



2023 Proposed Fee Changes REVISED 9-23-2022

At the public hearing on Wednesday, September 14, 2022, feedback was received from Wild Harvest Nature Connection, one user group that fits in the proposed fee-based recurring program permit category. No feedback was received from any of the other user groups that fit into this proposed permit category.

Wild Harvest Nature Connection is a Jefferson County based, private, for-profit, homeschool business that operates primarily out of WG Lunney Lake Farm County Park from 9 AM – 3 PM on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during the entire school year (September – May). Participant numbers are ~70 students per week, which puts this user group in the highest participation number category of the new permit. This business also operates a summer camp in Dane County Parks and at other local municipal parks.

Wild Harvest Nature Connection does not have a school building, the park is their primary meeting location. Dane County Parks provides an outdoor classroom learning space along with facilities such as shelters, restrooms, parking lots and playgrounds used by their program participants. The students meet in the parking area of shelter #1 each morning. The business does not rent the shelter, stating they do not need exclusive use and will share with others. However, having 20+ students with materials in the shelter, three days per week, does prohibit other drop in use. The shelter rents for \$115 per weekday - \$30 youth group discount = \$85 per day.

According to the Wild Harvest Nature Connection website, their tuition rate is \$1,500 - \$2,150 per student per year, with participants asked to pay what they can within the sliding scale. With 70 participants, if everyone paid the lowest rate of \$1,500, the business' gross income is likely over \$100,000 for their school year programs. Historically, Dane County Parks has only charged this group \$75 for an entire calendar year for the use of a park as their primary facility and outdoor classroom space. That \$75 fee does not come close to covering Dane County Park staff time and expendable supply costs for the services provided to this business. With a permit fee this low, Dane County Parks has been giving a private, for-profit, homeschool business a significant financial contribution by covering nearly 100% of the facility costs. That is not the intent of a public park system.

There are a number of organizations that have wonderful missions, like Wild Harvest Nature Connection, that use Dane County Parks to hold programs and special events. Most of these groups host single day events and reserve shelters and secure all required permits without discount or complaint. It is also noteworthy that if a group of homeschool parents wanted to meet up in a park, without operating it as a business and charging a participant fee, these proposed permit fees would not apply.

Dane County Parks encourages nature-based youth programming and is continually adapting policies and practices to meet community needs and to provide equitable access to parkland. We work to strengthen collaborations and programs with local non-profits and other community-based organizations and schools that offer free or nominal cost programming or that serve underrepresented or diverse communities, as recommended in the evaluation of Dane County Parks and the Henry Vilas Zoo by Keen Independent Research LLC and commissioned by the Dane County Board of Supervisors. Wild Harvest Nature Connection is a Jefferson County based, private, for-profit, homeschool business; not a local organization offering free or nominal cost programming.

Dane County Parks did not make this decision quickly. Dane County Park staff have been observing this group's use of parklands and researching how other park agencies charge groups like this for the past year. Wild Harvest Nature Connection's impact on the park is not as light as their comments state. The new fee structure was developed with a

sliding scale based on participant numbers so that groups that have higher numbers and spend more days in the park are charged appropriate for their impact on the park and the services provided.

Dane County Parks understands this is a significant change for this business, as evident from the public comments received. Therefore, Dane County Parks reduced the 2023 proposed cost of the fee-based recurring program permit by 33% for most of the cumulative participation # fee tiers in this revision. The lowest two (1-50 & 51-100) were combined into one, at the lower \$50 fee.

Fee-Based Recurring Program Permit

Fee-based recurring programs are programs that charge a participant fee (either per class or per session), meet more than one time, and are using a Dane County Park as their primary meeting location. These include: instructional courses, homeschool groups, preschool groups, fitness classes, etc. A typical school field trip does not fit into this category and should continue to reserve facilities through the standard reservation process.

These programs currently pay one \$75 special event permit fee, per location, per calendar year. If the group is not reserving a shelter, there are no additional fees. Most of these groups still use shelters if they are not reserved by another group, but choose not to reserve them for exclusive use. Some of these groups meet weekly, some several times a week, most meet year round.

These groups are charging their participants, in some cases significant fees, while paying Dane County Parks \$75 to use a park as their home base for an entire calendar year. This type of programmatic park use has grown significantly over the last several years and Dane County Parks needs to adjust accordingly. Fitting these groups into the existing special event permit system is relatively new and it does not accurately charge for the amount of parkland use and services provided to these groups.

The proposed fee structure will switch recurring fee-based programs from an annual special event permit to three session permits:

- Winter/Spring (January – May)
- Summer (June – August)
- Fall (September – December)

The proposed fee structure for recurring programs levels has fee tiers based on participant numbers. In addition to these tiered fees, the group will pay a \$25 application fee per session.

Recurring Fee-Based Programs Permit	
Cumulative Participant #s*	Cost per Session
1-100	\$50
101-250	\$200
251-500	\$400
501-1,000	\$600
1,001+	\$800

**Participant numbers are calculated on a total basis, for example if a program runs 1 time per week over 7 weeks and there are 10 participants each time, the number of participants is 70, even if it is the same participants attending each weekly program. Instructors, additional support staff or adult volunteers do not count towards participant numbers.*

This recurring fee-based program permit fee will not apply for Friends and Partner Groups permit requests. All fees will continue to be waived for these groups. A partner organization has a mission that supports Dane County Parks by restoring, protecting and/or promoting a specific Dane County Park property or properties. All of the money these partner groups raise through donations or program fees goes directly back to the park or to cover the organization’s basic operating expenses. Most of the groups are “Friends of XYZ County Park.”