restore and maintain the Cherokee Marsh ecosystem.

Other parcels in the Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area would benefit in a similar way from public ownership. As land becomes available, the County should work with its partners, including the City of Madison and the Department of Natural Resources, to find funding to acquire the land and manage it to promote a healthy Cherokee Marsh.

3. Continue to support the Naturalist program and volunteer efforts to manage park lands.

The beauty and health of our park lands owe much to the dedicated efforts of staff and volunteers who work year-round, with limited resources, to restore and maintain the prairies, oak openings, woodlands, wetlands, and other natural areas in our parks.

The County should support these proven management efforts with a commitment to continuing to have a qualified, full-time parks naturalist actively on site to direct management activities; by providing adequate funding for staff and capital budget items for land management; and by supporting the Adult Conservation Team and other volunteer efforts to work with County staff to manage the natural areas in our parks.

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

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