

Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee
Monday, May 11, 2026 Minutes
Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM

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

Others Present: Michele Sadauskas, Stephanie Boismenu, Karl Jennrich, Levi Rhody, Amber Rehberg, Eric Rempala, Dave Sorgel, and Jessica Young. Ken Drake, 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.

2. Approve Agenda: A motion by Sorgel/Newman to approve the May 11, 2026 Agenda. All ayes; motion carried.

3. Approve Minutes: A motion by Sorgel/Newman to approve the minutes of April 13, 2026 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:

Monday, June 8, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.
Monday, July 13, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

5. Public Comment:

None.

6. Introduction of Committee Members:

A brief welcome was extended to new Committee member, Dan Hess. It was noted that there have been no changes to the remaining Committee members.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to suspend the rules and to bring forward agenda item #21, Proposed Kathan Lake District. All ayes; motion carried.

7. Role of the Committee:

Chair Jensen provided remarks on the role of the Committee, emphasizing a facilitative leadership approach rather than directing or limiting discussion. He noted that differing opinions among members on conservation, land, and water issues are both expected and valuable.

Chair Jensen encouraged members and staff to identify key land and water priorities for the coming year and to consider how best to communicate those issues to the full County Board. He emphasized that the Committee's responsibility is to review,

discuss, and advance relevant issues, with decisions ultimately determined through member input and voting.

8. PFAS Update:

Eric Rempala provided a PFAS update and shared recent informational materials with the Committee, including articles addressing proposed groundwater standards and new state funding. The funding includes \$35 million designated for private well grants and \$80 million allocated to communities, including towns and counties. He noted that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is working to establish groundwater standards for several PFAS compounds, aligning in part with federal drinking water limits, and emphasized the importance of these standards in areas reliant on groundwater for drinking water.

Rempala also discussed recently approved state funding for the PFAS response, including allocations for private well grants and community support. He indicated that while funding has been approved, distribution is still being developed by the DNR, with implementation and availability expected later in the summer. The DNR is also in the process of hiring additional staff to support these efforts.

Additionally, Rempala highlighted the DNR's interim strategy on PFAS levels in biosolids applied to land. Concerns were raised regarding the proposed allowable limits, potential impacts on groundwater—especially in sandy soils—and risks to livestock. He emphasized particular concern for areas, such as the Town of Stella, that are already contaminated, suggesting that biosolid application in these locations should be halted until full remediation has been completed.

Discussion followed regarding the County's role in addressing PFAS, including whether responsibility should fall to the CUW Committee, the Health Department, or another entity. It was noted that PFAS remains an evolving issue, and the Committee may consider discussing County-wide strategies at the next CUW Committee meeting.

9. Appointments:

- Select Committee Vice-Chair:

Chair Jensen called for nominations for Committee Vice-Chair.

Newman/Schultz nominated Collette Sorgel, noting that she did an excellent job serving as Chair over the past year.

Jensen/Hess made a motion that the nominations be closed and that the Committee cast a unanimous ballot for Collette Sorgel to be the Vice-Chair of the CUW Committee. All ayes; motion carried.

- Select (NCLWCA) *North Central Land & Water Conservation Association* Representative and Alternate:

Jensen/Hess made a motion to have Linnaea Newman be the NCLWCA Representative, with Robb Jensen as the alternate representative if she is unable to attend meetings. All ayes; motion carried.

- Select Lumberjack RC&D Representative:

The Committee discussed appointing a representative to the Lumberjack Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) group. Sadauskas explained that the Lumberjack group meets quarterly and focuses on natural resource initiatives across a multi-county region. The organization administers a grant program, including matching grants for conservation-related projects, which are reviewed and ranked by the council.

It was noted that the program supports a variety of efforts, including invasive species management and water conservation, and provides funding opportunities that benefit local communities without requiring county financial contributions.

Sorgel/Jensen made a motion to appoint Collette Sorgel as the Lumberjack RC&D Representative, with Robb Jensen serving as backup. All ayes; motion carried.

10. Lake District Appointments & Reports:

Chair Jensen gave an overview of being a County representative at Lake District meetings: A Lake District is made up of one town appointee, one County appointee, and three elected commissioners. The commissioners hold the decision-making power, especially at the annual meeting, where the town and County representatives have no authority. At quarterly meetings, those appointees serve mainly in an advisory and informational role—helping answer questions, facilitate discussions, and provide the County's perspective to the community.

Bear Lake - Schultz
Horsehead - Hess
Lake Nokomis - Schultz
Mid Lake - Hess
Squash Lake - Newman
Thunder Lake - Sorgel
Crescent Lake - Jensen

Jensen/Hess made a motion to forward the recommendations for Lake District Appointments as presented by the Committee, and to forward it on to the County Board Chair for his consideration. All ayes; motion carried.

11. LWCD:

- Staff Introductions, LCC Training:

- i. An introduction of staff was given, as well as two LTE staff members who were absent: Joanne Lund and Baerbel Ehrig. They will connect with the Committee at a later date.
 - ii. The LCC Training is coming up, and a NCLWCA meeting follows it in the afternoon on June 9.
- LWRM 5-year Work Plan: An updated plan was sent to Committee members.
 - i. The updated Land and Water Resource Management five-year work plan was shared. The plan is typically reviewed every two years and remains largely the same as the previous version. Minor updates were made, including incorporating a new lake classification and adjustments to priority watershed areas.
- Office Reports:
 - i. Budget Actual – *April, 2026*
 - ii. Invoices Paid – *April, 2026*

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

12. Resolution for Citizen Member on CUW Committee:

Levi Rhody serves as the Committee’s required agricultural representative per statute. Discussion has begun about expanding representation to address broader water issues, including lakes, rivers, groundwater, PFAS concerns, and other issues. The Committee previously supported adding a second citizen member to serve as a “water representative.”

A resolution was introduced to update County Code to allow for up to two citizen members. The update also corrects prior language that incorrectly referred to the agricultural representative as a Farm Service Agency (FSA) representative.

The resolution explains the purpose of adding the additional member focused on water-related concerns.

Jensen/Hess made a motion to postpone the resolution for Citizen Member on the CUW Committee until the June meeting due to some Committee members not receiving the resolution in their packets. All ayes; motion carried.

13. Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Convention – Steph Boismenu & Michele Sadauskas

Boismenu, Sadauskas, and Newman attended the Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Convention. Staff delivered multiple presentations, demonstrating strong expertise and representation. The event provided valuable networking opportunities and generated new grant ideas.

Boismenu participated in a new initiative called Collaboration Room by Topic. The session highlighted increased concerns from lake groups, particularly regarding Eurasian watermilfoil and challenges with hand-harvesting

efforts. Future opportunities include hosting a workshop on invasive species and hand-harvesting led by Boismenu at next year's convention.

Newman mentioned that lake classification efforts continue to gain importance, especially in relation to wake boat impacts and informing property buyers and lake users. Emphasis was placed on education, outreach, and supporting lake associations as key roles of the Committee.

14. LWCD Upcoming Events:

A flyer was sent with upcoming events for LWCD.

15. LWCD items to include on next agenda:

- PFAS: County-wide Strategies (funding)

16. UWEX Office Reports:

- Budget Actual – April, 2026.
- Invoices Paid – April, 2026.

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

17. UWEX Upcoming Events:

A flyer was sent with the upcoming events for UWEX.

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

- Extension Overview: A video link will be sent to Committee members that will provide a brief overview of Extension. In Oneida County, two educators, Anne Williams and Sharon Krause provide Positive Youth Development Programs (4-H, Teen Court, and Raise Your Voice and other community youth programs.) One educator, Laurel Parins, co-funded with ADRC to provide evidence based health programming throughout the county.
 - i. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): The MOU was developed approximately two years ago, alongside the County's contract with UW-Extension. It was created to further clarify the partnership between counties and Extension. Chair Jensen will sign the MOU on behalf of the Committee.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding from UW-Madison Division of Extension for Oneida County as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

- ii. Rehberg emphasized flexibility to address new topics of interest. Extension resources, including University specialists, can be leveraged to support additional workshops or initiatives (e.g., AI or

local government topics). She encouraged Committee members to reach out with ideas and initiatives.

- **Artificial Intelligence:** Extension recently hired a new AI specialist. AI workshops have been offered for local and county officials, focusing on practical use and responsible practices. Emphasis was placed on data privacy risks when using free AI tools and the importance of using secure, paid platforms for sensitive information. AI is recognized as a useful but imperfect tool that requires careful verification of sources. Counties are beginning to develop policies and safeguards for AI use among staff. Extension is working toward providing templates and resources to help counties establish their own AI policies. The Committee expressed interest and some concern about AI, highlighting the need for continued education. Rehberg offered to coordinate future local or virtual AI training opportunities if there is interest.
- **Nicolet Facilities and Partnership Update:** There is ongoing collaboration with Nicolet College as they continue to transition. Rehberg met with Jill Kuczarski, Nicolet's Innovation Partner. Discussions are underway to explore joint initiatives, including programming and use of Nicolet's 3D printers, along with potential opportunities to include youth programming focused on technology and mentorship. Additional collaboration may involve other initiatives.

19. UWEX items to include on next agenda

- Educator Report – Laurel Parins, Health and Well-Being
- Office Reports
- Upcoming Events
- UW-Madison Division of Extension Updates

20. Public Comment:

None.

21. Proposed Kathan Lake District – Ken Drake, Kathan Lake Association

This item was moved up on the agenda before item #7, Role of the Committee.

Ken Drake, President of the Kathan Lake Association, provided a brief history and overview of the organization. The Association was established over 20 years ago to monitor the health of Kathan Lake, a 200-acre lake located near Eagle River in the Town of Sugar Camp. The Association remains active and has completed several projects, including efforts to manage Eurasian milfoil.

Drake explained that maintaining the lake through volunteer efforts alone has been demanding, and consistent monitoring presents ongoing challenges. As a result, the idea of forming a Kathan Lake District has been discussed over the past 10 years to help distribute responsibilities, provide a more formal structure, and allow for funding of potentially costly projects.

The Association has collaborated with Dan Butkus, Michele Sadauskas, the Oneida County Land Information Department, the Town of Sugar Camp, and the DNR throughout this process. Information has been distributed to lake property owners, and petitions have recently been sent out. These petitions are anticipated to be presented at a future CUW Committee meeting, possibly by July.

Drake noted that a current challenge is ensuring tax roll names align with collected signatures. An extensive question-and-answer document was also distributed to landowners, with limited follow-up inquiries received. Sadauskas provided Committee members with a tentative timeline outlining submission deadlines and other details.

Discussion followed regarding potential meeting logistics. A meeting location has not yet been determined, though the town hall is a common option. Newman suggested offering Zoom meetings to improve attendance, particularly during winter months. It was noted that statutory requirements call for quarterly meetings.

Jensen noted that the CUW Committee would recommend one of their members to be a representative for the new Lake District to the County Board.

22. Adjournment: Chair Jensen adjourned the meeting at 2:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary