

Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, June 8, 2026 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

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

Others Present: Michele Sadauskas, Stephanie Boismenu, Karl Jennrich, Levi Rhody, Adrielle Lee, Amber Rehberg, Laurel Parins, Ed Choinski, Eric Rempala, Kathleen Cooper, and Jessica Young. Linda Conlon, 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 three members present.

Announcement: The DNR is hosting a virtual PFAS listening session on Monday, June 15. Registration is required; details were shared by the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA).

2. Approve Agenda: A motion by Sorgel/Newman to approve the June 8, 2026 Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

3. Approve Minutes: A motion by Jensen/Sorgel to approve the minutes of May 11, 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:

Monday, July 13, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. Public Comment:

Stephanie Boismenu introduced Adrielle Lee, one of two LTE summer hires, who will assist with Aquatic Invasive Species monitoring and management, as well as water quality studies. A second LTE is expected to begin Monday, June 15.

Adrielle Lee introduced herself as a summer LTE, noting she is a student at Michigan State University studying environmental science with a minor in marine biology. She expressed interest in gaining experience with Aquatic Invasive Species.

Sadauskas presented a 10-year service award to Boismenu, offering appreciation and recognition for her contributions.

6. Conservation Congress Convention Report: – Ed Choinski

Ed Choinski, serving as Vice-Chair of Oneida County Conservation Congress, reported on the Conservation Congress State Convention held May 15–16 in Green Bay, noting strong attendance and extensive discussion on statewide conservation issues.

A primary theme throughout the convention was the ongoing lack of stable, long-term funding for Wisconsin DNR programs, affecting fisheries, wildlife, and conservation law enforcement operations.

Delegates emphasized that license fees have not increased since 2005 and do not reflect inflation. Several funding proposals were considered, including:

- A dedicated 1/8 of 1% state sales tax for conservation, similar to models in Minnesota and Missouri.
- Increases to hunting, fishing, and trapping license fees, with a 25% increase receiving support, while larger increases (50% and 75%) were rejected.
- A Natural Resources Board question proposing fee adjustments to reflect approximately 66% inflation over the past two decades.

Concern was raised regarding the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which is set to expire in 2026. This program has historically funded public land acquisition and conservation projects through matching grants. Delegates expressed hope that legislators will reauthorize the program.

Delegates also supported a proposal to increase the turkey stamp fee by \$10 to fund turkey research and habitat improvements.

Deer management remained a major topic of discussion. The updated Deer Management Unit structure was noted, with Oneida County now within Units 116, 120, and 121. County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) recommended modest increases in antlerless tags in Units 120 and 121 to slightly raise harvest numbers. Unit 116 was recommended for zero antlerless harvest due to consistently low deer populations; this recommendation advanced to the Natural Resources Board despite some disagreement from local biologists.

Broader wildlife and habitat issues included:

- Resolutions supporting habitat restoration, wetland and water resource protection, and conservation of pollinators and native species.
- A proposal to designate the Hine's emerald dragonfly as Wisconsin's state insect.

Wind energy impacts were discussed, particularly bird mortality from turbines. Delegates passed a resolution encouraging mitigation strategies, including painting one turbine blade black to improve visibility for birds.

Water quality and agriculture-related concerns included nutrient management, groundwater protection, and the environmental impact of agricultural practices such as digesters.

Youth engagement efforts were highlighted, including recognition of a repeat Youth Conservation Congress delegate from Sugar Camp who will enter the Coast Guard.

Overall, the convention focused heavily on securing sustainable conservation funding, improving wildlife and habitat management, and ensuring long-term support for Wisconsin's natural resources and outdoor traditions, with many proposals expected to advance to the Natural Resources Board and state legislature.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to forward the Wisconsin Conservation Congress State Convention Report to the County Board Chair for consideration as a report item on the County Board agenda. All ayes; motion carried.

7. PFAs – County-Wide Strategies (Funding) and Update:

Rempala discussed the Wisconsin DNR's reevaluation of PFAS-related biosolid spreading standards, including a proposed interim strategy that lowers allowable PFAS levels compared to previous guidelines. Both the current and prior standards were shared for comparison.

He noted that Oneida County Clean Water Action is part of a statewide PFAS coalition that includes Clean Wisconsin, Wisconsin Conservation Voters, River Alliance, Wisconsin Green Fire, and affected communities such as Marinette, French Island, and the Town of Stella, which now has representation in the group.

The coalition submitted formal comments to the DNR on the interim strategy, including multiple recommendations. A key recommendation specific to Oneida County emphasized that biosolid spreading should be prohibited on lands already identified as PFAS-contaminated (e.g., Stella), regardless of allowable application thresholds. Rempala stressed that once contamination is confirmed, stricter protections should apply. He highlighted the importance of continued soil testing, noting that testing has been completed in Stella (with EPA support), and that contaminated lands should be clearly identified and excluded from further spreading.

Rempala encouraged Oneida County to better define how it will address PFAS issues, including identifying leadership, decision-making authority, and coordination across committees and departments. He suggested involvement from the Health Department and Solid Waste Committee, particularly regarding biosolid management practices.

He noted the County Health Department has been asked to contribute information on local PFAS response efforts for a broader Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) initiative, underscoring the need for a clear and coordinated approach.

Potential support resources were identified, including anticipated assistance from UW–Extension and a need for stronger involvement from the WCA in helping counties manage PFAS challenges.

Rempala outlined upcoming DNR PFAS listening sessions for different stakeholder groups, including a municipal session scheduled for June 15, and encouraged County participation despite limited meeting time.

He concluded by emphasizing the complexity of PFAS management, the need for continued coordination and planning, and the importance of supporting smaller communities such as Stella, which may lack sufficient capacity to address PFAS issues independently.

Chair Jensen acknowledged that PFAS has already been established as a recurring agenda item for the CUW Committee and stated he would follow up with County Board Supervisor Fried to clarify direction, including whether individual committees should continue addressing PFAS separately, or an ad hoc committee should be formed to coordinate efforts. He also indicated he would look into whether the WCA plans to provide guidance or resources on PFAS at its September convention.

Linda Conlon noted that PFAS has been a standing agenda item for the Board of Health since the Stella issue began, with ongoing discussions each month. She agreed with previous comments that having multiple committees addressing PFAS independently is inefficient and emphasized the need for a more coordinated, unified approach. Conlon highlighted the importance of clearly defining roles and responsibilities among committees and departments, including identifying lead entities for specific PFAS-related efforts, particularly as potential funding becomes available. She reported that the WCA requested an article from the Health Department on Oneida County's PFAS efforts. Conlon proposed a collaborative article including contributions from multiple groups to better reflect the full scope and history of PFAS work in Oneida County. The article will primarily focus on past and current efforts, but may include a concluding statement emphasizing the need for continued action and collaboration. Conlon expressed support for leadership coordinating a unified strategy to avoid siloed efforts and improve overall effectiveness in addressing PFAS.

8. Lake District Reports:

Chair Jensen thanked the Committee for reviewing Lake District assignments and providing input on preferences. He noted that the revised assignments differed from the initial proposal but reflected Committee feedback and were well received. Chair Jensen expressed appreciation for the collaborative process and stated that the effort was successful as the Committee moves forward with future meetings.

9. LWCD Office Reports:

- Budget Actual – May 2026

- Invoices Paid – May 2026

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

10. Resolution for Citizen Member on CUW Committee:

Sadauskas reported that a previously discussed resolution has been redistributed to Committee members after earlier issues with email delivery. The resolution now includes a fiscal impact statement prepared by the Finance Office. With Committee approval, the resolution will be advanced to the County Board for consideration at the June 16 meeting.

Newman/Sorgel made a motion to present the resolution and move it forward to the full County Board for next-steps as a non-consent agenda item. All ayes; motion carried.

11. Bee Lawn Project #1 (Mary Beth Petesch): – Michele Sadauskas

Baerbel introduced herself as an LTE with the Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD), noting 10 years of service, including roles as pollinator coordinator and lakeshore restoration specialist. She reported growing interest among homeowners in creating pollinator habitats that also allow for recreational use. The “bee lawn” concept, developed by the University of Minnesota, was highlighted as a model that supports pollinators while maintaining usability for activities such as walking and recreation. Since 2019, LWCD has promoted bee lawns through workshops, but participation has been limited due to lack of funding. A recent County Lake grant now includes funding to support up to three bee lawn projects in priority watersheds. The first project has been installed in Three Lakes, with additional reference to a demonstration plot at the Healing Nature Center established two years ago, which has shown successful growth and public interest. Baerbel noted that interested homeowners have been influenced by the demonstration site and invited the public to view it during an open house at 12 p.m. Sunday, June 28 at the Healing Nature Center.

12. Kathan Lake District Update:

Sadauskas gave an update from Ken Drake, Lake District President. Approximately 60 signatures have been tentatively identified as eligible, with 42 signatures already returned. The district remains on track to submit the petition in July. Signature materials are expected to be submitted soon for initial review by the County. Overall progress toward petition submission was reported as positive.

13. LWCD Upcoming Events:

- June 15: DNR PFAS Municipal Listening Session
- 11:30 a.m. – 12: 30 p.m. June 19: DNR PFAS Virtual Public Listening Session
- 12 p.m. – 3 p.m. June 28: Pollinator Habitat Site Tour at Healing Nature Center

14. LWCD items to include on next agenda:

- Kathan Lake District

15. UWEX Educator Report: – Health & Well Being, Laurel Parins

Laurel Parins provided an overview of her role with Extension, focusing on promoting health and well-being through education, skill-building, and community connections across diverse populations, including older adults, youth, caregivers, and Oneida County employees.

She highlighted several programs:

- Sit and Be Fit: Weekly class (Minocqua) for older adults emphasizing strength, balance, mobility, and social connection.
- StrongBodies: Strength training program to improve muscle, balance, and independence; providing leadership and support for volunteers.
- Stepping On: Falls prevention program to reduce risk and build confidence among older adults.
- Mind Over Matter: Program addressing bladder and bowel health, including education on pelvic floor health, nutrition, and lifestyle changes.

Parins demonstrated simple exercises used in programming, including seated and standing movements aimed at improving mobility, strength, and circulation. She emphasized mental health and stress management through programs such as WeCOPE, workplace wellness sessions, and community presentations; included breathing techniques to reduce stress and improve focus.

Parins noted additional outreach efforts including youth programs (e.g., Kids on the Run), school wellness initiatives, ADRC meal site education, WJFW segments, and ADRC newsletter contributions.

Parins concluded by reinforcing the goal of helping Oneida County residents build healthy habits, prevent illness and injury, and improve overall quality of life through accessible wellness programming.

16. UWEX Office Reports:

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

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

17. UWEX Upcoming Events:

- Committee members received a list of upcoming local and state-wide events.
- June 12 and 13: Youth Science Discovery Days
- June 23-25: The Future of Placemaking: In Pursuit of Place Summit, Lambeau Field, Green Bay – Registration is required.

- July 6-11: Youth Summer Theater Program
- July 20-24: Oneida County 4-H Robo-Camp
- August 5-7: Oneida County 4-H Advanced Robo-Camp
- August 2026 – February/March 2027: Oneida County Youth in Governance
- September-December: Oneida County 4-H Lego Robotics Teams

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

Rehberg reported the hiring of a statewide Emerging Contaminants Specialist who will focus on PFAS and other emerging contaminants as part of the Natural Resource Institute. The position is intended to provide educational resources, guidance, and planning support to counties, rather than direct on-site implementation. The specialist has developed tools and resources and may be able to assist Oneida County in building a coordinated PFAS response plan, drawing on approaches from other counties. Rehberg will initiate contact with the specialist and explore opportunities for assistance; a potential presentation to the Committee was discussed.

There is strong participation in upcoming youth programming, including full registration for summer theater and robotics camps. Also noted was the continued growth of Youth in Governance, expanding from a pilot of three participants to seven this year, with ongoing need for coordination and mentorship support.

- Area 3 and Area 4 Hiring Update:
 - Effective June 29, AED responsibilities will be restructured, with Rehberg focusing solely on Area 3 (including Oneida County). Karly Harrison will assume responsibility for Forest, Florence, Lac du Flambeau, and Forest County Potawatomi. This change is expected to improve capacity and allow greater focus on local needs in Oneida County and all surrounding counties and tribal nations.
 - Rehberg’s revised service area will include Taylor, Price, Lincoln, Langlade, and Oneida counties, with continued commitment to serving Oneida County.
- Nicolet College Collaboration Update:
 - Discussions have begun and regular coordination meetings are planned once capacity allows.
- FY2027 Contract Fees for Educators
 - The 2027 contract fee for the County’s co-funded UW-Extension positions (currently 1.7 FTE) will be \$50,045, reflecting a 2% increase to cover salary and benefit costs; this information was shared in advance of budget planning.

19. UWEX items to include on next agenda:

- Possible Connection with the PFAS State-Wide Specialist

20. Public Comment:

Kathleen Cooper responded to remarks regarding the Knowles-Nelson Fund and clarified that it did not fund the Pelican River Forest acquisition. Cooper stated that the Pelican River Forest effort reflected public support rather than a loss of local control, asserting that many residents and townships supported the project despite opposition from some County Board members. Cooper expressed concern that the County Board has not consistently reflected the will of constituents, citing both the Pelican River Forest issue and a past mining referendum in which voters opposed mining but the County later adopted an ordinance viewed as favorable to mining interests. Cooper emphasized the importance of elected officials listening to their constituents and encouraged continued responsiveness, noting that the Conservation Committee has generally been receptive to public input.

21. Adjournment: Chair Jensen adjourned the meeting at 2:22 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary