

The Cherokee Marsh News

The newsletter of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh

Operation Fresh Start Helps Restore Cherokee Marsh

Anita Weier

Young people in the Operation Fresh Start program spent weeks this summer working hard in the Cherokee Marsh – installing a new aluminum boardwalk that will not deteriorate like the old wooden boardwalk, placing plants in the water to provide habitat for creatures and removing invasive plants from the marsh.

For some, it was their first chance to venture into the world of nature. It was also a chance to find new opportunities.

“The best thing is I learn about a place I never knew,” said Sean Johnson, who lives on the West Side of Madison. “The mosquitoes are the hardest part of it.”

Tabitha Dahl, 17, who lives in Madison’s East Side, said her counselor at La Follette High School recommended her to Work and Learn for the program. “We spent a month on the boardwalk and pulling invasive species,” she said.

Dahl loves the work, except for the garter snakes she sometimes encounters.

“I am improving my life. I am going to college at MATC, building houses and being outside working with plants,” said David Meboe, 21, a Madison native who now lives in Cross Plains. He has been working with Operation Fresh Start on various projects for more than a year. “I enjoy working here. It’s the best job I’ve had,” he said.

Russ Hefty, conservation resource supervisor for Madison, directed the five-to-seven person crew in cooperation with Operation Fresh Start crew supervisor David Madden. The five weeks of work in Cherokee Marsh during the summer went well, according to Hefty, and the soft-stemmed bulrushes placed in bricks to secure them in the water will provide cover for aquatic insects that also attract juvenile fish. Among other tasks, the crew replaced honeysuckles with native wildflowers, helped with a controlled burn, reworked the railings on the East Marsh observation platform and stained that structure.

The city has used Operation Fresh Start crews in city
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Sean Johnson, David Meboe (center) and Tabitha Dahl get plants ready for placement in the water at Cherokee Marsh to build habitat. Photo by Anita Weier.

**Full moon walk!
 Fall seed collecting!
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Operation Fresh Start

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conservation and other parks for 25 years, Hefty said. This year, crews worked for a total of 14 weeks in various parks, and the city paid \$25,000 for that work.

The nonprofit Fresh Start organization has provided comprehensive employment and training services to 7,000 youth and adults in Dane County since 1970. Best known for renovating or constructing 185 single-family houses for sale to low-income first time home buyers, it also has expanded into year-round conservation work.

In the past, Operation Fresh Start's seasonal conservation crews have contributed to the restoration of valuable environmental lands and the stewardship of city and county conservation parks. Recently, the organization extended its mission to include two year-round conservation crews. Crew members working in supervised teams will complete labor-intensive conservation and community development work projects on public lands in

South Central Wisconsin throughout the year.

How much is done at Madison parks including the Cherokee Marsh this coming year will depend on the final city budget.

(A version of this story appears in the Northside News.)



Workers take bulrushes to their new home. Photo by Anita Weier.

Stormwater Retention Ponds Proposed for Cherokee Marsh

Jan Axelson

The City of Madison's Engineering Division has proposed a stormwater retention project on City-owned land north of Wheeler Rd.

The project will consist of two stormwater retention ponds and a restored wetland. Currently the site has two ditches that carry stormwater from uphill streets and neighborhoods into the Yahara River and the lakes downstream. The project will create a pond at the head of each ditch on the site.

The ponds will treat the stormwater before it enters the Yahara River and will help the City meet EPA and DNR requirements for stormwater management. The restored wetland will further treat the stormwater and will provide wildlife habitat and opportunities for education.

The Parks Division plans to restore the area surrounding the ponds to oak savannah with walking paths and will preserve a grove of mature white oaks.



The proposed retention ponds and restored wetland will keep sediments and other pollutants from reaching the Yahara River at Cherokee Marsh. (City of Madison Engineering Division drawing.)

Enjoy the Grasses of Cherokee Marsh Prairies This Fall

Alex Singer

Interspersed among, and often overtopping, the flowering plants we've enjoyed over the past few months in the Marsh have been two of the prairie tallgrass triumvirate: Big Bluestem and Indiangrass.

Big Bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii* Vitman, which can grow as high as 9 feet, is the tallest of the tall grasses and a member of the bunch grasses. Also known as Turkeyfoot due to its three-branched seed head, the stem of a mature Big Bluestem turns blue-purple from an initial blue-green, and the hairy 12 inch-long blades acquire a red tinge. While it will have stopped flowering by the time you read this, ending in late September, the leaves will have turned bronze and the 3 inch seed heads bronze to purple or green, more reasons for its use as an ornamental by landscapers and home gardeners and for you to seek it out.

Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), also known as Yellow Indiangrass due to flowers that have quite extrusive yellow anthers (though hidden in August-September by hairy scales), grows as high as 8 feet and is often found in the same areas as Big Bluestem. Though blueish-green in the summer, by now the foliage has turned red-gold and will remain so through the winter, with a golden plume of seed heads. The ½ inch-wide leaves are long blades that extend from the stem almost 2 feet at a 45 degree angle, rough to the touch with a whitish bloom. In addition to the thousands (up to 175,000 per lb.!) of seeds, it can



The seedheads of Big Bluestem have the shape of a turkey's foot. Photo by Janet Battista.

reproduce via rhizome, and as the seeds dry off during a spring snow melt or after a rain, they dig themselves into the ground.

While Big Bluestem is tolerant of a wide range of soils and moisture, it does best in moist, well-drained soil, sending out deep roots and forming a strong sod. Once upon a time, Big Bluestem covered acres and was the chief grass of the prairie, the loss of which contributed to the dustbowl. This state grass of Illinois and Missouri was an important forage for bison, and is considered a good one for cattle and horses due to a high protein content.

Though highly tolerant of poorly to excessively drained, rocky to sandy soils, from acid to alkaline conditions, Indiangrass does best in well-drained floodplain soils. This hardy grass can live through flooding and repeated fires, as it did as a major component of the prairies that once dominated the prairies of central and eastern U.S. Also a palatable grazing grass, it is excellent for wildlife habitat and nesting cover for game birds, and the seeds are eaten by small mammals and many song birds.

While not generally flashy flowerers, grasses can be appreciated year round both visually and for the rustling of their leaves in the autumn months.

Alex Singer is a new Northside resident who greatly enjoys his proximity to Cherokee Marsh and other green areas, although continues to miss the Ecuadorian Amazon where he spent time as a naturalist guide.



Indiangrass waves in the breeze in the Cherokee Marsh prairie. Photo by Janet Battista.

Events Calendar

Fall Seed Collecting

October 5 (Tuesday), 9:30 am - noon AND

October 26 (Tuesday), 9:30 am - noon

Help collect prairie seeds in Yahara Heights County Park. Wear long pants, long-sleeve shirt, bring pruning shears and gloves if available.

Directions: north of Madison, going north on HWY 113 and just past the intersection with HWY M, turn RIGHT (east) on River Road, then RIGHT on Riverview Road to the "T" intersection with Caton Lane. Turn right and drive into the prairie.

A project of Dane County Parks' adult conservation team. For more info, contact Rhea at 244-3601.

Full Moon Walk

October 23 (Saturday), 7 pm - 9 pm

Here is a rare chance to walk the trails of the conservation park after dark and under a full moon. A campfire and hot cocoa will follow the walk.

Meet in the parking lot of Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit, 6098 North Sherman Ave.

Sponsored by the Friends of Cherokee Marsh and Madison Parks.



Marketgoers examine live snakes and other critters at Cherokee Marsh Day at the Northside Farmers Market on September 12. Photo by Muriel Simms.

Read past and current issues of this newsletter at <http://www.CherokeeMarsh.org>

Radio Listeners Learn about Frogs and More



On the evening of August 31, frog enthusiast Bailey Sargent (above, left) and Madison school-district naturalist Ami Rupnow (sitting next to Bailey) shared their experiences in Cherokee Marsh with listeners to radio station WORT. The event was part of WORT's focus on Madison's North Side. Thanks to Bailey and Ami for a great show! Photo by Anita Weier.

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.

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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. We sponsor and promote activities and events such as:

Planting native species, collecting seeds, and controlling invasive species.

Wetland educational events and opportunities.

Paddle outings, hikes, and cultural events.

Individual \$15

Osprey \$100

Family \$25

Sandhill Crane \$250

Mallard \$50

Great Blue Heron \$500

Additional donation \$ _____

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 also help with

Field work Publicity Tours Education Board/Committee work

Other _____

Name _____

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Include your email address if you would like to receive our newsletter. 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.