

Friends of Cherokee Marsh

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Comments on Madison's 2011-2016 Park and Open Space Plan

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh appreciate the long-standing commitment to Cherokee Marsh shown by Parks staff, the Park Commissioners, elected officials, and others. A healthy Cherokee Marsh is crucial to the health of the Yahara lakes downstream.

Below are our recommendations for the 2011-2016 Park and Open Space Plan.

1. Continue to work to acquire land to protect Cherokee Marsh.

Over the last five years, the City has demonstrated its commitment to Cherokee Marsh by acquiring hundreds of acres of wetlands and adjacent uplands. Public ownership of this land means that Parks staff can begin to manage the land and stormwater to promote a functioning wetland ecosystem.

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

2. Perform a study of groundwater and surface-water resources in the Cherokee Marsh area.

The 2005 Park and Open Space Plan placed a high priority on a detailed study of groundwater and surface-water resources to protect the Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area. We urge the City to initiate efforts to complete this study before new development proceeds near Cherokee Marsh.

The study should include the mapping of discharge and recharge areas, mapping and estimating the flow from springs, monitoring water level changes due to pumping at the nearby municipal well, and estimating the effects of new development on the wetlands. Studies of this type have been conducted for the Pheasant Branch Conservancy and the Token Creek area but not for Cherokee Marsh.

The information provided by the study will help in making decisions about locations and types of development that are appropriate for the area. Without this information, we risk that new development will cause irreparable harm to Cherokee Marsh.

3. Support staff and volunteer efforts to manage natural areas.

Active management of natural areas promotes healthy ecosystems that support a diverse mix of plants and animals. Management includes plugging or filling ditches to restore wetland hydrology and using fire and manual removal to discourage invasive plants.

The City should support management efforts by providing adequate funding for staff and capital budget items for land management and by supporting volunteer efforts to work with the City 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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