

## Cherokee Marsh Oak Savanna Restoration Project

In October 2012 a group of UW field ecology students analyzed species composition and age demographics of an oak woodland unit at Cherokee Marsh. Over the past 100 years there has been a shift with decreased presence of white and bur oaks, while black oak and black cherry have increased. This is consistent with similar oak woodland changes documented in Southern Wisconsin over the same time frame. The absence of fire in the landscape has led to increased presence of more shade tolerant species like black cherry (which is intolerant of fire). The tree density also increased reducing the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor which reduces shrub cover and herbaceous plant growth.

In 2011-12 park staff used a forestry mower to control exotic shrubs in the understory. In December 2012 Operation Fresh Start (OFS) began working on the next phase of the oak savanna restoration initiative at Cherokee Marsh funded by a Madison Community Foundation grant. They cut buckthorn and honeysuckle that could not be mowed with the forestry mower. We identified some small areas in the park suitable for canopy thinning using chainsaws and hand labor. The OFS crew cut smaller diameter cherry, oak, and hickory along a wetland edge to open up the canopy to promote herbaceous plant growth in the ground layer.

Park staff is currently exploring options to reduce the canopy cover on a larger scale to shift these oak woodlands toward the historic savanna / open oak woodland plant communities that once dominated Southern Wisconsin. These plant communities evolved under a frequent fire regime managed by the native peoples present on the landscape prior to European settlement. However, because of the absence of fire for over 125 years it is not possible to use fire as the sole tool to restore these ecosystems. It would require a catastrophic fire event (burning under extreme weather conditions) to turn back the clock and restore these oak woodlands. Since this is not feasible in our modern society we need to explore other options to thin the tree canopy. We are considering a biomass harvest as a tool to restore diversity to the oak woodlands.

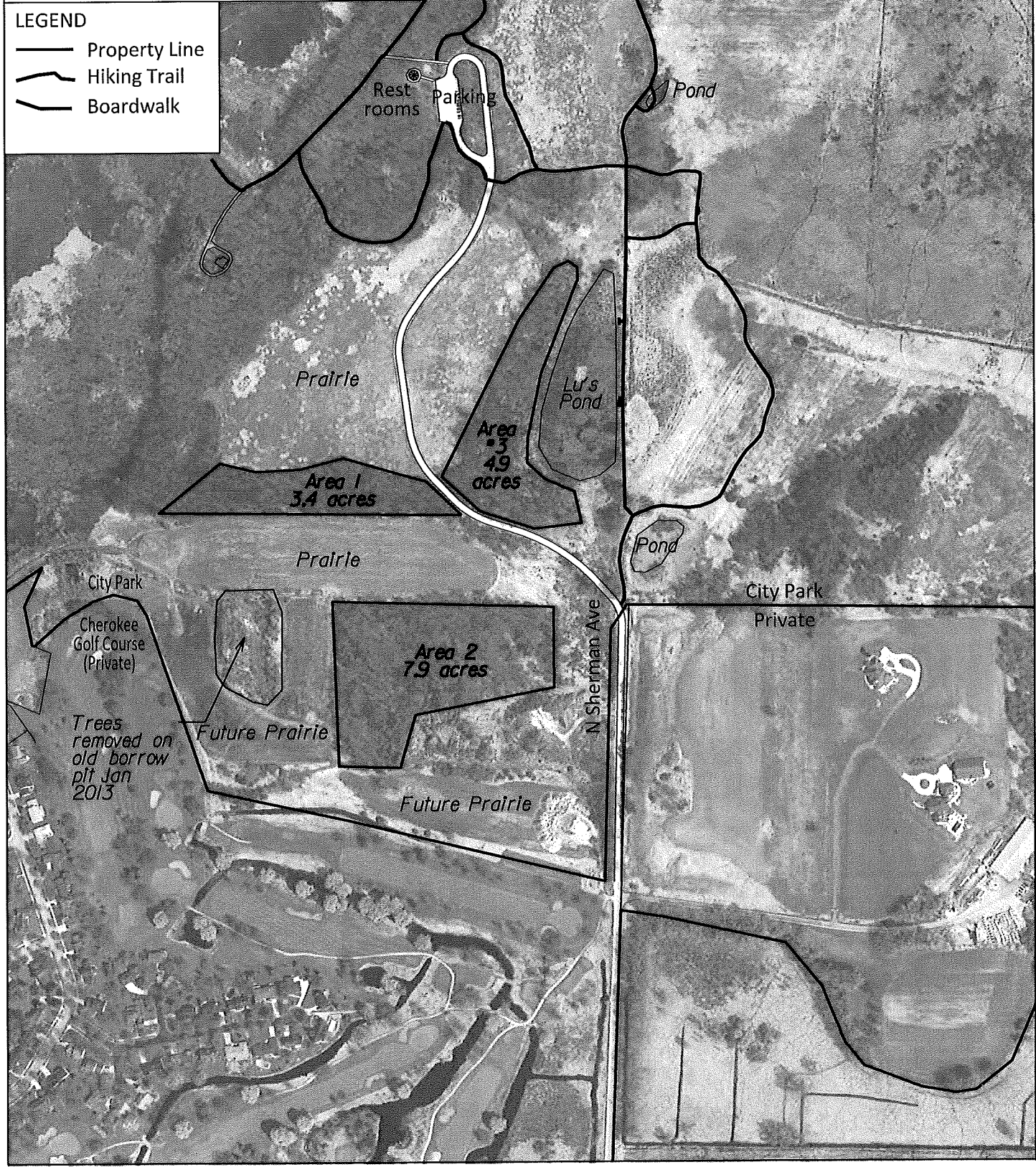
**Oak Savanna / Prairie Complex  
Restoration 2013-14**  
 CHEROKEE CONSERVATION PARK - NORTH UNIT  
 6098 N SHERMAN AVE, MADISON WI Feb 27 2013

City of Madison  
 Dept. of Public Works - Parks Div.  
 City-County Building, Suite 104  
 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
 PO Box 2987 Madison, WI 53701  
 (608)266-4711 [www.cityofmadison.com/parks](http://www.cityofmadison.com/parks)

Graphical Scale  
 0 500 ft

**conserve  
MADISON  
PARKS**

- LEGEND**
- Property Line
  - Hiking Trail
  - Boardwalk



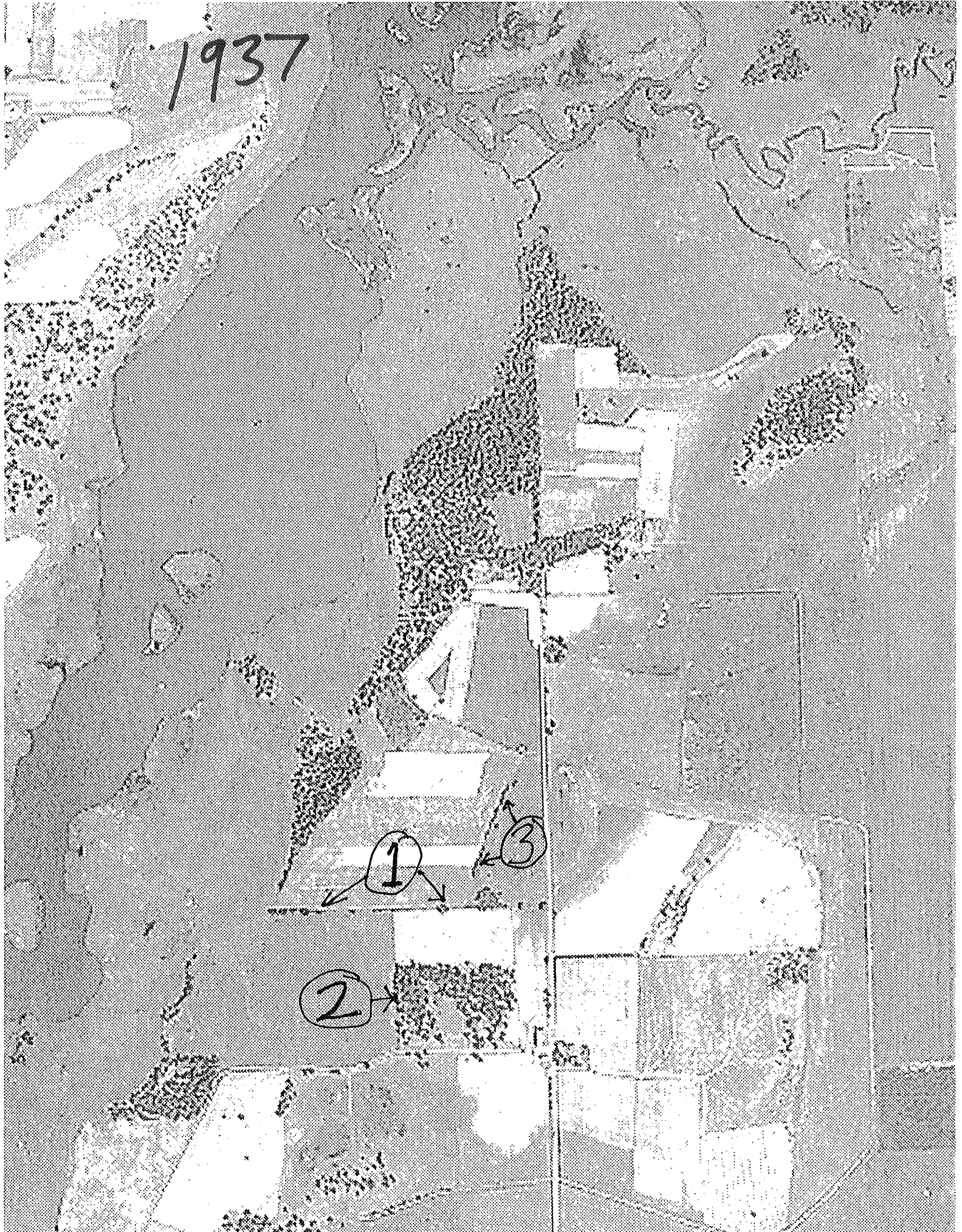
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## Hefty, Russ

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**From:** Jan Axelson [jan@lvr.com]  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 21, 2013 11:01 AM  
**To:** Briski, Kevin  
**Cc:** Hefty, Russ  
**Subject:** In support of planned tree thinning in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's North Unit

Kevin,

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh support the proposed thinning of trees just north of the "5th addition" parcel in Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park's North Unit.

Removing selected trees will tie together the new prairie restoration in the 5th addition and the prairie north of the existing trees. The resulting larger prairie with scattered oaks will be of far greater value to wildlife than two smaller prairies divided by woods. The restored area will also be a good example of the oak opening landscape that once dominated Dane County but is now rare.

Jan Axelson  
President  
Friends of Cherokee Marsh