



**Nelson Institute for
Environmental Studies**
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin
Interim Provost Eric Wilcots
Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Robert G. Cramer
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Madison, WI 53706

April 24, 2023

Dear Chancellor Mnookin, Interim Provost Wilcots, and Vice Chancellor Cramer:
We are writing as members of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee for two purposes. **We want to applaud the recent decision to give the Lakeshore Nature Preserve a new administrative home within the Office of Sustainability. We also strongly support efforts to increase the base budget and staffing levels for the Preserve. The Preserve is used by thousands of students, staff, and faculty for coursework, research, environmental services, respite, and recreation. It is also an important “front door” to the university for thousands of members of the public. To provide those services safely and consistently, the Committee supports an increase in the Preserve’s budget and staff consistent with its value to UW–Madison.**

UW–Madison is widely known for our Lakeshore Nature Preserve, a 300-acre natural area enhancing 4.3 miles of the south shore of Lake Mendota. It represents about one-third of the total acreage of the main UW-Madison campus and includes iconic locations like the Lakeshore Path and Picnic Point as well as a variety of environmental, cultural, and educational landscapes. The Preserve serves as a living classroom laboratory for UW–Madison’s teaching and research needs as well as a place for campus and community members to experience and explore nature and history on our campus.



The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee was formed in 2000 by Provost John Wiley to advise the Division of Facilities Planning and Management (FP&M), which manages the 300-acre Preserve. The Committee meets monthly and gives FP&M advice on policy, annual work plans, and budgets. Our charge is, in part, “to ensure the integrity of these cherished campus resources through the provision of necessary and appropriate oversight, policies, guidelines, stewardship and management.”

Because of this responsibility, our Committee understands and documents the value of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve to UW–Madison. The educational importance of the Preserve is enormous. In 2022 alone Preserve staff, with the Committee’s oversight, reviewed and approved over 85 education and research permits, representing classes and projects for over 25 departments. These include many students’ most memorable educational experiences in Biology, Forest & Wildlife Ecology, Botany, English, Environmental Studies, Plant Pathology, Anthropology, and Entomology. The preserve also supports the long-term research and teaching

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that goes on in the Biocore Prairie and the Class of 1918 Marsh. Well over 2000 UW-Madison students used the preserve as a site for teaching, learning, and research last year. External partners, including the Wisconsin DNR, USDA Forest Service, NOAA, various environmental NGOs, and a very active Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve have permits for various long- and short-term research, community engagement, and citizen science projects in the Preserve.

While the Lakeshore Nature Preserve serves as an unparalleled educational resource for campus, most students and staff know it as a place of recreation, respite, and culture. A student on the committee recalls that many students express their gratitude for this “beautiful” and “peaceful” space, and how it has contributed significantly to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being in what can sometimes feel like a stressful and competitive environment. In addition, the sheer scale of public use of the Preserve is worth mentioning. There were over 149,000 visits to Picnic Point along the main entrance path alone last year (the only Preserve access point for which we have precise numbers). The Eagle Heights Community Garden, the Wunk Sheek Gardens, the Greenhouse Learning Community Gardens, and the FH King Farm are all hosted within the Preserve. The Lakeshore Path is used by thousands of students every day. And the Preserve also encompasses critical cultural resources, with three burial mound groups, as well as numerous locations important to the Ho-Chunk Nation.

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee is concerned about the staffing and budgetary challenges at the Preserve. The wide array of activities and responsibilities described above has been managed through the amazing work of a very small staff and shockingly small support budget. Following the retirement of its part-time Director in 2022, the Preserve now has three full-time staff (an interim director, a volunteer and outreach coordinator, and a field projects coordinator). The Preserve has historically had an annual budget allocation for supplies and services of about \$12,000. **This budget does not cover the minimum maintenance and upkeep responsibilities at the preserve.** For many years, private donations (approximately \$140,000/yr) have been used to perform basic activities like the repainting and maintenance of gates, control of invasive species, the development of planning documents, the management of UW–Madison bioswales, and even the maintenance and emptying of pit toilets on the Preserve. **Ongoing management and maintenance of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve should not rely on outside donations.** Gifts and donations should be used, as they are elsewhere on campus, to enhance and supplement institutional support for the qualities that make the Lakeshore Nature Preserve so important to campus.

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee believes that this historically small annual budget allocation is unacceptable. **UW–Madison should support the Preserve with a staffing plan and an operating budget that is commensurate with its educational, recreational, environmental, and cultural importance.** The most recent Lakeshore Nature Preserve supply and service budget request for about \$150,000 per year more closely reflects the actual costs of maintaining and managing this amazing campus resource. The Lakeshore Nature Preserve has also asked for an additional land management position, which would allow the staff to keep up with the ongoing demands of keeping the Preserve ecologically healthy and safe for visitors. The Committee wholeheartedly supports this request.



The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee is proud to provide guidance and advice to the Preserve's hardworking staff and leadership. We strongly support the recent move of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve to the Office of Sustainability; that office's mission is closely aligned with the mission of the Preserve. We hope that the leadership of FP&M, the Provost, and the Chancellor will support the Lakeshore Nature Preserve's budget and staffing requests. Images from the Preserve are featured prominently in almost all UW–Madison promotional materials, as they are in the hearts of our alumni. The University should recognize the importance of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve through its funding and staffing decisions.

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee welcomes your questions about this letter, or about our work. If you would like to discuss these issues in more depth we would be happy to arrange a meeting between University leadership and our members. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Beattie, Chair, Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee
Teaching Faculty, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies

With the approval and support of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee:

Katherine Cramer, Professor, Political Science, and Natalie C. Holton Chair of Letters & Science

Claudia Guzmán, Director, Multicultural Student Center

Cole Koffron, ASM Student Representative

Anna Pidgeon, Professor, Wildlife Ecology

Elmo Rawling, Professor, Department of Extension

Bella Ruchti, ASM Student Representative

Evie Sellers, ASM Student Representative)

Kyle Webert, Teaching Faculty, Botany and the Center for Ecology and the Environment

cc: Cindy Torstveit, Associate Vice Chancellor, Facilities Planning & Management
Paul Robbins, Dean, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies
Missy Nergard, Director of Sustainability