

Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, January 12, 2026 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

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

Others Present: Michele Sadauskas, Stephanie Boismenu, Karl Jennrich, JoAnne Lund, Levi Rhody, Alan Wirt, Amber Rehberg, Sharon Krause, Dave Sorgel, Tracy Hartman, Kathleen Cooper, Eric Rempala, and Jessica Young. Jonna Jewell and Jim Kavemeier 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 Newman/Schultz to approve the January 12, 2026 Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

3. Approve Minutes: A motion by Newman/Schultz to approve the minutes of October 13, 2025 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:

Monday, February 9, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. Public Comment:

Eric Rempala (Oneida County Clean Waters Action) addressed items #11 and #12. Regarding item #12, the Shoreland Protection Ordinance, Rempala expressed concerns about the language used, particularly related to clearcutting within the viewing corridor. He noted that terms such as "contouring," without a clear definition, create uncertainty for contractors, builders, landscapers, and Planning and Zoning staff in determining what is permissible. Rempala recommended including definitions for such terms to ensure clarity and compliance. Rempala also commented on item #11, the 2025 Assembly Bill 449, providing background information to help the Committee understand its implications. He explained that allowing property owners to double the size of their buildings without County oversight could have significant negative and devastating impacts, especially on lakeshore and riverfront properties. Rempala urged the Committee to develop measures that maintain some level of local control.

Kathleen Cooper (Rhineland) addressed items #11 and #12. Regarding item #11, the 2025 Assembly Bill 449, Cooper expressed frustration over what she perceives as misleading information. Cooper noted concerns about buildings being constructed with multiple entrances while sharing the same septic and well systems, and the removal of restrictions that previously prohibited use as short-term rentals such as Airbnb's. Cooper stated that these changes allow such uses without township or county regulation. She emphasized that the housing shortage is being used as justification for

these measures, similar to how it was leveraged in opposition to the Pelican River Forest project. Cooper argued that permitting short-term rentals does not address the housing problem and suggested that preventing investment companies from purchasing homes solely to rent at exorbitant rates would be a more effective solution. She voiced concerns about potential septic system overloads leading to groundwater contamination and urged the Committee to make recommendations opposing the bill, noting its broad impact on the community.

Dan Butkus (Squash Lake) sent a prepared statement to the Land & Water Conservation Department (LWCD), which was read by Michele Sadauskas:

“It’s been a pleasure working with you JoAnne Lund and the others on the advisory committee for the lake classification grant. I believe you did a fantastic job of working with the various lake groups. You came up with a workable Lake Classification model, that is not an easy task. Some aspects of the work and concepts were a bit nebulous at the beginning; however somehow you were able to make sense of all of it as well as get all of us on the committee to pull in one direction. I just wanted to say thank you for your efforts. I believe it will be a useful tool. A job well done.”

6. PFAS Update:

Agenda Items #6 through #16 were moved to the bottom of the agenda after items # 17 through #21. Land & Water Conservation presented after UW-Extension.

Eric Rempala provided an update on state funding. The DNR reported that expanded water tests were conducted to determine if other areas were as impacted as Stella. Testing was offered to residents in Sugar Camp, Pelican, Crescent, Newbold, and Pine Lake. Over 100 property owners participated in the free testing, which was by invitation only. The DNR is focusing on agricultural areas where paper mill sludge spreading may contribute to PFAS contamination.

Test results showed the following levels: Newbold reported 1,000 parts per trillion, while Crescent results ranged from 100-200 parts per trillion. The source of contamination, whether firefighting foam or paper mill sludge, remains unclear. Municipalities such as Rhinelander should receive funding through the state budget; however, legislators have not allocated funds for private well owners, which remains a major concern.

Funding for expanded testing comes from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), related to efforts to assign a Superfund designation to Stella. Approximately 400 tests (valued at \$300-\$500 each) were funded, with the DNR managing outreach and sampling. Rempala noted it is encouraging that no results have reached 46,000 parts per trillion. He suggested creating a map of tested areas to share information with local communities. PCA sludge spreading is currently uninvestigated, and no comment can be made at this time.

7. CUW Committee Out-of-County Travel Approval for 2026:

Pre-approval is being requested for Committee members and Conservation Congress members to travel out of Oneida County for meetings during the year 2026.

Jensen/Sorgel made a motion to approve the CUW Committee Out-of-County Travel Approval for 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

8. AIS Boat/Trailer Cleaning Station Project Summary – Stephanie Boismenu

Stephanie Boismenu informed the Committee about a project at the Lake Tomahawk Park boat landing, initiated by Jim Kavemeier of the Tomahawk Lake Association. The goal of the project is to determine the most suitable decontamination unit for that landing. Kavemeier worked closely with the Town of Lake Tomahawk and Boismenu to study boat traffic patterns, landing needs, and available decontamination options. The recommended solution for the long, narrow landing is the installation of boat and trailer cleaning stations. Each station will feature educational signage with plant removal tools and brushes attached on an honor system, as well as plant disposal bins for easy removal of aquatic plants and debris. A station was strategically placed at three boat-prep, pull-off areas: pre-launch, post-launch, and overflow parking boat-prep areas. Stations will be positioned far enough from the water to prevent further lake contamination. Plant disposal bins will be installed in the spring. Additionally, a “Clean-In/Clean-Out” stencil will be painted on the blacktop in front of each station for clear visibility to visitors.

9. Resolution to Discontinue Portions of Town Roads in the Town of Little Rice:

A map included in the meeting packet highlighted a section of trail/lane running directly under a State Natural Area. Justification for the discontinued use of this road is the high cost of maintenance caused by 4-wheeler traffic. The town currently grades and adds gravel weekly, but the road is quickly damaged again. This is an ongoing issue.

The road serves only County forest land—there are no residences in the area. The town can no longer afford upkeep, as tax revenue is insufficient to cover constant repairs. The Forestry Division also lacks funds to assist. Attempts to secure contributions from 4-Wheeler clubs have been unsuccessful.

A public hearing on this matter is scheduled for January 29, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. at the Little Rice Town Hall.

10. Lake Classification System Update – JoAnne Lund

The Lake Classification System was completed at the end of 2025. A press release was issued, and the project is now in its promotional phase for the next several years. WJFW conducted an interview on the classification system, and several newspapers picked up the story. The interview focused on AIS and enhanced wakes—topics that are part of the system but not its primary focus.

Two major documents are available to the public on the LWCD website. The first is a detailed report outlining the methods used for lake classification. This report examines 451 lakes with complete data sets, considering size, depth, shape parameters, and watershed location, along with a health assessment. Lakes were grouped into three categories based on similar attributes:

- Class 1 (most sensitive)
- Class 2
- Class 3 (least sensitive)

Emphasis remains that all lakes require protection.

With input from an advisory committee, four major risk factors were identified:

1. Public access
2. Density of development
3. Potential exposure to enhanced waves
4. Current AIS status

For each risk factor, priority lakes were identified based on class (sensitivity). Tables in the report are followed by recommended protection activities, and the document concludes with a comprehensive list of activities for each risk factor. A quick-reference section lists lakes by class, allowing residents to easily find their lake and see which risk factors most impact it. Lakes shaded in yellow indicate protection from enhanced waves by town ordinance, covering approximately 40% of Oneida County lakes.

The Committee thanked Lund for her diligent efforts toward protecting Oneida County lakes.

11. 2025 Assembly Bill 449: Local Regulation of Accessory Dwelling Units:

Proposed Assembly Bill 449 was included in the meeting packet. The bill addresses accessory dwelling units (ADUs), which are residential units located on the same parcel as an existing single-family dwelling. ADUs provide complete independent living facilities for one or more persons and have a separate entrance from the primary dwelling. It would allow one ADU on each parcel zoned for residential use or mixed use on an existing single-family dwelling unit.

This could potentially double residential density in Vilas and Oneida Counties, increase septic system discharges, and does not allow municipalities to prohibit ADUs from being used as short-term rentals. Language that previously prohibited short-term rentals was removed.

Jennrich noted the bill is part of a broader push for affordable housing by increasing density and development. There is hope to discuss this further at the next Planning &

Development Committee meeting. The community has asked Jennrich to review ordinance amendments to allow more concentrated multi-family developments in zoning districts that permit them, and to allow one- and two-family homes on single-family residential lots or duplexes.

Currently, there is no prohibition against using an ADU as a tourist rooming house, which raises concerns about the loss of affordable housing—especially on lakefront properties. For example, a landowner in Three Lakes built additional homes for tourist rooming houses on their property. Local zoning in Oneida County currently requires 100 feet of frontage with an additional 75 feet for extra dwellings, but it is unclear whether the bill would include lot size requirements.

An ADU would need to meet single-family home code standards. The bill's focus is to allow second homes regardless of zoning district or lot size, effectively eliminating single-family zoning and superseding local zoning prohibitions.

Vilas County plans to send a letter to Representatives Felzkowski and Swearingen to clarify their positions. At present, the bill is stalled and appears to be losing momentum.

Key Concern: Allowing additional dwellings could double septic and other system loads, undermining conservation efforts, and there would be no local control.

The strategy would be to keep track of what Vilas County is doing in regard to their resolution and reviewing the feedback received from Representatives Felzkowski and Swearingen.

12. Shoreland Protection Ordinance 9.95, 9.97, and Article 10. Update:

- a. CUW Letter of Recommendation.
- b. DNR Review of Planning and Development Submittal.

A letter of recommendation was drafted using feedback from a previous meeting and sent to Jennrich. Sadauskas invited Committee members to provide feedback and edits before the letter is forwarded to the Planning & Development (P&D) Committee. Jennrich can include the letter as an agenda item for discussion at their next meeting.

The next P&D Committee meeting is scheduled for January 21, and Committee members were encouraged to attend if available.

13. Lake District Reports:

Thunder Lake: At the previous meeting, a letter from the insurance company was reviewed stating they would no longer insure the aerator. Fifteen years ago, barrels were ignored and someone drove into the water, and last year the pump building was struck by lightning and had to be replaced. Sadauskas assisted in finding new insurance companies, and quotes are currently being obtained from different agencies.

Squash Lake: The previous meeting included discussion on the “pluck and toss” strategy and the number of divers needed. There are 13 divers, paid \$42 per hour for experienced divers and \$40 per hour for new divers. Diving time per day varies by individual—typically a full day, sometimes a half day. Four divers work per boat, and the new dive boat allows bags to be hooked to the side without climbing aboard, improving efficiency. Divers schedule and rotate among themselves, creating a self-regulating system.

14. LWCD Office Reports:

- a. Budget Actual – *December, 2025.*
- b. Invoices Paid – *October, November, & December, 2025.*

15. LWCD Upcoming Events:

- January 20, 2026: Judging for the Environmental Awareness Poster Contest
- January 21, 2026: Environmental Awareness Speaking Contest
- January 28, 2026: North Central Land and Water Conservation Association Meeting
- March 4-6, 2026: Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association 73rd Annual Conference

16. LWCD items to include on next agenda:

Regular agenda items.

17. 2025 Annual Report:

Agenda Items #17 through #21 were moved above agenda item #6.

- a. Oneida County 4-H
- b. Community Youth Development
- c. Health & Well-Being
- d. Office Administration

The 2025 Annual Report will be presented at the February County Board Meeting. All County Board Supervisors will receive a hard copy of the report in their mailboxes for review prior to the meeting. Anne Williams will provide an overview of the Youth in Governance Program, and Rehberg will present a brief summary of the full report.

18. Proposal: UW-Extension Office Restructure:

The proposal emphasizes openness to exploring options for cross-departmental support while recognizing Jess Young’s primary role and skill set. As requested by the Executive Committee, UW-Extension was asked to review office administration and Young’s capacity to determine whether support could be provided to other county departments. Balancing current programming with new opportunities is challenging, as office administration work is fluid; some days allow flexibility for additional projects, while others do not.

The proposal will be treated as a pilot program, with feedback and reassessment at three months, six months, and one year. Hartman stated that the Executive Committee's request is being honored as best as possible while remaining respectful of staff impact. There is no set number of hours for external projects; requests will be considered based on available capacity and alignment with Young's role. A Google Form template will be available for department heads to submit requests, which will be reviewed by Rehberg and Young for skills and capacity, then forwarded to Hartman for approval. If the proposal is approved by both the CUW Committee and County Board, expectations will be shared with department heads, and the process will be introduced slowly to avoid confusion.

Young expressed willingness to participate but voiced concerns about time capacity and the volume of requests during peak programming seasons (spring, summer, fall). She emphasized that communication will remain open with her supervisor, Rehberg, who will advocate for her if needed. Newman strongly cautioned against overburdening Young, noting that employees who agree to take on extra work often struggle to maintain balance and risk burnout. Newman stressed the importance of protecting employee rights and avoiding a situation where a valued employee is set up to fail. Young acknowledged these concerns and shared similar concerns.

Chair Sorgel commented that this could be an opportunity to improve processes and increase efficiency across departments, with Young observing operations and suggesting improvements. Jensen added that he is confident Hartman will ensure Young's schedule remains reasonable and will communicate with the Executive Committee if expectations become unrealistic. Newman reiterated her concern about workload and the need for oversight. Rehberg confirmed that the focus will remain within the bounds of Young's hired role and that expectations will be clearly communicated to department heads. Young will have the option to decline requests that do not fit her schedule or skill set.

The proposal includes examples of acceptable projects and stresses flexibility. There will be no set hours for external work; adjustments will be made as needed. Chair Sorgel suggested this could open the door for other County employees to float between departments in the future. LRES has been involved in discussions and will provide input as needed.

No changes were made to the proposal. It will be sent as presented to the full County Board.

Jensen/Schultz made a motion to forward the Proposal for the UW-Extension Office Restructure to the full County Board. All ayes; motion carried.

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

a. UWEX Status Update:

- i. November/December County Report
- ii. MOU Review

20. UWEX Office Reports:

- a. Budget Actual – *December, 2025*
- b. Invoices Paid – *September, October, November, & December, 2025*

21. UWEX items to include on next agenda

Regular agenda items.

22. Public Comment:

Kathleen Cooper (Rhinelander) commented on two issues:

- Mining Ordinance: Cooper noted that after the 2018 mining referendum passed, the mining zoning ordinance was changed to allow mining in 1A Forestry General Use. She stated that no other county in Wisconsin has such a liberal mining ordinance. Cooper requested that the Committee reexamine this ordinance next month and consider making a proposal to the County Board to restrict mining to manufacturing zones, aligning with constituent concerns.
- Manure Storage Ordinance and CAFOs: Cooper expressed concerns about Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), describing them as large factory farms that pollute air, land, groundwater, and surface water, and are moving into small Wisconsin towns. She stated that local residents object to CAFOs, which bring in significant agricultural lobbying power to challenge property owners and use local land and water resources. Cooper referenced the Ad Hoc Committee created in 2019 by the CUW Committee to draft a new manure storage ordinance. Tom Jerow and Dan Butkus invested significant time in writing the ordinance, which included exceptions for small farmers who were grandfathered in. The ordinance aimed to prevent CAFOs but was tabled after objections from small farmers. Cooper reported that manure is now being spread in inappropriate areas, with large manure lagoons impacting lakes. She stated that CAFO representatives have indicated they would rather pay fines than fix problems, as it is cheaper, and described this as disrespectful to local communities. Cooper requested that the Committee revisit the ordinance and bring it back for discussion.

23. Adjournment: Chair Sorgel adjourned the meeting at 2:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary