

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh

A Land Manager Remembers Cherokee Marsh

Jan Axelson

“I carried the wheelbarrow on top of my car,” recalls retired Parks manager Si Widstrand about his early days working for Madison Parks. “We had so little equipment we used to joke that we worked with a rock and a stick.”

On a walk in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park’s North Unit, retired Madison Parks manager Si Widstrand shared his memories of working in the park and his hopes for the future of the marsh and other natural areas in the City.

In 1974, Si began working as the “one and only seasonal ranger – the “lone ranger” – for Madison’s Conservation Parks. From there he advanced to year-round ranger and various management positions until retiring in 2008 from his position as Parks Development Manager. A guiding force and early mentor in Si’s career was legendary environmental educator and activist Jim Zimmerman.

These are some of the interesting facts Si shared with us:

Years ago, Cherokee Marsh was home to an active summer work/learn program and a summer day camp for students. One graduate of the work/learn program, Penny Klein, went on to become the Public Lands Manager for the City of Middleton.

Before City ownership, the Fauerbach family had a cottage in what is now the Conservation Park. The path to the south end of the river boardwalk was constructed in part with bottle caps from the Fauerbach brewery.

Lu’s pond, named for wildlife educator Lu Severson, has long been a popular hangout for American bitterns, the marsh bird perhaps best known for its distinctive “pump-er-lunk” call. (An American bittern was spotted at Lu’s pond this spring.)

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Retired Parks manager Si Widstrand tours Cherokee Marsh with Friends directors Jan Axelson and Janet Battista. Photo by Jim Hughes.



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**The Voyageur Canoes Are Back!
Take a Stake in the Lakes Clean-up!
Butterflies!**

Details on these events and more on page 5.

Land Manager

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In 1981, the area east of the high hill became the second prairie restoration by Madison Parks. (The first was at Owen Park.)

The main parking lot and restrooms were added in 1974 to provide a central location for the trailheads in the park.

The concrete slab at the top of the hill was once the floor of a picnic shelter. Parks removed the shelter in the 1990s to focus resources on conservation efforts.

Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's South Unit, off Wheeler Rd., at one time hosted girl-scout campouts.

When asked if at any time in the past, Parks had more resources for maintaining its natural areas, Si replied that "there were never any good years" for restoration funding. Over the years, the City added staff slowly. New resources available today include native seed nurseries, experienced restoration consultants and contractors, college-educated restorationists, and new equipment such as brush mowers for clearing invasives.

Just about any tour of Cherokee Marsh includes a discussion of the boardwalk. Si recalled that the original boardwalk was built with salvaged wood from cottages torn down on the site. The materials weren't durable, and the boardwalk didn't last. In 1974-75, the park had

no boardwalk along the river. The next attempt was constructed of treated wood posts and oak planks. This boardwalk still proved impossible to maintain because of its location in the quaking marsh of peat that has floated up from the river bottom due to raised lake levels. The current aluminum boardwalk has reduced the need for maintenance and makes it easier to do prescribed burns. Since retiring, Si has become an active volunteer with Parks. His focus is restoration work, mainly on the West side near his home. "I enjoy doing things on my own schedule," Si reports.

Si's advice for managing the City's natural areas is to "set priorities and don't let the good areas go bad. Look for easy work that will have a lot of benefit." To that end, Si has been talking with the Madison Board of Park Commissioners and Parks staff about having the City develop a management plan for the wild areas in all of Madison's Parks. Si is always interested in finding other volunteer land managers and projects throughout the City. Contact him at si.widstrand@gmail.com.

We are fortunate to have the continued benefit of Si's experience and dedication to our natural areas!

Cranes and Warblers Tallied

Jan Axelson

Dedicated birders counted cranes, warblers, and more in Cherokee Marsh this spring.

On the morning of April 16, I joined four other volunteers rising before dawn to count sandhill cranes in Cherokee Marsh. We covered three areas and tallied a total of 37 cranes. Our combined total was less than last year's, possibly due to the late spring.

Paddling the upper Yahara River, Dennis Tande and Mary Manering counted 11 cranes. In the northern portion of Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's North Unit, Daniel Gómez Ibáñez and Virginia Swisher counted 14 cranes, including six breeding pairs. In my area, the southern portion of the North Unit, I counted 12 cranes.

Some of the other wildlife I observed that morning were American woodcock, wild turkey, wood ducks, swamp sparrows, and great blue heron.

The count was part of the annual Midwest Crane Count conducted by the International Crane Foundation. Since the 1930s, the estimated number of sandhill cranes in Wisconsin has increased from 25 to over 10,000.

On May 11, Dan Graham and Peter Fissel led a Madison Audubon warbler walk in the Conservation Park's North Unit. The group identified 61 species of birds.



Two of Cherokee Marsh's newest residents are these sandhill crane colts, shown being cared for by a parent on May 21. Photo by Daniel Gómez Ibáñez.

The total included 12 warbler species, many who were using Cherokee Marsh as a migration stopover. Colorful birds were abundant: yellow warbler, common yellowthroat, Blackburnian (firethroat) warbler, goldfinch, cardinal, orchard oriole, wood duck, and a Baltimore oriole that all agreed was a particularly stunning shade of orange.

Cow Slobber and Bee Balm

Alex Singer

Common names for the same plant are as diverse as the areas in which they're found. They can be descriptive or whimsical, reflect usage or some obvious trait, or merely be named for a location or a person. Wildflowers, especially that have been found to be edible and/or medicinal, and which have been encountered by several cultures over many years, often have more than their fair share of names unusual and mundane.

A couple of the wildflowers that we find not only in Cherokee Marsh but around (and in) our homes are known by many common, and not so common, names; the Ohio Spiderwort, *Tradescantia ohioensis*, belongs to a genus of approximately 71 species of perennials native to the New World. While the genus honors the erstwhile gardener for King Charles I of England who popularized the spiderworts in English gardens, "Cow Slobber" is very descriptive of the mucilaginous, clear sap, which may also account for the general common name due to the spider silk-like quality of the same slobber. Look for the long, thin leaves on the knee-high plants, though the (usually) blue flowers are short lived; luckily there can be 20 or more per stem, and all parts of the plant are edible.

The spiderworts will be blooming in June, and Wild Bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa*, known by many as Bee Balm, will start the following month. It derives its name from an Italian orange used to flavor Earl Grey tea, with which it shares a similar odor, which in terms comes from the Italian bergamotto, a modification of the Turkish *bey armudu*, literally "Bey's pear". This wildflower belongs to the mint family and the genus contains roughly 16 species of annual or perennial plants.

Bee Balm is the natural source of the antiseptic thymol, the primary active ingredient in modern commercial

mouthwash formulas, and various Native American groups used it medicinally both internally and externally for a range of ailments. Via rhizomes, it forms large clumps up to three feet high, the dark-green, coarsely-toothed leaves spread with reddish veins, the bright red tubular flowers in showy clusters of 30 or more. The fragrant and showy flowers attract many birds and insects, but mammals tend to avoid it possibly due to the oregano-mint flavor and the capacity to cause flatulence. (ironically, some Native American groups used it to prevent this problem!)

Recognizing the existence of this plethora of common names once again makes us give thanks to Linnaeus (who developed the system of naming plants that we use today), but they sure are fun.



Bergamot comes into bloom in July. Public domain photo from Wikipedia.



Look for spiderworts in the prairie in June. Photo by Jim Hughes.

Use Your Pierce's Rewards Card to Help the Friends

Do you shop at Pierce's Northside Market? Did you know you can designate the Friends of Cherokee Marsh as a non-profit eligible to receive contributions from Pierce's Community Foundation?

Sign up at the store or go to:

<http://www.piercesmarkets.com/portage/enrollment.php>

Environmental News Notes

Why We Need Wetland Education and Oversight

On February 3rd, Governor Walker signed 2011 Act 6 into law, clearing the way for development in a high quality wetland in the Village of Ashwaubenon in Brown County.

The bill exempts the parcel from state wetland permit requirements and authorizes up to three acres of wetland fill.

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) opposed the bill and believes one reason the bill passed was the large amount of misinformation presented by those with no training in identifying wetland boundaries and wetland plants or in evaluating wetland functions and quality.

Read what the WWA has to say about how this case shows the need for wetland education and oversight:

<http://www.wisconsinwetlands.org/BergstromCaseStudy.htm>

Read past and current issues of this newsletter at www.CherokeeMarsh.org

Events Calendar

Directions to locations mentioned follow the listings.

Evening Paddle in Voyageur Canoes

Thursday, June 9

Two tours: 5:00 pm - 6:45 pm AND 6:45 pm - 8:30 pm

Tour Cherokee Marsh in replicas of the vessels used centuries ago by French voyageurs to cross Lake Superior and other large North American waters. Each canoe holds 10 paddlers. No experience needed. Paddles and life preservers provided.

Paddlers in their own canoes and kayaks are also welcome to join the tour.

Reservations required for the Voyageur canoes. To reserve a spot, send the paddlers' names, ages of any children, and which time you prefer to susan.josheff@wisconsin.gov. You'll receive an email message if the trips are canceled due to weather.

Sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as part of Dane County's Take a Stake in the Lakes weeks.

Meet at the School Road boat landing.

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Advisory Group Formed to Study Lake Levels

The Wisconsin DNR has convened a Yahara Lakes Water Level Advisory Group (YLAG2) to develop recommendations on how to best manage the Yahara lakes as a system.

The group's monthly meetings are open to the public with opportunities for comments and questions. For more information, visit:

<http://www.countyofdane.com/lwr/landconservation/ylag.aspx>



One of Cherokee Marsh's chorus frogs gives a full blast. Photo by Janet Battista.



Voyageur canoes head out for a paddle. Photo by Justin Sargent.

Events

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Cherokee Marsh Clean-up

Saturday, June 11, 10 am to noon

Help pick up trash in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's South Unit. We'll be working along Wheeler Rd., the park trails, and the ditches. Trash bags and gloves provided. Participants will receive a *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 weeks.

Meet in the **front parking lot** at the School Road boat landing.

Butterflies of Cherokee Marsh

Saturday, June 25, 10:00 am – noon

Seek out butterflies, dragonflies, and other interesting small creatures in Cherokee Marsh. In recent years, participants on this walk have spotted over a dozen different types of butterflies. The tour leader is conservation biologist and grasshopper expert Kathy Kirk.

A few pairs of binoculars will be available for lending but bring your own if you have them. Wear long pants and a hat for protection from the sun.

This is a joint trip with the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association and Madison Audubon.

Meet at Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park North Unit.

Tour the Cherokee Marsh Restoration by Canoe or Kayak

Saturday, August 6, 8:00 am – 11:00 am

Join Conservation Resources Supervisor Russ Hefty on a tour of Madison Parks' wetland restoration project on the upper Yahara River at Cherokee Marsh.

This is joint tour with the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, Madison Audubon, and Madison Parks.

Bring your own canoe or kayak and meet at the School Road Boat Landing.

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 gravel road.

School Road Boat Landing

Heading north on Northport Drive/HWY 113, turn right on School Rd. Where the road curves right onto Wheeler Rd. take an immediate left into Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park. Follow the gravel road to the boat landing.

Parting Note from Anita Weier

I regret that I had to leave the board of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh following my election to the Madison City Council.

The city attorney advised me that if I remained on the board, I would likely have a conflict of interest that would prevent me from voting on matters related to the marsh.

However, I am still a member of the Friends, and I remain dedicated to protecting and preserving Cherokee Marsh and other environmental treasures.

The mayor has appointed me to the city Committee on Environment and the multi-jurisdictional Yahara Lakes Level Advisory Group 2 created by the DNR to advise that agency on lake levels. – Anita



Friends of Cherokee Marsh

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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)

Justin Sargent

Muriel Simms

Dick Walker

Dorothy Wheeler (Secretary)

Advisor (non-voting)

Don Hammes

Membership Form

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

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.