



Nelson Institute for
Environmental Studies
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

December 2024

THE COMMONS

For alumni and friends of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison



The Professor and Megyn Kelly

Get to know Steph Tai through the eyes of their lizard.

Our 2024 highlight reel.
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bookshelf.
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Hats off to the winter
Class of 2024!
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We'd love to hear from you! [Send us](#) feedback or questions about this issue, or share story ideas for future issues.

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We're reducing our carbon footprint! We hope you enjoy our digitally published magazine, sent monthly to Nelson alumni, students, and friends.

Cover photo by Hannah Gasper, Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association

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From the Dean

Greetings, Nelson Institute community,

No matter where you are — or who you are — 2024 has been one heck of a year. And when it came to headlines surrounding the environment and sustainability, I'm proud to say that the Nelson Institute lent its expertise locally and globally.

In January, Steph Tai — our associate dean for education and faculty affairs — helped make sense of [years-long lawsuits](#) over PFAS contamination. Tracey Holloway, director of our energy, analysis, and policy program, was the go-to source when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a [new set of rules for PM2.5](#). Remember the smokey air that blanketed the country last summer? Jonathan Patz helped Wisconsinites [analyze the health outcomes](#) of that event. Here are some more examples from [spring](#), [summer](#), and [fall](#). And for the biggest headlines from here at the institute, turn to [page 4](#) for our own highlight reel. If this seems like a lot of coverage, believe me, it's just the tip of our impact iceberg.

It's no secret (at least, I hope not) that work from the Nelson Institute has impacts across the globe. What gives me a lot of pride, too, is seeing our direct influence right here on campus. This month ends a monumental year for environmental and sustainability work at UW–Madison. We saw the debut of a [landmark sustainability initiative](#), which includes [five goals](#) ranging from net-zero emissions to increased educational experiences. We launched the [Sustainability Research Hub](#), which has already supported projects seeking nearly \$200 million in research funding. We celebrated the first [Earth Fest](#), a unified effort between Nelson and the Office of Sustainability, along with partners across campus, which brought more than 7,000 people together to celebrate the environment and sustain-

ability. (Save the date for [Earth Fest 2025!](#)) And to top it all off, we started preparing for an unprecedented increase in faculty thanks to the [RISE-EARTH initiative](#).



To be sure, this is a campuswide effort. UW–Madison's many schools and colleges, to say nothing of its leadership, have led an unprecedented focus on sustainability. But it would be no exaggeration to say Nelson has provided key leadership, model programs, cross-campus opportunities, and its inimitable *esprit de corps* for the effort. This unit has been at the driving heart of making some big changes on this campus. And none of these transformations could have happened without the day-to-day work of the *people* who make up the institute. In our final issue of the year, you'll see some of that work, from uniting corporate sustainability practitioners to creating meaningful connections between undergraduates. Read on!

To preview the new year: you won't see a typical issue of *The Commons* in your inbox in January. Look, instead, for a readership survey. Your feedback is invaluable in shaping our communications efforts — and by extension, the future of the institute.

For my part, I am keen to see more snow. A few flurries came down here in Madison the other day, marking the belated onset of winter in earnest, bringing a sense of year-ending closure, and allowing me to look ahead with guarded optimism.

On, Wisconsin!

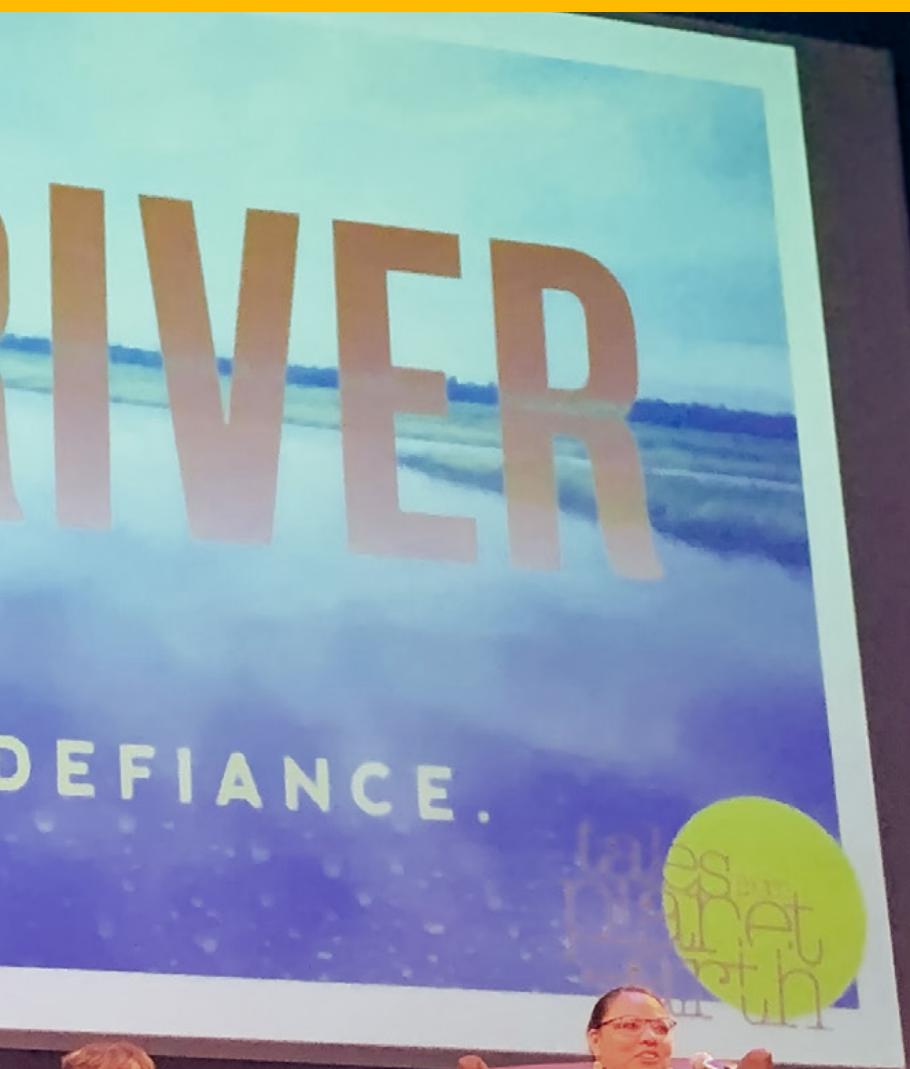
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Robbins".

Paul Robbins
Dean, Nelson Institute

BAD R

A STORY OF





A Night at the Theater

To celebrate Native November, the Nelson Institute hosted a free campus and community screening of *Bad River: A Story of Defiance*. On Monday, Nov. 18, more than 400 people gathered at the Memorial Union Theater's Shannon Hall for the viewing, followed by a Q & A with several of the voices featured in the film. "The water calls to me, to the people in this room, people that came to see this film," said Misty Jackson, one of the panelists. "That's what it is: the water called you." Read a full [recap](#) of the event.

Photo by Alessandra Rella

2024 // YEAR IN REVIEW

Close out 2024 with these Nelson Institute highlights.

By Chelsea Rademacher



Photo courtesy of Bridgette Mason

January

The Wisconsin State Climatology Office has a full team! Bridgette Mason [joined the team](#) as the assistant state climatologist, working alongside Steve Vavrus and Ed Hopkins.



Photo by Hedi LaMarr Rudd

April

The Nelson Institute and the Office of Sustainability joined forces to launch the inaugural [Earth Fest](#). The weeklong celebration of the environment and sustainability saw nearly 7,000 participants.

Bonus! At the Earth Fest Kickoff Celebration, Chancellor Mnookin unveiled another unprecedented investment in sustainability: the [RISE-EARTH hiring initiative](#).

February

At the February Board of Regents meeting, Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin announced a [landmark environmental sustainability initiative](#) that will change the face of campus.



Photo by Althea Dotzour, University Communications

May

From sustainability on campus to supporting environmental efforts worldwide, the Nelson Institute hosted officers in the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) for an [intensive workshop on the environment](#).



Photo courtesy of Aly Fleming

March

Soon after, the first action item of the initiative launched: the [Sustainability Research Hub](#), housed in the Nelson Institute.



Photo by Todd Brown / SMPH Media Solutions



Photo by Rob Beattie

June

A new group of professional master's students arrived on campus and hit the ground running! Members of the "EC11" and "EO17" cohorts got to know each other – and the land around them – with a field trip to the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area.



Photo by Hedi LaMarr Rudd

July

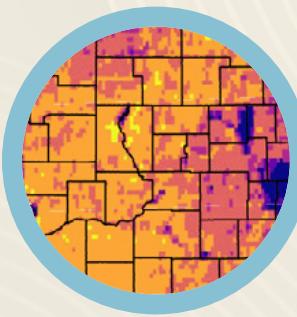
And the award goes to ... seven of the Nelson Institute's most promising and distinguished alumni! Spanning programs and decades, this year's collection of alumni award winners is truly spectacular.

[Meet the winners.](#)

Photo by Lauren Graves,
Office of Sustainability

October

Where do the worlds of AI and sustainability overlap? In many places, but on October 23, the nexus was the Discovery Building for the [third annual Sustainability Symposium](#), which centered around the crossover between the two emerging fields.



