

**Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee**  
**Monday, February 12, 2024 Minutes**  
**Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM**

**Committee Members:** Chairman Jim Winkler, Robb Jensen, Tommy Ryden and Linnaea Newman. Collette Sorgel on Zoom.

**Others Present:** Michele Sadauskas, Karl Jennrich, Stephanie Boismenu, Ted Rulseh (OCLRA), Eric Rempala (OCCWA), Kathleen Cooper, Beckie Gaskill (Lakeland Times), Diana Harris, Jeff Verdoorn (Oneida County EDC), Joe Steinhage, Tom LaDue, Michael Stinebrink (USDA), Tom Jerow, Amber Rehberg, Sharon Krause and Jessica Young. Jonna Jewell, Steven Schreier and Dan Butkus on Zoom.

**1. Call to order and Chairperson's Announcements:**

Chairman Winkler called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. The meeting was properly posted and handicapped accessible and ADA compliant. The symbol /s/ represents a valid virtual attendee's signature.

**2. Approve Agenda:** A motion by Ryden/Jensen to approve the February 12, 2024 Amended Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

**3. Approve Minutes:** A motion by Jensen/Ryden to approve the minutes of January 15, 2024 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

**4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:**

Monday, March 11, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

**5. Public Comment:**

Joe Steinhage (Town of Newbold) addressed item #9. There were a number of proposed changes made to the resolution by the County Board that he would like to address. Steinhage believes more whereases should be added in order to be more encompassing of the resolution. In the original resolution, the distance from shoreline is proposed at 500 feet, but many studies are showing as far away as 700 feet. Steinhage disagrees with the proposed 15 feet minimum depth; studies are showing 30 feet as the minimum depth, which would make 20 feet depth the absolute minimum to prevent scouring lake bottoms, destruction of fish spawning sites, and vegetation. The scientific studies and empirical data are irrefutable. Steinhage suggests that the word 'enhanced' for wakes is the most proper and widely used term, not the word 'excessive'. The current state legislation is woefully inadequate, dangerous, and does not address all of the salient concerns. Steinhage encourages the Committee to have all information as accurate as possible before moving it to the County Board.

Ted Rulseh (Town of Cassian), president of the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association, addressed item #9. The resolution suggests a distance from shore of 300 feet; that is not consistent with what scientific studies are showing, nor is it consistent with what states or local communities are doing. Vermont is about to go to final regulation with 500 feet from shore and 20 feet depth of water. Michigan DNR Fisheries has recommended 500 feet from shore and 15

feet depth. Three townships in northwestern Wisconsin have a distance from shore of 700 feet. The proposed bill at the state legislature states 200 feet from shore, which is consistent with what the boating industry wants. If Oneida County supports 300 feet from shore they will be sending the wrong message. The science shows that the distance should be much greater. Rulseh encouraged the Committee to read the new study being published by Wisconsin's Green Fire, which will be a review of the scientific studies done on the topic so far.

Jeff Verdoorn, Executive Director of the Oneida County Economic Development Corporation, addressed item #9. Verdoorn stated that lakes are the most important economic part of Oneida County, but they are fragile. Lakes are largely responsible for the economic engine that is Oneida County tourism, generating \$362 million annually in revenue for Oneida County and small businesses. All the while delivering \$22 million in local and state taxes which is equivalent to 35% of the total Oneida County budget. Twelve percent of employment in Oneida County comes from tourism. Verdoorn stated that it's important to remember that tourism is what drives Oneida County and our quality lakes are what drives tourism. Science shows that enhanced wakeboating can cause scouring in any depths less than 20-25 feet and less than 500 feet from shore (preferably 700 feet) risks personal safety. One wakeboat can destroy a small lake. The lakes of Oneida County are typically very shallow, which is a concern of wakeboaters because they believe it would eliminate too many lakes; however, we cannot afford to risk our lakes for the sake of the wakeboat population. This is a very real threat and we need to take action.

Tom LaDue (Town of Stella) addressed item #9. LaDue would like to keep the north in the north and have individuals respect the water resources. LaDue suggests 500 feet (preferably 700 feet) from the shoreline and 20 feet (preferably 30 feet) depth in order to protect resources.

Eric Rempala, member of Oneida County Clean Waters Action, addressed item #9. Rempala believes the suggestion of 500 feet from shoreline and 30 feet depth would be better for fish beds, tourism, and fishing. Rempala emphasized that if individuals do use studies, do not use the ones from manufacturing industries due to bias.

Kathleen Cooper (Pelican Township) addressed item #9. Cooper stated that the original resolution was good, but it did not consider the size of the lake, which should be at least 1500 acres. The changes made by the County Board to the original resolution were not based on science, the supervisor that suggested the changes sells wakeboats and that is a conflict of interest. The number of people with the ability to buy a wakeboat in Oneida County is very small, the majority of individuals using lakes here are fisherman, swimmers, kayakers, and kids. A small child could potentially drown in an enhanced wake if they were small enough. Cooper believes changes to the resolution that favor less regulation is dangerous. The enhanced wakes will flood out loon's nests. These changes will not benefit the majority of individuals living in Oneida County who make their living off of lakes or recreate on the lakes. Science says minimum of 500 feet from shore and 30 feet depth. The lakes have to be 1500 acres. Reconsider the changes to the resolution. This is fact versus non-fact.

#### **6. L Newman request to attend April Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Conference:**

A blanket statement for mileage was approved at the last CUW Committee meeting. Newman is requesting an overnight for the April Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Conference. Newman would like to attend because they are doing specific training for new Lake District supervisors which will enhance Newman's education. Newman will share this knowledge and information with new Lake District supervisors after the elections. This year is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of chapter 33, and many recommendations were made to change the language to make it more precise and official. Newman stated that Tracy Hartman confirmed there is money available to reimburse for the trip.

Jensen believes staying overnight is beneficial as it allows for greater networking opportunities.

Jensen/Sorgel made a motion to approve the attendance of Linnaea Newman to the conference and for travel and lodging expenses to be paid for by the county. All ayes; motion carried.

Chair Winkler requested that Sadauskas put an update from Newman on the agenda for the May CUW Committee meeting.

#### **7. Lumberjack RC & D:**

Newman attended the lumberjack meeting which was a positive experience that focused on positive conservation efforts. Newman had the opportunity to bestow grants on various conservation interests. All of the grants requested came to a total of \$47,000, making it possible for everyone to receive the grant they requested. Some of the requests were focused on preserving and reconstructing historical pavilions, cleaning things up, and putting them in a better state. Small towns with no money for a park or trail system will also benefit from these grants, as they will enhance life for all individuals living and visiting the area.

#### **8. PFAS Update:**

- a. Resolution #16-2024 to direct the WDNR to test well water for PFAS in areas near historically permitted sludge/waste spreading in Oneida County.

A resolution was presented that went on to the state and it was addressed that it should be taken on by committees. Chair Winkler thought it would be important for the Committee to consider adding it to future agendas. Snowden Lake in particular is concerning, as people are being directed to shower right after swimming in the lake by the DNR. Local wells are also being affected by PFAS, making this a land conservation issue, which should be addressed on the CUW Committee. Chair Winkler would like to have the land-water model out on display to show County Board members exactly how PFAS is affecting land and water in a three dimensional viewing, using red dye to show how PFAS travels.

Jensen stated three wells were tested in Crescent and the DNR has made no contact with the landowners to discuss possible solutions. Jensen believes there should be an

ongoing dialogue with the state to discuss the plans to communicate with individual landowners.

Chair Winkler asked Verdoorn if the byproduct from the mill that was spread on the land was tested for PFAS, and if so, was PFAS detected. Verdoorn stated it had not been tested for PFAS in the past.

Ryden would like to know if the mills need a license to dump sludge on the land. All sites accepting municipal sludge or paper mill sludge or local septic providers had permits from the DNR from past sludge spreading on agricultural land.

Chair Winkler commented that chemicals are going into our soils that can have an adverse effect on wells; millions of tourism dollars coming from lake usage could be affected by the PFAS issue. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

Newman would like to know if the CUW Committee can join forces with the Health Committee on this issue to prevent duplicate work.

Jensen commented that we should continue to work with the Health Department and the state on this issue.

Sorgel believes PFAS should be kept on the agenda, as does Newman who stated that staying updated on the issue is important because we haven't see the worst of it yet.

Chair Winkler will discuss with Scott Holewinski about bringing PFAS to the County Board as an educational piece in April or May when the new group of supervisors comes in. This could be an opportunity to teach youth and adults about conservation, showing them what happens underneath the soil surface.

## **9. Enhanced Wake Update:**

### **a. County Board Amended Resolution #12-2024 Enhanced Wake Regulations.**

The amended resolution from the County Board came back. Sadauskas included notes and comments for the Committee to discuss and consider.

County Board voted and recommended 300 feet instead of 500 feet from shoreline and 15 feet instead of 30 feet depth. They also suggested changing the terminology from 'enhanced' to 'excessive'. Sadauskas recommends the continued use of the word enhanced as it is used throughout the literature.

Chair Winkler would like a proposed resolution be ready for presentation at the March CUW Committee meeting so last minute changes can be made.

WCA had some hot button topics that the legislator was trying to address before finishing their session. Chair Winkler was informed that the resolution would not be brought forward, and it is not being pushed by legislators, giving everyone more time to work on the resolution which would be an advisory to the state on making a decision.

Jensen does not believe there will be a vote before the legislature adjourns next month and suggested that any changes made should be sent to the County Board for discussion.

Sorgel requested to know the definition of the words enhanced and excessive in regard to wakes. Ryden explained that the term enhanced refers to boats that have been modified specifically to make bigger wakes, whereas the term excessive would refer to any boat that makes big wakes, as there are boats with no modifications that can throw large wakes. Ryden proposed using the term excessive as it encompasses all boats, not just the modified ones.

Chair Winkler shared that the Newbold resolution focused solely on the wakes being created and did not take the type of boat into consideration. The resolution was sent to the DNR and they are still waiting for a response on it.

Newman stated that the resolution is solely advisory and believes that using the term enhanced would be best, as it is the commonly used term for this issue and most individuals understand what it means.

Ryden believes that the term excessive should be used because it would encompass all bad wakes, not just those produced by boats with modification.

Jensen referred to line 20 of the amended resolution and requested clarification. Sadauskas stated that the resolution was developed to respond to the bill and that the terminology used reflected that of the proposed bill, which is why 'wakesurfing and wakeboarding' should be kept in the proposed resolution and not be substituted by the word 'excessive'.

Chair Winkler suggests that anything sent to the state should be the most accurate and up-to-date information, and that copies of the studies should be submitted along with the resolution.

Tom Jerow spoke about a study coming out from Greenfire that will support 600 feet from shore and 20 feet depth, with language on AIS and the decontamination of boats. If the lake is not correctly mapped, there should be no wakeboating on those lakes.

Chair Winkler would like to have a final draft of the resolution ready for review for the March CUW Committee meeting.

#### **10. Agricultural Representative on CUW Committee:**

Sadauskas is open to suggestions from Committee about an 'agricultural representative' for the Committee. John Engel is interested in continuing on as the Agricultural Representative for the CUW Committee. No word from FSA yet on who the Vilas/Oneida representative will be.

Winkler/Jensen made a motion to accept John Engel as the Agricultural Representative for 2024. All ayes; motion carried.

**11. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) – Michael Stinebrink**

*This item was moved up on the agenda just after Approve Minutes (#3) to accommodate the presenter, Michael Stinebrink.*

Stinebrink reviewed the Memorandum of Agreement between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Oneida County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) with the Committee.

NRCS was set up as a federal/state partnership where local farmers formed conservation districts, and the USDA provided assistance to farmers with the help of conservation districts. NRCS is supposed to enter into agreement with the local authority to provide USDA assistance to farmers and rural landowners; the last MOA expired in 2019. The new agreement is replacing the expired agreement.

Expectations of the county are listed on page three, section B of the agreement.

There are strict privacy provisions on information sharing within the federal farm bill; when NRCS works with a landowner, the landowner's personal information cannot be shared with a third party. When Oneida County works with NRCS and landowners, they are bound to this federal law too.

Jensen would like to know who the *conservation cooperator* refers to on page nine. Stinebrink responded that the terminology encompasses the entire county.

Due to elections coming up and possible changes in the members of the CUW Committee, it would be prudent to assign a more permanent type of individual within the Committee to sign the contract when it is finalized.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to approve the memorandum agreement between USDA, NRCS and Oneida County LWCD and to authorize the Oneida County Conservationist to sign the agreement, pending review by Corporation Counsel. All ayes; motion carried.

**12. Lake District Reports**

(Thunder, Nokomis, Mid, Bear, Crescent, Squash, Horsehead).

Thunder Lake has been submitted by Collette Sorgel.

**13. LWCD Office Reports:**

- a. Budget Actual – (2023 to date and 2024).
- b. Invoices Paid.

Committee acknowledged and received items 13a and 13b.

**14. LWCD items to include on next agenda:**

- PFAS
- Enhanced Wake

**15. Public Comment:**

Eric Rempala addressed item #8. Rempala believes the county needs to be involved and that a committee needs to take ownership of this issue. He sent an article by Katie Thorensen to the entire County Board that included an interactive map from the DNR that shows where all sludge had been spread with the dates, locations, and amounts since 1996. Rempala stated that Oneida County should put in an open records request to the DNR to get the data on spreading before 1996. Rempala believes that PFAS contamination is not only in Stella, that it is present in Oneida County, and would like testing done in various locations. The DNR is open to having discussions with committees and boards at meetings, so long as there are no resolutions being made.

Kathleen Cooper addressed item #8. Cooper believes that this issue is going to get worse before it gets better. The EPA has not put out numbers that would guide the DNR, what the DNR considers to be safe may not actually be safe due to this lack of guidance. Anything presenting as less than 200 ppm can be filtered out using a filtration system, but anything over that cannot be filtered out. The cost of filtration systems is high and the cost of water from safe sources is high. The Town of Stella is being considered a possible superfund site, showing just how large of a problem this really is. We do not know the extent of the contamination, but the Oneida County Health Department, CUW Committee, and Oneida County Board need to address this issue. The state legislators need to release the near \$125 million designated for PFAS clean-up.

Tom LaDue addressed item #8. LaDue lives on Snowden Lake and the PFAS issue affects him on a very personal level. LaDue has lived there for 14 years, drinking the water and eating the fish. LaDue thanked the Committee for bringing the issue up and taking a closer look at it.

Joe Steinhage addressed item #9. Steinhage shares the concerns of the Committee about the DNR being MIA on certain issues. The water is the jurisdiction of the DNR and you would expect them to be up in arms on this issue, but you don't hear from them on it very much. Unless a town specifically brings the issue up to them, you do not hear much about it from them. The size of lake, acreage wise, taking minimum depth and distance from shoreline you can look at them as independent variables and the size of the lake as a dependent variable. Typography differs greatly from one lake to another. Minimum depth and distance from shoreline are extremely critical and leaves the size of the lake to be determined by that.

## **16. Area 4 Extension Director Update – A. Rehberg**

- a. UWEX Status Update:
  - The Wisconsin 4-H Impact Report is available for review and focuses on the numbers, and highlights the programs available.
  - The Oneida County Extension office at Nicolet is at full capacity with staffing. The state has approved additional funding to build up workspaces and purchase necessary furniture for the growth. The Dean has supported this funding and although the purchase is being made by UW-Madison, the furniture will be owned by Oneida County.
  - Rehberg helped to facilitate a meeting between Tri-County Human Service staff and directors of Social Services at the Nicolet campus in January.
- b. Staffing & Communication Plan:
  - Oneida County Extension is fully staffed. Communication is being built up through promotion and marketing who we are, the programming we offer, the resources we have, and the services we provide. Efforts are continuously being made to grow awareness and visibility within the community. We will be at the Up North Expo in March.
- c. Nicolet Facilities Update:
  - Nicolet is going through a period of transition. Rehberg had the opportunity to network with Kate Ferrel, the president of Nicolet College, and Ellen Mathein, the Dean of Business and Entrepreneurship, and will continue to build relationships and seek out opportunities for partnership.

## **17. Youth in Governance – Sharon Krause**

Rehberg commented that they were in a solid place to begin development of the Youth in Governance (YIG) program. Krause has some capacity to work on this, she already has done a lot of the leg work to develop the program. Right now, they are learning as much as possible so that the plan is solid moving forward. Currently, YIG is in the development stages, making it a good time to have conversations about concerns, such as the capacity of the County Board to become mentors and the capacity of youth to participate during school hours.

Diana Harris reflected on her time in YIG, which was a profoundly positive experience for her. She mentioned that transportation and other logistical problems should be considered for students outside of Rhinelander.

Krause asked the Committee their thoughts on what some hurdles or outcomes might be. She then went on to list some of the positive youth development outcomes: youth will have ownership, adults will hear the voice of youth, the community may benefit in regard to programming, there is potential for this to morph into community placemaking, youth will develop civic engagement skills, and youth will become more informed and involved in local government.

Krause emphasized the importance of having youth be a part of the committees rather than the County Board. Krause would like youth to discover a spark about one or two issues that they



could follow and focus on, and then bring discussion to the County Board regarding those issues.

The Lakeland School District is interested, but has concerns about travel to Rhinelander and the amount of school hours that will be missed. Rhinelander is fully committed.

Training will be provided over the summer and the program would begin in the fall. Training would be for youth and their mentors to properly prepare them for the program.

Krause addressed the concern that youth are interested in being fully involved and they have high expectations on what they spend their time on. In order for this to be beneficial and effective, the YIG program would need to allow for as much interaction and involvement as possible.

Jensen is hesitant; concerned about the time commitment for youth. Wants to make sure they have the support to understand the issues and fully engage. Also, considering how can some citizenship programming be provided to more students? Krause suggested that the youth of YIG could present to their peers about the program as part of a social studies class or civic government course. Jensen stated he will support anything that would help more young people understand county government.

Krause emphasized the importance of this opportunity for adults to hear the minds of youth, and that youth would learn from adults, but adults would also learn from the youth.

Rehberg suggested exploring a Youth in Government Day at the courthouse; youth would visit different departments and hear from department heads and county board members. This will create a more comprehensive program that can be built up and expanded.

Rehberg suggested the timeline of promoting YIG in the spring, training in the summer, and the program officially starting in the fall. Rehberg asked the Committee what was needed to move it from the conversation stage to the next stage. Chair Winkler commented that the support of the superintendent and principal was needed before the program could begin. They need to be engaged in the process and give their blessing for youth to be excused (not marked absent) when participating in YIG. Scott Holewinski would also need to be included and engaged in the process, and it would need to be brought to the County Board before summer.

Next steps would be scheduling a conversation with Scott Holewinski and the County Board leadership, get their support and approval to move forward.

Newman commented that it might be interesting to have some youth candidates present for the swearing in ceremony of newly elected officials in April. Chair Winkler suggested having a judge meet with the youth in the fall after the program starts to have a pseudo swearing in ceremony for the youth.

**18. UWEX Office Reports:**

- a. Budget Actual
- b. Invoices Paid

Committee acknowledged and received agenda items 18a & 18b, as presented.

**19. UWEX Items to include on next agenda:**

- Update on Youth in Governance
- Area 4 Extension Director Updates
- Committee Transitions

**20. Public Comment:**

Tom Jerow addressed item #19. Jerow is happy that Youth in Governance is being brought back to Oneida County. Jerow thinks it is a good idea to have them on committees instead of on the board, it will give them a chance to dive in better on topics the county is addressing.

**21. Adjournment:** Chairman Winkler adjourned meeting at 3:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary