



Director's Note: New Year, New Possibilities

By Brad Herrick, Lakeshore Nature Preserve Director

As we turn the page on 2025, Preserve staff are gearing up for exciting changes and opportunities in 2026. We look forward to the groundbreaking of the Frautschi Center, an 11,000-square-foot [Living Building-certified](#) visitor center and staff headquarters. This will be the most sustainably built and managed building on the UW-Madison campus. In addition, this space will provide extensive opportunities to engage students, staff, faculty, and the community about the important cultural and ecological attributes that shaped and continue to inform the Lakeshore Nature Preserve.

Over the course of 2026, visitors will also see two significant changes to Picnic Point. First, using the [2023 Preserve Master Plan](#) as our guide, we will begin the first phase of an ecological restoration project at Picnic Point. In partnership with Good Oak Ecological Services, students, and volunteers, our initial focus will be on removing a number of downed logs that fell during a severe storm in 2024. In most cases, when trees fall naturally, it is best to leave them on the forest floor to remain an important component of the ecosystem. However, in this case, the excessive number of downed trees in certain areas of Picnic Point is suppressing the germination of native vegetation. Selected downed logs will be removed, and these areas will be seeded with native species. In addition, the project will

include removal of woody invasive species and shoreline restoration. These changes represent opportunities to increase native biodiversity and reduce shoreline erosion.

The second change is instituting a “carry in, carry out” policy for Picnic Point. Picnic Point is the Preserve’s flagship destination, welcoming over 100,000 people annually who enjoy sitting around a fire circle, running or hiking to the Point’s tip, learning about the Native American mound groups, and taking in incredible views of Lake Mendota, the Capitol, and campus. Unfortunately, these activities produce trash and recyclables that do not always make their way into the proper receptacles or the bins overflow and attract wildlife. This change also aligns with campus sustainability goals. The dozen waste and recycling receptacles are serviced six days a week (they are always full) by driving a gas-powered truck up and down the Picnic Point trail. Removing the bins reduces fossil fuel use. Finally, this change aligns with our core mission as a natural area for research, teaching, education, outreach, and respite. Waste and recycling receptacles will be available at the entrance to Picnic Point, and we will also encourage people to bring their trash and recycling home with them.

Here’s to a new year of discoveries and possibilities at the Lakeshore Nature Preserve!



UW photographer Taylor Wolfram captured this vivid display of the Northern Lights over University Bay and Picnic Point in November.

Taylor Wolfram / UW-Madison

Supporting Bat Conservation in the Preserve

By Makeela Magomolla, 2025 Student Engagement Grant Awardee, UW Bat Brigade

The average person can easily name three different species of birds in Wisconsin, but very few can name three different species of bats. The University of Wisconsin Bat Brigade provides students with a unique opportunity to learn about Wisconsin bats by conducting acoustic surveys within the Lakeshore Nature Preserve. Acoustic data is collected by walking along a certain route with an ultrasonic recorder called the Echo Meter. The data is shared with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bat Program and also provides students with the opportunity for independent research.

There is still a lot we can learn about bats. They are fascinating and relatively understudied animals. Previously, the data collected by the Bat Brigade was limited by student participation and availability. However, the Bat Brigade was a recipient of a 2025 Lakeshore Nature Preserve [Student Engagement Grant](#) for the *Establishment of an Acoustic Bat Monitoring Station at the Biocore Prairie*. With this grant, a stationary acoustic recorder, the Mini Bat 2AA, was deployed in the Biocore Prairie and significantly increased the amount of data recorded for the season. Previously a survey was conducted at least once a week for about 90

minutes, however with the static recorder, bat acoustics can be recorded every evening from sunset to sunrise. This not only provides more data for state wide monitoring but also gives students the opportunity to learn data analysis and increases the possibility of more diverse research projects.

The Bat Brigade has also had the opportunity to reach audiences outside of the University student body. On October 25th, in celebration of [Bat Week](#), the Bat Brigade hosted a [public bat walk](#) within the Preserve in partnership with the Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and the Wisconsin Science Festival. Around 40 attendees participated to learn about bat ecology, conservation, and acoustic surveying.

With the establishment of the monitoring station, the Bat Brigade can increase collection of valuable information about bat ecology, help engage students in data analysis and research, and use these findings to educate and involve the greater Madison community. You can learn more about the UW Bat Brigade by reading this [UW News](#) feature or joining the Brigade for a bat walk!



Left and center: Makeela Magomolla stands next to the stationary acoustic bat recorder, the Mini Bat 2AA, mounted on a pole in Biocore Prairie.

Right: Makeela shows off the Echo Meter, a device that turns a smartphone into an interactive bat detector for walking acoustic bat monitoring routes.

Student Engagement Grants Fund Fifty Projects

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Academic Fund was started in 1999 with relatively modest gifts by former UW faculty members Robert M. Goodman and Henry Hart. Those gifts grew over the years and have since funded fifty small grants for learning in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve.

The broad purpose of the grants is to facilitate the use of the Preserve as an educational resource, particularly for undergraduate students. Just a few examples of the projects that have been funded in the Preserve: wild and domestic canid activity, exploring seasonal yeast biodiversity, examining flowering times of native prairie plants, tree swallow nest boxes, and understanding how nature impacts student writing and wellbeing. You can view a [list of all awards](#) since 2014.

Any student, faculty, or staff member at UW-Madison may apply for grants of up to \$1,000. The funds can be used for the purchase of equipment, testing and supplies, or for student stipends related to a specific project in the Preserve.

View the [Request for Proposals](#). **The deadline to submit a proposal is March 1, 2026.**

You can help fund more learning opportunities in the Preserve by contributing to the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Academic Fund. Please contact Preserve Director [Brad Herrick](#).

Writing Lake Mendota: Students Create a Narrative Map of Lake Sites

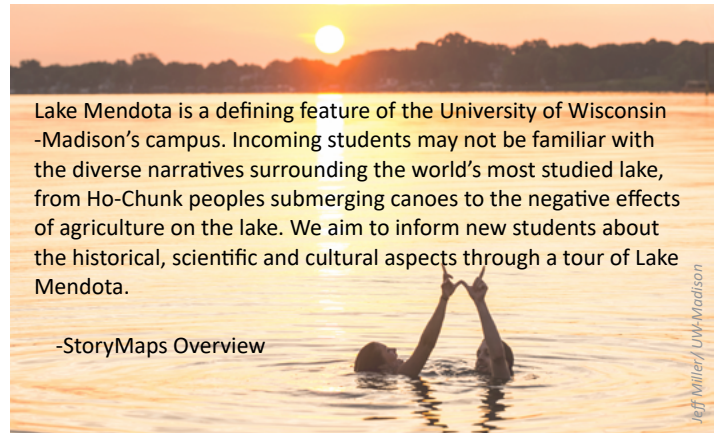
By Noreen McAuliffe, 2025 Student Engagement Grant Awardee, and Lecturer in English and the Nelson Institute of Environmental Studies

Lake Mendota is often cited as the most studied lake in the world, yet new discoveries and stories still emerge from its waters. Students in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies benefitted from a Lakeshore Nature Preserve [Student Engagement Grant](#) to support student learning in their Fall 2025 environmental studies capstone course: *Water Maps: Writing Lake Mendota*. This capstone course allowed students to learn and practice the techniques of research and writing in the environmental humanities.

Students spent the first half of the semester learning about the cultural, historical, and scientific narratives of Lake Mendota through readings and field experiences. They started off the course with a walking tour of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve led by Preserve field projects coordinator, Adam Gundlach. They learned about Ho-Chunk culture on a First Nations Cultural Landscape Tour with Kane Funmaker, and the recent discoveries of ancient dugout canoes in Mendota from a guest lecture by Sissel Schroeder. With Olaf Jensen from the Center for Limnology, they experienced the long-term ecological research on the lake with a boat excursion on the Limnos and water sampling. In the second half of the course, students used their Lake

Mendota knowledge to pursue independent research projects on sites around the lake.

The final capstone project for the class was published as a map tour titled [Water Maps: Writing Lake Mendota](#) on StoryMaps by ArcGIS. The tour features images, maps, audiovisual clips, and narratives that immerse the audience in the past, present, and future of Lake Mendota.



Lake Mendota is a defining feature of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's campus. Incoming students may not be familiar with the diverse narratives surrounding the world's most studied lake, from Ho-Chunk peoples submerging canoes to the negative effects of agriculture on the lake. We aim to inform new students about the historical, scientific and cultural aspects through a tour of Lake Mendota.

-StoryMaps Overview

Jeff Walker/ UW-Madison

Exploring Spring Ephemerals as an Undergraduate

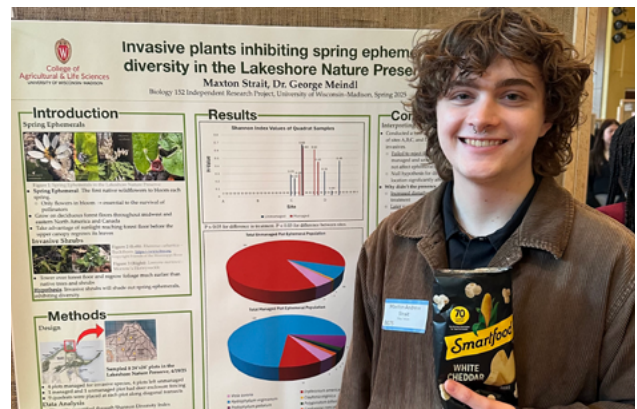
By Maxton Strait, 2025 Student Engagement Grant Awardee, and UW Biology major

Early spring is an exciting time in the Lakeshore Preserve, where seemingly barren forest floors explode into lush understories adorned with beautiful short-lived flowers. This quick transition is due to a type of native wildflower known as spring ephemerals—the first flowers to shoot up as soon as the snow melts, and disappear just as quickly when the trees regrow their leaves. These flowers play a crucial role in the forest ecosystem by being one of the sole providers for pollinators early in the season, but face increased vulnerability to disturbances due to their high sensitivity to light and very short growing season.

As a biology student who frequents the Preserve, I wanted to learn more about the protection of these plants, and UW gave me the resources to do so. I first contacted Dr. George Meindl, who has a network of managed and unmanaged vegetation survey plots in the Preserve for use in student research projects. Together, we formulated a study design that tested for the effects of early-season invasive shrubs and deer herbivory on spring ephemeral diversity. We then obtained a Student Engagement Grant that enabled us to put up fencing around some plots to prevent herbivory from deer. This fencing will also benefit future students who wish to use Dr. Meindl's plots for undergraduate research.

After analyzing our data collected in mid-April, we saw little indication of effects from deer herbivory and invasives, but obtained useful data on spring ephemeral populations and found many new directions for our study relating to the effects of invasive species management on sensitive natives like spring ephemerals. We will be exploring these new directions this coming spring.

This has been an incredibly impactful experience for me as an undergraduate, all blossoming from a simple curiosity about flowers in the reserve. I encourage any student with a lakeshore curiosity to contact a professor, apply for a grant, and see how far a simple question can take you!



Maxton presented his Student Engagement Grant funded research at the Biology 152 Poster Symposium at the end of the Spring 2025 semester.



Photos provided by Maxton Strait

Bloodroot (left) and wild ginger (right), are two spring flowering plants Maxton recorded in his research plots.

FRIENDS OF THE LAKESHORE NATURE PRESERVE 2026 Field Trips

Taylor Wolf from UW-Madison

Sun Jan 25 - Friends Favorite Places - 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Cruise the Preserve with naturalist Paul Noeldner to visit your favorite destinations a week after the snowy solstice.

Wed Feb 4 - Tick-Borne Diseases, from Lyme to Babesiosis - 7:00 p.m. Explore with Professors Susan Paskewitz and David Drake and naturalist Paul Noeldner how the ecology of ticks affects the epidemiology of tick-borne diseases such as Lyme and Babesiosis, and what you can do this coming summer to reduce your risks from our favorite blood-sucking arachnids. Meet in Room 1360 Genetics Biotechnology Center, 425 Henry Mall. Parking is available for a *small fee in Lot 20, 1390 University Ave; Lot 20 is attached to the Genetics Biotech Center building*

for easy wintertime access. The Biotechnology Center is also served by many Metro buses: use the Orchard Street station on University Ave.

Sun Feb 22 - Winter Birds - 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. Before the spring migrants return, join with Chuck Henrikson to get a good look at our hardy winterovers, some of whom are already singing out mating territories and a few (like great horned owls) who might already have young to care for.

Public parking is free on weekends and after 4:30 p.m. on weekdays in Lot 130 (2003 University Bay Drive). The entry point is served by Metro Bus Stop #2938 outbound and #2881 inbound. See map.wisc.edu.

Structure Your Life...Not Your Preserve

By Jeff Kirchman, Community Police Officer & University Natural Areas Police Liaison Officer

A winter walk through the Lakeshore Nature Preserve presents a new landscape. With the veil of greenery removed, what was hidden is often revealed.

When I walk the Preserve and other campus natural areas in winter, I often discover a new crop of improvised structures. Most frequently, they're made from downed timber. Sometimes they're lean-tos, or other crude structures. I've come across the occasional tree fort and hunting blind. And once, I stumbled into what could have passed as an Ewok village. Impressive...but not allowed.

The first reason is safety. Downed timber is an untrustworthy building material, and raised logs have the heft to cause injury when they fall.

Then there's the disruption to the natural order. Remember, this is a nature preserve. Leaving things where they naturally lay provides shelter for animals, soil for plants and so much more.

Finally, there's a law preventing it. Wisconsin State Statute UWS 18.07(7) states: "No person may place or erect any facility or structure upon university lands unless authorized by the chief administrative officer." Violations could result in fines of nearly \$200.

Please refrain from disturbing fallen timber and, if you observe a secret structure built in the area, alert Preserve staff or contact me.

You can reach Officer Kirchman at jkirchman@wisc.edu or 608-264-2677.



This structure was found in a clearing near the Indian burial mounds at Eagle Heights Woods some years ago. While impressive, the builders trampled the vegetation in the vicinity and encroached on the burial site.

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