

# The Cherokee Marsh News

*The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh*

## Local Residents Help Fund Restoration Project on County Land

*Mary Manering and Dennis Tande*

Many people are aware that Dane County Parks has been diligently working to restore the ecosystems around Cherokee Marsh. The results of their efforts inspired us to do similar work with our property and some of the adjacent Dane County parkland on the north side of the Yahara River.

In a collaborative effort with Dane County Parks and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, we took the first step of this approximately six acre oak savanna restoration project in February, 2012. Driftless Land Stewardship, LLC from Bagley WI utilized a forestry mower to remove brushy vegetation up to eight inches in diameter, providing immediately rewarding results.

Our next step is to remove the larger trees, but keeping the specimens of interest, primarily oaks and shag bark hickories. There are five species of oaks present in the restoration area, including white, northern red, northern pin, black and bur.

We will carefully monitor the resulting undergrowth and hope the additional sunlight will help dormant desirables to grow. The expertise of Driftless Land Stewardship and Dane County Parks staff will help us implement

the appropriate control measures to combat the never ending supply of non-natives.

After a few years of this approach, we will then sow seeds of native savanna plants. It is our hope this effort will result in an environment conducive to native Wisconsin flora and fauna for future generations to enjoy.



*This view shows the same corner after brush removal. Photo by Dennis Tande.*



*This view shows how one corner of the area looked before the restoration work. Photo by Dennis Tande.*

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# The Hidden Park: Cherokee Marsh Mendota Unit

*Dana Erlandsen*

Many people think of Cherokee Marsh as the wetlands visible to the north of Highway 113. Not as many people realize that an entire unit of the Marsh lies south of Highway 113, just off the northeastern coast of Lake Mendota.

Cherokee Marsh Mendota Unit consists of 121 acres of wood savannah, uplands and marsh. The north border is Westport Road and part of the railroad tracks; the east border is the lake and the Lighthouse Bay condominium development; the west is Green Avenue, Beilfuss Drive and Knutson Drive; the south border is Sauthoff Road.

Most of the Mendota Unit is wetland that is inaccessible to hikers. Although the wetlands may be viewed by paddlers, there is no dock or beach for watercraft.

However, the wooded portion of the park offers interesting short hikes. Hiking trails may be entered at three different points along Sauthoff Road, although there is no parking for cars there. Those arriving by car may park on Beilfuss Drive next to the entry point in Westport Meadows Park, or on Meadow Valley Drive next to Meadow Ridge Park.

Most of the wooded land in the Mendota unit was grazed or cultivated until the 1980s, when the City of Madison acquired it. Ten years later, the City also bought the land for the Meadow Ridge Park and Meadow Ridge Conservation Park, the striking hill and prairie just south of the Mendota Unit. The purchase protected the uplands of the lake and marsh, as well as connecting to the state hospital grounds to the south.

A nice way to start a hike in the Mendota Unit is to park on Meadow Valley Drive, next to the playground for Meadow Ridge Park. One can pause to admire the small park (with its large modern jungle gym, swings, basketball court and



*Take the hiking trail through the woods at Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's Mendota Unit. Photo by Dana Erlandsen.*

picnic table), the nearby retention pond, and the grassy plains that are perfect for kite flying.

Walk up the path to the top of the large sandstone hill that is the heart of the Meadow Ridge Conservation Park. There is a stunning view across Lake Mendota from the hilltop. Prior inhabitants enjoyed this view as well – the area near Veith Avenue was the site of a Native American village, and a restored Native American bear mound – 77 feet long – adorns the crest of Meadow Ridge Hill. The Veith Avenue neighborhood was formerly known in the 1800s as the “Solid Comfort” neighborhood – perhaps for the comfort of its excellent lake views.

After descending the hill, cross to the beautiful red oak and basswood forest of the Mendota Unit that begins at the southern border of Sauthoff Road. Take a last, lingering look at the lake as you leave Sauthoff Road – unlike the other three units of the Marsh (North, South and Yahara), the Mendota Unit offers few water vistas except for what one can see at the end of Sauthoff Road.

Much of the invasive brush has been cleared away in the southern part of the woods, giving it a tall and spacious feel. In the spring, the woods are carpeted with wildflowers such as Dutchman's breeches, trout lily and cutleaf toothwort. Plenty of animals make their home in the park – deer, rabbits, squirrels, snakes, sandhill cranes and a variety of birds.

Proceeding north, there is a small meadow with the remains of a house foundation. This parcel in the center of the woods was acquired by the City in 2007. Even without the foundation, evidence of the house can still be seen in the shrubs and domesticated plants that grow



*In spring, the Mendota Unit has displays of wildflowers like these Dutchman's Breeches. Photo by Dana Erlandsen.*

*Continued on page 2*

## Hidden Park (continued)

there, such as large drifts of daffodils, onions, rhubarb and black raspberry bushes. The remnant of the old road to the homestead, Loeprich Lane (the sign is still posted), is another good entrance point into the park from Sauthoff Road. To the west of the meadow is a peat marsh with an alder thicket - something not frequently found in Dane County – which usually signifies the presence of nearby springs.

As one moves north away from the clearing, one crosses a small wooden bridge across a dry but mossy spillway. Large grapevines drape the trees on the left, while lovely hackberry and silver maple trees grace the right hand side of the trail. The hiking trail ends at Westport Meadows Park, at the corner of Beilfuss and Crownhardt Circle. The park has a slide, swings, small merry-go-round and basketball court.

This wetland was severely damaged in 1993, when high water levels on Lake Mendota cause five acres of peat marsh to float away from a peninsula of wetlands at the end of Sauthoff Road.

This incident – and other, less publicized losses of floating peat marsh – is one of the reasons that members of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and other groups continue to advocate for lower summer levels on Lake Mendota.

## National Science Foundation Funds Research in Cherokee Marsh

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is funding a study in Cherokee Marsh. Chris Kucharik, a scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and colleagues are studying how changes in climate, land cover, urban areas and human demands affect the Cherokee Marsh ecosystem.

Read more in the article, “Cry Me a River: Following a Watershed’s Winding Path to Sustainability” here:

<http://www.nsf.gov/discoveries>

## See Live Bats!

The Wisconsin Bat Festival will feature live bat programs with bats from around the world, including Wisconsin’s backyard bats. The event also includes hands-on games and activities for the entire family.

May 12 (Saturday), 9 am – 5 pm, Warner Park Community Recreation Center, 1625 Northport Drive, Madison. Adults \$10, kids under 16 free when accompanied by an adult. All proceeds benefit the Wisconsin Bat Conservation Fund.

<http://wiatri.net/inventory/bats/batfest.cfm>

## Public Forum Held on Lake Levels

*Jan Axelson*

In 2008, following back-to-back summers of record rainfall, the City of Madison asked the DNR to review its orders for managing lake levels on the Yahara lakes. On March 28, the DNR’s advisory group on lake levels presented its draft recommendations at a public forum.

Members of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and other groups have been advocating for lower summer levels on Lake Mendota, both to protect the Cherokee Marsh wetlands and other shorelines and for public safety.

In the face of records showing that Lake Mendota regularly exceeds its target maximum level – sometimes for months on end – a majority of the advisory group agreed that Lake Mendota should be managed near its target summer minimum. This change could result in Lake Mendota being about 3 inches lower in summer.

The recommendation is less than many wanted, but it would offer some protection for Cherokee Marsh wetlands and other shorelines and would reduce flooding threats on Mendota and downstream. However, the group won’t finalize its recommendations until it meets later this spring to consider the public comments received.

Any recommendations by the advisory group will move to the DNR or Dane County for further consideration and approval.

Watch our Facebook page and email group for a notice about how to submit comments on the advisory group’s recommendations.

## Membership News

Thanks to members who used the membership form’s new *in memory of* option to make the following donations in addition to their memberships:

Rachel Jones, \$35 in memory of Matthew Graves

David Lewke, \$10 in memory of Clara Lewke

Thanks also to the members who helped share their support of Cherokee Marsh with gift memberships for new members. We love new members!

Keep in touch!

Email group

[www.groups.yahoo.com/group/cherokeemarsh](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/cherokeemarsh)

Facebook page

[www.facebook.com/friends.of.cherokee.marsh](http://www.facebook.com/friends.of.cherokee.marsh)

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[www.facebook.com/groups/cherokee.marsh](http://www.facebook.com/groups/cherokee.marsh)

# Events Calendar

## Evening in Cherokee Marsh

April 20 (Friday), 6:30 pm until dark

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

Observe the courtship flight of woodcock and snipe. See cranes and spring migrants.

Sponsored by Madison Audubon and the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

## Earth Day Planting Event

April 22 (Sunday), 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

Celebrate Earth Day by scattering seed and planting wildflowers in a restoration of an oak opening. No experience needed. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

## Help with a Prairie Burn

April 24 (Tuesday), 10:00 am, may work through lunch

Yahara Heights County Park

Help with a prescribed burn of the restored prairie in Yahara Heights County Park. Bring drinking water and wear appropriate clothing (no nylon or flammable synthetics) and hat. Sponsored by Dane County Parks with the Adult Conservation Team.

Sign up with Rhea (224-3601). Call 245-6898 for cancellation information and rain date scheduling. Rain/ weather date: April 25.

## Enjoy Wildflowers and Other Signs of Spring

May 6 (Sunday), 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit

Cherokee Marsh naturalist Ami Rupnow and Friends Director Dana Erlandsen will lead a walk to look for wildflowers and other signs of spring. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

## Take a Stake in the Lakes Clean Up

Saturday, June 9, 10 am – noon

Meet at the corner of Wheeler Rd. and Comanche Way. We'll head out to pick up trash wherever needed. Participants get a free *Take a Stake in the Lakes* T-shirt. Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh as part of Dane County's Take a Stake in the Lakes.



## Save the Dates

Check our website for details on these tours in partnership with Madison Audubon.

May 9 (Wed.)

Warbler Walk at Cherokee Marsh

June 30 (Sat.)

Butterflies of Cherokee Marsh

August 4 (Sat.)

Cherokee Marsh, Upper Yahara River Tour

October 10 (Wed.)

Cherokee Marsh, North Unit

## 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.

Yahara Heights County Park

Heading north on HWY 113/Northport Dr., just past HWY M, turn right on River Rd., then right on Riverview Dr., and right on Caton Ln. From the end of Caton Ln., drive into the park.

## Friends of Cherokee Marsh

PO Box 3390

Madison WI 53704

info@CherokeeMarsh.org

[www.CherokeeMarsh.org](http://www.CherokeeMarsh.org)

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

### Directors

Jan Axelson (President)

Timothy Baker

Janet Battista (Vice President)

Dana Erlandsen

Lesleigh Luttrell (Treasurer)

Lydia Maurer

Justin Sargent

Muriel Simms

Dick Walker

Dorothy Wheeler (Secretary)

### Advisor (non-voting)

Don Hammes

# Membership Form

Join or renew online at [CherokeeMarsh.org](http://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](http://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.