Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, July 13, 2026 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

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

Others Present: Michele Sadauskas, Karl Jennrich, Levi Rhody, Amber Rehberg, Eric Rempala, Ken Drake, Jacob Piasecki, Sara Chiamulera, and Jessica Young. Stephanie Boismenue, Dan Butkus, Katie Bauknecht, and Jonna Jewell on Zoom.

1. **Call to order and Chairperson's Announcements:**
   Chair Jensen called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was properly posted and handicapped accessible and ADA compliant. A quorum was confirmed with five members present.

   Chair Jensen sent an email to County Board Supervisor Billy Fried regarding PFAS and the possibility of establishing a PFAS committee. The Health Department expressed similar concerns regarding the number of committees currently addressing PFAS-related issues and whether an oversight committee should be created to coordinate efforts. The Executive Committee will consider the matter at a future meeting.

2. **Approve Agenda:** A motion by Newman/Sorgel to approve the July 13, 2026 Agenda as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

3. **Approve Minutes:** A motion by Newman/Jensen to approve the minutes of June 8, 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

4. **Dates/Location of Future Meetings:**
   Monday, August 10, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. **Public Comment:**
   None.

6. **Kathan Lake District Petition Submission:**
   Sadauskas reported that the petition was officially submitted to the Oneida County Clerk's Office on Monday, July 13, 2026. With the filing completed, the statutory 30-day timeline for holding a public hearing begins, and must be conducted before August 13, 2026. Sadauskas requested input from the Committee on selecting a date, time, and location for the required public hearing. Sadauskas contacted the Chair of the Town of Sugar Camp regarding location preferences, and a request was made that the hearing be held in the Town of Sugar Camp. Committee members were in agreeance to that request. It was confirmed that the proposed location has reliable internet access and Zoom would be utilized to record the hearing. The Committee discussed remote participation and agreed to allow public testimony via Zoom in addition to in-person testimony.

The Committee scheduled the public hearing for Wednesday, August 5, at 6:00 p.m. at the Sugar Camp Town Hall. A quorum of the CUW Committee will be required to attend the public hearing.

The Committee also agreed to accept written public comments. Written comments must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. on Monday, August 3, and may be emailed to the Committee through an email address that will be publicly provided on the Land & Water Conservation Department website.

It was noted that the Committee's role at the public hearing will be solely to listen to testimony and receive comments.

Sadauskas advised that a draft of the final report will be shared with the Committee for review before the matter advances to the County Board level.

Additionally, it was noted that the Kathan Lake District has a webpage available through the Land & Water Conservation Department website, where information related to the petition and process may be made available.

7. **Ordinance Amendment – *Karl Jennrich***

The Committee was informed that Resolution 46-2026 (Ordinance Amendment 03-2026) failed to pass at the County Board meeting held on June 16, 2026. The proposed amendment modified the membership structure of the CUW Committee to include up to two citizen members. Following the County Board meeting, discussions were held regarding the need to address and correct the Committee membership language.

The proposed amendment would revise the Committee composition to consist of five County Board Supervisors and one person engaged in agricultural use pursuant to Chapters 91 and 92 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The amendment would remove the remaining language currently contained in the ordinance. It was noted that there is presently no Farm Service Agency (FSA)-designated position required; rather, state statute only requires representation by an individual engaged in agricultural use, as defined by statute.

The Committee was advised that the current membership already includes an individual who meets this qualification. Therefore, the proposed amendment is intended as a technical correction to align the ordinance with statutory requirements and existing practice. It was further noted that the amendment would have no fiscal impact, as it reflects the Committee's current composition and operations.

A request was made for the Committee to support the ordinance amendment to correct the Committee membership language.

Jensen/Hess made a motion to approve the ordinance amendment for Chapter 2, Article II, Section 2.30, as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

8. **PFAs Update:**

Eric Rempala provided an update on PFAS-related activities and concerns. It was reported that the DNR is discontinuing the Stella water-testing program due to the loss of EPA funding. Concern was expressed that available testing opportunities were underutilized by both the public and the County, resulting in unused funding for additional testing. Discussion noted challenges in effectively communicating testing opportunities to residents and suggested that an oversight committee could help identify and address missed opportunities in the future.

Rempala stated that concerns about property values and disclosure requirements may have discouraged some residents from participating in water testing. It was noted that testing had been expanded beyond Stella to include Newbold, Pelican, Pine Lake, and Crescent. Concern was expressed that, because available funding was not fully utilized, testing opportunities could have been extended to additional areas of the County with histories of agricultural activity.

An update was also provided on a forthcoming PFAS study in the Stella area. A University of Wisconsin researcher is expected to begin a state-funded study this fall involving approximately 100 volunteer participants. The study will include water sampling, blood testing, and surveys to better understand the effects of PFAS contamination. Aggregate results will be made public, while individual participant information will remain confidential. Additional federal funding is still under review and could potentially expand the study.

Rempala further reported on a recent DNR listening session regarding PFAS and biosolids. The DNR has released an interim strategy that lowers some allowable PFAS thresholds for biosolid land application. Concerns were expressed regarding the lack of scientific consensus on acceptable PFAS levels in biosolids and the continued allowance of biosolid spreading on known contaminated fields. The Committee advocated that no biosolids containing PFAS should be spread on fields already identified as contaminated. It was noted that the recently released interim strategy did not appear to incorporate this recommendation.

9. **2027 Budget – LTE Staffing Requests:**
State mandated, fully funded positions.

The Committee reviewed the 2027 budget staffing requests from the Land and Water Conservation Department.

The first request was for the LWRM (Land and Water Resource Management) Plan Project Coordinator position, which is state mandated and partially funded through DATCP and Wisconsin DNR grants, with a County tax levy component.

The Committee reviewed the two LWRM Plan Conservation Project Assistant positions, which are state mandated and fully grant funded.

The AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) Program staffing requests were also reviewed. The positions are fully state funded. Committee members noted that while the request was categorized as "desirable," it is fully funded, and there was no support expressed for eliminating the positions.

Jensen/Hess made a motion to approve the Oneida County staffing request from the Land and Water Conservation Department, as presented, and forward it on to the Executive Committee. All ayes; motion carried.

10. Lake District Reports:

Squash Lake: Newman reported that the Squash Lake District met the previous day. The district continues its primary work of removing Eurasian watermilfoil from the lake. The district plans to apply for its annual grant to continue this work and anticipates approval based on its history of receiving funding from the DNR.

It was also reported that the district purchased a new dive boat last year and recently approved the purchase of a trailer for transporting and storing oxygen tanks used by the dive team. The trailer is expected to improve efficiency by allowing tanks to remain stored together and be transported for refilling as a unit.

The Squash Lake annual meeting is scheduled for August 8.

Thunder Lake: Sorgel announced that Thunder Lake would be having a lunch party on Saturday at noon, featuring brats, burgers, and a potluck meal, along with district updates for attendees.

Mid Lake: The district reported that operations are progressing well. Discussion included the possibility of purchasing a truck to replace a leased vehicle that has become costly.

Horsehead Lake: Hess reported participating in a Horsehead Lake District meeting via Zoom and noted positive improvements in lake conditions. The district's aeration system is reportedly producing favorable results, including improved water quality and healthier fish populations.

Nokomis Lake: Schultz attended the Nokomis meeting. The district is exploring the addition of approximately 120 off-water property owners who have lake access through subdivision and private lots but are not currently included in the district or contributing to its funding. District officials are working with County staff, including Land Records, to gather the information necessary to notify affected property owners. A public hearing will eventually be required before any changes can be made. The matter is expected to be discussed further at the district's annual meeting in August.

Bear Lake: Schultz reported that the Bear Lake District is exploring lake restoration and oxygenation technologies intended to improve lake conditions by reducing organic material accumulation and increasing dissolved oxygen levels. The district is evaluating systems that use air distribution equipment to oxygenate the water and improve aquatic habitat. Preliminary estimates indicate that such a project could be costly, potentially approaching $1 million based on similar projects completed elsewhere in Wisconsin. The district's next meeting is scheduled for the following evening.

11. Resolution to Initiate Process for Altering a Highway:

The Committee received notice of a proposed road discontinuance in the Town of Minocqua. Jennrich explained that, pursuant to state statute, the Committee is notified and provided an opportunity to comment on such matters. It was noted that the proposed discontinuance does not appear to affect any functions of the Committee and does not restrict access to adjoining property owners. Jennrich further noted that the Town of Minocqua routinely provides these notices for Committee review.

Jensen/Hess made a motion to let the record show that the CUW Committee received the information regarding the resolution to initiate process for altering a highway from the Town of Minocqua, and currently there are no recommendations. All ayes; motion carried.

12. LWCD Office Reports:

- Budget Actual – June, 2026
- Invoices Paid – June, 2026

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

13. LWCD Upcoming Events:

- July 31: The Highway 47 Tour
- August 6: Stewardship Award Banquet, 5-8 p.m. – Holiday Acres
- August 8: Snapshot Day
- August 12: Star Party – Nicolet College

All upcoming events are posted on the Land & Water Conservation Department website.

14. LWCD items to include on next agenda:

- Kathan Lake District Updates
- Lumberjack R&D Grants

15. UWEX Office Reports:

- Budget Actual – *June, 2026*
- Invoices Paid – *June, 2026*

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

16. UWEX Upcoming Events – July/August:

- Oneida County Youth in Governance starts in August
- StrongBodies at Rhinelander ADRC, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11 a.m.
- Various Virtual State Wide Programs Available to all Residents

17. UW-Madison Division of Extension Updates: – Area 4 Extension Director – A. Rehberg

Rehberg provided an update regarding previous discussions about inviting the Emerging Contaminants Specialist to attend a future meeting and provide an overview of PFAS-related work and potential opportunities related to emerging contaminants. Since the Committee's last meeting, it was learned that the specialist has accepted a position with the Wisconsin DNR and

is no longer with Extension. Rehberg indicated that Extension continues to have educators involved in PFAS and emerging contaminant work and will seek to arrange for a representative to attend either the August or September meeting to provide an overview of current efforts and future direction. Chair Jensen noted that the Executive Committee is expected to discuss the potential formation of an ad hoc committee related to the issue later in the month or in early August.

- 4-H Educator Position: Rehberg reported that 4-H Educator Anne Williams has submitted her resignation due to her family's relocation to western Wisconsin. Williams will remain in the position through September to assist with transitioning programs and responsibilities.

  An update was provided on several successful youth programs. The Missoula Children's Theatre Program was recently completed and continues to grow in participation and community support. It was noted that the partnership with Nicolet College has strengthened significantly, with the college expressing strong support for continuing to host the program. Rehberg also reported that upcoming robotics programming, including RoboCamp and a year-round robotics club, has experienced strong participation and community support. Volunteers have secured funding to expand robotics opportunities, including the development of a new high school team.

  To ensure continuity of programming, Rehberg requested Committee support to fill the vacant 0.5 FTE 4-H Educator position through a direct-hire process. Rehberg explained that a direct hire would allow for a quicker hiring timeline and provide overlap with the departing educator, while avoiding the lengthier university hiring process. The position would be filled on a temporary basis not to exceed two years, allowing time to evaluate long-term programming and staffing needs. No additional funding or budget adjustments are required.

  Committee members expressed support for proceeding with the direct-hire process in order to maintain continuity of existing 4-H programs and services.

  Jensen/Newman made a motion to approve the direct hire through UW-Extension for the 4-H Educator position. All ayes; motion carried.

  Chair Jensen volunteered to participate on the interviewing committee, with a referral to substitute Tracy Hartman, if needed.

18. UWEX items to include on next agenda:

- 2027 Budget Overview & Documents
- 4-H Educator Position
- Office Relocation

19. Public Comment:

None.

20. Adjournment: Chair Jensen adjourned the meeting at 1:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary