



Nelson Institute for
Environmental Studies
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

February 2024

THE COMMONS

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



A Triumphant Return

The American marten has come home to Wisconsin after 100 years of extinction.

Campus prioritizes
sustainability.

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your next road trip.
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to the *New York Times*.
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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.

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From the Dean

Greetings, Nelson alumni and friends,

Class is (back) in session! The semester started a little over three weeks ago, and here at the Nelson Institute we've hit the ground running. Although, when it comes to, you know, *protecting and restoring the planet*, our superlative faculty, staff, and students rarely take a day off (take a look at [page 18](#) to see just some of the national media our faculty appeared in over winter break).

The Nelson Institute continues to be a leader in helping stem the tide of global species extinction, reversing runaway climate change, and adapting to a changing planet. Beyond such critical topics like weather and climate, sustainability, and agriculture, the species-related work coming out of the Nelson Institute is truly astounding and a theme that rang loud and clear as I read this month's issue.

Let's start with the American marten — a species that went extinct in Wisconsin some 100 years ago. Research [led by Erik Olson](#), a graduate of our environment and resources

program, made the groundbreaking discovery that the marten had returned to Madeline Island in Ashland County. Now a faculty member at Northland College, he teamed up with Nelson faculty affiliates Jonathan Pauli and Tim Van Deelen (his PhD advisor!). Erik told us, "It is a bit surreal working alongside your graduate school mentors as collaborators in this way. Being able to work alongside them and their amazing graduate students has been a major highlight of my career." Not only is our research impactful, but so, too, are the connections forged here.

Also in this issue, Jonathan Pauli and Ben Zuckerberg — both professors in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and faculty affiliates in (and Ben is the current director of) our Center for Ecology and the Environment — discuss how the habitat of the [snowshoe hare](#) is

changing ... and how the species itself is adapting. This wonderful research is being shared through their work with the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts' wildlife working group.



Switching gears from field cameras to satellite imagery, I would be remiss to gloss over the contributions of our environmental observation and informatics (EOI) staff and students. You want cutting edge? EOI is it. Sarah Graves, the program director, has been penning some helpful stories about how the field of observation and informatics can make broad contributions to myriad environmental and conservation efforts. If you want to learn more about this field at the intersection of data science and environmental studies, Sarah has shared a great list of [podcasts](#).

There's yet another approach to stemming extinction: genetics. While it is critical to save wild plants, animals, birds, and insects here and now, while protecting the places they live, the rapid rate of global change also means that conservation will ultimately require that we do more. We need to store the diversity of genes of the world's wild beings now, before we lose them. That effort is a critical goal of many of Nelson's affiliates and leaders and our "Global Ark" program seeks resources to train students, create resources, and build teams to address this [critical challenge](#).

Read on to dive deeper into these stories and so many more.

Be well,

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

Paul Robbins
Dean, Nelson Institute





Announcing the Tribal Education Promise

In December, UW–Madison Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin announced a new pathway for Wisconsin's Native students to attend the UW: the Tribal Educational Promise. Beginning next fall, any undergrads who are enrolled members of federally recognized Wisconsin Indian tribes will receive full financial assistance. "The university and this institute reside on the lands of the Ho-Chunk people, and the state we now call Wisconsin is the home of Ojibwe, Oneida, Menominee, and countless other original residents," said Nelson Institute Dean Paul Robbins. "We owe it to these neighbors to make this campus as accessible, welcoming, and friendly as we possibly can. This new program for UW Native students is a big step to fulfilling that obligation. I couldn't be more excited about this effort."



By Nathan Jandl, Office of Sustainability

UW-Madison students participate in a waste audit. One of the chancellor's sustainability initiative goals is to achieve a Zero Waste campus by 2040.
Photo courtesy of Office of Sustainability

The University of Wisconsin–Madison has a rich history of advancing environmental sustainability through its excellence in fields ranging from ecology to wildlife biology to satellite technology. Building on this tradition, the university is launching a new cross-campus initiative focused on environmental sustainability, centered around five goals that include the launch of an interdisciplinary research hub.

Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin [formally announced the initiative](#) at the meeting of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents on Thursday, Feb. 8.

The plan represents the most comprehensive environmental sustainability initiative in UW–Madison's history and will advance the university's research and education missions while also making campus a living laboratory for sustainable practices.

With the goals as a guide, UW–Madison will be on a

course to drastically reduce our campus's and physical plant's impact on the environment, cultivate a culture of sustainability, build climate resilience, and inspire innovations that will benefit campus, the people of Wisconsin and the planet.

“This initiative builds on UW–Madison’s great Wisconsin Idea, our tradition of innovation for the public good,” says Mnookin. “It prioritizes issues that affect the people and communities of our state. We owe it to Wisconsin to further demonstrate leadership in sustainability and stewardship of our planet. These goals set us on our way while building on the great strides we’ve taken in recent years.”

The new initiative is structured around the following five goals:

- The launch of the Sustainability Research Hub this spring to facilitate large, interdisciplinary grants and drive sustainability innovation.

- Procuring 100% renewable electricity on campus by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2048 or sooner to drastically reduce UW–Madison’s carbon footprint, improve public health and address global climate change.
- Meeting prospective and current student demand by ensuring all interested students have access to sustainability educational experiences by 2030.
- Achieving a Zero Waste campus by 2040 by sustainably managing materials and related emissions from procurement and use to reuse or disposal.
- Achieving STARS Gold by 2025 to align UW–Madison performance with peer institutions and foster campus-wide participation in sustainability efforts.

The new initiative reflects the university’s commitment to stewardship and to addressing challenges to the state’s natural resources and a changing climate, both of which are affecting Wisconsin residents.

For instance, there is [reduced ice cover on the state’s lakes](#), [disease-carrying ticks](#) are taking advantage of longer growing seasons and warmer temperatures, and climate-related storm shifts and floods are [increasing insurance rates](#) and [causing costly damage](#).

By establishing specific targets and timelines for the initiative’s goals, UW–Madison is also integrating key priorities expressed by numerous stakeholders. These goals reflect collaborations with campus shared governance, community members, and students, including the Associated Students of Madison Sustainability Committee and its Student Subcommittee of the Sustainability Advisory Council, who have remained engaged in sustainability issues and interested in educational opportunities.

The university’s 2048 target for reaching [net-zero emissions](#) — which coincides with UW–Madison’s 200th anniversary — also aligns with the City of Madison’s [2050 goal](#) and with the Paris Climate Agreement.

“Sustainability has become a core principle in how we plan, build, and operate at UW–Madison,” says Cindy Torstveit, associate vice chancellor of Facilities Planning and Management. “We are incorporating [cutting-edge sustainability design features](#) into new building projects, launching a study to understand how we can decarbonize our heating and cooling systems, and collaborating with our utilities on exciting initiatives like the [new solar and agriculture research project](#) at the Kegonsa Research Campus.”

Efforts to achieve the initiative’s goals will also include a cross-cutting approach to waste management, focusing on highly visible issues like [food scraps](#) and recycling, while tackling less apparent challenges, such as the [indirect emissions](#) created by the manufacture of products used on campus.

Missy Nergard, director of sustainability at UW–Madison, says that the university’s approach is particularly notable for centering education and research while creating ripple effects that go far beyond the boundaries of campus.

“Our goals are not abstract: They’re fundamentally mission- and people-focused,” Nergard says. “We are developing an institutional strategy that leverages the work of our amazing faculty while creating opportunities for teaching and research here in Madison as well as across the globe.”

She adds: “We are using campus as a living laboratory for sustainability projects while collaborating with communities near and far. And we are honoring and engaging our students, who are passionately interested in bringing sustainability principles to bear on their future careers and in creating a livable, equitable planet.”

Eminent university figures like Aldo Leopold and Gaylord Nelson laid the groundwork for the modern conservation movement and the Earth Day celebration. Today, nearly half of all departments and more than 320 faculty members participate in sustainability-related research, making major contributions to scholarship in [air quality and energy](#), [global health and climate change](#), and [environmental justice and food systems](#), among other topics.

To complement its [existing academic opportunities](#), UW–Madison will expand its educational offerings to help train adaptable, interdisciplinary thinkers who are ready to face the challenges of the future.

“Sustainability has always been at the core of the UW–Madison mission because it’s at the core of people’s lives throughout the state. People are concerned about clean air, trout in their streams and the quality of their water,” says Paul Robbins, dean of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. “This campus sustainability initiative is an extension of our mission to listen to those people and address those concerns. Communities want to see it; our students are demanding it. The next few years are going to be very exciting.”

For more information, visit sustainability.wisc.edu.



A Paws-itive Sighting

For the first time in a century, martens — Wisconsin's only state endangered mammal — have been spotted on Lake Superior's Madeline Island.

By Danielle Kaeding, Wisconsin Public Radio

The small number that exist in the state make their home in a few areas of northern Wisconsin, including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Wildlife biologists estimate only around 30 to 80 animals live within the complex forests of northern Wisconsin and Lake Superior islands just offshore the Bayfield peninsula. They say one should count themselves lucky

to spy the weasel-like animal. The furry critters are about the size of a house cat with beautiful chocolate fur and a throat patch with marbled yellow coloring. They can scurry up and down trees with their semi-retractable claws.

"It's really exciting to think this is, at least in contemporary times, the first documented evidence of an American marten on Madeline Island."

— Erik Olson

College, was intrigued when he received an email of photos from his research assistant. Northland junior Sydni Bennette alerted him to a possible sighting on Madeline Island.

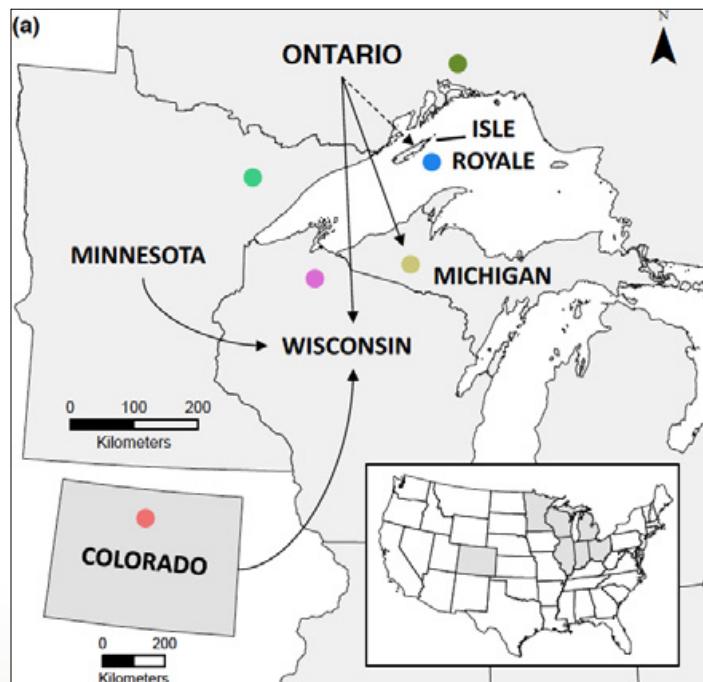
"When I saw it, I was like, that definitely looks like a marten," Olson said.

The photos were captured as part of a project to study wildlife called "Wild Madeline." Olson sent the pictures from a network of 25 trail cameras installed on the island to Jon Gilbert, biological services director with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Gilbert agreed it was indeed a marten.

"It's really exciting to think this is, at least in contemporary times, the first documented evidence of an American marten on Madeline Island," Olson said.

Olson said it may be 100 years or more since the marten was last seen on the island. The marten, or waabizheshi, is a clan animal that holds significance for Ojibwe tribes in Wisconsin. Sarah Gordon Altman, or Niigaanosekwe in the Ojibwe language, is a member of the marten clan with the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.



The populations of martens surveyed for this study surrounded the Lake Superior basin. Colorado martens from a different species served as a comparison. Graphic courtesy of Jonathan Pauli and Phil Manlick



Students in Erik Olson's wildlife techniques class at Northland College. The class helps check field cameras each spring. Photos courtesy of Erik Olson (5)



An American marten in the Apostle Islands.



An American marten is captured by a trail camera on Madeline Island.

“It was a very important animal in the sense that it’s considered small, but extremely tenacious, almost vicious, in the way that they battle other animals in the hunt,” she said.

First spotted in the Apostle Islands more than a decade ago, Gilbert said the discovery indicates a positive trend for the species.

“We keep finding them on more and more islands, which is really interesting,” Gilbert said. “To me, that indicates a pretty robust, healthy population, which is a good sign.”

“We have these populations that appear to be holding on, even at small population sizes.”

— Jonathan Pauli

Long Extinct in Wisconsin, Marten Recovery is Ongoing

The American marten is a close cousin to the sable, which were sought for their fashionable furs. Jonathan Pauli, forestry and wildlife ecology professor at UW–Madison, said they were extensively trapped for their pelts, which were made into hats and mittens. At the same time, clearcutting of forests dramatically altered the habitat they preferred.

By the 1920s, martens had gone extinct in Wisconsin.

The state began to bring them back through a series of reintroduction efforts beginning in the 1950s. Martens from British Columbia and Colorado were brought to the Apostle Islands, but that effort was deemed a failure. But Pauli said martens naturally recolonized the islands from other sites in Wisconsin and Michigan. So far, they’ve been found on 11 of the 22 islands.

“This most recent camera detection of marten on Madeline Island really begins to kind of complete the colonization of the

vast majority of the Apostle Islands,” Pauli said. “Given that Madeline Island is the largest, it’s exciting to see it return.”

Martens are known to strike out on their own over long distances with a range of around 50 miles. Pauli said the best guess among wildlife biologists is that they are moving between the islands by traveling across the ice.

While few are found, he said their ability to move and reproduce with martens at other recovery sites in Wisconsin can improve the overall viability of the regional population.

“It’s not like by any means we’re out of the woods here with this species,” Pauli said. “But it does mean that we have these populations that appear to be holding on even at small population sizes.”

Could the Marten Gain a Foothold on Madeline Island?

The number of martens detected on Madeline Island remains unclear. Olson said it’s difficult to determine whether the photos captured one or more martens. He said the marten has been spotted at multiple sites within the interior core of the island except for a sighting at Big Bay State Park.



Bridget Stroede and Sydni Bennette, student research assistants from Northland College, set a camera trap on Madeline Island in June 2022 as part of the Wild Madeline Project of Northland College.

“We’re excited to see how broadly they’re distributed both throughout the island, and if we’re seeing signs of greater abundance,” Olson said.

While biologists are happy to see martens have made their way back to Madeline Island, they’re still not sure whether they can establish a breeding population there.



An American marten eagerly awaits release in 2017.

Nelson at the Forefront

In 2014, Northland College and UW–Madison were working together with the National Park Service when the Apostle Islands' martens first showed themselves. Leading the way was Northland associate professor Erik Olson and UW professors Jonathan Pauli and Tim Van Deelen. Beyond their interest and expertise in the small mustelid, the scientists have a mutual connection: the Nelson Institute.

Olson is a double degree earner, having completed both his master's and PhD in the environment and resources program — with Van Deelen serving as his PhD advisor. In 2019, Olson's work at Northland [was honored](#) by the Nelson Institute with a Rising Star Alumni Award. "The partnership between Northland College, UW–Madison, and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore has been natural and synergistic from the beginning," Olson said. "The project is in its 11th year now, and each year we are learning something new."

Pauli, whose academic home is in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences' Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, is a faculty affiliate in Nelson's Center for Ecology and the Environment. Both Pauli and Jon Gilbert, also quoted in this article, are also members of the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) wildlife working group, a partner program between the Nelson Institute and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

(Read more from the WICCI wildlife working group on [page 16](#).)

"Personally, it is a bit surreal working alongside your graduate school mentors as collaborators in this way," Olson said, reflecting on the experience. "Tim Van Deelen was my PhD advisor and Jon Pauli was a young assistant professor whom I looked up to when I was wrapping up my PhD. Being able to work alongside them and their amazing graduate students has been a major highlight of my career."

The islands in the area, including Madeline, have the type of complex forest habitat where the animals can thrive. They like a lot of downed trees and woody debris. Canada Yew, an evergreen shrub that hides critters on the forest floor, is also abundant in the understories of the island forests.

Pauli said those settings give martens good hunting grounds for them to pursue and feed on red-backed voles, which are the most abundant mammal species on the islands. The landscape also hides martens from predators like coyotes and fishers.



UW–Madison professor Jonathan Pauli releases a marten that was captured on the Apostle Islands. Photo courtesy of Jonathan Pauli

But there are also deer on Madeline Island. And they could eat up Canada yew that provides cover for both martens and their prey.

Gilbert said it may be possible for martens to thrive on the island. Or it may be that browsing deer send the animals looking for a more suitable home.

In the meantime, Olson said their research is ongoing.

"We're continuing to monitor some of the other islands," Olson said. "That's always exciting to see where these critters will pop up."

This story was originally published by Wisconsin Public Radio.



Erik Olson



Jonathan Pauli



Tim Van Deelen

Top Podcasts in Earth Observation

Whether you're new to remote sensing or well-versed in geospatial topics, you'll find something to like in these audio delights.

By Sarah Graves

Photo by iStock / Wiresstock

Earth Observation Podcasts



There is no shortage of ways to learn about a topic, and Earth observation is no different! Thanks to scientists and professionals around the world, there are many podcasts covering topics on remote sensing data, cloud computing, open-source software, and career advice.

Here are a few of our favorite Earth observation podcasts. They range in topics from more focused remote sensing research topics to broad geospatial data and applications. We have highlighted specific episodes on topics from the basics of remote sensing and satellites to how AI methods apply to image analysis.



Eyes on Earth

The *Eyes on Earth* podcast from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) highlights not only the science applications of satellite data, but also the contributions of the Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center and the

scientists who make access to satellite data possible.

Recommended Episodes

New to remote sensing:

- [Thirty years of land change in the U.S.](#)
- [Satellites 101](#)

For data lovers:

- [Satellites and cloud computing](#)

Fun applications:

- [Earth as art](#)
- [Hurricane disturbance mapping](#)

The MapScaping Podcast



MapScaping

The *MapScaping* podcast covers a broad range of geospatial topics and conversations about geospatial careers. With weekly episodes since 2019 and a searchable catalog and show notes, it is easy to find something relevant for you!

Recommended Episodes

New to remote sensing:

- [Earth observation, platforms, and data](#)

For data lovers:

- [Computer vision and GeoAI](#)

Fun applications:

- [Conservation and GIS](#)
- [Bathymetric LiDAR and blue carbon](#)



Down to Earth

The [Down to Earth](#) podcast is from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' (IEEE) Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society (GRSS) and filled with in-depth conversations with scientists and their research. In addition to this podcast, the IEEE GRSS also provides a space for mentorship and support for researchers in earth observation.

Recommended Episodes

New to remote sensing:

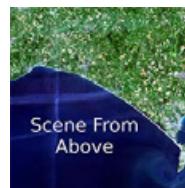
- [Growing the next generation of climate scientists](#)

For data lovers:

- [Dealing with data: infrastructure and standards](#)

Fun applications:

- [Tackling the earth's top two megatrends through remote sensing](#)



Scene from Above

We love the [Scene from Above](#) podcast for its news updates, its catchy intro song, and for its recent focus on representing more voices and perspectives in remote sensing. Be sure to follow

this podcast for updates from the community groups [LadiesofLandsat](#) and [SistersofSAR](#).

Recommended Episodes

New to remote sensing:

- [New hosts](#)

For data lovers:

- [PC/GEE \(Planetary Computer/Google Earth Engine\)](#)

Fun applications:

- [GNSS to study natural hazards](#)

Learn More with an MS in Earth Observation



David Kolodziejski presenting his EOI capstone project on applying machine learning algorithms to assess the temporal change of biomass across the Emerald Edge Rainforest. Photo by Lindy Oates

Are you hooked on earth observation yet? The [environmental observation and informatics MS program](#) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is a non-thesis degree offering training at the intersection of geospatial data and environmental conservation. [Check out what our students and graduates do!](#)

Sarah Graves is the coordinator for the Nelson Institute's environmental observation and informatics MS program, which is rooted in the disciplines of environmental conservation, remote sensing and GIS, and informatics.

UniverCity Year's Class of 2026

The program that connects the UW to the state announces six partnerships with Wisconsin communities.

By Abigail Becker, UniverCity Alliance

University of Wisconsin–Madison's UniverCity program is excited to announce six Wisconsin local governments are partnering with university resources to address community-identified challenges.

Since 2016, UniverCity Alliance has connected Wisconsin communities with faculty, staff, instructors, students, courses, and more during a three-year partnership. [UniverCity is an alliance](#) of interdisciplinary leaders dedicated to fostering innovation in communities of all sizes.

“Year after year, we are excited to work with Wisconsin local governments and pair them with UW–Madison’s faculty, staff, instructors, and students to jumpstart their goals,” UniverCity’s managing director Gavin Luter said. “Our primary aim is to listen to these local leaders and find the best match for their community’s needs.”



Much of Mount Pleasant's local government business is conducted in the village hall, seen here. Courtesy of Village of Mount Pleasant



The Village of DeForest is part of the greater Madison area and located two miles north of the Dane County Regional Airport. Courtesy of Village of DeForest

Since inception, 29 communities have partnered with UniverCity. The new cohort brings the total to 35 communities, with 18 counties and 17 cities, towns, and villages participating.

“UniverCity is making UW–Madison more accessible and responsive to a growing number of Wisconsin communities,” Luter said. “These partnerships are a two-way street: We learn from our partner communities, and they learn from UniverCity’s on-campus partners.”

The six communities include the villages of DeForest and Mount Pleasant; the city of Waupaca; and Chippewa, Jackson, and Iowa counties. Jackson County applied to UniverCity in collaboration with the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin.

Over the past several years, UniverCity community partners



have worked during a three-year engagement to identify and complete projects. DeForest, Mount Pleasant, Waupaca, and Chippewa and Jackson counties are partnering through 2026, while Iowa County is engaged in a more accelerated timeline.

Iowa County sought out UniverCity to study the feasibility of consolidating services within the county and across the region to save taxpayer dollars, improve service delivery, or unlock innovation.

“This is an exciting opportunity to respond to Iowa County’s needs in a different way that adds to UniverCity’s traditional

three-year engagement model,” Luter said. “We want to support Wisconsin communities in ways that best meets their needs.”

Future Thinking

Local leaders from these communities are forward thinking and looking to the university to support their long-term goals. They are also excited to play a part in UW–Madison students’ academic experiences.

“The Village of DeForest is excited to team up with UniverCity,” Village of DeForest administrator Bill Chang said. “We are proud to be working with creative future professionals to make the Village of DeForest a preferred community to live and be a destination for recreation and business.”

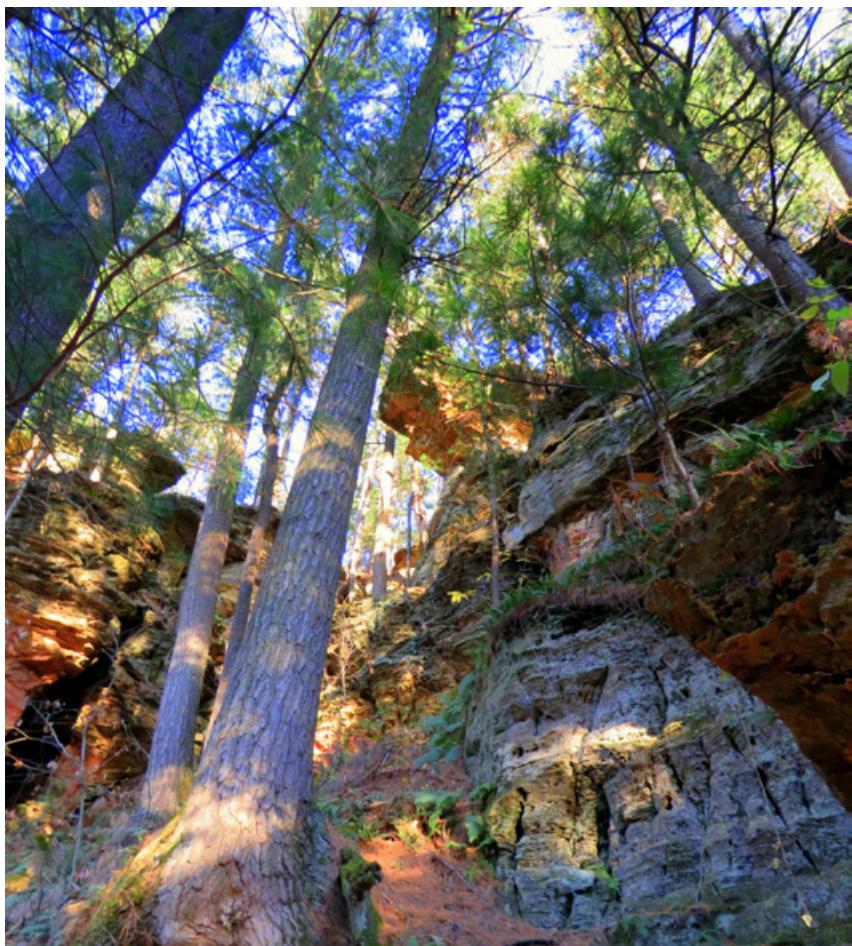
Waupaca city administrator Aaron Jenson said the UniverCity process will support priority planning efforts and increase the city’s ability to secure grants and execute important projects.

“After reviewing outcomes in other communities, the City of Waupaca is confident the UniverCity program is a great option for planning efforts that will mimic professional level documents,” Jenson said. “We look forward to partnering with UniverCity, the faculty and students, to take necessary steps in the continuous improvement of Waupaca while playing a role in the development of young professionals in our related fields.”

Village of Mount Pleasant president David DeGroot



Two people balance on stand-up paddle boards in Lake Holcombe at Chippewa County Pine Point Park. Photo courtesy of Chippewa County



Top: Iowa County features several natural amenities like Governor Dodge State Park and Ridgeway Pine Relict State Natural Area, pictured here. Photo by Mary Kay Baum
 Above: A crowd of people line the sidewalks during a parade in Waupaca. Courtesy of City of Waupaca

is also hopeful UniverCity can help the village prepare for the future. The village aims to explore service costs for new developments, a master plan for a 73-acre park, and the potential expansion of the Public Works Department.

“As the village continues to see an increase in commercial and residential development, coupled with a fast-growing population, Mount Pleasant seeks to plan for its future,” DeGroot said.

UniverCity has helped Wisconsin communities address a wide range of needs, from environmental sustainability to childcare policies and strategic messaging campaigns. Chippewa County applied to UniverCity to analyze technology services — a first for the program.

“Technology is constantly changing and we want to ensure that we are providing the best and most secure systems to serve the needs of our citizens,” county administrator Randy Scholz said. “Utilizing the knowledge and expertise of the UniverCity program, we look forward to creating a technology roadmap to meet these needs.”

Jackson County plans to address projects in the City of Black River Falls, the villages of Melrose and Taylor, and with the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin. These topic areas range from energy use and downtown revitalization plans, to tourism initiatives and relationship building with the Ho-Chunk Nation.

“Jackson County government is excited to partner with UniverCity to explore the possibilities to make our county and local communities more resilient and ready for the

City of Waupaca

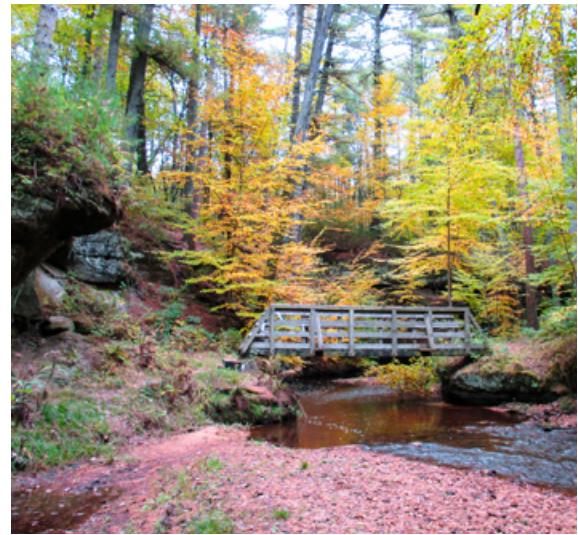
Population: 6,282 (2020 census)
 Area: 7.92 square miles

Chippewa County

Population: 66,297 (2020 census)
 Area: 1,041 square miles
 Comprises 11 villages and cities

Village of Mount Pleasant

Population: 27,732 (2020 census)
 Area: 36 square miles



challenges ahead,” said Max Hart, chair of the Jackson County Extension Education Committee.

Village of Melrose president Ben Boardman said the village is interested in projects that “enhance the beauty of our village and build activities in the village that encour-

age a stronger sense of community and identity.”

UniverCity is now matching community projects with campus resources. If you are a UW–Madison instructor interested in partnering with Wisconsin communities, please email Gavin Luter at luter@wisc.edu.



Top left: Fall foliage begins to make an appearance around Mirror Lake in the City of Waupaca. Courtesy of City of Waupaca; Top right: Perry Creek, a tributary of the Black River in Jackson County. Home to Black River State Forest, which features 68,000 acres of pine and oak forest. Photo by Black River State Forest; Left: The Village of DeForest's park system includes 57 acres of community parkland, 30 acres of neighborhood parkland, and over 300 acres of conservancy. Courtesy of Village of DeForest

Village of DeForest

Population: 10,811 (2020 census)
Area: 7.49 square miles

Jackson County

Population: 21,145 (2020 census)
Area: 1,000 square miles
Comprises six villages and cities

Iowa County

Population: 23,709 (2020 census)
Comprises 15 villages and cities



Wild Winter Wonderland

How climate impacts are shaping the winter wildlife community.

By Dea Larsen Converse, Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts

Photo by iStock / JHWilliams

Ben Zuckerberg and Jonathan Pauli are associate professors in the Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology in UW–Madison’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, as well as faculty affiliates in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and its Center for Ecology and the Environment.

Can you give us an overview of what's been happening with wildlife and climate change?

Zuckerberg: What we have seen over the past 40 to 50 years clearly has been a pretty significant shift in the climate system. Species are responding to that in a number of different ways, from changes in their phenology and migration patterns to shifts in their distribution and ranges, especially northward. Impacted species encompass not only what we consider the cold or winter adapted species that are moving northward,

but also warmer adapted species moving northward and colonizing Wisconsin.



Ben Zuckerberg



Jonathan Pauli

“When it comes to the conservation of ecological communities and species in the face of climate change, I do have hope.”

— Jonathan Pauli

Pauli: The snowshoe hare is an ideal species to begin to look at some of those shifts. Every year snowshoe hares turn white in the winter to match the snowy background and effectively camouflage against all of the species that kill and consume them. In spring, they turn brown. As snow cover season is declining in terms of its duration, snowshoe hares are increasingly mismatched, especially around their current southern range boundary. This mismatch means they are white on a brown background and are more vulnerable to predation. One of the things that we have done very effectively in wildlife ecology and conservation biology for decades is to understand species habitat relationships and actively manage the habitat to try and promote that species. For example, one of our past graduate students, Evan Wilson, noticed that if the mismatched hare was in a young aspen or alder thicket, it is easier for them to hide from predators and they achieve the same survival rate as the matched snowshoe hare. This is one example of the ways in which we could think about managing habitat to try to offset, at least in some places and at some times, the negative consequences of climate change on species.



Photo by Taylor Peltier / Pauli Lab, UW-Madison



The current range of snowshoe hares in Wisconsin (gray), and areas of range contraction since 1980 (red). Graphic provided by WICCI

Do you have hope for the future?

Pauli: When it comes to the conservation of ecological communities and species in the face of climate change, I do have hope. There's an increasing groundswell of people realizing how important this is.

Zuckerberg: I share Jon's hopefulness. I think the societal conversation is certainly heading in the right direction.

Support WICCI

The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) is a statewide collaboration of scientists and stakeholders formed as a partnership between UW-Madison's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. WICCI's goals are to evaluate climate change impacts on Wisconsin and foster solutions. Gifts to the [WICCI Program Fund](#) provide general, discretionary program support and enhance and expand WICCI's teaching, research, and public service roles. Gifts also support partnership-building activities, including faculty, staff, and student recruitment, retention, and morale.

This [condensed interview](#) is part of a series highlighting interviews done for the 2021 WICCI Assessment Report. The full interview is available at wicci.wisc.edu.

Extra! Extra!

Across the institute, Nelson faculty are making headlines.

Photo by iStock / Artisteer

How Much Can Forests Fight Climate Change? A Sensor in Space Has Answers.

New York Times, December 8, 2023

Quoted: Lisa Naughton, Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment, Center for Ecology and the Environment, faculty affiliate

“Nearly all protected areas are becoming much more accessible and much more vulnerable ... Not just to local subsistence hunting and illicit timber extraction, but to things like artisanal mining and road penetration.”

[Read more](#)

Can Offshore Great Lakes Projects Get a Second Wind?

WXPR, December 22, 2023

Quoted: Greg Nemet, Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment, faculty affiliate

“Nemet pointed out land-based wind farms are prominent in other parts of the Midwest. Wisconsin is not known for its wind, but Nemet stressed lake winds are strong, and in the push for clean energy, it is hard to rule out an offshore project eventually being floated in places like Wisconsin.”

[Read more](#)

Anyone Can Help Monarch Butterflies. All You Need is a Yard.

National Geographic, December 14, 2023

Quoted: Karen Oberhauser, faculty affiliate

“Karen Oberhauser, the director of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum and the founder of the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project, advises against rearing monarchs in captivity on a large scale or for more than a single generation, since captivity may disrupt the development of their navigational abilities and, over time, can alter their genetic makeup.”

[Read more](#)



PFAS Lawsuits Involve Complex Science and Law, but Settlements Can Be Worth Millions

Wisconsin Public Radio, January 1, 2024

Quoted: Steph Tai, Associate Dean for Education and Faculty Affairs, faculty affiliate

“There can be some ability to trace that, because each company would be producing, potentially, different types of PFAS that could be linked back to them.”

[Read more](#)

Endangered Species Act's 50th Anniversary: What Six Northwest Animals Can Tell Us

The *Columbian*, December 25, 2023

Quoted: Adrian Treves, faculty member

"Gray wolves are a resilient species, Treves said. And they don't tend to congregate in one place; rather, when a pack grows too large they'll instinctively spread out. But protections aren't evenly spread, Treves said, in large part thanks to a lack of a national recovery plan from federal officials."

[Read more](#)



Madison Trees: Residents Protest a 'Silent' Deforestation

The *Cap Times*, January 3, 2024

Quoted: Michael Notaro, Center for Climatic Research

"This is a critical space for people, especially with enhanced warming from climate change. If you remove that, you have more urban heat islands, you have more local warming, you lose carbon to the atmosphere, you increase the amount of solar radiation coming in ... Large removal of trees is not a good option."

[Read more](#)



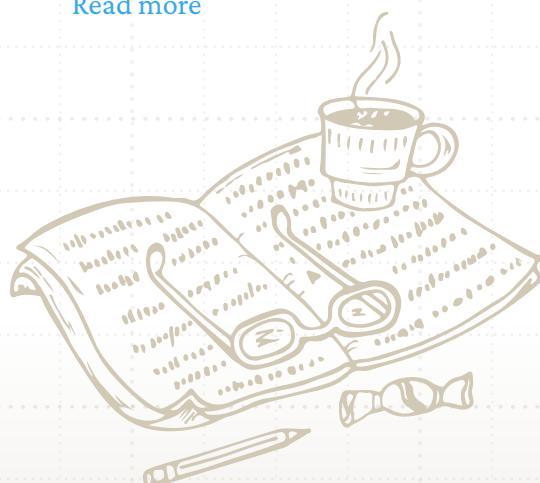
U.S. In Deep Freeze While Much of the World Is Extra Toasty? Yet Again, It's Climate Change

AP News, January 16, 2024

Quoted: Steve Vavrus, State Climatology Office, Center for Climatic Research, Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts

"... The polar vortex outbreaks have become more frequent in recent decades. The idea is the jet stream — the upper air circulation that drives weather — is wavier in amplified global warming, said University of Wisconsin-Madison climate scientist Steve Vavrus."

[Read more](#)



From the Desk of Andrea Hicks

A monthly update from faculty, staff, and students in the Office of Sustainability - Education and Research. This month's column is from director Andrea Hicks.

There are many challenges to improving the sustainability of our campus in a meaningful manner. Often, a sustainability problem is the result of cascading effects that are only visible when considering a whole systems approach. For example, compostable cups, which have been offered in some campus facilities, are designed to degrade in an industrial composting facility and decrease plastic waste. Although such cups sound like a wonderful idea, they actually pose significant issues to our campus waste-handling efforts. First, there is a lack of access to facilities that can compost the cups; and second, campus community members are often confused about how to dispose of them, despite education efforts over the years, which yields contamination of existing waste streams.

To dig in a bit more: these cups are labeled “compostable,” but they only are under certain conditions, such as those found in an industrial composting facility that can reach temperatures of over 160 degrees Fahrenheit. It’s estimated that the entire U.S. only has about 200 full-scale facilities that could handle these types of compostable cups; however, only about three-fifths of these facilities actually

accept compostable packaging.

There is also the issue of community education. In our 2021 campus sustainability survey, members of the UW–Madison community were asked:

Compostable plastic beverage cups are available at some dining venues on campus. Which of the following available disposal options is the most sustainable choice for the compostable cup?

- A. Food scraps (61 percent answered)
- B. Plastics Recycling (25 percent)
- C. Metal Recycling (1 percent)
- D. Landfill (8 percent)
- E. Other (4 percent)

The best place for the compostable cups to be disposed of on campus is in the landfill, which only 8 percent of respondents selected (some of the “other” responses mentioned something to that effect). This means that the majority of campus community members did not know how to properly dispose of compostable cups. This misunderstanding leads to a cascade of issues: when the cups are disposed of in “food scraps” or “plastics recycling,” they actually are a form of contamination which



Andrea Hicks

lowers the quality of those waste and recovery streams.

A UW–Madison campus waste audit, in which different collected waste streams were sorted and characterized, similarly found that users of the campus facilities did not sort compostable plastic cups correctly. The audit found that while consumers were quite good at disposing of PETE (polyethylene terephthalate) plastics correctly, they likely do not know how to correctly dispose of PLA (polylactic acid), PP (polypropylene), and PS (polystyrene) cups on campus. These studies highlight an issue when it comes to trying to increase the sustainability of our UW–Madison campus, in particular, that changes only work if there is the infrastructure and education to support those changes.



Director's Cut

A quarterly update from Ben Zuckerberg, director of the Center for Ecology and the Environment

As the new director of the Center for Ecology and the Environment (CEE), I am happy to report on our long list of successful and exciting initiatives! Filling in the shoes of our [outgoing director](#), Sean Schoville, is no small task, but it has been made easier by working with a wonderful and committed group of ecologists.

The purpose of the CEE is to provide a nexus for faculty and graduate students to share ideas, enhance scholarship, and to promote ecology on campus. With generous support from the College of Letters & Science, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, we have been busy with several activities including:

- Our annual [fall symposium](#), which featured fantastic talks by new faculty and the prominent researcher, Knute Nadelhoffer!
- Continued support of the WILD SEEDS (Strategies for Ecology, Education, Diversity, and Sustainability) student chapter, and undergraduate student group dedicated to ecological awareness, diversity, and sustainability. Mentored by CEE graduate students, SEEDS focuses on connecting with students from traditionally underrepresented communities who share a passion for ecology and conservation.
- The Queer Ecology Reading Group, which launched this fall to discuss works at the intersection of queer and feminist theory, posthumanism, ecology, and evolutionary science. Ecologists have widely diverse identities, and yet many foundational theories in the natural sciences explicitly ignore the existence of queerness in gender and sexuality. This group discusses the context of these traditions, the implications they have on the research(ers), and possible inter-

ventions. This has been a great collaboration with the Center for Culture, History, and Environment.

- The annual social and dinner for affiliated faculty — always one of my favorite opportunities to connect with old and new colleagues. Center-affiliated faculty met new faculty on campus, discussed ongoing initiatives for the center, and solicited feedback and input on future initiatives.
- Our joint biological sciences graduate student recruitment poster session, which showcased ecological research on campus and improved graduate student recruitment.
- Our continued partnership with the JF Crow Institute for the Study of Evolution to develop a new graduate degree program: ecology and evolutionary biology.

We are excited to announce the Aldo Leopold Graduate Research Award this spring, which would not be possible without the generous support of UW–Madison alumnus, Steven Lawry. Turn the page to read more about Steven.

I am particularly grateful for the support and efforts of Kyle Webert and our awesome executive committee: Wendy Turner, James Crall, Roberto Carrera-Martínez, Zac Freedman, Cooper Rosin, Jesse Weber, Sara Hotchkiss, Aldo Arellano, Jamie Botsch, Anupreksha Jain, Emily Adler, Olivia Bernauer, Carson Keller, and Sean Schoville.

In the coming years, our goal is to enrich and enhance our on- and off-campus activities and serve as the umbrella organization for ecological researchers at UW–Madison!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Zuckerberg".

Ben Zuckerberg



New Graduate Research Award Supports Socio-Ecological Research

Nelson Institute alumnus Steven Lawry shepherds the Leopold legacy to future generations of Wisconsin graduates.

By Chelsea Rademacher

Steve Lawry, director of CIFOR's Equity, Gender and Tenure research program, visits Baghamara Bufferzone Community Forest. Photo by Chandra Shekhar Karki / CIFOR

When it comes to the field of socio-ecology, Nelson Institute graduate Steven Lawry has written the book (or, at least, one of them). An expert on land and forest rights, his work spans the globe — from Botswana to South Sudan and Liberia to Indonesia to India and to Yellow Springs, Ohio, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. His impact has also been felt here in Madison through his longtime support of graduate students in the socio-ecological field. In 1999, he established the Steven W. Lawry Graduate Fellowship, which in 2004, became part of the [Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship Program](#). In 2020 — to celebrate the Nelson Institute's 50-year anniversary, the fellowship was renamed as the Aldo Leopold Land Ethic Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship. And now, Lawry's support is entering its next chapter as it becomes the Aldo Leopold Graduate Research Award.

“Ecology, ecosystems, biogeochemistry, conservation,

biodiversity ... These are all fundamentally intertwined with humanity, society, and economy, whether we like it or not,” says Paul Robbins, dean of the Nelson Institute. “By providing crucial support for students who take that complexity seriously, Steven Lawry is building the future of environmental science and problem solving. This is a huge contribution.”

Starting next year, thesis-based master’s and PhD students in any field can apply to receive funding to partially or fully cover their research-related expenses, including living expenses, travel, conference attendance, and more. Awardees will be determined by the director of the Center for Ecology and the Environment (CEE), one of the Nelson Institute’s four research centers.

“A central mission of the CEE is to foster connectedness and support research among UW–Madison graduate



students concerned with how social values, behaviors, and institutions interact with the environment to shape both social and ecological outcomes,” says Ben Zuckerberg, CEE’s current director.

“As part of that mission, we strive to support graduate students on campus who are interested in the intersection of ecological and social issues. Graduate students are often balancing multiple goals as part of their research, and true interdisciplinary research is always challenging. The generous support from Steven Lawry will undoubtedly allow graduate students to advance their interest in socio-ecological research.”

Lawry knows all about the grad-student balance. While working towards his PhD in the Nelson Institute’s land resources program (now environment and resources), he worked as a research assistant in the UW–Madison’s Land Tenure Center. When he earned his doctorate in 1988, he became a senior scientist there and developed a research program on the relationships between tenure arrangements and natural resource management outcomes, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa countries — an area he had experience in, having spent his pre-UW years helping to improve land use and land use governance practices in Botswana’s Kalahari Desert region.

“It was during my time in Botswana that I became motivated and inspired to study land tenure and land reform,” Lawry has said. “I applied to study at the Nelson Institute because I was drawn to its interdisciplinary approach.” It was at Nelson that Lawry found the teachings of Aldo Leopold, which helped guide his professional career and remain relevant in his role as a senior associate at the Center for International Forestry Research.

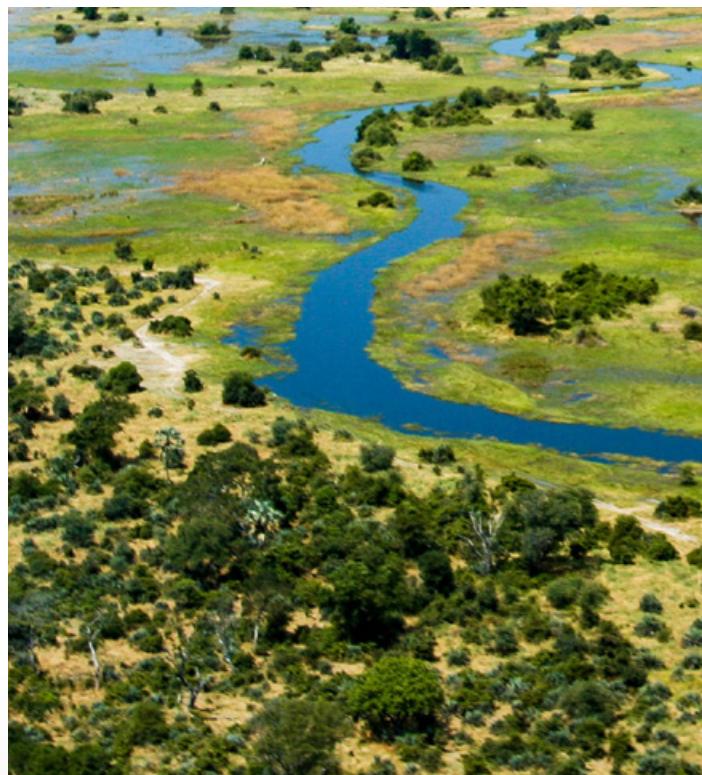
“It was during my time in Botswana that I became motivated and inspired to study land tenure and land reform,” Lawry has said. “I applied to study at the Nelson Institute because I was drawn to its interdisciplinary approach.” It was at Nelson that Lawry found the teachings of Aldo Leopold, which helped guide his professional career and remain relevant in his role as a senior associate at the Center for International Forestry Research.

“Steve is passionate about the legacy and teachings of Aldo Leopold, and his gift will support the next generation of researchers moving conservation science forward.”

— Ben Zuckerberg

“Aldo Leopold was an early scholar of socio-ecological systems and pointed out that we can study individual disciplines alone, but we can’t use them alone,” Lawry notes. “He argued that governments can’t manage resources well directly, and that only land users can bring to bear ‘that combination of solicitude, foresight, and skill’ conducive to sustainable outcomes. For me, the challenges of arresting climate change are revealed in the stewardship practices of people and communities who manage resources well, grounded in an understanding of socio-ecological relationships.”

Zuckerberg adds, “Steve is passionate about the legacy and teachings of Aldo Leopold, and his gift to the Nelson Institute will support the next generation of researchers moving conservation science forward in new and exciting directions.”



The Okavango Delta in Botswana is a very large, swampy inland delta formed where the Okavango River reaches a tectonic trough in the central part of the endorheic basin of the Kalahari. Photo by iStock / Even.F.H

An Interdisciplinary Education

Hailey Kuhn has cultivated her undergraduate experience to reflect her diverse passions.

By Anica Graney

Kuhn with her sister, Paige, hiking in Acadia National Park, Maine. Photo courtesy of Hailey Kuhn (3)



“I love talking with [Anna Gade] because we both question and hope to understand environmental themes and narratives through a religious lens. She’s been a huge mentor of mine in terms of figuring out what I’m doing, where I’m going, and how to use the knowledge that I’ve gained.”

— Hailey Kuhn

The world is Hailey Kuhn’s oyster — and she knows it. With a variety of interests geared toward nature, spirituality, and wellness, it’s only natural for her to want to take an interdisciplinary approach to her undergraduate experience. Why pick one major when she could take two? Why pick one certificate when she could take three? The world is vast and full, and Kuhn is determined to learn and experience all that she can.

In her first year at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Kuhn took an introductory course suited toward her spirituality interest called Exploring Religion in Sickness and Health, which centered on how religious communities viewed and understood a variety of diseases. “I really liked that, it nuanced my perspectives on religion and wellness, and it got me hooked on religious studies,” Kuhn said.

However, she knew there was more that she could do with her education, and, on the advice of her dad, took an introductory botany course. This nurtured her interest in plants and got her thinking about how her varied interests overlap. The next semester she enrolled in an ethnobotany course which opened her eyes to how culture and religion fit with understandings and uses of the environment. “That’s been my path now — different avenues of ethnobotany, whether on the more spiritual/ritual side or the more material side, like with foods and medicines,” Kuhn said. “Especially how native plants are used by Native Americans of the Midwest.”

With majors in [environmental studies](#) and religious studies and certificates in South Asian studies, American Indian and Indigenous studies, and French, Kuhn has fulfilled her search for an interdisciplinary education and will graduate in the spring of 2024. Throughout her undergraduate career, Kuhn has taken opportunities to make connections and advance her knowledge for the subjects she is passionate about, including chatting with Anna Gade, environmental studies chair and professor who shares similar passions with Kuhn.



Above: Photos from an InterTribal gathering at the Wisconsin InterTribal Lake Winnebago Connectivity Project for Wild Rice conservation site. This event, attended by Kuhn's capstone class, promoted community and awareness of traditional snow activities including the game Snow Snake.



Kuhn exploring the UW's Botany Greenhouse. Photo by Anosh Wasker

"I took her environmental humanities course and another on Islam, which led to a lot of chats with her," Kuhn said. "I love talking with her because we both question and hope to understand environmental themes and narratives through a religious lens. She's been a huge mentor of mine in terms of figuring out what I'm doing, where I'm going, and how to use the knowledge that I've gained."

Another mentor that shaped Kuhn's education was Native Nations Partnerships faculty associate Jessie Conaway. For her environmental studies capstone course, Kuhn was introduced to Conaway's project on wild rice conservation with Brothertown Indian Nation, a Tribal Nation and Native community in Wisconsin. Kuhn's contribution to this project included creating a [decolonized map](#) that used Native languages to highlight key locations near the wild rice conservation site. She says that researching Native American creation stories, migration stories, and sacred sites was instrumental in this process.

Continuing her interest in Native studies, Kuhn will be authoring a thesis paper titled "Traditional Anishinaabe Lifeways and Their Present Revitalizations" which is funded by the University of Wisconsin–Madison Letters & Science Honors Program through a Trewartha Senior Thesis Research Grant. Kuhn's thesis will center on traditional ideologies and understandings of nature through local, Native perspectives.

"I want to center a lot of Native voices in this thesis in order to do these communities justice. I'm going to be emphasizing their voices very specifically so that they may be the ones to tell their stories," Kuhn said. "I am in the process of selecting these primary sources, and I have also done a lot of literature reviews, including finding primary sources and secondary analyses of different Anishinaabe traditions and uses of plants in Ojibwe traditions."

In addition to her studies, Kuhn has helped prep botany labs, harvested with the People's Farm community garden, and worked with the Ethical and Responsible Business Network on a project to promote the organic, local, and sustainable products used by Bloom Bake Shop. Kuhn advises other students to do the same as she has — get involved, stay connected, and explore as many opportunities as possible.

Kuhn's future, while uncertain, is still bright with possibilities. The world is her oyster, after all, and Kuhn knows her interdisciplinary education will allow her to help solve problems and improve the world.



Building a Sustainable Community

As a watershed engagement manager, Taylor Haag helps teach her community how valuable water resources are.

By Laila Smith

The stream session of the Green Lake Association's Educator Lake Class. Photos courtesy of Taylor Haag (2)

Imagine a community where people work together to preserve natural resources, protect their watershed, and learn about the importance of conservation. Educators teach students about the importance of ecosystem ecology and how it pertains to their own environment, and farmers use sustainable practices to manage agriculture. For Taylor Haag and the rest of the Green Lake community, this is the reality.

Taylor Haag is a watershed engagement manager with the [Green Lake Association \(GLA\)](#), a nonprofit based in Green Lake, Wisconsin. In 2022, she completed her [master's degree in environmental conservation](#) through the Nelson Institute after graduating from UW–Madison with majors in zoology and environmental studies. Since starting at

the GLA, Haag has helped manage water testing programs, promote the GLA's education program, coordinate environmental events for the community, and even [won the GLA a Land Rover vehicle](#).

What were some of your goals in pursuing a master's degree?

I wanted to use my time in graduate school to gain more real-world project experience through opportunities like the capstone project where we had the time to work with an organization to create deliverables. The real-world experiences I gained from the Nelson Institute really set me apart from other applicants while still being within the safety net of academia.

Additionally, my cohort had a wide range of people from different backgrounds — there were people like me who were already coming from science backgrounds, but also people coming from journalism backgrounds who wanted to become science reporters. There were a lot of different people with different world perspectives and job experiences, so another one of my goals was to pull as much as I could from these people with different life experiences and find my own role in the environmental field.

What are some of your job responsibilities?

At the Green Lake Association, I have many different roles. I lead our water quality sampling programs, including both blue-green algae and spring monitoring programs. I also lead our education and volunteer programs.

With our volunteer program, we have a lot of citizen science projects, such as [Salt Watch](#) in the winter, where we measure chloride levels in streams to identify salting hotspots and reduce road salt use, and in the summer we measure water clarity. In 2024, we are launching a new Nitrate Watch program in the watershed and coordinating a local group of [Water Action Volunteers](#).

What is the GLA's Conservation Field Day?

The Conservation Field Day is an annual event for the GLA where we partner with the Green Lake County Farm Bureau to bring the community together to engage in insightful conversations about the environment and land and water resources. It's a great opportunity for farmers and people in the agriculture community to learn about sustainable agriculture practices, and also show community members the work that's being done in the agriculture community.

"We have a very active community and volunteers that care about the lake and are passionate about preserving it."

— Taylor Haag

This year in particular was special because we were able to hold the Conservation Field Day at [Boerson Farm](#), which is a regenerative farm in our watershed. The Boersons' farm rotationally grazes a beef herd, has no-till vegetables (which helps prevent soil erosion and chemical runoff), is a certified organic farm, and participates in a farm share program. In the morning of the Conservation Field Day, we had four stations — one on their grazing, one on their no-till vegetables, one with a pasture soil pit, and one on conservation easements. Our lunch also used meat and vegetables from Boerson Farm, so everything we ate was grown right there and it really tied our conversations on land stewardship back to the community. In the afternoon we held a pollinator walk session, where a pollinator specialist talked about the importance of pollinators to our ecosystems and to agriculture. It all showed how amazing the outcomes can be when you take care of the soil and farm sustainably.

Can you explain the Land Rover's Defender Service Award that you helped the GLA win?

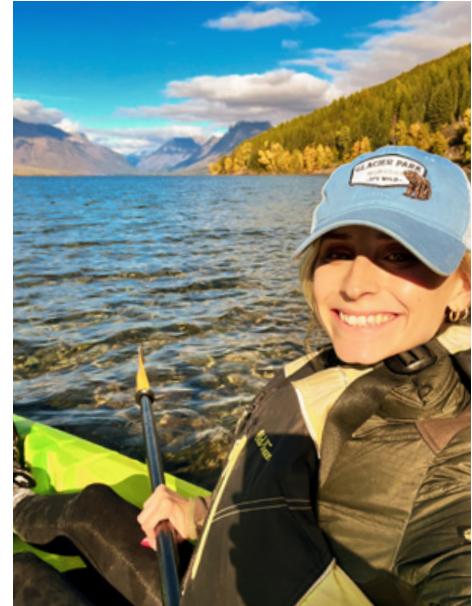
Soon after I started at the GLA in August 2022, I read an article about how nonprofit environmental organizations had won Land Rover vehicles the previous year. I

thought it was a really cool opportunity, so I brought it to the GLA's chief executive officer, and she gave me the go-ahead to apply for it. She later told me that she thought it was a one-in-a-million chance but didn't want to crush my enthusiasm since it was only my second week there! We filmed a video explaining what the GLA is as an organization, the world we do, and how this vehicle could help us expand our mission.

A month after submitting our video, we heard that we were one of five finalists in the environment and conservation category, and from there it went to a public vote. We sent emails, printed postcards that were put in pickup orders at grocery stores and did all sorts of things to spread the word. Thankfully, it worked! We became a top-two organization, and I was able to travel to New York for the Defender Service Awards

Banquet. At the awards ceremony, it was announced live that the [GLA won the Land Rover!](#)

It was truly incredible and I can't emphasize enough how grateful we are to the community. The vehicle has been extremely valuable for transporting equipment to all of our field projects and events.



Haag kayaking on Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park, Montana, in September.

What are you most proud of so far in your career?

I've been with the GLA for a little over a year and a half, and I'm proud of what I'm helping build in the Green Lake Watershed. We have a very active community and volunteers that care about the lake and are passionate about preserving it. I'm excited to share lake classes, host events like the Conservation Field Day, and bolster up our education and volunteer programs to be engaging with people who are invested in the health of this lake and watershed. I have a lot of hope for what I can accomplish in my career and I'm looking forward to continuing learning more and setting even higher goals.

On, Philanthropy!



Dan Fallon

A quarterly update from the Nelson Institute's senior director of development.

As we kick off 2024, I want to highlight the impact you can have on the present and future of the Nelson Institute and UW–Madison through gift planning. What is gift planning? Simply, it is a method of supporting the UW that enables philanthropic individuals to make larger gifts than they could make from their regular income. Commonly donated through a will or trust, planned gifts are usually granted when a donor passes away, but there are a number of other charitable options available depending on your life stage and financial situation.

You've worked hard for what you have, so you care about your legacy. Gift planning integrates your charitable gift into your overall financial, tax, and estate planning to maximize benefits both to you and to the UW–Madison. Depending on the arrangements you choose, you can:

- Reduce your income taxes
- Avoid capital-gains tax
- Increase your spendable income
- Retain payments for life

In collaboration with my fantastic colleagues in the Office of Gift Planning at the University of Wisconsin Foundation, I am here to answer any questions you might have along the way.

In the coming year, there are two changes to gift planning vehicles that I want to highlight:

Charitable Gift Annuity Rates on the Rise

This year has the potential to be the year of the Charitable Gift Annuity. As of January 1, 2024, the American Council on Gift Annuities has determined it appropriate to raise maximum suggested rates. This is the third time in the last 18 months that rates have increased.

On average, rates will increase by 0.4 percent, depending on the age of the annuitant(s).

Some important information to consider:

- Minimum gift needed to establish a charitable gift annuity at the University of Wisconsin Foundation is \$10,000;
- Charitable gift annuities are most commonly established with gifts of cash or stock, but other assets can be considered; and
- If a donor is 70.5 or older, they can make a one-time election to establish a charitable gift annuity with a gift directly from their IRA. In 2024, this one-time election can be up to \$53,000 (a \$3,000 increase from 2023).

2024 Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) - Gift Limit Increase

For the first time, as part of the SECURE Act 2.0, qualified charitable distribution (QCD) gifts are indexed for inflation. Because of this, the QCD limit in 2024 will increase to \$105,000, up from \$100,000 in 2023.

Additionally, the limit for a one-time QCD from an IRA to establish a life income gift has increased to \$53,000, up from \$50,000 in 2023.

If you have any questions about gift planning, please contact me at (608) 852-7929 or dan.fallon@supportuw.org.

Thank you for your support of the Nelson Institute!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Fallon".

Dan Fallon

Now Open: 2024 Alumni Awards



RISING STAR
ALUMNI AWARD



DISTINGUISHED
ALUMNI AWARD

Each year, the Nelson Institute shines a spotlight on alumni who are truly living the Wisconsin Idea and making a difference in the world. Nominations are now open through the end of the month for the 2024 Alumni Awards. Nominate a friend, colleague, mentor, or yourself today!

Award winners are selected by members of the Nelson Institute alumni awards committee and approved by the Nelson Institute senior leadership team. Awards are presented at the Nelson Institute's annual Rendezvous on the Terrace gathering for alumni and friends.



Kyle Tanger speaks after receiving his Distinguished Alumni Award during the Rendezvous on the Terrace 2023 event. Photo by Hedi Lamarr Rudd

SAVE THE DATE

*Celebrate the Nelson Institute
during Day of the Badger*

Day of the Badger, a celebration of what makes UW–Madison great, is coming back April 16–17! Save the date to join the philanthropic festivities and help to make Nelson stronger today for the Badgers of tomorrow. Watch your email and follow along on our social media accounts (@nelsoninstitute).



APRIL 16–17



Supply Chain Sustainability

Making Agriculture Sustainable from Production to Consumption

Thursday, March 14, 2024 | 5:15–6:15 p.m.

1310 Wisconsin School of Business Plenary Room

nelson.wisc.edu/supplychain

What are you having for dinner tonight? Whether you're indulging in a petite filet or enjoying a seasonal salad, your food took a complex journey to arrive on your plate. What is the agricultural supply chain ... and how does it impact our planet? Dig into this topic at this year's Sustainable Success lecture.

Wisconsin School of Business &
Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies



Planet, People, Profit

Careers in Corporate Sustainability

Planet, People, Profit

Careers in Corporate Sustainability

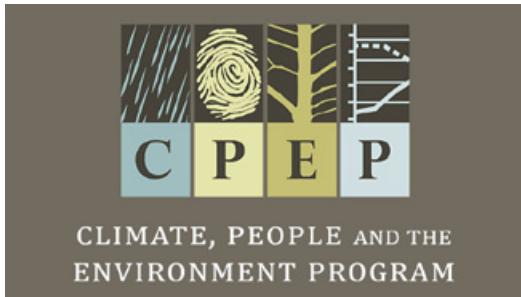
Tuesday, Feb. 27

5:30–6:30 p.m.

Zoom

As leaders step into 2024, they are faced with a new business landscape – one that not only prioritizes success and growth but fosters sustainability and values social responsibility. Join the Wisconsin School of Business and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison for Planet, People, Profit: Careers in Corporate Sustainability. Alumni experts will break down the relationship between business and sustainability, share industry knowledge and tips, and discuss career pathways in the field.

nelson.wisc.edu/ppp



CPEP Series

Each semester the [Climate, People, and the Environment Program \(CPEP\)](#) hosts a [weekly seminar](#) featuring lectures by visiting speakers as well as presentations by CPEP faculty, scientists, and students. CPEP seminars take place from 4-5 p.m. on Tuesdays at 811 Atmospheric, Oceanic, and Space Sciences Building. The presentations are held in conjunction with the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences and are open to the public.

Featured CPEP Seminar:

Fixing the Climate Crisis: Changing our Light Bulbs and Ourselves with Brian Henning,

director of the Gonzaga Climate Institute, Gonzaga University

March 12 | [Learn more](#)



Weston Roundtable Series

The Weston Roundtable Series promotes a robust understanding of sustainability science, engineering, and policy through weekly lectures co-sponsored by the Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment (SAGE), the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and the Office of Sustainability. Lectures are on Thursdays from 4:15-5:15 p.m. at 1163 Mechanical Engineering.

Featured Weston Roundtable:

Leaning In: Sustainability is Our Opportunity and Responsibility with Sarah Klopatek,

chief livestock scientist at JBS

February 29 | [Learn more](#)



Center for Culture, History, and Environment: Environmental Colloquia

The Center for [Culture, History, and Environment \(CHE\)](#) invites you to attend the Spring 2024 CHE Environmental Colloquia series on Wednesdays from 12-1 p.m. in 140 Science Hall.

Featured CHE Colloquia:

Cityscape Landscape with Tim Portlock, UW-Madison professor of environmental studies and art

March 13 | [Learn more](#)

Support NELSON

Interested in supporting the Nelson Institute? There are many ways to contribute to the Nelson Institute — participating in our events, mentoring our students, providing connections to your personal networks, and making financial gifts. All of these are necessary and important to us, and we invite you to invest in our community in the way that makes the most sense to you.

[Learn more](#) about all of the great academic programs, research centers, and public programs we offer.

Gifts in any amount are needed and appreciated!



EARTH FEST

APRIL 19–26 | 2024

EARTH FEST KICKS OFF ON FRIDAY, APRIL 19,
WITH PANEL DISCUSSIONS, ART AND PERFORMANCES, A
KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY TONY REAMES, AND MORE!
THE FULL FEST'S LINEUP — AS WELL AS REGISTRATION
FOR THE KICK OFF — DROPS ON MARCH 1.

Get ready for a week of engaging, hands-on, educational events. Dive into groundbreaking research or dig in the dirt as you pot your own plant. Sift and winnow the latest research or sort and filter recyclables. Make career connections for your future or master sustainable techniques for your home.

Earth Fest is for all members of the Badger community: from students to alumni, faculty to friends, and seasoned experts to future Badgers. Until then, [learn more](#) about what you can expect from the inaugural Earth Fest.



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