

May 9, 2013

To: Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee  
Parks Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee  
Madison Parks Commission

From: Si Widstrand 7226 Branford Lane East, Madison, 53717

Re: Proposed 2014 Budget for Land Stewardship and Volunteer Support

Two years ago, I came to the Park Commission requesting a basic level of management for ALL of the wild and undeveloped acreage in the Parks System, most of which is not currently managed. All Land should receive a basic level of stewardship. No Public Land should be neglected. The Commission liked the idea, but stopped short of adopting it as policy. We've made some good progress in two years and I appreciate the staff efforts. With support from Park Operations we've gotten several new areas under management, and we have several new volunteer groups doing good work. But we still have a ways to go, and I'm asking for some definite commitment in the 2014 budget.

1. One of the key needs that hasn't been met is a simple inventory of ALL Wild Area acreage in Madison Parks, and development of a management/implementation plan that would identify the budget and resources needed for basic management of all areas. I read that Mayor Soglin is offering to add more Operation Fresh Start crews for conservation work in 2013, and it would be very helpful to have this plan already in place with some priorities established. I offered a plan two years ago, and I can also offer a simple inventory of 3000 acres that I did recently. This doesn't have to be terribly complex. After a two-year period I am asking you to adopt my inventory and plan, or come up with something better. If it has to be budget-authorized, please include it.

2. I'd also like to see the Parks Division devote more resources to developing dedicated volunteer/neighborhood groups to undertake Wild Area Stewardship. The focus should be on helping volunteers to get started, and empowering them to expand their efforts. For example, Parks could support chain saw training and certification for some qualified volunteers (rather than asking volunteers to pay \$100 to get certified).

3. Develop a new process (now underway) for approving new volunteer/partnership projects that encourages new efforts and empowers volunteers. Ideally it's a two-step process to help volunteers start simple, build a core group, then do a more complex long-term plan. This path has been followed by some of our most successful start-up groups: Baxter-Indian Springs 1995, Glenwood Children's Park 1997, Carpenter-Ridgeway-Starkweather 1998, Westmoreland Green Team 2001. These groups have been ongoing since those startup dates and have expanded their volunteer service.

4. Improve park maintenance staff training in the identification and control of exotic/invasive species in Madison Parks. Staff should also be encouraged to be entrepreneurial and collaborative in undertaking control efforts consistent with park master plans and the comprehensive plan. Perhaps Parks employees, volunteers and Fresh Start Crews could meet each other and share training opportunities (and also accomplish work). Citizen education and outreach on land management in parks could also be expanded to show good work in progress.

5. Support Conservation staff to broaden their efforts and include the basic management of more acreage in Conservation Parks. Staff does a great job with high quality restorations in select areas, but is unable to do any management in some areas. Extend basic wild area management to all conservation land to preserve options for future restoration. They do more than we think, but the Conservation Parks system also needs an inventory and a plan to be adequately supported.

6. Develop more and better partnerships from untapped potential. Add “Restore Madison Parks” on the logo? RESTORE teams? Parks Foundation. Madison Community Foundation. Operation Fresh Start. Other youth or adult conservation organizations? Corporate sponsors? Other volunteers – I worked with 20 different groups last year. I know of, or have previously worked with, about 30 more. 100 organized volunteers could monitor all the wild areas for the entire City (40 acres for each volunteer). For reference the Madison Audubon Society has 3000 members, 1400 with Madison addresses. I think there is untapped potential, but it’s very difficult to pitch ideas if we don’t have an overall plan with some priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of these ideas.

Si Widstrand

Cc: Mayor Soglin  
Kevin Briski