

Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, August 11, 2025 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

Committee Members: Chair Collette Sorgel, Linnaea Newman, Lenore Lopez, Robb Jensen, and Chris Schultz.

Others Present: Karl Jennrich, Michele Sadauskas, Stephanie Boismenue, Levi Rhody, Eric Rempala, Tracy Hartman, Amber Rehberg, Anne Williams, and Jessica Young. Jonna Jewell and Beckie Gaskill on Zoom.

1. Call to order and Chairperson's Announcements:

Chair Sorgel called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. The meeting was properly posted and handicapped accessible and ADA compliant.

2. Approve Agenda: A motion by Schultz/Newman to approve the August 11, 2025 Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

3. Approve Minutes: A motion by Jensen/Lopez to approve the minutes of June 9, 2025 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:

There was an adjustment to the next normal meeting date. It was changed to: Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. Public Comment:

Eric Rempala (Oneida County Clean Waters Action), provided an update regarding PFAS-related developments. The Town of Stella is tentatively scheduled to host a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) PFAS informational meeting on August 21, with confirmation on the date expected within the coming week. Representatives from the Oneida County Health Department, including Linda Conlon, will be present at the upcoming meeting.

The DNR is expanding PFAS testing efforts within Oneida County to include five additional towns: Newbold, Crescent, Pine Lake, Sugar Camp, and Pelican. Selection for testing will be based on bio-solid application records, with a focus on agricultural lands. It is recommended that these towns be proactively informed about the testing process, as they may not be as familiar with PFAS-related issues as the Town of Stella.

The State of Wisconsin has allocated substantial grant funding for PFAS mitigation in its budget. While these funds are expected to benefit well owners in Rhinelander, they may not be applicable to Stella.

Residents who qualify for the expanded testing will receive mailed notifications offering the opportunity to participate in free PFAS testing. Each town will be provided with a list of addresses selected by the DNR for solicitation. Participation is voluntary, and all test results will be made publicly available.

6. LWCD Upcoming Events:

August 21: Star Party at Nicolet College

September 10: Oneida County Pasture Walk at Hanson's Garden Village

7. Summer Tour Attendance Approval:

As no Committee members will be in attendance, formal approval is not required.

8. Farmland Preservation Program Update:

The current Farmland Preservation Plan for Oneida County is set to expire on December 31, 2025. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has contacted the Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) to inquire about interest in renewing the plan.

The estimated cost to renew the plan is \$5,000-\$6,000, if the County utilizes the 50% matching grant offered by DATCP.

Historically, utilization of the plan has been infrequent, with only a few instances of use over the past decade. While the plan does offer tax credit benefits, these are contingent upon exclusive agricultural zoning, which Oneida County does not currently have in place. Based on this limited applicability and overall cost to renew, Sadauskas has recommended against renewal, noting that the plan is not mandatory and has provided minimal value to the County.

Jensen raised questions regarding the County's authority over potential solar farm developments. Due to strong support from the State for renewable energy initiatives, Oneida County and other counties have limited control over such projects.

Committee has chosen to take no action, thereby the plan will not be renewed.

9. Lumberjack RC&D At-Large Membership:

Lumberjack RC&D is currently seeking candidates for at-large membership, with one remaining opening available for Oneida County. At present, the County is represented by one Committee member (Linnaea Newman) and one at-large member (Bob Mott).

Committee members are encouraged to refer individuals who may be a good fit for this role. Eligible candidates must be non-committee members and non-County Board Supervisors. Interested individuals should be directed to contact Lumberjack RC&D for further information.

Newman has expressed support for adding another at-large member from Oneida County, citing the potential to increase access to conservation grants. Additional representation could enhance the County's capacity to request and secure funding for local conservation initiatives.

An informational packet will be provided to Committee members to share with prospective candidates.

10. 2026 LWCD Budget:

- a. **LTE Staffing Requests:** The LWCD currently maintains eight staff positions, with seven fully grant-funded and one partially grant-funded. Approval is being sought to proceed with the Limited Term Employment (LTE) staffing requests for budget year 2026. Minor revisions have been made to the request documents. The narrative for the Administrative Support position was updated to reflect improved language, and a mathematical adjustment was made to the funding figures for the two AIS Specialist positions. Additional funding is anticipated for the partially grant-funded position, which will be addressed in a future meeting.

Although the positions and hours remain consistent with previous years, Committee approval is still required for all LTE requests. A modest salary increase is included to account for expected annual raises.

Newman/Lopez made a motion to approve the staffing request form for the LTE positions. All ayes; motion carried.

11. PFAs Update:

Additional areas within Oneida County have recently been included in the ongoing testing initiative. Committee members are encouraged to remain attentive to developments and to stay informed on the issue in anticipation of potential media inquiries.

12. Lake District Reports:

Thunder Lake: Meeting attendance continues to decline. Funding from Fish & Wildlife grants has supported fish stocking efforts, with hopes to purchase more this season. The lake's water level dropped by 5 inches over the past two weeks. A shed housing electrical components and aerator pumps was damaged, likely due to a lightning strike, resulting in the need to purchase replacement parts. The Three Lakes Waterfront Association has been contacted for guidance and may attend the next meeting to discuss potential support at no cost.

Horsehead Lake: The annual meeting was held on Saturday, August 2, 2025. The current secretary has announced they will not seek re-election. Yellow Iris and Eurasian Milfoil have been identified in the lake. It was agreed that weed harvesting is necessary, with cutting limited to the west side. No fish restocking is planned at this time.

Lake Nokomis: The annual meeting took place on Saturday, August 9, 2025. Due to the high cost of renting a pontoon boat (approximately \$10,000 each time), the lake association invested \$10,000 in a pontoon boat to deploy buoys. Recent dam work included the installation of bright lighting. Eurasian Milfoil was discovered in three locations: however, efforts to remove were halted due to the presence of wild rice.

Bear Lake: Walleye stocking is scheduled for the fall. Clean Boats, Clean Waters (CBCW) efforts are ongoing at the boat landing. Reports of disruptive behavior on boats have led to increased patrols by the Sheriff's Department. Wakeboats were a major topic of concern at both the Bear Lake and Lake Nokomis meetings.

Squash Lake: The annual meeting took place on Saturday, August 9, 2025. Last year's Eurasian Milfoil harvest totaled 17,000 pounds – a figure already matched this year. A team of 10-12 divers, supported by a specialized dive boat, continues removal efforts. The special dive boat is working very well. The boat has been equipped with a special ladder to make it easier for divers to get in and out of the water with heavy gear. The DNR does not generally deny permits for hand-pulling Milfoil, a method Squash Lake has employed since 2017.

Crescent Lake: Divers will continue Milfoil removal through September. Wakeboats were a central topic at the most recent meeting. The current board is not taking a position on the issue. Statute does not allow the Town of Crescent to have authority in managing the lake. Research is being conducted on the environmental impacts of using chemical treatments.

13. LWCD Office Reports: – June & July, 2025.

- a. Budget Actual.
- b. Invoices Paid.

14. LWCD items to include on next agenda:

- PFAs Update (Chair Sorgel requested this agenda item be moved to the beginning of the meeting).
- 2026 Budget Overview
- Lake District Reports

15. Programming/Educator Report: - Anne Williams

- In July, the Oneida County 4-H Youth Summer Theater Program was hosted at Nicolet College's Lakeside Center. The program welcomed 45 youth participants. Every participant was cast in a role for the musical production. Two professional actor-directors from the Missoula Children's Theater led rehearsals and directed the performance, which was successfully staged within one week. To support future programming, the Oneida County 4-H Leaders' Association organized a fundraising bake sale featuring gingerbread cookies. The scale and success of the

program required significant coordination and organization from support staff. The event was a collaborative effort between Oneida County 4-H, Oneida County Extension, and Nicolet College, which has expressed enthusiasm for hosting the program again next year.

- Also in July, Oneida County 4-H launched its inaugural Robotics Day Camp at Nicolet College, designed for students in grades 4-5 across public, private, and homeschool settings within Oneida County. The camp engaged 12 youth in hands-on robotics learning using LEGO kits. The limited enrollment allowed for individualized instruction and helped manage equipment and material costs. The program introduced many new families to 4-H and provided a gateway to further involvement. Sharon Krause, Positive Youth Development Educator for Oneida County, led outdoor activities focused on survival skills and recreation. The camp was featured in a segment by News Channel 12, available on their website and Facebook page. Robotics Day Camp served as an accessible entry point to robotics, easing the learning curve for younger participants.
- A training session was held in Three Lakes to prepare five new adult volunteers to serve as team coaches for the upcoming LEGO Robotics Clubs. The initiative will launch one challenge team and two explorer teams, marking the first robotics clubs in that area.
- The Rhinelander LEGO Robotics Program is set to begin this month with a theme centered on archaeology and history. Youth participants will engage with the community to explore how technology can be integrated while focusing on historical understanding and heritage preservation.
- The pilot year of the Oneida County Youth in Governance Program will commence in August, featuring three high school students – two from Rhinelander High School and one from Lakeland Union High School. The program has garnered strong interest from County Board Supervisors, many of whom volunteered to serve as mentors. Youth participants have been matched with mentors based on their committee interests. A Supervisor-Mentor training is scheduled for August 13, followed by a Meet & Greet Luncheon on August 20.

16. 2026 UWEX Budget Process:

The proposed 2026 UW-Extension budget reflects a decrease from the previous year, with a total request of \$137,393, compared to \$139,381 in 2025. Despite this reduction, the budget accommodates increased staffing costs due to standard annual wage adjustments and is expected to support the growth and expansion of programming across Oneida County.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to approve the UW-Extension budget for \$137,393 and forward it on to the Executive Committee for inclusion in the 2026 Budget. All ayes; motion carried.

17. Area 4 Extension Director Update: – A Rehberg.

- a. UWEX Status Update:

i. Programming Updates

For over 30 years, UW-Madison Extension's FoodWise program has helped Wisconsin communities eat healthier, and live more active lives. On July 4, 2025 the congressional budget reconciliation bill was signed into law, and eliminated all National Education and Obesity Prevention Grant Program (SNAP-Ed) Funding effective September 30, 2025. FoodWise has been a vital part of Oneida County Extension, delivering nutrition education in schools and supporting food access efforts throughout the community. The recent program cuts represent a significant loss, especially for low-income families and youth. FoodWise helped build healthier habits, improve food security, and empower individuals to make lasting changes. FoodWise educators provide .9 FTE services in Oneida County.

ii. Nicolet Facilities & Partnership Update

Extension staff continues to strengthen their partnership with Nicolet College, collaborating on a variety of programs that bring diverse community members to campus. The relationship remains strong and continues to grow through shared initiatives. In August, Nicolet provided space for StrongBodies to host a statewide training day, welcoming new volunteers from across Wisconsin and the local area, further enriching the campus community.

18. UWEX Office Reports: – May, June, & July, 2025.

This item was moved up on the agenda before item #17, Area 4 Extension Director Update by Amber Rehberg.

- a. Budget Actual.
- b. Invoices Paid.

19. UWEX items to include on next agenda:

FoodWise Wrap-Up

20. Public Comment:

None.

21. Adjournment: Chair Sorgel adjourned the meeting at 3 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary