Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, August 10, 2026 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

Committee Members: Chair Robb Jensen, Linnaea Newman, Dan Hess, Collette Sorgel, and Chris Schultz.

Others Present: Michele Sadauskas, Karl Jennrich, Jeremy Irish, Bob Mott, Mary Schmitzer, Levi Rhody, Kathleen Cooper, Eric Rempala, Tracy Hartman, and Jessica Young. CJ Kraft, Dan Butkus, and Jonna Jewell on Zoom.

1. **Call to order and Chairperson's Announcements:**
   Chair Jensen called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. The meeting was properly posted and handicapped accessible and ADA compliant. A quorum was confirmed with five members present.

   Chair Jensen shared several announcements. A stewardship recognition banquet was recently held at Holiday Acres, featuring an engaging speaker who provided valuable information about wetlands and wildlife. Members were also encouraged to review the latest *Counties* magazine, which includes several articles relevant to land and water issues. Among them is an article highlighting how Oneida County partnerships are helping shape the local PFAS response, including mention of Eric Rempala's involvement. Other articles address PFAS-related concerns and evolving environmental regulations in Wisconsin. Chair Jensen also reported attending a North Central Regional Planning Commission meeting, where a presentation was given on the future of solar and wind energy development.

2. **Approve Amended Agenda:** A motion by Hess/Schultz to approve the August 10, 2026 Amended Agenda as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

3. **Approve Minutes:** A motion by Chair Jensen/Newman to approve the minutes of July 13, 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.
   Agenda Items #3 was moved below agenda item #5.

4. **Dates/Location of Future Meetings:**
   Monday, September 14, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. **Public Comment:**
   Kathleen Cooper (Pelican Township) commended the Committee for the recent stewardship recognition banquet, noting that it was a very enjoyable event and that the speaker was excellent. She congratulated Eric Rempala on receiving the Stewardship Award, stating that the recognition was well deserved. Cooper emphasized her appreciation for the extensive work he does to protect and improve water quality in

Oneida County, describing his efforts as comparable to a full-time job. She thanked the Committee for recognizing his contributions and expressed her support for its continued work.

6. **Lumberjack Grant Submission:**
Sadauskas informed the Committee that Lumberjack RC&D is accepting grant applications, with a submission deadline of September 1. As part of the application process, applicants seeking funding for projects within Oneida County are required to present their proposed projects to the Committee. The purpose of the presentation is to make the Committee aware of the project and to document the presentation in the meeting minutes. Committee approval of the project is not required as part of this process.

    a. ILIDS Presentation – *CJ Kraft*
    CJ Kraft, representing the Lake Julia Association and serving as a member of its Board, presented information regarding a proposed grant application to Lumberjack RC&D for the installation of an Internet Landing Installed Device Sensor (ILIDS) system at the Lake Julia boat landing. Lake Julia, identified by the Wisconsin DNR as Julia Lake, is a 400-acre lake located east of Three Lakes and spanning both Oneida and Forest Counties.

    Kraft explained that the ILIDS system is designed to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). The solar-powered system is installed at a boat landing and is activated when a trailer enters the area, providing an audible reminder for boaters to remove debris and drain water from boats and trailers before launching. The system also informs users that activity is being monitored, helping to encourage compliance with AIS prevention measures.

    The Association is pursuing the project due to increasing concerns about the spread of aquatic invasive species and the challenges of maintaining adequate staffing through the Clean Boats, Clean Waters program. The ILIDS system would provide a consistent monitoring presence for approximately 16 hours per day throughout the boating season, from April through October.

    Kraft stated that the total cost to purchase, install, and operate the system for its first year is estimated at just under $20,000. The Lake Julia Association is applying for a $10,000 Lumberjack RC&D grant and, if awarded, has sufficient funds budgeted for 2027 to cover the remaining project costs. The Lumberjack RC&D grant awards are expected to be considered in late October, and, if approved, installation of the ILIDS system is planned for April of the following year. The presentation was provided to inform the Committee of the proposed project as part of the grant application process.

Sorgel asked whether the Lake Julia Association would be able to proceed with the project if it received less than the full $10,000 grant amount, noting that many applicants may be asked to accept reduced funding due to limited grant funds available. Kraft responded that the Association's current budget is based on receiving the full $10,000 grant award. He stated that receipt of the full amount would allow the project to move forward as planned. If a smaller award were received, the Association would likely need to seek additional financial contributions from lake residents through a special assessment or donation effort, the outcome of which would be uncertain.

Mott advised that if the proposed ILIDS system includes a raised concrete base or other fixed structure, it should be clearly marked and made highly visible to help prevent accidents and improve public safety.

b. Town of Schoepke Shoreline Project – *Bob Mott*

Bob Mott, Chair of the Town of Schoepke, and Mary Schmitzer, Land Use Committee Chair for the Pelican Lake Association, presented information regarding a proposed shoreline restoration project on Pelican Lake that will be submitted for consideration under the Lumberjack RC&D grant program.

Mott reported that the Pelican Lake Association represents approximately 400 members and a 3,500-acre lake. The proposed project would restore and stabilize approximately 150 feet of shoreline located north of the Schoepke Town Hall in Pelican Lake. The area was originally developed as a shoreline buffer demonstration project in 2014-2015 with funding from a Lumberjack RC&D grant. The Town donated the shoreline area to the Association to demonstrate how native vegetation and shoreline buffers can improve water quality by filtering runoff and reducing erosion. Located along Highway 45, the site has served as a visible example for riparian property owners and visitors interested in shoreline conservation practices. The proposed restoration would include the installation of riprap and soil stabilization measures to preserve the shoreline both adjacent to and south of the existing demonstration buffer. The project area would extend from a grass-covered shoreline section near the buffer to a nearby culvert along Highway 45. In addition to addressing shoreline erosion, the project would continue to serve as a demonstration site showcasing shoreline protection and native planting techniques for waterfront property owners. Four cost estimates had been obtained for the project, ranging from approximately $11,700 to $17,000. The Association believes the bids reflect comparable scopes of work. The project is expected to be submitted as a 2027 grant application to Lumberjack RC&D.

Schmitzer provided additional details regarding the proposed Pelican Lake shoreline restoration project. She described the shoreline area north of the public dock and noted that the site shows significant erosion and deteriorating shoreline conditions. The shoreline has not been substantially restored or maintained for many years and contains remnants of older shoreline protection materials, including rocks located both below and slightly above the waterline.

Schmitzer explained that the goal of the project is to restore and stabilize approximately 150 feet of shoreline through the installation of riprap and shoreline protection measures extending above the ordinary high-water mark, along with the establishment of a restored buffer zone. She noted that the original buffer area experienced substantial erosion and is in need of repair. Native plantings would be incorporated into the restoration to improve shoreline stability, reduce runoff, and enhance wildlife habitat. Currently, the area contains primarily weeds.

The project proposal includes contributions from the Pelican Lake Association, the Town of Schoepke, and volunteers who would assist through cash and in-kind support. The proposed work, as outlined by the project contractor, would include installation of rock and soil stabilization materials as well as native vegetation intended to benefit pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

Schmitzer emphasized that the project would not only address shoreline erosion and runoff concerns but would also serve as a public demonstration site for shoreline restoration practices. The location is publicly accessible and includes a parking area, shoreline garden, and viewing area established through a previous conservation grant. The restored site would provide educational opportunities for residents, visitors, and shoreline property owners interested in learning about effective erosion control techniques, native plantings, and shoreline protection methods. She noted that interpretive signage is planned to explain the project and promote conservation practices.

c. LWCD Presentation – *M. Sadauskas*

Sadauskas presented a proposed Lumberjack RC&D grant application focused on protecting and promoting dark skies as a natural resource in northern Wisconsin. The project would build upon ongoing educational efforts, including the Northwoods Lights Out events held annually in June and August, which raises awareness about light pollution and the benefits of preserving natural darkness.

The proposed one-year project would seek $10,000 in grant funding, with the majority of the funding designated for a coordinator position to lead outreach and education efforts. The project's focus would be on helping homeowners, businesses, lake associations, and communities understand the importance of dark skies and encouraging voluntary adoption of responsible lighting practices.

Emphasis would be placed on education and awareness rather than regulation or infrastructure improvements.

Planned activities include expanding public presentations, developing educational and outreach materials, strengthening partnerships, and increasing community engagement. The Department is beginning to collaborate with the newly formed organization DarkSky Wisconsin and is working with partners including the Northwoods Land Trust, Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association, Northwoods Explorers, and Vilas County. Additional outreach opportunities are being explored, including public awareness campaigns and collaboration with lake associations interested in promoting dark-sky-friendly practices.

Sadauskas noted that the project would primarily involve staff and LTE coordinator time dedicated to outreach and public engagement. The proposed grant application is expected to be presented to Lumberjack RC&D for consideration at its October meeting. No Committee action was requested, and the presentation was provided to inform the Committee of the proposed project.

7. **Kathan Lake District Public Hearing Update:**

The Committee received an update on the recent Kathan Lake District public hearing, which was attended by three Committee members in person and one member virtually. No action items resulted from the hearing, and the agenda item was included primarily to provide an opportunity for discussion and follow-up. Committee members were reminded that written comments and materials submitted during the public hearing had been distributed electronically via email.

Chair Jensen noted that the hearing was well attended, with approximately 30 individuals present, and commented that the event was well organized. Appreciation was expressed to Land and Water Conservation Department staff and others involved in planning and facilitating the hearing.

Newman acknowledged comments submitted by the Town of Sugar Camp concerning representation on the proposed Lake District Board. It was clarified that state statute requires appointment of a town representative to a lake district, but the representative is not required to be a member of the town board. Chair Jensen noted that there had been some misunderstanding regarding this requirement and that the Town of Sugar Camp had since received clarification.

Additional discussion focused on local government concerns about the creation of a new taxing authority through a lake district. Chair Jensen noted that existing lake districts in the area have remained focused on their intended purposes, particularly aquatic invasive species management. The Kathan Lake District proposal was described as having strong support among property owners, with approximately 72% of owners indicating support for formation of the district.

Chair Jensen thanked staff, land records personnel, and all others involved in supporting the public hearing process and acknowledged the significant amount of work required to prepare the information and documentation associated with district formation.

8. **Wildlife Damage Program (WDP) –** *Jim Tharman*
   a. 2027 WDP Budget *(Presented by Jeremy Irish for Jim Tharman)*
   The Committee received a presentation regarding the proposed 2027 Wildlife Damage Program budget. The program assists agricultural producers experiencing crop damage from wildlife, primarily deer, bear, geese, and turkeys, but may also address impacts to specialty agricultural operations such as berry farms, cranberry producers, beekeeping operations, Christmas tree farms, and other agricultural enterprises.

   Under the program, producers report wildlife damage concerns to the USDA Wildlife Services, and program funding supports site visits, assessments, abatement recommendations, and formal appraisals when necessary. The program is funded through a partnership involving the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), USDA Wildlife Services, and County government, with state and federal funds passing through to support local program administration.

   Committee members were provided with copies of the proposed budget. It was explained that two budget formats are required because federal and state agencies each require different reporting categories and line-item formats. The second budget document provides a simplified breakdown of expenses, including mileage, overhead, operational costs, abatement activities, and other program expenditures.

   Irish noted that USDA Wildlife Services contributes $3,376 in federal funding toward the program. Overall, the proposed 2027 budget reflects an increase of approximately 2.9% compared to the 2026 budget, representing an increase of roughly $1,200. Approval of the budget is required for Oneida County to continue participating in the Wildlife Damage Program and providing services to agricultural producers within the County.

   Chair Jensen/Hess made a motion to approve the 2027 WDP Budget for $39,302.42 from W-DNR funding and forward it on to the Executive Committee. All ayes; motion carried.

   b. 2027 Deer Donation Program
   Hess/Newman made a motion to approve the 2027 Deer Donation Program as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

9. **PFAs Update:**

Eric Rempala provided an update regarding PFAS funding opportunities discussed in a recent Wisconsin Counties Association publication. He noted that the article contains limited detail because the DNR has not yet released significant information about how the funding will be distributed or administered. However, funding is expected to become available in the fall.

Rempala explained that the anticipated grant program may include funding opportunities related to private wells, schools, childcare facilities, and biosolids, all of which could have relevance within Oneida County. He discussed potential considerations for the County, including whether to pursue grant funding for biosolids testing, expanded PFAS testing beyond the Town of Stella, or investigations in other areas where biosolids may have historically been applied. He noted that questions remain regarding which County department would take the lead in applying for and administering these grants.

Rempala also reported that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding previously made available for expanded PFAS testing associated with the Stella-area Superfund investigation has been fully expended. He further stated that he had submitted a series of questions to the EPA regarding the status of the investigation, the possibility of continued testing efforts, the future scope of the Superfund site, and related matters. The EPA acknowledged receipt of the inquiry and indicated that a response would be forthcoming.

Additional information was provided regarding anticipated PFAS funding opportunities through the DNR. Rempala noted that the program details remain fluid, but DNR staff have indicated that grant funds may be used to hire contractors to administer testing programs or perform related work. He stated that counties will need to evaluate whether contracting services or administering programs internally would be the most effective and cost-efficient approach.

Rempala further advised that DNR staff are willing to meet with county officials and committees to answer questions about the funding programs as more information becomes available. He identified Mark Pauly as the local DNR contact who can either provide information directly or connect the County with the appropriate DNR staff, depending on the specific area of concern, such as biosolids, groundwater, or drinking water programs.

Rempala emphasized that the DNR's role will primarily be to provide funding rather than administer local testing programs. He noted that responsibilities previously handled by DNR staff, including outreach, mailings, and program implementation, may now fall to local governments or grant recipients. As a result, counties will likely be responsible for developing grant proposals, determining how funding will be used, establishing local program priorities, and administering testing or assistance programs.

10. Lake District Reports:

Lake Nokomis: Schultz noted that Lake Nokomis held its annual meeting on Saturday, August 8, 2026. Because the district spans both Oneida and Lincoln Counties, the Town of Nokomis and the Town of Bradley have each adopted the same wake boat resolution to ensure consistency between the two municipalities. This matter was completed in July. Schultz also reported that the district voted to expand its boundaries to include approximately 114 parcels that currently have lake access through two separate lots but are not paying Lake District fees. The district approved adding these parcels.

Discussion followed regarding aquatic invasive species control, particularly hand-pulling of Eurasian watermilfoil. It was noted that Crescent Lake has darker water and a murkier lake bottom than Squash Lake, making hand-pulling efforts more difficult due to reduced visibility. Squash Lake has historically relied on hand-pulling and currently pays divers approximately $42 per hour for this work. Members discussed how water clarity significantly affects the effectiveness of hand-pulling, as milfoil fragments can drift away before divers are able to locate and remove them in areas with limited visibility. It was also noted that divers remove the roots along with the plants during the process.

A challenge identified was the availability of qualified divers. While Squash Lake, a medium-sized lake, has been successful in maintaining a large and active volunteer and contracted diver program, concern was expressed that a much larger lake would require substantially more dive time and personnel to achieve similar results. Discussion included surprise at the number of divers currently participating, as the program had previously operated with only a few divers.

Squash Lake: Newman reported that, at the annual meeting, members approved the purchase of a trailer for oxygen tanks. The trailer will allow all 40 tanks to be transported at one time to Pine Lake for refilling, eliminating the need to repeatedly load and unload tanks. Newman described how the Lake District has invested in equipment and processes designed specifically for diver efficiency and comfort. The dive boat purchased this year was designed with input from the divers, and procedures have been established to minimize physical strain. Divers attach bags of milfoil to hooks on the side of the boat, allowing them to drain before being brought aboard, reducing the need to lift heavy, water-filled bags or repeatedly climb in and out of the boat wearing tanks. It was noted that diver satisfaction and ownership of the program have contributed to its success. Divers take pride in the amount of milfoil removed each year, and the program is currently experiencing its largest removal season to date. Members observed that milfoil appears to be growing longer into the fall because of milder winters and increased light penetration during winter months. Newman also noted that Squash Lake's characteristics may contribute to ongoing milfoil growth and removal needs. Divers are expected to continue operations through September. The divers independently coordinate their schedules, dive partners, and work times, requiring little administrative involvement from the Lake District beyond providing needed equipment and support.

It was suggested that lake visibility should be evaluated before pursuing a similar hand-pulling program elsewhere, as adequate water clarity is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of diver-based milfoil removal efforts.

Thunder Lake: Sorgel reported that the group held its annual picnic, which was well attended. Attendees enjoyed bratwursts, hamburgers, and desserts. Following the picnic, a brief meeting was held to select the date for the next meeting.

11. LWCD Office Reports:
- Budget Actual – *July, 2026*
- Invoices Paid – *July, 2026*

Budget Actual and Invoices Paid reports were received by the CUW Committee.

12. LWCD Upcoming Events:
- August 13 – Star Party at Nicolet College

13. LWCD items to include on next agenda:
Agenda items to be sent to either Jonna Jewell or Michele Sadauskas, who will forward them on to Chair Jensen.

14. UWEX Office Reports:
- Budget Actual – *July, 2026*
- Invoices Paid – *July, 2026*

Budget Actual and Invoices Paid reports were received by the CUW Committee.

15. UWEX Upcoming Events:
- Tuesdays, August 18 – September 29, 12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Stepping On Program at the ADRC in Rhinelander

16. UWEX 2027 Budget:
- **2027 Budget Overview:** Young presented the 2027 budget overview, highlighting the department's mission of providing research-based education and connecting residents with UW-Madison resources through partnerships and leveraged funding. Primary program areas include youth development, health and wellness education, STEM programming, 4-H, leadership development, and agricultural support. Young emphasized the department's continued focus on securing

grants, sponsorships, and other external funding sources to maximize services while minimizing impacts on taxpayers.

- **End-of-Year Estimates:** Young reported generating more than $10,700 in additional revenue through grants, service fees, and internal and external projects during 2026. Year-end projections indicate revenues will exceed budget estimates in several areas, while multiple expense categories are expected to come in under budget due to operational efficiencies. Overall, the department projects approximately $2,655 in cost savings for 2026.
- **2027 Budget Request:** Young noted that despite an anticipated increase of approximately $5,900 in personnel costs related to wages and benefits, the overall budget increase from 2026 to 2027 is only $1,406. Revenue projections were adjusted to reflect actual funding sources, including removal of one-time grant revenues from prior years and an increase in public charges revenue to $28,518, supported by internal and external projects and ADRC funding. Young also noted that Extension will assume the full cost of the Health and Well-Being Educator position beginning in 2027, with ADRC funding continuing to offset those costs. Several budget line items were adjusted to better reflect current operations. Telephone and printing costs were reduced due to lower usage and technology efficiencies, while increases were proposed for professional development, program supplies, mileage, and program delivery expenses. Young explained that changes in County finance procedures require educator mileage and expenses to be reallocated to different budget accounts, resulting in corresponding increases in those accounts and the elimination of the Meals, Lodging, and Miscellaneous account. Overall, the proposed budget reflects operational efficiencies, realistic revenue projections, and continued support for Extension programming.

Hess/Schultz made a motion to approve the UW Extension 2027 Budget and to forward it on to the Executive Committee. All ayes; motion carried.

17. UWEX Updates – *Jessica Young*

a. 4H Educator Position
Chair Jensen reported that interviews were conducted for the vacant 4-H position. The selected candidate has extensive experience with the Oneida County 4-H program, including participation as a youth member, and demonstrated a strong understanding of local 4-H operations.

Young noted the candidate has submitted the necessary paperwork to UW-Extension Human Resources and is completing the onboarding process. A tentative start date of August 24 was reported, pending final confirmation.

b. Office Relocation
Young reported that Human Services approached Amber Rehberg about the possibility of utilizing available office space within the Human Services building

as part of ongoing discussions about future office needs. Buildings and Grounds will compare Extension's current office footprint at Nicolet College with the available space to determine whether it would adequately accommodate staff and programming needs.

Young emphasized appreciation for Nicolet College's longstanding partnership, which provides office, classroom, and meeting space at no cost and has been instrumental in supporting Extension programs. Since February, Extension has utilized Nicolet facilities approximately 50 times for meetings, educational programs, and community events. As part of the evaluation process, staff will consider factors including space requirements, program delivery, public accessibility, the visitor experience, and the broader benefits the Nicolet partnership provides to other County departments. At this time, Extension is gathering information and assessing potential options while remaining appreciative of both Human Services' interest and Nicolet College's continued support.

Committee members discussed the potential office relocation and expressed support for Extension remaining at Nicolet College. Young indicated they are satisfied with the current arrangement. Discussion highlighted the benefits of the Nicolet partnership, including access to educational and meeting spaces, strong visibility within the community, and the ability to host programs such as LEGO Robotics without additional facility costs.

Several Committee members voiced support for maintaining the current location, noting the value of the partnership with Nicolet College, the efficient use of existing facilities, and the positive impact on both organizations. While appreciative of Human Services' willingness to provide office space, the consensus of the discussion favored continuing the relationship with Nicolet College, if feasible.

18. UWEX Items to include on next agenda:
Agenda items to be sent to Amber Rehberg.

19. Public Comment:
None at this time.

20. Adjournment: Chair Jensen adjourned the meeting at 2:34 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary