

DATE: October 22, 2019

TO: Personnel & Finance Committee

FROM: Laura Hicklin

RE: Land & Water Equity & Inclusion and Sustainability Initiatives

The Land & Water Resources Department (LWRD) is committed to implementation of our Equity & Inclusion and Sustainability plans and initiatives.

Equity & Inclusion

LWRD believes that everyone deserves to live in a community with healthy land and water resources and with access to the parks, trails, and other natural resources in the county. We work to ensure that our policies and practices promote equitable access to these resources, and to the jobs, opportunities, and programs that our department offers.

In 2018, we developed an Equity and Inclusion Plan, which was submitted to the Dane County Office of Equity and Inclusion. We expect that this plan will help increase our understanding of equity issues and how we can be a constructive part of a more equitable and inclusive department and county. The plan includes actions and ideas to increase the diversity of our workforce, and identify and remove barriers so that all county residents have equal access to our programs and services. This plan builds on equity initiatives already underway in our department.

Our 2019 equity efforts kicked off with an all-staff screening of An American Ascent, which was followed by a discussion with the producer, James Edward Mills. James is a local journalist who has devoted a lot of his career to “the subject of diversity, equity and inclusion in the world of outdoor recreation and environmental conservation” and to “addressing the disparity of representation when it comes to people of color and their place in the outdoors”. James is also the author of The Adventure Gap – Changing the Face of the Outdoors. A primary goal of the event was to help staff understand how our equity and inclusion work intersects with our natural resources and outdoor recreation work.

We also continued the work of our Equity and Inclusion staff team, which meets regularly and organizes activities such as the LWRD Equity Bingo. Other examples of the staff team work include the LWRD equity library and actively participating in trainings and workshops, including 6 staff attending the YWCA Racial Justice Summit. The staff team also compiled a number of resources for staff to explore the idea of equity and inclusion as it relates to natural resources.

In 2019, the department hosted four interns from the Simpson Street Free Press and the Boys and Girls Club. We also launched a new Youth Environmental Leadership Experience program. This seven-week program works with students to explore community and environmental issues through a series of field trips and hands-on activities in Dane County Parks, with environmental professionals and with community leaders.

A final highlight of our 2019 work includes our continued emphasis to prioritize equitable access to forestry amenities and outreach programs. LWRD staff analyzed census and SNAP data to determine which county lands have the most potential to provide food resources to low-income populations. We then prioritized fruit tree plantings at Lake View Hill County Park, Mendota County Park and at the Capital Springs Recreation Area. We continue to fund two conservation crews with Operation Fresh Start and have expanded the program to provide forestry apprenticeship training to graduates.

Equity & Inclusion highlights from the LWRD 2020 budget:

- Creation of the Dane County Parks apprenticeship program to provide paid training and job experience for young adults
- Launching “Get Outside” to connect kids and community centers to the outdoors
- Continued funding for two Operation Fresh Start Crews
- Continued funding for the Lake Explorers Camp



Sustainability

Sustainability is ingrained in all programs and activities of LWRD. Highlights of our 2019 work include:

- Continued implementation of our records modernization that will reduce paper and which includes online stormwater and erosion control permitting to reduce travel to our office
- Evaluating long-term water quality trends in the Yahara Watershed
- Acquiring, restoring and monitoring critical properties for water quality and quantity benefits, such as the recent addition to Pheasant Branch Conservancy
- Planning for solar installation to offset consumption at the Lussier Family Heritage Center and the William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park Campground
- Installation of solar at Fen Oak and continued use of solar systems at Indian Lake County Park and Silverwood County park

- Cropland conversion of over 500 acres to perennial cover, which improves water quality, reduces surface water volumes, improves habitat and sequesters carbon
- Facilitated the implementation of over 11,700 acres of cover crops in the county
- This year we distributed just under 4,000 free native plants to schools and community groups. Since the program began in 2016, we have distributed over 10,000 free native plants to 70 different schools and community groups in Dane County
- Continued use of CNG vehicles in our fleet

Sustainability highlights from the LWRD 2020 budget:

- Implementation of the solar array at the Lussier Family Heritage Center and the William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park campground
- Installation of electric vehicle charging stations at Dane County dog parks
- Installation of electric vehicle charging stations at the Lyman F. Anderson Agriculture & Conservation Center
- New parking lot at the Lyman F. Anderson Agriculture & Conservation Center that will serve as a demonstration site for practices such as pervious pavement
- Expansion of our CNG fleet
- Continuation of the Continuous Cover Program