Map courtesy of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL, 2019)

August

What would an alternative-energy-powered Wisconsin look like? UW-Madison researchers looked at the barriers and benefits of a renewable energy transition in the state in the latest [Nelson Issue Brief](#).



Photo by Jeff Miller / UW-Madison

September

On a broad scale, the health benefits of decarbonization may seem obvious. But Professor Jonathan Patz knows that the reality is much hazier. Climate policies often ignore short-term human health and equity considerations, which is exactly what Patz's [new research center](#) will be investigating.



Photo courtesy of the Office of Business Engagement

November

Sustainability teaching and research doesn't only happen on campus. In November, the Nelson Institute and the Office of Business Engagement celebrated the [one-year anniversary of the Business Sustainability Leadership Forum](#), which unites corporate leaders who share a vision for a more sustainable future.



Photo by iStock / Rommel Gonzalez

December

The Center for Culture, History, and Environment hosted a [special environmental colloquia](#) on December 11, which brought together Indigenous thought leaders from the Peruvian Andes to the Ho-Chunk Nation.

Shared Solutions

Sustaining partnerships, progress with Business Sustainability Leadership Forum

By Katie McMullen, Office of Business Engagement



Attendees of the October 9 BSLF meeting hosted by American Family Insurance at "The Spark" office building in downtown Madison, a space that models sustainable innovation. Photos courtesy of the Office of Business Engagement

One year ago, the Office of Business Engagement (OBE) and UW–Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) teamed up with prominent businesses to spark important conversations about environmental sustainability. Known as the Business Sustainability Leadership Forum (BSLF), the group has been meeting regularly to share insights and identify common sustainability challenges.

"This is a group of doers who quickly identified the desire for action."

— Sara Braas

"What makes this group exciting and unique is the diversity of perspectives and experience from industry, university and government partners that are brought together," says Sara Braas, associate director of OBE and one of the main BSLF coordinators. "The result is a more thorough and

profound understanding of the cross-sector sustainability challenges and, ultimately, the most innovative shared solutions."

Throughout its first year, BSLF partners have been refining the group's scope and mission. In conjunction with the [Sustainability Research Hub](#) on campus, it has developed a strong network of leading experts on campus. The work continues in tandem with [UW–Madison's RISE-EARTH initiative](#), which will accelerate the growth of UW–Madison's environmental sustainability research, adding up to 40 new campus-funded hires at all levels across the university.

"Creating space for the exchange of ideas and building connections is an extremely important and valuable function," notes Braas. "But this is a group of doers who quickly identified the desire for action."

At the group's last meeting in October, hosted by Ameri-



The Business Sustainability Leadership Forum with UW–Madison Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin (center) at the inaugural full group meeting on Friday, Nov. 17, 2023.



During an April 2024 meeting of BSLF, attendees worked in groups to discuss strategy considerations.

can Family Insurance, more than 40 representatives from businesses, campus units and governmental partners joined OBE and the Nelson Institute at “The Spark” office building in downtown Madison, a space that epitomizes sustainable innovation. There, the group began to hone-in on its focus and purpose: a shared research project.

“There is a great deal of enthusiasm, insight and innovation emerging from the forum,” says Aly Fleming, director of public private partnerships at the Nelson Institute. “The participants are communicating authentically about challenges and successes and, as a result, they’ve collectively identified project work that will have a shared impact in our state and beyond.”

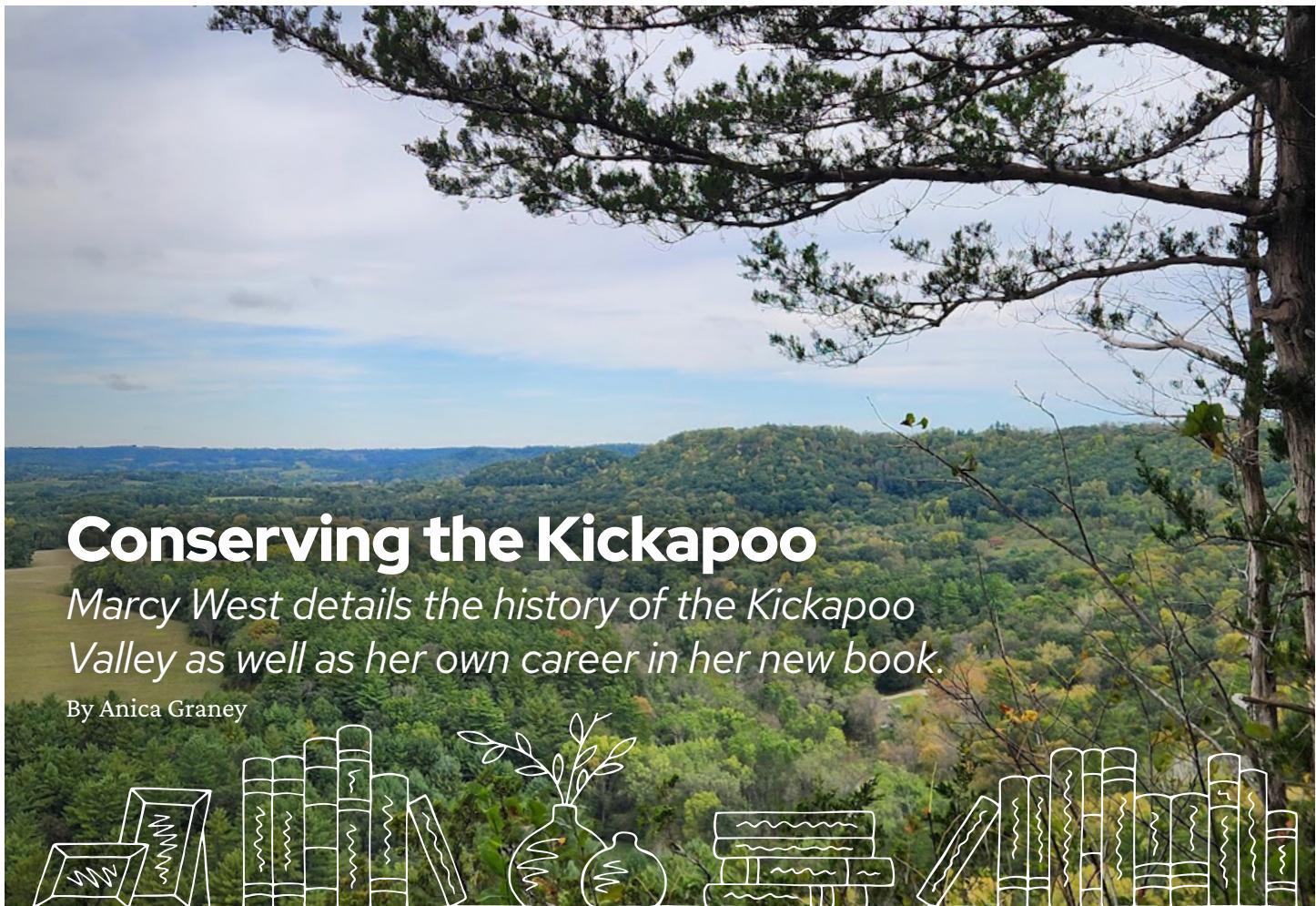


BSLF attendees on October 7 in “The Spark” building discussing project opportunity mapping.

As the group moves into its second year, BSLF will start conducting research and collaborative projects to advance public-private partnerships in sustainability. It will also continue to welcome new members.

“We have an incredible group of top businesses from Wisconsin and the region that operate globally — but there’s more room at the table,” says Fleming. “With more diverse partnership and participation in this work, we know we’ll see successful generation and adoption of innovative sustainability practices.”

This story was originally published by the UW–Madison Office of Business Engagement.



Conserving the Kickapoo

Marcy West details the history of the Kickapoo Valley as well as her own career in her new book.

By Anica Graney

The view from Blackhawk Rock at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Photo courtesy of Marcy West



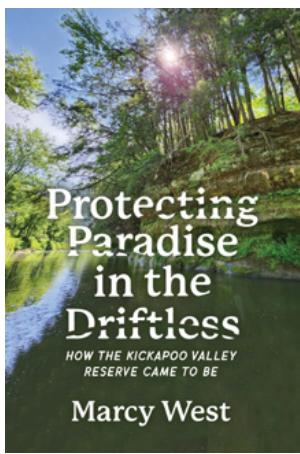
“It’s one of those places that deserves protection, and it’s wonderful to see that it is in permanent protection and taken care of.”

— Marcy West

For many Wisconsinites, the state’s landscape might seem like an endless patchwork of farmland and cornfields. But beyond the dairy farms, Wisconsin’s natural beauty is far more diverse — from the dense, flat woodlands of the Northwoods to the rugged, rolling hills of the Driftless Area in the southwest. It was this unique, untouched terrain that captivated conservationist and newly published author Marcy West. “Growing up in Green Bay, where you think the whole world is flat, the hills and valleys of the Driftless Area really knocked our socks off,” West said.

She first discovered the beauty of southwest Wisconsin after moving to Madison with her husband upon graduating from UW-Stevens Point with a degree in natural resource management and a minor in public relations. It was here that West heard about a job opportunity with the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, meaning a chance to move deeper into the Driftless Area and work in an environment that inspired her passion for conservation. “We had fallen in love with the area from our time in Baraboo,” West said, detailing her first experience with the Kickapoo Valley. “Some friends introduced us to the Kickapoo River, and we went canoeing and camped at Wildcat Mountain State Park.”

The position was executive director of the [Kickapoo Valley Reserve](#), meaning West would be leading the organization and handling any issues that



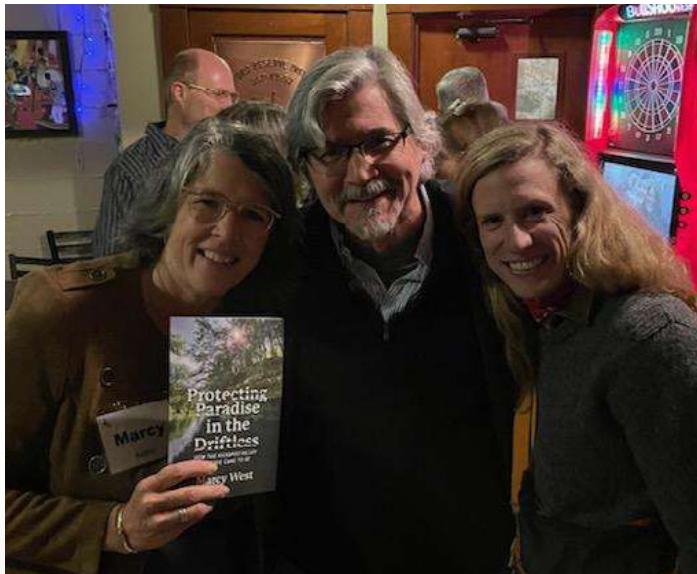
might present themselves. "I did not comprehend the challenge that it would be, and I had no clear understanding of what was in front of me," West said, explaining that in the late 1960s to early 1970s, the federal government bought 149 farms in the Kickapoo Valley area to make way for a dam and reservoir. However, after many delays, the project was ultimately halted in 1975, and

the people of the area were outraged after sacrificing their land for no benefit.

Despite the tension, West interviewed for and accepted the directorship in 1996, noting that it was the determination of the community that called her to join in their efforts of creating a thriving environment. Her welcome to the organization began with managing an ownership transfer of 1,200 acres of land from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, entrusted to the Ho-Chunk Nation, and 7,369 acres of land to the State of Wisconsin.

"It was really challenging, but really exciting," West said. "It was very bipartisan — Republicans and Democrats working together to get the federal legislation approved, to get the federal funding, to pull together the creation of the board, and to develop a budget so we could hire staff."

Ultimately, all the work was worth it as the area is now 8,600 acres of unique micro habitats and plant communi-



Marcy West, Paul Robbins, and Caroline Gottschalk Druschke at one of West's book talks this past fall.

ties. "It's one of those places that deserves protection, and it's wonderful to see that it is in permanent protection and taken care of," West said.

In 2012, Nelson Institute Dean Paul Robbins visited the Kickapoo Valley Reserve with a group of Nelson students for a field trip. After taking in the scenery and learning about the history of the area, Robbins encouraged West to write a book about it. West admits she was hesitant at first. "I thought the visitor center exhibits told the story well, but Paul insisted that it was Wisconsin history and needed to be written down," West said. "So, I have Paul to blame ... or thank depending on the day or what was happening with the book."



A tree shades the forest floor in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

The book, *Protecting Paradise in the Driftless: How the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Came to Be*, which was published earlier this year, details the history of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, the politics and grassroots efforts that created the reserve, and West's own anecdotes from her years as executive director. She hopes readers will come away with an understanding of how to tackle difficult issues as well as to always be looking out for local protected places. "You need to pay attention to how things are being managed, how politics impact the land, and how people are affecting the resource. We have to keep these environmentally significant places well-cared for, and make sure the next generation understands how important it is as well," West said.

West resigned from the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in 2021 to serve as the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's Office of Rural Prosperity director. West is now officially "semi-retired" as she continues to do rural and environmental advocacy work. "Just not 60 hours a week anymore," West chuckled.

Teachers' Pets: Steph Tai and Megyn Kelly

When it comes to exercise, dressing up, or coming to campus, this iguana don't wanna.

By John Allen, Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association



"She's trained me to help her be even lazier than she has to be."

— Steph Tai

At first glance, you wouldn't suspect Megyn Kelly the iguana needed rescuing from anything. But she's a rescue nonetheless. Law professor Steph Tai found Megyn at Reptile Rescue when both needed saving: Megyn as the runt of her litter, Tai grief-stricken over the death of their previous iguana. Today, Megyn is content to indolently run the household. "She's trained me to help her be even lazier than she has to be," says Tai. "Sometimes I'll put food in her food bowl, and she'll stick her tongue out as if to get the food, but she can't quite reach. And at this point, I just move it closer to her."



What kind of iguana is Megyn?

She's the most common kind of iguana. The ones that are infesting Florida right now.

Where did she come from?

She's a rescue iguana. Reptile Rapture is a store in town that just sells reptiles and amphibians and the occasional tarantula. [Megyn] was the runt of the litter, and the previous owner couldn't take care of the iguanas anymore. They were not getting fed enough [and] didn't have enough heat. And when I walked in there, I was really depressed. [The store owner] knew that I was an experienced iguana caretaker, and so, since she was a runt and had some skin issues, they felt like it was okay to trust me with her.

How old is she?

That was 2015, so now she's 11 years old. She was two years old then — not a baby, but very small for two years.

Any pet peeves?

I put a brown wig on her once, and dressed her up, and called her Megyn Thee Iguana, after Megan Thee Stallion. But she didn't like it. Iguanas don't like when you put costumes on them.

So costumes are one of Megyn's pet peeves. Any others?

Cold. She doesn't like the cold. She doesn't like being petted too much.

What does she do when she's angry or annoyed?

You can tell if you're annoying her because she will close the eye on the side of her head where you are and keep the other eye open. It's like she doesn't want to look at you anymore.

What does she like?

She likes fruit. ... Megyn has a sweet tooth. She'll pretty much only eat fruit. And dandelions.

Does Megyn have any favorite tricks?

Just sitting there. She likes to bask. Iguanas don't really do all that much.



Law professor Steph Tai found iguana Megyn Kelly when they were both in need of a companion. Photo by Hannah Gasper, Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association

Where's her favorite basking spot?

Under her heat lamp. She likes the lamp more than natural light because it's warmer. She also likes the kitchen, because it gets warm in the afternoon.

What's her personality like?

She was very traumatized when I first got her — because of being bullied, I guess, by the rest of the iguanas in the litter. She's come a long way since then.

If Megyn were a student, what would she study?

Probably solar energy. Or heating systems. Or fruit. She might be some kind of botanist.

If Megyn were in the yearbook, what award would she win?

Derpiest. *Derpy* is internet slang for goofy, specifically for lolling their tongues out. I think she is legitimately derpy. There's a reason why. Her tongue is, I think, too long for her mouth. I had to get her tongue clipped once because she kept biting on it and bleeding. But I think it's grown back.

This story was originally published by Badger Insider, the magazine for members of the Wisconsin Alumni Association.

From the Office of Sustainability

A monthly update from faculty, staff, and students in the Office of Sustainability - Education and Research. This month's column is from Tim Lindstrom and Audrey Stanton.

The fall semester at UW–Madison brings a flurry of activity within the [Office of Sustainability Intern Program](#) — from planning campus events and seasonal celebrations to presenting at academic conferences and managing campus sustainability certification programs.

Our intern program underwent several notable structural changes this past year in preparation for the current cohort, with the goal of redesigning and codifying the interns' work around four core breadths: sustainability certification and consulting, student education and outreach, communications and digital content production, and academic research and writing. What does this look like in practice? Intern teams continue their work of administering our three sustainability certification programs for [offices](#), [labs](#), and [events](#) on campus, producing the [SustainUW Podcast](#), and contributing to our office's [communications](#) efforts. Additionally, we have welcomed two new teams to our intern ranks: a [team](#) focused on educating and engaging the UW–Madison student body around sustainability, often in collaboration with other campus groups, and a [team](#) focused on telling the story of sustainability efforts at UW–Madison through peer-reviewed journal articles, conference presentations, and other academic formats. We're excited for these new developments and eager to share some of their accomplishments below.

In September, in collaboration with University Housing, we cohosted [Sustain-a-Bash](#). This weeklong celebration of campus sustainability welcomes new students and invites the UW–Madison community to learn how [#BadgersLiveSustainably](#). The [education and outreach intern team](#) hosted two Sustainability Walking Tours and the Campus Sustainability Scavenger Hunt based on the [Campus Sustainability Map](#). Interns also helped to coordinate Bucky's Slide to Sustain-a-Bash and the Sustain-a-Bash Showcase – two events filled with music, games, and sustainability-focused student organizations.

This fall, the interns also presented talks and posters at regional and local conferences: the [Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability annual conference](#) and the [UW–Madison Sustainability Symposium](#). The presentations included “Best Practices in Sustainability Communications” and “Students Leading Systems Change at UW–Madison.” The students shared the great work happening at UW–Madison, gained important professional experience, and networked with sustainability-focused peers.

As we celebrate the fall's accomplishments, we are also excited to look towards the spring and continue this great work. Now through January 17, the [call for internship applications is open](#) as we hire for our 14th intern cohort. Please consider applying and sharing with anyone who may be interested!



OS interns Vibha Srinivasan and Audrey Davies present at the 2024 UW–Madison Sustainability Symposium. Photo by Lauren Graves



Director's Cut

A quarterly update from Will Brockliss, director of the Center for Culture, History, and Environment.

Hello everyone!

There is a lot to be excited about at the Center for Culture, History, and Environment right now. Having dedicated 2023–24 to the theme of “Environmental Art,” we have declared 2024–25 our “Year of Deep Time,” with a view to broadening and complicating our engagement with human and nonhuman histories. This semester, we have heard from Anna Gade (UW–Madison) on time and the environment in early Islam and from Jason König (University of St. Andrews) on ancient Greek and Roman concepts of the earth. We are looking forward to talks next semester from Sara Hotchkiss (on paleoclimatology), Eric Carson (on geological time), and Frédéric Neyrat (on concepts of time).

I would also like to draw attention to ways in which we are developing and deepening our collaborations with our partners in the Native Nations. In September, we kicked off our series of colloquia with the latest news from Sissel Schroeder (UW–Madison anthropology) and Tamara Thomsen (Wisconsin Historical Society) on discoveries of dugout canoes in Wisconsin. Subsequently, we were visited by environmental filmmaker Jeff Spitz, whose movie *Return of Navajo Boy* has drawn urgent attention to the harm caused by uranium mining to the lands and members of the Navajo Nation. Individuals from the Nation,

who have played key roles in the film project and in its continued push for environmental justice, joined us via zoom for Jeff’s talk and for the lively discussion that followed.

Our final event of 2024, held on December 11, took the form of a symposium on time, healing, and Indigenous cultures. Arranged in partnership with Mundo Esperanza, whose pioneering work brings together the Indigenous peoples of North and Central America, the event included speakers from the Q’ero Nation of Peru and from the Ho-Chunk Nation. We opened with talks from traditional healers Rolando Pauccar Calcina and Tupaq Ttito Kuntur, before hearing from Joann Jones, former president of the Ho-Chunk Nation (HCN), and Bill Quackenbush, HCN tribal historic preservation officer. CHE’s own Kata Beilin, who has been researching Mayan culture, also presented.

I wish you all a productive holiday season!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Brockliss".

Will Brockliss



Books for Future Environmentalists

Celebrate 10 years of *Edge Effects* with this book list from the Cooperative Children's Book Center.

By Megan Schliesman, Cooperative Children's Book Center

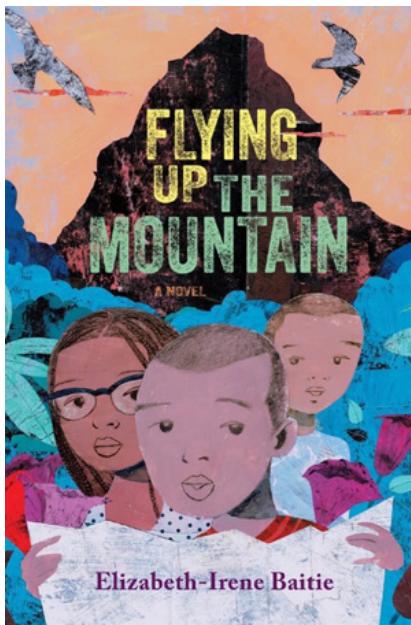
Photo by David Clode



Edge Effects turned 10 last week. In honor of 10-year-olds everywhere, we collaborated with the [Cooperative Children's Book Center \(CCBC\)](#) at UW-Madison to recommend 10 environmental children's books. And if you need recommended reading for adults, check out our [2023 Year in Review](#) and [birthday post](#) from last year!

Books about nature and the environment can enhance young readers' appreciation for nature and the earth, increase their understanding of environmental issues and challenges, and inspire action for change. They can also feed readers' interest, fuel fascination, and even inspire awe, just like nature itself can.

This list provides a small sampling of the many books for middle grade readers – and many types of books – that explore nature and the environment. They include novels with environmental themes, informational books about scientific research, fascinating plants, engaging animals, and lives inspired by the natural world. For more nature-themed books recommended for readers from preschool through high school-age, check out the CCBC's full [eco-reading bibliography](#) and the [CCBC-recommended book search](#).



***Flying Up the Mountain* by
Elizabeth-Irene Baitie (Norton,
2023)**
233 pages
Ages 8–11

Ato lives in West Africa and is making a long-coveted trip to Nnoma, an island established as an environmental sanctuary. Nnoma invites groups of kids for weeklong stays during which they compete in environmentally themed challenges, with those on the top three teams given the honor of being named Asofa, earth protectors, at week's end. The island's Guardians, who run the activities, are adults who were among the first Asofa. Ato desperately wants to be named Asofa. But he also hopes to use his time on the island to find

a message that his dad, who died when Ato was young and who was involved in the creation of Nnoma, supposedly left there for Ato. Friction between the two girls on Ato's team, and between Ato and a boy on another team, is already hindering his progress toward these goals when Ato discovers the future of Nnoma is in jeopardy: One or more of the Guardians is conspiring with developers to mine the island's resources. Thwarting these nefarious plans becomes the most important mission of all in this mystery-adventure from a Ghanaian author. The young characters' knowledge and enthusiasm for protecting the environment is inspiring, while friendship dynamics and tensions ground them as refreshingly relatable.



***Force of Nature: A Novel of Rachel Carson* by Ann E. Burg, illustrated by Sophie Blackall (Scholastic Press, 2024)**
278 pages
Age 10 and older

"In school we learned the earth / was once covered in water. / Imagine! / Ocean water covering everything ... Someday I want to visit / the ocean and meet all / the wonderful creatures / who live there!" A lyrical novel-in-verse about Rachel Carson begins with her childhood in rural Pennsylvania. Young Rachel delighted in nature; it also provided escape and solace as family members navigated difficult times. A child who loved writing, Rachel went on to study English in college until discovering biology, switching majors despite warnings of limited opportunities for

women in science. She'd almost graduated before finally seeing the ocean for the first time. She entered a graduate program in marine biology but had to find paying work after the death of her father and her older sister left her the sole provider for her mother and two young nieces. Writing about science and nature became a beautiful melding of her two passions. She wrote several highly regarded books for children before *Silent Spring*, penned while undergoing treatment for cancer and caring for her young nephew. Carson faced immense losses in her life, which are given full feeling here, but they're balanced with the joy she found in nature and family—especially her nieces and great-nephew. Her remarkable spirit and accomplish-



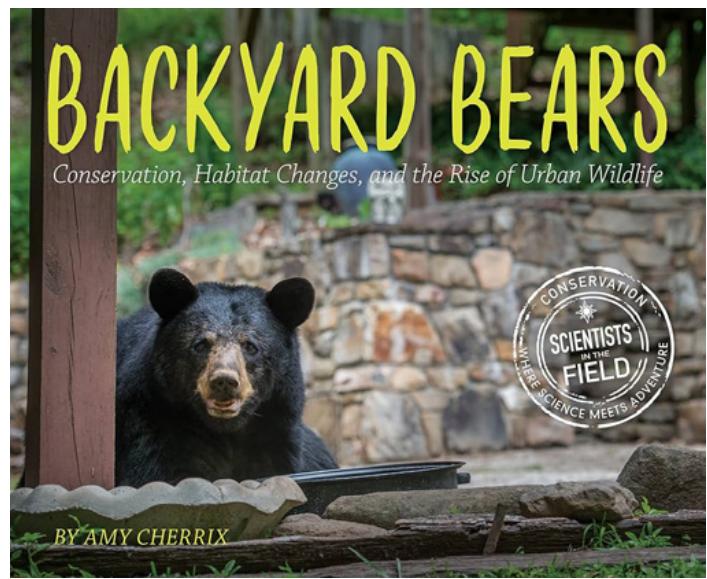
ments also leave a lasting impression in this inspiring work graced by black-and-white spot art.



Backyard Bears by Amy Cherrix
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018)

73 pages
Ages 9–13

Each stand-alone volume in the “Scientists in the Field” series explores scientific research and problem solving related to the natural world. Here, an exploration of the intersection of wildlife and human populations in urban and suburban areas opens with four wildlife biologists studying the growing black bear population in and near Asheville, North Carolina. Their study acknowledges the challenges (and rewards) to humans who regularly encounter urban bears, dispels some misinformation about the species, and describes practical ways that coliving can be managed. Information gained from bears fitted with radio collars helps the biologists predict behavior and recommend ways to keep both bears and humans safe. Final chapters delve into how humans have historically made poor decisions involving interaction with wildlife, with outcomes that often threaten animal habitat and food supply. Other species that have



adapted to encroaching urban landscapes are briefly presented, including leopards in Mumbai, wild boars in Berlin, and feral chickens in Hawaii.



Save Our Forest! by Nora Dåsnes, translated from the Norwegian
by Lise Lærdal Bryn (Hippo Park / Astra Books, 2024)

229 pages
Ages 9–12

Bao (Vietnamese Norwegian) and her best friends Tuva and Linnea (both white) love the bog (forest) behind their middle school, where they've played and adventured for years. Bao is also passionate about environmental issues, and, as president of the student council, a student representative on the school board. A convergence of issues — not enough parking, and unusually heavy rain causing flooding in the forest that poses a danger — leads to members of the board outvoting Bao and deciding to raze part of the forest to expand the school parking lot. Bao's furious that no one seems to care about the impact on forest life or kids, or that more cars only contribute to climate change, which is behind changing weather patterns, while more concrete means more runoff. Her anger is compounded by frustration with her mom, who was too busy to help Bao prepare for the meeting. She tries to rally other kids to protest the parking lot, at first with limited success, but a daring act on Bao's part inspires a group of them to stage a camp-in, occupying the forest so work cannot begin. Bao's passion, rooted in climate anxiety and her love for the forest, is not always matched by her fellow protestors, especially once the rain begins again; it's one of the elements that makes this heartfelt, inspiring graphic novel, translated from the Norwegian, so genuine.

Total Garbage: A Messy Dive**into Trash, Waste, and Our****World****by Rebecca Donnelly, illustrated by John Hendrix (Henry Holt/Macmillan, 2023)**

138 pages

Ages 9–14

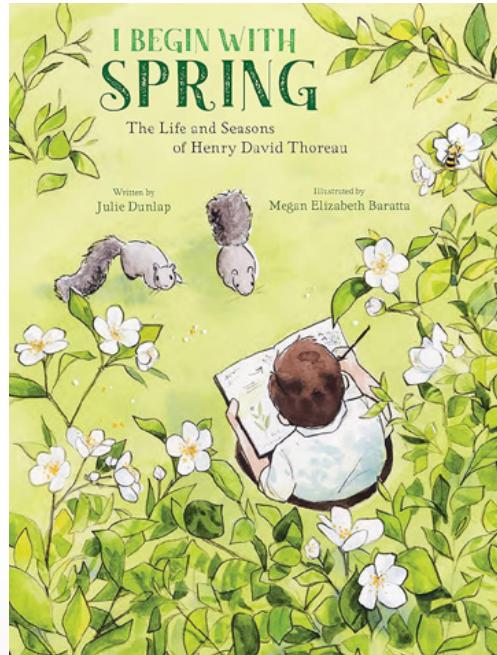
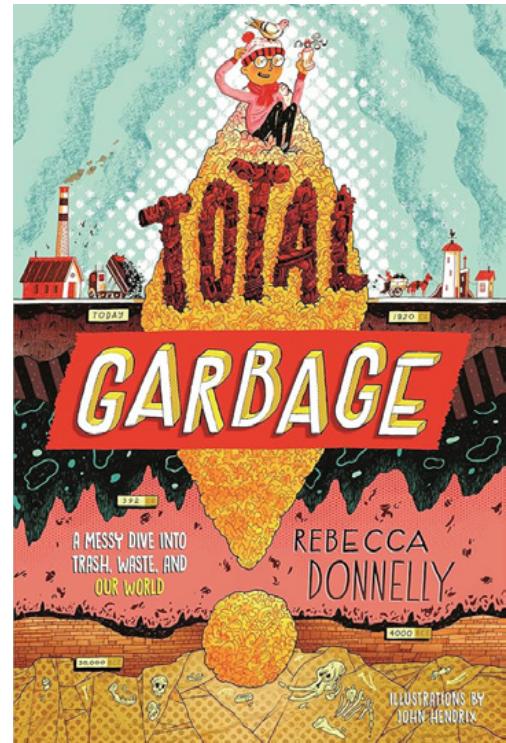
An eye-opening, occasionally gross, and above all fascinating account explores what we do with the things we no longer want or need. Chapters titled “What Is Trash?”, “Where Does Our Garbage Come From?”, “Why Do We Make So Much Garbage?”, “Where Does Our Garbage Go?”, “What Can We Learn from Our Garbage?”, and “How Can We Do Better?”



explore various kinds of waste; the waste stream, which exists for both an item's production (upstream) and post-use (downstream); and options for what we can (and can't) do with various kinds of waste; as well as some intriguing history. The absence of a table of contents is unfortunate,

but the engaging narrative invites thoughtful consideration of the individual and collective impact of our choices and the cause-and-effect relationship

humans have with garbage. A “Trash Timeline,” selected resources, and index are included in the back matter of a volume that is pure trash — in the best way possible.



I Begin with Spring: The Life and Seasons of Henry David Thoreau by Julie Dunlap, illustrated by Megan Elizabeth Baratta (Tilbury House, 2022)

96 pages

Ages 8–12

This biography of Henry David Thoreau styled like a nature journal opens with the line, “There are four seasons in a year: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. I will begin with Spring.” Thoreau’s lifetime of observations around his home in Concord, Massachusetts, infuse every design aspect of this highly illustrated text. A dated timeline running across the bottom of each page introduces

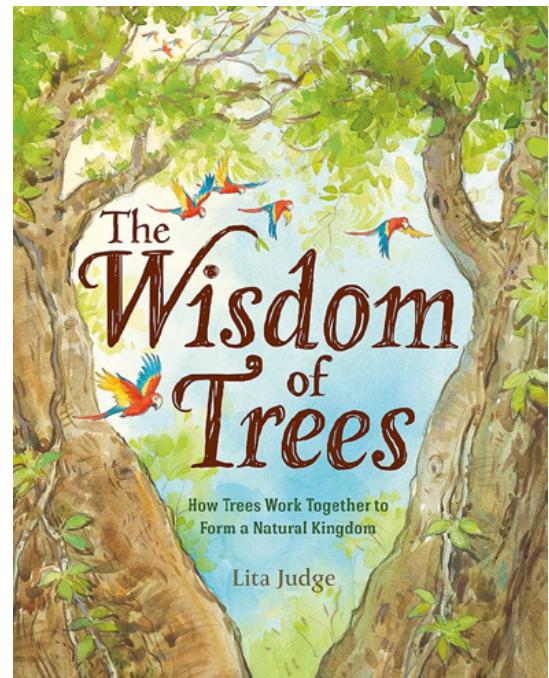
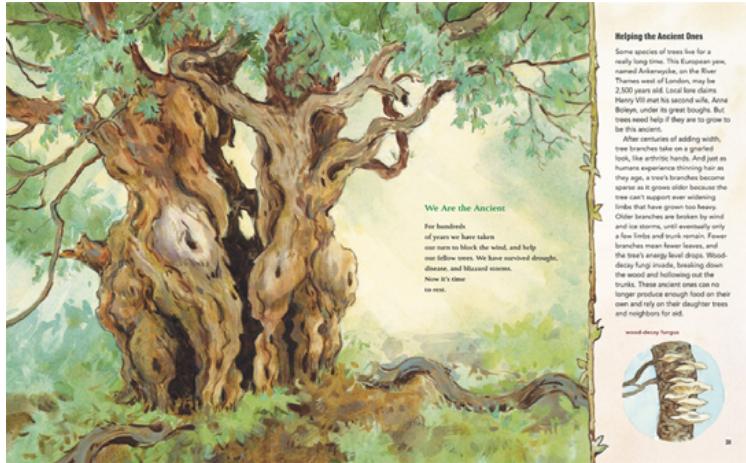
readers to the science of phenology (the timing of natural events) and shed light on Thoreau’s contributions to the study of climate change today. His attentive and detailed notes about plants and animals, day by day and from year to year, broaden the impact of his work beyond his well-known two years at Walden Pond. Pencil and watercolor illustrations, many with scientific labels, are awash on every page. Historical images of people, places, and documents provide social, political, and geographic context for Thoreau’s life and times, including his support of abolition and thoughts on Charles Darwin’s work.

The Wisdom of Trees: How Trees Work Together to Form a Natural Kingdom by Lita Judge (Roaring Brook, 2021)

47 pages

Ages 7–11

A fascinating book of poetry and information explores the ways trees communicate and support one another, other plants, and animals in their environments. Trees can use their root systems to warn one another about insect or animal predators, for example, or to provide food for trees that are sick or too young to produce enough for themselves. Trees also provide enough blooms and nuts to both feed nearby animals and create new trees. The range of topics in this volume covers many types of trees and multiple aspects of their survival. Each double-page spread includes a poem on the left (e.g., “How



to Speak in Tree,” “We Are Like Wizards,” “Song of Hunger”) and related informational text on the right. A lovely watercolor illustration connects the two with a scene related to the narrative. Ample back matter includes additional information for each page spread, including more details about the specific types of trees and phenomena mentioned.



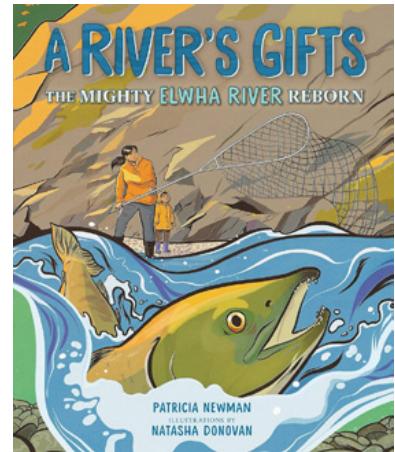
A River's Gifts: The Mighty Elwha River Reborn by Patricia Newman, illustrated by Natasha Donovan (Millbrook, 2022)

48 pages

Ages 8–12

A thorough account elucidates the dramatic history of the Elwha River, sacred to the Elwha Klallam Tribe (also known as the Strong People) of the land commonly known as Washington State. Beginning with overviews of the river's formation, the salmon that spawn in its waters, and the natural resources the river provides for the Strong People, the narrative then covers the decades of damage caused by the actions of white settlers. In 1910 and 1926, respectively, the “strangers” built two dams, greatly disrupting life in and around the river: The salmon population is decimated, habitats destroyed, banks eroded, and the Strong People's Creation Site and lands are flooded.

When the license for the dams is up for renewal, the Strong People and other allies double down on their efforts to have the dam removed; eventually, they succeed. Removal of the dams and successful rehabilitation of the river takes years and the work of many specialists, including fish, water, plant, tribal, and wildlife scientists, and many volunteers. Replete with clear diagrams and sidebars, this is a fascinating and inspiring account of perseverance, cooperation, and gratifying success.



Mysterious Glowing Mammals: An Unexpected Discovery Sparks a Scientific Investigation

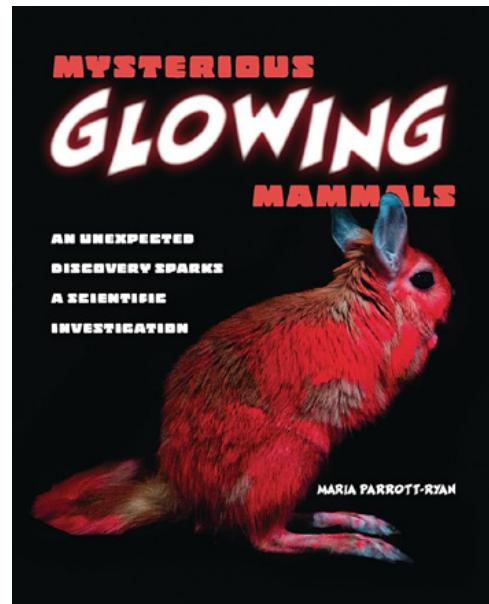
by Maria Parrott-Ryan (Millbrook Press / Lerner, 2024)

56 pages

Ages 8–13

This intriguing science mystery begins in Wisconsin's Northwoods, on a night ecologist Jonathan Martin was studying tree frogs in his backyard. Using his ultraviolet flashlight, he saw something pink and luminous flash through the upper canopy. He couldn't believe his eyes: It was a flying squirrel. Specifically, a GLOWING flying squirrel. Nothing like it had ever been documented. The surprise discovery led to the formation of a small team of scientists at Northland College in Ashland. Was this phenomenon unique? Tied to a specific family of squirrels or certain species? Was the fur glowing from exposure to something, or

did it glow naturally? Were there other animals that glowed? "Team Biofluorescent," as they called themselves, began researching the scientific record to find out what else was known about biofluorescence in animals. There were many examples of jellyfish, coral, and sea anemones, and some land animals like tree frogs and chameleons, but only one record of a mammal, and nothing about flying squirrels. They narrowed their search by looking at other specimens at the Field Museum in Chicago, discovering even more surprises in the dark. Their exciting scientific discovery from 2019 is told here in an engaging account that includes explanation of scientific terms, and captivating photographs.



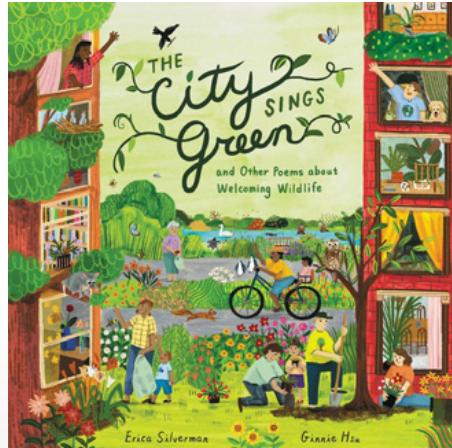
FRONT AND CENTER

The City Sings Green & Other Poems about Welcoming Wildlife by Erica Silverman, illustrated by Ginnie Hsu (Clarion / HarperCollins, 2024)

40 pages

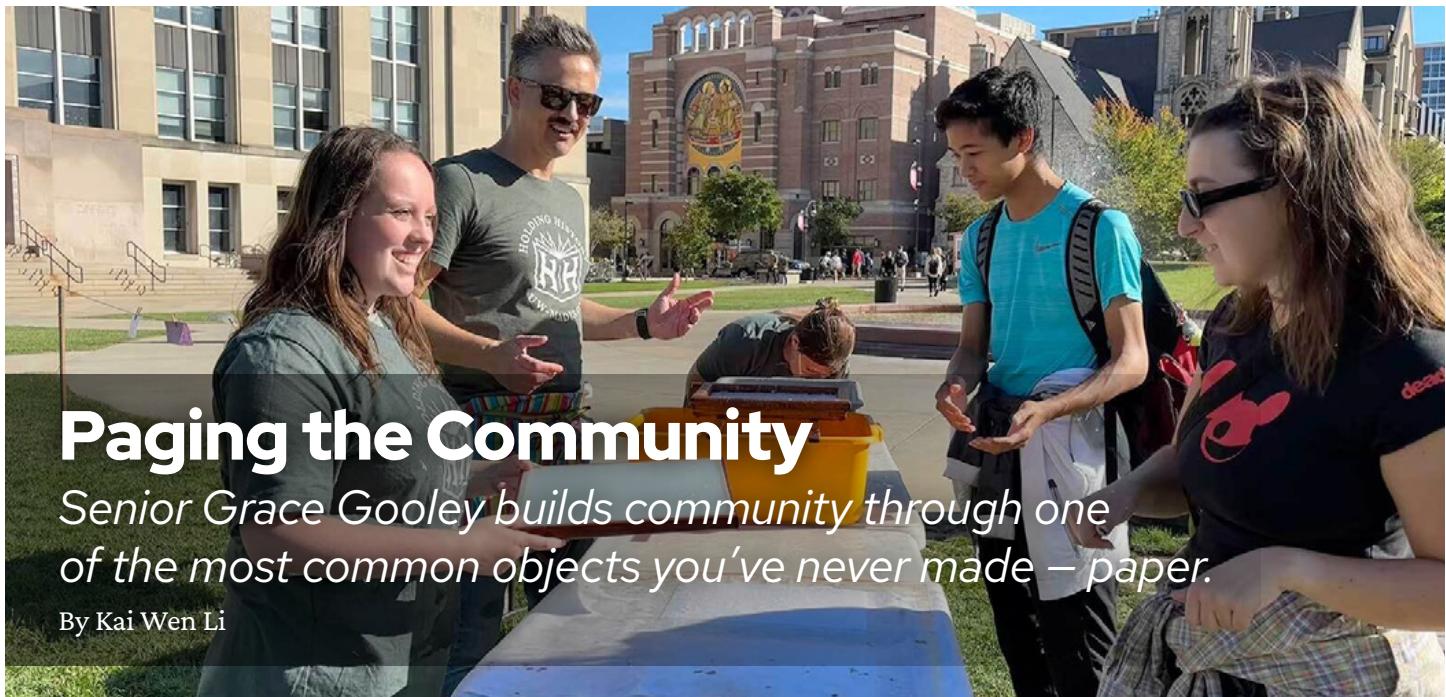
Ages 7–11

This uplifting, inspiring work highlights eleven environmental restoration and problem-solving projects around the world. When Toronto began creating more green spaces and urban forests, ravens returned to the city. A penguin tunnel was built to help 14" Little Blue penguins cross a busy highway in New Zealand, and a honeybee highway in Oslo, Norway, provides the pollinators with food and resting places on rooftops across the city. A concerted effort to regreen Singapore has resulted in the return of vanishing wildlife, including smooth-coated otters, while a project to rewild a Los Angeles schoolyard has resulted in thriving native plants and the appearance of a



rare burrowing owl. These and other featured endeavors, described in playful poems and brief informative text, create a sense of hopeful possibility in a can-do collection with vibrant illustrations that add to the cheerful feel. Additional resources about restoration work and each specific project, as well as suggestions for learning about issues close to home and ways to take action, are at volume's end.

The annotations for the books above were written by the CCBC professional staff for the CCBC's annual best-of-the-year list, CCBC Choices. All © Cooperative Children's Book Center. The Cooperative Children's Book Center is a unique and vital gathering place for books, ideas, and expertise in the field of children's and young adult literature. The CCBC is a noncirculating examination, study, and research library for Wisconsin school and public librarians, teachers, early childhood care providers, university students, and others interested in children's and young adult literature.



Paging the Community

Senior Grace Gooley builds community through one of the most common objects you've never made – paper.

By Kai Wen Li

Grace Gooley (front, left) helps out at a papermaking event on Library Mall. Photo courtesy of Grace Gooley

Throughout the afternoon, passersby stop and gather sporadically at the gleaming white tents on Library Mall. A few tables are set up on the grass, where a group of people are learning how to make paper. They dip wooden screens into buckets of water mixed with pulp made from recycled cloth and rags. Drawing them back out as the pulp collects into a mold, they then press the screens onto a thin layer of cloth to dry under the sun.

Dozens of people from around campus come by throughout the day, producing paper with their own hands, probably for the first time. Among those guiding the first-time papermakers is Grace Gooley, a senior majoring in chemistry and environmental studies. She's also the lead undergraduate ambassador for the Nelson Institute of Environmental Studies. She jointly organizes this year's papermaking event with [Holding History](#), a student-driven humanities program that organizes public community events demonstrating how culture and knowledge are passed along through media.

But Gooley's role in organizing the event is just one instance of her extensive campus involvement. In addition to serving as an ambassador for the Nelson Institute, she's also a current L&S Dean's Ambassador, the copresident of the Chemistry Undergraduate Research Board (CURB) and a member of Alpha Chi Sigma, a coed chemistry fraternity.

"It's a lot of planning," Gooley says, balancing her lab work and senior thesis in a schedule that would seem

overwhelming for many. But for Gooley, it's just a matter of planning. "I keep it all on Outlook," she says.

Over the course of her undergraduate career, Gooley's future aspirations have become increasingly clear — to make an impact in climate research. But this wasn't always her intention.

"During my freshman year I was actually set on becoming a high school chemistry teacher," Gooley says. "When I took an intro to climate and weather course during my sophomore year, I realized I wanted to switch gears."

Gooley hasn't completely abandoned the prospect of teaching, but her immediate plan after graduation is to continue doing research in a PhD program and eventually work for a government agency such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"I still want to go into teaching later, but I feel like I can make a bigger impact in climate change research," Gooley says. "I really like the idea of constantly learning and trying to find new solutions."

At the same time, Gooley also developed an interest in finding community among people in her major. Last year, Gooley applied to the Nelson Institute ambassadors program after receiving an email calling for undergraduate students interested in fostering a community for environmental studies majors and certificates.

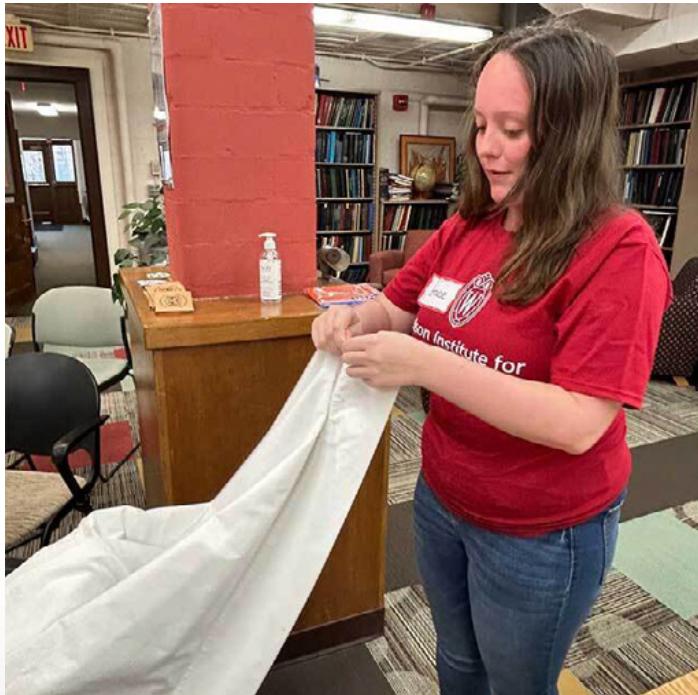
"I was really interested, because I didn't know any other environmental studies majors at the time," she says. "I really just wanted to meet other people who had the same interests as me."

But while Gooley tried to find community in her own major, she was also interested in bridging different people in various disciplines. Gooley is also an L&S Dean's Ambassador, a position through which she hopes to organize joint events that would connect students from both L&S and the Nelson Institute.

"I'm trying to help bridge the gap between L&S and Nelson," Gooley says. "There are a lot of people who are in both schools. It'd be really nice to organize more events targeted at both audiences, because there's a lot of overlapping interests."

Papermaking is one such event among myriad joint collaborations that Gooley has helped to organize during her time as ambassador, including a haunted house in Science Hall with the Japanese Student Association and a plant swap for students and faculty to exchange plants with each other.

Collaborations like papermaking sometimes happen fortuitously. During the summer, Joshua Calhoun, an associate professor of English and Nelson Institute affiliate, reached out for a potential collaboration between his program Holding History and the Nelson Institute.



Grace Gooley (photo by Cecelia Alfonso-Stokes)

Gooley happened to know Calhoun — she had taken one of his classes during freshman year and even attended his papermaking event on Library Mall, which he hosts annually as the codirector of Holding History.

Gooley and Calhoun both share an interest in building interdisciplinary communities, bridging the sciences and the arts.

"I really want to try to make the student experience less intimidating, less complicated."

— Grace Gooley

This is especially true of papermaking — anybody can make paper.

The sheets of paper made during the event are stored away until spring, when the Nelson Institute and Holding History plan to create an art exhibition in Science Hall featuring the papers made collectively by the community.

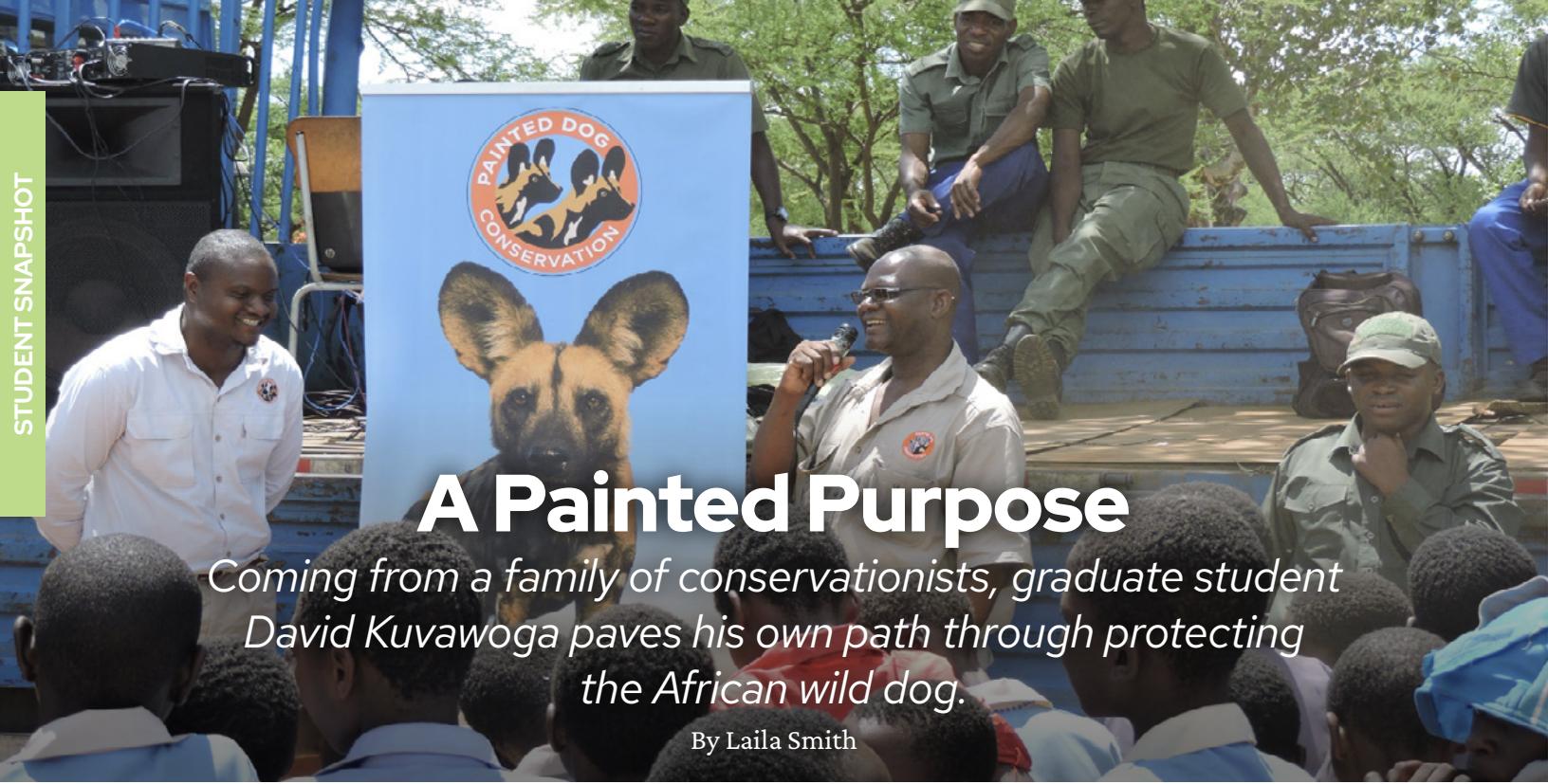
"I personally think community building is really important," Gooley says. "I really want to try to make the student experience less intimidating, less complicated. Personally, I felt so much more comfortable on campus after joining these organizations because I know so many more people than just those in my lab or within my major."

For Gooley, this kind of community-driven work is also valuable to being a student or even a researcher, especially in a field where collaboration between various disciplines is a matter of necessity.

"I think it's important for issues like climate change, to be able to explain what you're trying to do and what you're researching," Gooley says. "Especially in politics, where sometimes that knowledge isn't being broadcasted in a way that's very understandable to someone outside of that scientific community."

Gooley admits that finding community can feel intimidating at first, especially for new students. But communities aren't always closed off — more often than not, even the act of making paper with other students creates community around the objects we share.

This story was originally published by the College of Letters & Science.



A Painted Purpose

Coming from a family of conservationists, graduate student David Kuvawoga paves his own path through protecting the African wild dog.

By Laila Smith

Kuvawoga speaking to a crowd about the importance of protecting the painted dogs. Photo courtesy of David Kuvawoga

David Kuvawoga has held a deep connection to the environment since birth. Growing up in a rural village in Chirumanzu, Zimbabwe, he was surrounded by vast grasslands, rolling mountains, and a horizon full of fresh air. “When I was young, I just wanted to be outside,” Kuvawoga says. This early love of nature is what eventually led him to the Nelson Institute, where he is currently earning his master’s degree in environmental conservation.

Kuvawoga was also surrounded by a family that cared deeply about the environment — his older brother went into conservation, and his father worked for Zimbabwe’s national parks. To Kuvawoga, “I had people ahead of me who paved the way for me and brought home the passion for environmental conservation. It’s what we lived and breathed, so my own passion developed early on.”

As Kuvawoga grew older, he began to take an interest in his dad’s work as a national park ranger. “I was so into it that one day I put on his uniform — which was too big for me — sat in his office and imitated him. It was almost like a premonition as to what direction in life I wanted to take,” says Kuvawoga. “I was so inspired by not only the work my dad was doing, but also the people he interacted with, the family that the national parks created, and the protection the parks brought to the wildlife.”

Though his brother and father had somewhat “paved the way” for Kuvawoga’s career in environmental con-

servation, he still feels like the decision was his own. “I embraced the idea that you could be one with the environment,” he says. He had a passion for learning about the natural world and was constantly questioning the role humans play in the environment. “I was asking myself questions that I was too young to be asking,” says Kuvawoga, “but I was asking them because I had a desire to know the answers — and I knew I could find those answers through studying conservation.”

Kuvawoga started with a bachelor’s degree in nature conservation, graduating in 2010 from Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa. “My education was quite encompassing, and it [made me] someone who could lead teams and operations in conservation,” Kuvawoga says. After graduating, he worked as an assistant estate manager near Johannesburg, South Africa, but began to miss his home country. “I wanted to have a greater impact as a professional and home was the best place to begin.”

In 2015, Kuvawoga returned to Zimbabwe just in time to become an operations manager for [Painted Dog Conservation \(PDC\)](#), an organization that works with government agencies and communities to raise awareness for the endangered African wild dog, also known as the painted dog. Right now, there are fewer than 7,000 painted dogs left — but Kuvawoga and his team are developing strategies around the clock to raise that number.

One way PDC helps raise awareness about the species is educating local youth about the threats that African wild dogs face. “Their relationship with wildlife is somewhat bitter,” Kuvawoga says. “They’ve only seen lions or elephants when they’re coming to kill their family’s cattle or eating the last of their crops.” Since 2004, PDC has brought more than 16,000 kids from local primary schools to Hwange National Park, where the organization’s work is based.

Introducing younger generations to Hwange, its wildlife, and the basic principles of environmental conservation has sparked a generational shift, with many locals growing to appreciate the painted dogs and their role in the ecosystem. In 2015, local communities even started to volunteer their own anti-poaching units to help PDC remove wire snare traps that often snagged painted dogs as bycatch.

“We need to be out there, doing our best every day and hoping that we can experience those life-changing moments when people and wildlife are reconnected again,”

— David Kuvawoga

However, Kuvawoga has learned that these attitude shifts don’t happen overnight. “It takes time for behavior to change when we’re working with communities,” Kuvawoga says. “It’s something that shows us that conservation is not a sprint, it’s a marathon. But we still need to be out there, doing our best every day and hoping that, one day, we can experience those life-changing moments when people and wildlife are reconnected again.”

While working at Painted Dog Conservation Kuvawoga felt himself wanting to understand conservation on a broader scale, leading him to the Nelson Institute’s environmental conservation program. He first heard about the Nelson Institute in 2017, when Arlyne Johnson, a Nelson Institute lecturer, was visiting Zimbabwe as a strategic planning expert with the [Foundations of Success](#). To Kuvawoga, “I knew that when I was ready to go back to school, it had to be at one of the best institutions I could find — and everything I heard about the Nelson Institute made it obvious to me that this is the place I was going to go.”

Kuvawoga decided that he was ready to enter back into academia earlier this year, and is now a first year master’s student in the Nelson Institute’s environmental conservation program. “The instructors are the best out



Painted dogs, also known as African wild dogs. Photo by Nicholas Dyer

there. They’re widening my horizon from many different perspectives — like conservation planning, leadership, policy, human-wildlife conflict, climate change, communication, and more, Kuvawoga says. “I am a changed person now. My attention to detail and planning skills have improved, my resource base is wider, and I feel like I can take on the world.”

Within his studies, Kuvawoga is particularly passionate about investigating how humans interact with wildlife, and how those interactions can often be invasive or inconsiderate of animal welfare. He says, “sustainable conservation should make enforceable policies that safeguard wildlife in the long-term. We can’t turn a blind eye; we have to speak out for animals.”

After graduation, Kuvawoga plans on returning to Zimbabwe to continue speaking out for its wildlife. “I’ve been with Painted Dog Conservation for 10 years now, and the vision hasn’t been fulfilled yet. We have a job to do,” he says. Upon his return to the organization, Kuvawoga, who is now PDC’s operations director, aims to not only protect the painted dogs, but also dozens of other species across Africa that face threats from a changing environment. The best way to do this, he says, is through collaboration.

“Environmental conservation isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon,” Kuvawoga reiterates. “But even as a marathon, it’s more of a relay-marathon.” When it comes to solving environmental issues, it takes an entire team of people working diligently over time to see change. “The world’s environmental problems are many and diverse, and you can’t deal with them alone. You need to have partnerships, you need to collaborate, and you need to have a multidisciplinary approach to the environmental challenges that the world is facing. We’re all in this together.”

Congrats, Grads!

This weekend, 70 Nelson students enter alumnihood.

This Sunday, Dec. 15, 70 Nelson students will turn their tassels to become UW alumni at the 2024 winter commencement ceremony. The Nelson Institute started the festivities early with a Science Hall celebration on Thursday, Dec. 12, where Dean Paul Robbins and proud Nelson faculty raised coffee mugs to toast the soon-to-be graduates at a breakfast celebration. Join us in congratulating the winter Class of 2024!



NELSON

Environmental Studies Majors

Kendi Aaron
Tierney Boler
Carter Brown
Zoe Cook
Aiden Cook
Samantha Givich
Jacob Kresse
Alison Leib
Ann Marie Lunney
Mitchell Martens
Najib Mohtar
Taryn Murphy
Nick Raffone
John Ryan
Molly Schaefer

Sustainability Certificates

London Bates
Mehek Checker

Olivia Cross

Trent Davis
Kozon Lee
Joshua Mumm
Riley Thompson

Environmental Studies Certificates

Clayton Atkison
Kallyn Batista
Beau Berg
Natalie Boucher
Rex Boyce
Sydney Buteyn
Sydney Gargulak
Hermay Gonzales
Josef Haupt
William Hazeltine
Zach Heard
Madeline Holman
Kayla Holman

T Innis

Lissa Kanton
Hannah Kleiboer
Sophia Lee
Julian Lin

Garrett Lowery
Aryssa Mahrt
Jonathan Martin
Natalie Maruyama
Lucy Merkel
Leanne Moczynski
Elizabeth Moe
Arjun Muralikrishnan
Carly Phalen
Sylvia Reinebach
Lucy Rieder
Sneha Sadia
Henry Severson
Levi Smith
Sally Stuart
Majenta Stuntebeck
Alexandra Vang

Sophie Verkoulen

Truely Wallhaus
Tracy Yang
Taylor Wartell

Environment and Resources MS

Michael Menon

Environment and Resources PhD

Elizabeth Berg
Christopher Caldwell
Sheamus Cavanaugh
Tatiana Maeda
Nicholas Mailloux
Karann Putrevu
Brian Schuh
Sophia Winkler-Schor

Finding Climate Optimism with Dan Utech, EPA Chief of Staff

Where do we see signs of climate progress—and how do we hold on to them?

On this episode of the *SustainUW Podcast*, Dan Utech, chief of staff for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), joins student hosts Brynne Hill, Audrey Davies, and Aiden Culver to explore the balance between urgency and optimism in climate action.

With decades of experience in environmental policy, Utech reflects on the wins and challenges that define federal climate action, offering insight into the role of the Inflation Reduction Act, the EPA's Justice40 framework, the influence of youth activism, and what it takes to keep emissions reductions on track. The conversation invites listeners to think critically about federal climate policy—and the persistence required to keep it moving forward.

The *SustainUW Podcast* is produced and hosted by student interns at the UW–Madison Office of Sustainability, spotlighting the people, policies, and practices shaping sustainability on campus and beyond. Through thoughtful, student-led interviews, the podcast bridges campus conversations with global climate issues.



You might also like:

[Choosing Hope: Jon Foley on Science-Backed Climate Solutions](#)



The *SustainUW Podcast* is created and hosted by Office of Sustainability interns, bringing conversations about sustainability at UW–Madison to life. Photos courtesy of Office of Sustainability (2)



The *SustainUW Podcast* team records with Dan Utech, EPA chief of staff.

Gear Up for a Greener Future with Nelson Institute Apparel!

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