

**Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee**  
**Monday, April 13, 2026 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:** Michele Sadauskas, Stephanie Boismenu, Karl Jennrich, Anne Williams, Sharon Krause, Amber Rehberg, Dave Sorgel, Eric Rempala, Ted Rulseh, Tom Wiensch, Kathleen Cooper, and Jessica Young. Levi Rhody and Jonna Jewell on Zoom.

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

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

**2. Approve Agenda:** A motion by Jensen/Newman to approve the April 13, 2026 Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

**3. Approve Minutes:** A motion by Newman/Lopez to approve the minutes of February 9, 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

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

Monday, May 11, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

**5. Public Comment:**

None.

**6. PFAS Update:**

Chair Sorgel reported that PFAS-related funding has been approved by the Legislature. Rempala confirmed that the funds have been released and that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will be adding ten new positions; however, it is not yet known how many of those positions will be specifically assigned to PFAS-related work. At this time, there is no information available regarding how the funding will be allocated. It is anticipated that additional details and a formal plan will be available by summer.

**7. Wisconsin Land + Water Annual Conference Review:** - March 4-6, 2026 - M. Sadauskas

Sadauskas reported that the conference was well attended by county conservationists, staff, and county board supervisors throughout the state of Wisconsin. Sadauskas also presented on current research efforts, including the Lake Classification System and the enhanced wakes category. Attendees received feedback and guidance from a small panel of county board supervisors from various locations on effective communication with legislators and representatives, including appropriate messaging and topics to

avoid. Tips shared included refraining from the use of inappropriate language and inviting legislators to participate in tours during the spring. Several policy sessions were offered and found to be informative and useful. Oneida County placed first in two divisions of the speaking contest, with Ainsley and Sutton Pitlik presenting before an audience of approximately 350 attendees. None of the poster submissions placed.

## **8. Shoreland Protection Ordinance 9.95, 9.97, and Article 10 Update:**

### **a. General Discussion:**

- i. Jennrich reported that additional time will be required for further review. Following the public hearing, outside Counsel Larry Konopacki and Jennrich reviewed all public comments line by line as they relate to the ordinance amendments. Technical comments were submitted to the DNR, outlining areas of agreement, proposed modifications, and items with which outside counsel disagreed with the DNR.
- ii. Jennrich noted that he received an email from the DNR on Friday. The DNR confirmed receipt of the County's modified proposed amendments submitted on March 19, 2026, including revisions to Chapter 9 (Articles 1, 3, 5, and 9) and Article 10 (Definitions). The DNR indicated, however, that it did not receive an updated crosswalk document or any changes to the appendices.
- iii. Jennrich explained that one of the County's modifications involved the removal of Section 9.90B in Chapter 9, Article 9, titled General Zoning Provisions Applied in Chart of Jurisdiction. This removal eliminated the incorporation of Articles 1 through 8 and Article 10, which had previously been used to satisfy certain shoreland zoning requirements, including definitions and land division administration. The DNR has requested a complete, consolidated draft of the post-shoreland protection provisions in a single document, along with an updated crosswalk identifying where all shoreland requirements are addressed. The DNR provided both the prior crosswalk and a blank template for this purpose and advised that formal review will resume once the requested documents are received.
- iv. Jennrich stated that he will update and resubmit the required shoreland ordinance review checklist, which is now required with ordinance submissions. He further reported that staff is working to remove appendices, including diagrams and images, from the ordinance and instead provide them as handout materials. This approach follows legal counsel's recommendation that ordinance language—not visual materials—controls enforcement, and that changes to appendices could otherwise necessitate formal ordinance amendments. Jennrich noted that these revisions will require additional time.
- v. Jennrich assured the Committee that a copy of the revised ordinance would be shared once it is ready. No timeframe for completion is available at this time. Corporation Counsel will need to determine

whether the proposed changes remain within the scope of the public hearing or if an additional public hearing will be required.

Clear Cutting Topic: No further discussion occurred at the Planning & Development Committee meeting. The item was opened for public comment; however, no deliberations were held.

- b. Oneida County Clean Waters Action (OCCWA) & Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association (OCLRA) proposed access/viewing corridor language:
  - i. Rulseh reported that OCLRA has been working for a number of years to try and get a provision in the Shoreland Protection Ordinance that would disallow clear cutting in the access and viewing corridors. The language recommended states that no more than 50% of the trees larger than six-inch diameter or larger be removed, with the provision that Oneida County Planning & Zoning offers flexibility based on the site. OCLRA is requesting this suggestion be brought to the full County Board, if it cannot be brought up in front of the Planning & Development Committee. OCLRA believes that having something in writing will provide education to land owners, providing a clear understanding of the impacts of clear cutting on shoreland areas. The intent is to have the language 'counter ready', meaning it can be explained efficiently and easily at the Planning & Zoning Department counter. Chair Sorgel commented that educating contractors would also be helpful.
  - ii. Wiensch reported that Sawyer, Vilas, and Marinette Counties all have clear-cutting restrictions approved by the DNR, making the idea viable for Oneida County as well. Jensen worries that if the County is challenged on these ordinances, it would tie up staff in court proceedings and open the County up to litigation. He also agreed that having language in the ordinance and informing people of it is not such a bad thing either. The County can regulate in areas where the DNR cannot. Prohibiting clear cutting is something the DNR does not regulate. The code is older than the statutes, making them not match-up very well.
  - iii. It was suggested that LWCD submit a report, a non-action item, to the County Board after the vote for chair, to provide a further depth of knowledge on the topic.

## **9. Lake District Reports:**

Mid Lake Protection District – A report was presented on April 8 regarding the District's budget, which is in good standing. The District plans to conduct surveys during the summer season and currently maintains four years of financial reserves designated for hand-pulling invasive species. The District does not intend to pursue chemical treatment methods. The Mid Lake Comprehensive Management Plan has been approved for 2026 and 2027.

Crescent Lake – Plans to apply for grant funding to address invasive species management. If grant funding is not secured, the District will seek authorization to utilize up to five days of DASH treatment. Ongoing concern was noted regarding potential sale of the Crescent Lake Bible Camp property, particularly the potential impacts on the lake should the property be developed into condominiums.

**10. LWCD Office Reports:**

- a. Budget Actual – *February & March, 2026 and Final #s for 2025.*
  - i. Final 2025 Financial Summary:
    1. Total expenditures for 2025, including wages, supplies, mileage, cost share, and other paid expenses, amounted to \$387,744.
    2. Total grant funding received in 2025 was \$295,075.
    3. The net County contribution for 2025 was \$92,669, supporting the equivalent of 4.5 full time employees.
- b. Invoices Paid – *February & March, 2026.*

**11. LWCD Upcoming Events:**

- Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Convention: April 15-17, 2026
- Earth Day at Nicolet College: 3-7 p.m. April 22, 2026

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

- Election of a new Chairperson and Vice Chairperson for the CUW Committee
- Review of the Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Convention
- Kathon Lake District proposal
- Committee member introductions
- North Central Land & Water Conservation Association (NCLWCA) update and alternate selection
- Staff introductions
- Lake District updates and representative selection

**13. UWEX Office Reports:**

- a. Budget Actual – *January, February, & March, 2026.*
- b. Invoices Paid – *January, February, & March, 2026.*

**14. Program Highlights:**

- a. Positive Youth Development – S. Krause  
The Teen Court Coordinator provided an overview of recent program outcomes and youth prevention activities. An informational handout was shared, intended to support outreach efforts to encourage additional families to participate in Teen Court. The handout includes results from a voluntary survey distributed to youth participants and their families. To date, 44 surveys have been returned

from approximately 100 recipients. All but one respondent successfully completed their assigned sanctions, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Selected youth comments highlighted accountability, personal growth, and appreciation for receiving a second chance. Program adjustments were discussed, including a revised panel format that begins with personal questions rather than incident-focused questions. This approach has contributed to more meaningful dialogue, improved understanding of circumstances, and positive engagement from both youth and parents.

Survey results indicated that 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their case was handled fairly, panelists were professional, and they were satisfied with both the process and sanctions. Most respondents stated they would recommend Teen Court to others. Additionally, the majority reported improved accountability, family relationships, peer relationships, respect for others, understanding of the juvenile justice system, and awareness of the effects of substance use. Coordinator noted that substance-related cases most commonly involve alcohol, vaping, and THC, with THC cases increasing. Parental survey responses are being reviewed separately and will be presented at a later date.

An update was also provided on the Raise Your Voice Club. The Lakeland club was discontinued due to limited participation; however, alternative programming will be implemented. At Rhinelander High School, the club remains active and will host its third open mic night in May at ArtStart. These events provide youth an opportunity to share creative work and discuss mental health topics. Health Department staff now attend club meetings to receive direct youth input. Additional youth-led initiatives include educational outreach at YMCA Teen Night.

Upcoming opportunities include participation in an Aspirus Health roundtable event on May 1, where students from Rhinelander and Lakeland will share youth perspectives on substance misuse and mental health with healthcare professionals and college students. The Coordinator is also mentoring a group of Rhinelander High School students interested in mental health, who will deliver stress-management activities to fourth and fifth graders using the Mind Matters curriculum.

At Lakeland High School, substance use prevention and mental health activities will transition to the Ignition program, led by a school guidance counselor and focused on supporting freshmen transitioning to high school. Regionally, multiple coalitions are collaborating to bring Vibe18 (youth prevention program) back to area schools in fall 2026, including Rhinelander, Lakeland, Lac du Flambeau, Northland Pines, James Williams Middle School, and Forest County

school districts. Follow-up peer education efforts will be led by student groups at each school.

b. 4-H – A. Williams

The 4-H Youth Development Educator provided updates on the Youth in Governance Program, which concluded in February. Evaluation results were shared from both student participants and County Board Supervisor/Mentors. Students completed pre- and post-program evaluations, which demonstrated significant growth in understanding county government operations, including committee structure, decision-making processes, and current issues affecting Oneida County. Students also reported increased civic awareness, confidence that youth voices matter, stronger leadership skills, improved communication with adults, and a greater sense of belonging and connection to the community. Several students expressed feeling more prepared to discuss local issues with others, indicating increased civic readiness. Overall feedback showed the pilot year had a meaningful and positive impact, with most students expressing interest in participating again and recommending program expansion to include more youth.

Supervisor/Mentors also completed evaluations and reported a positive first-year experience. Mentors noted strong student engagement, effective support from UW-Extension staff, and a well-structured program. Challenges identified included the complexity of county government processes and student scheduling conflicts. Mentors observed notable student growth in confidence, agenda review skills, and questioning. All mentors indicated interest in mentoring again, with one suggestion to include more structured pre- and post-meeting discussions.

Committee members shared positive observations, noting visible student growth, increased confidence, and professional communication skills. Members discussed potential opportunities to further enhance student participation, such as assigning students to research and follow specific policy topics over time and incorporating youth perspectives into standing committee agenda items. The importance of modeling respectful disagreement and exposing students to real-world governance complexities was emphasized.

The Educator reported that the next Youth in Governance program cycle will begin with training in August, with student participation in committee meetings anticipated from October through February. Additional Supervisor/Mentors will be needed, and interested Committee members were encouraged to contact staff.

In June, 4-H will partner with UW-Madison's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences to offer free, two-day educational programs at the Rhinelander

Agricultural Research Station (June 12) and the Kemp Natural Resources Station (June 13) for youth entering grades 4–12. *Please contact Jess Young if you are interested in attending either day!*

In July, 4-H will host a free Youth Summer Theater Program for youth entering grades 1–12, featuring a one-hour family-friendly performance at 1 p.m. on July 11 at the Lakeside Center Theater on Nicole campus.

Also offered in July, a Robo-Camp for youth entering grades 4-5, and in August an Advanced Robo-Camp for youth who have participated on a Lego Robotics Challenge team.

A new volunteer-led 4-H robotics planning group has been formed to expand sustainable, year-round robotics opportunities in Oneida County, with a focus on life-skill development such as teamwork, communication, and problem solving.

Committee members expressed appreciation for the programming and suggested improving communication and promotion of public-facing events, such as sharing a regularly distributed calendar of activities. Staff acknowledged the feedback and indicated efforts will be made to enhance outreach and visibility of community-open programs.

Staff recognition was shared, highlighting statewide acknowledgment of Oneida County programs in the Wisconsin 4-H Positive Youth Development Impact Report. Committee members complimented the quality and accessibility of program reporting and expressed appreciation for the educational impact of 4-H programming.

c. Health & Wellbeing – L. Parins

Rehberg reported that Parins will provide her update at the next meeting due to a scheduling conflict.

**15. UWEX Status Update:**

- a. Nicolet Facilities Update: The relationship with Nicolet remains positive and beneficial, with opportunities to further integrate natural resource specialists into future community events, such as Earth Day programming. The retirement of Al Javoroski, who served as the Nicolet main point of contact, was noted. That position will not be refilled, resulting in a temporary gap; however, staff will continue to work with Nicolet leadership during their ongoing strategic transition to maintain alignment and partnership opportunities.
- b. Extension MOU Review: Rehberg explained that the document remains unchanged from the prior year and does not require action unless the Committee has concerns or wishes to formally execute it. The Committee agreed to keep the item on the agenda for awareness, particularly for new members.

- c. Interdepartmental Support Update: Young reported strong collaboration with County departments, particularly in support of projects for ADRC, Finance, and Human Resources. Assistance included data analysis and presentation development for an ADRC survey, logistical support for Finance during tax mailings, and extensive records preparation for Human Resources digitization and shredding. While progress has been steady, staff noted the work is highly time-intensive and temporarily slowed by IT security system issues and seasonal Extension workload demands. The Human Services project was noted as a revenue-generating effort that helps offset staff time costs through previously allocated funds.
- d. ADRC and Extension Contract for Health & Wellbeing Educator: Rehberg provided a contract update involving ADRC and Extension staffing, outlining efforts underway to combine Parins' partial ADRC-funded position into the County's Extension contract. This restructuring aims to reduce administrative costs, improve efficiency, and leverage additional resources. Committee members were advised that an updated contract may be presented for review once finalized.

Committee members inquired about UW–Extension support related to AI implementation for local governments. Rehberg confirmed Extension and WCA are actively developing guidance, workshops, and best-practice resources, including legal and cybersecurity considerations. Additional AI education opportunities are anticipated at the WCA Annual Conference. Rehberg agreed to follow up and share available training resources, including a UW-System educational video series.

**16. UWEX items to include on next agenda**

- UWEX Office Reports
- UWEX Upcoming Events (local and state-wide)
- Extension MOU Review
- Artificial Intelligence (AI): Overview of how AI can support County and Extension work; UW-Stout educational videos on AI to be shared with the Committee

**17. Public Comment:**

None.

**18. Adjournment:** Chair Sorgel adjourned the meeting at 2:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary