Community Engagement Report

Susan Sandford
Strategic Engagement Coordinator
September 16, 2020

DANE COUNTY LAND&WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

Photo: Kadjata Bah, Simpson Street Free Press

Environmental Education

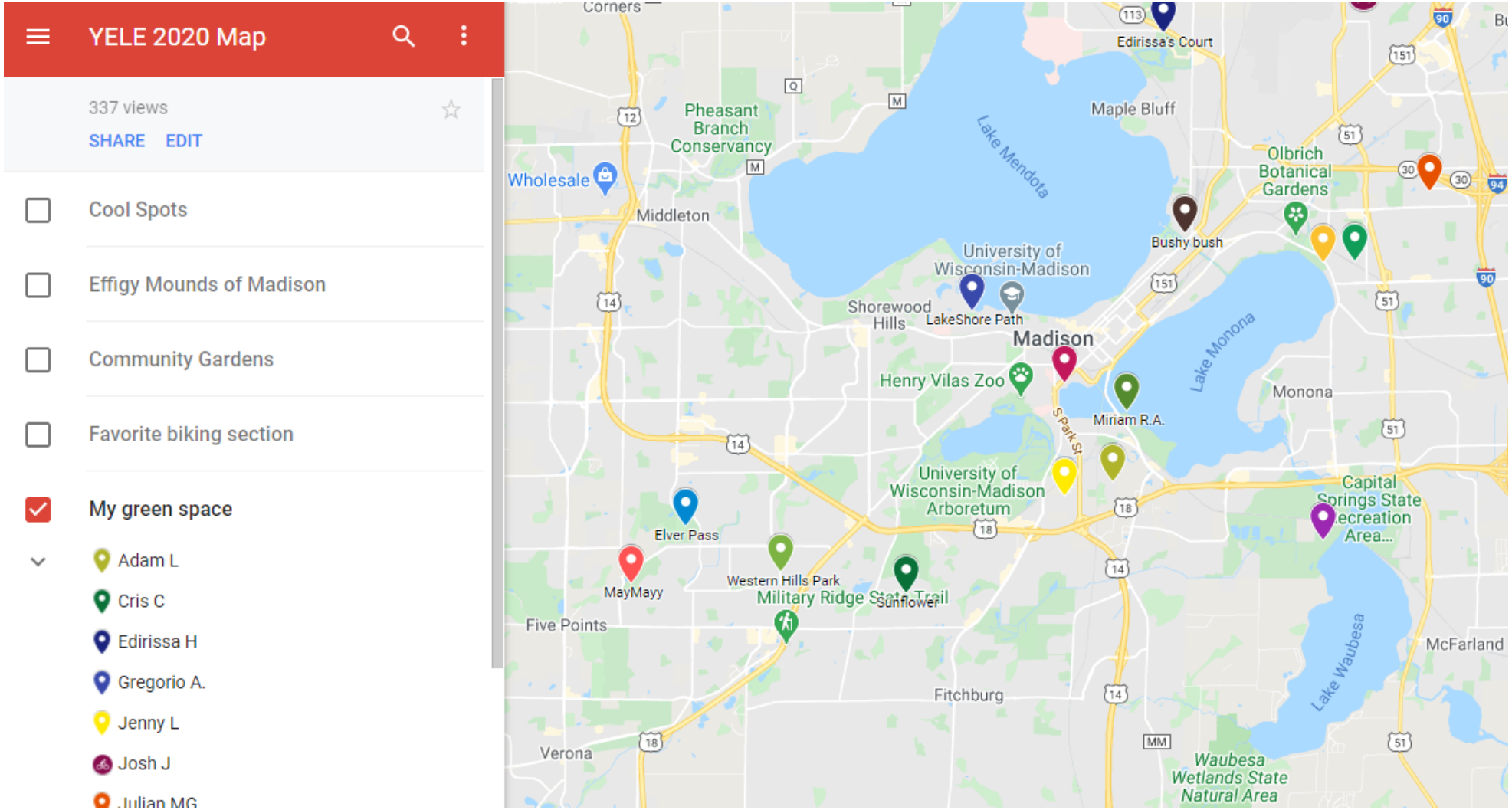
Staff provided **77 hours** of outdoor and environmental education programming for underserved populations through two main programs:

Get Outside

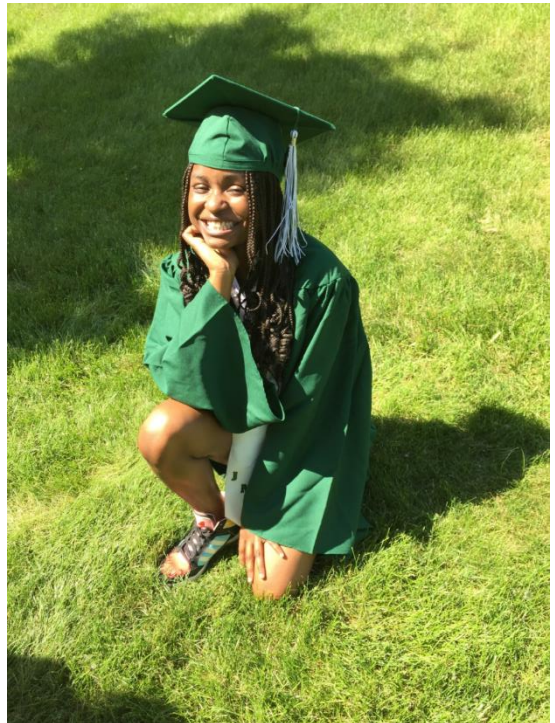
Youth Environmental Leadership Experience

Get Outside!

Virtual YELE



Virtual YELE



StoryWalk®

August 16 - September 14:
<u>Over in the Meadow</u> by Jane Cabrera

September 15 - October 14:
<u>Black is a Rainbow Color</u> by Angela Joy

October 15 - November 14:
<u>The Hike</u> by Alison Farrell

Simpson Street Free Press

Exercise Mind *and* Body at the Lake Farm County Park StoryWalk

by Mariana Bah, age 13

The StoryWalk Project was initiated by Anne Ferguson, a chronic disease prevention specialist from Monterpelier, Vermont, in 2007. She wanted to find a way to encourage both kids and adults to be more active, which is very important to chronic illness prevention. She then launched StoryWalk, which is "an innovative and delightful way for children — and adults! — to enjoy reading and the outdoors at the same time." Since 2007, StoryWalk has been installed in 50 states and 12 countries. The latest local installment is here at the Lussier Family Heritage Center in William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park.

This summer, my siblings and I visited the StoryWalk after biking through Lake Farm County Park. When we arrived at the Lussier Family Heritage Center, we expected to bike on another paved trail to read this month's title. But it turned out that the StoryWalk was actually in a beautiful garden near the Center. The book was "Over in the Meadow" by Jane Cabera, which is based off of the classic children's rhyme of the same name. The staff replace books on the StoryWalk with a fresh title monthly. The Monona Public Library supplies the books. The pages from the books are laminated and posted along the walk.

My sisters and I had a great time reading the pages while observing the nearby flora and fauna. Participating in the StoryWalk is a fantastic way to get families into nature by combining the joy of reading with the outdoors.

In addition to the StoryWalk, Lake Farm County Park offers many different opportunities to have fun while being outdoors. The park is 328 acres, making it a safe place to go while social distancing. It also has campgrounds, playgrounds, an observation tower, and many hiking and cross country ski trails, not to mention two biking/pedestrian trails—the Lower Yahara River Trail and the Capital City Trail, which leads to downtown Madison.

[Sources: *Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Lussier Family Heritage Center*]

For more info…

https://www.lussierheritagecenter.com/Educational-Programs

Simpson Street Free Press

Simpson Street Free Press

Visit the Oak Savanna at Indian Lake County Park

By Jules Da Costa Age 12

Dane County Parks staff and dedicated volunteers have been working hard to restore the natural landscape at Indian Lake County Park. This effort has improved and enhanced what is certainly one of the most beautiful spots in southern Wisconsin.

Dane County's gorgeous Indian Lake County Park has benefitted over the years from scores of committed volunteers. They have removed less desirable plant and tree species to provide more room for native species to grow and thrive. And, of course, more room for members of the public to enjoy this wonderful place. Just a short drive from Madison, visitors will notice some of the results of this conservation work as soon as they enter the main parking area.

According to the Dane County Parks Department, there was a time when Oak Savanna was one of the most common vegetation types in the upper Midwest. But it is now one of the rarest natural communities on Planet Earth. Today's visitors will notice about four acres of natural Oak Savanna landscape from the parking lot just beyond the park shelter.

But there is much more to see and explore at Indian Lake. In all, volunteers and staff have restored about 30 acres of land, trails, and lakeside. They have restored native woodlands and Oak Savannas and brought prairies back to life. At least 20 acres of beautiful prairies and six acres of woodland have been restored so far. There is also the mysterious looking and abandoned "Matz Farmstead" located at Indian Lake. Various trails connect these places and are easily accessible so that visitors can explore.

One invasive species that has been largely removed at Indian Lake Park is the black locust trees that had been taking over the land. Parks staff chopped down trees and used controlled burns to help get rid of these and other invasive species. Once this process is completed, more restoration work will continue at the park.

All and all, it is a fascinating process that nature lovers will enjoy watching unfold. It is hard work. But it's worth it because the remnants of the scenic prairies and Oak Savanna will grow and flourish once again.

Indian Lake County Park is located in northwestern Dane County and is part of Wisconsin's beautiful Driftless Area. This park is a 483-acre piece of paradise. It is only a short drive away and available to the public for free. Anyone who needs a little respite from the COVID-19 pandemic will find it an easy and convenient place to practice social distancing. You can hike the trails, watch nature, go fishing, explore the woods, or picnic with friends and family.

And did I mention it's also free for the public?

Dane County's Indian Lake Park is an impressive and important resource for all of us. Perhaps even more so during a pandemic.

[Sources: *Wisconsin State Journal; Dane County; Waunakee Tribune*]

Read More Online: www.SimpsonStreetFreePress.org

Simpson Street Free Press

Giant Vacuums Clean Dane County Beaches

By Desteny Alvarez, age 15

Dane County is testing a new technology designed to clean out algae blooms local lakes. Strange as it might sound, this new technology actually uses a vacuum to remove hazardous blue-green algae blooms located near Dane County's beaches.

Blue-green algae blooms are harmful to people. Exposure to this kind of algae can cause health concerns for both humans and pets. This new effort intends to make our local beaches clean and safe to swim in during warm temperatures.

This vacuum device cleans our local waters by connecting a pipe to a vacuum nozzle, which pulls out the algae scum from the water and puts it in filter bags. It then separates the clean water from the algae scum and releases the clean water back into the lake. Meanwhile, the algae scum and debris stay inside the filter bags.

"This new technology will allow families to have a safe and fun time at the beach, without having to worry about water quality. Projects like this are an extension of our equity work — providing safe, free fun across our community and encouraging kids to get outside." said Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi.

"As the summer heats up and the COVID-19 pandemic continues, Dane County residents are turning to our lakes to cool down and reconnect with the outdoors," Parisi said in a statement.

According to a recent article in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, Mendota County Park has been chosen as a pilot area for this project. The plan is to expand this new method throughout the Dane County.

Parisi and other Dane County officials have stressed how important it is to have clean beaches and healthy local lakes. Past efforts have focused on algae control, implementing projects that would eliminate sources of phosphorus, which cause algae blooms.

Other efforts to clean and mange area lakes have been effective to a degree. But they are not 100 percent successful. For instance, Dane County has expanded its "blue waters barge" program. This initiative picks up trash and debris from stormwater outlets, public beaches, and piers. The hope is that this new algae vacuum system will be another effective tool to help keep our local lakes and beaches safe and accessible.

"As far as we know, we are the first county to use this type of system," Parisi says. Dane County officials say they are eager to share this technology with other interested communities.

[Sources: *Wisconsin State Journal*; Spectrum News; Madison.com]

Read More Online: www.SimpsonStreetFreePress.org

Simpson Street Free Press

Unclogging the Yahara River

Flood Mitigation in Dane County Adapts to a New Normal Climate

by Christy Zheng, age 17

In August of 2018, the chain of lakes connected by the Yahara River had remained above target summer maximum levels—the appropriate lake levels set by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources—for four months, despite efforts to eliminate blockages in the system. Flash flooding on August 21 threatened to push the lakes over the edge. The city of Madison closed major thoroughfares and urged residents to remain at home as the water rushed in, damaging homes, businesses, and public infrastructure. First responders worked all night, evacuating residents from flooded homes and rescuing stranded motorists. In the aftermath of the flooding, there was one casualty and an estimated $209 million in damages— the majority of which was not covered by insurance. While the cause of the flooding is an environmental quagmire, it boils down to this: inefficient movement of water through the Yahara Watershed and torrential rainfalls were the impetus for the catastrophe.

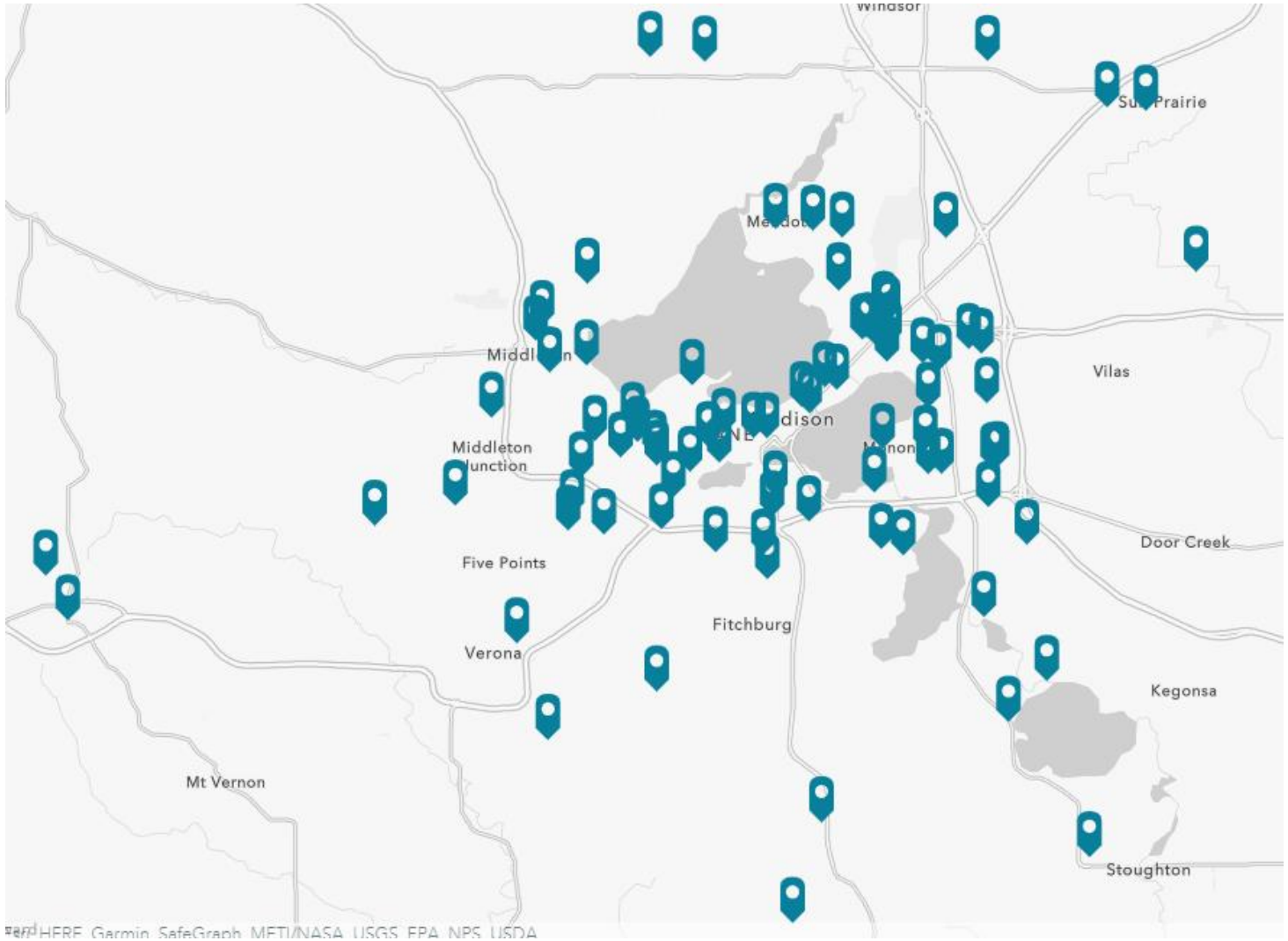
The Yahara Watershed does not naturally lend itself to a fast flow. The river drops a mere 1.5 feet over four miles; it's flat, so the water moves slowly. However, several other factors exacerbate the slow movement of water, including aquatic weeds, sediment, and debris. A task force on flood mitigation was created after the 2018 flooding to pose solutions for these flow restrictors, with input from the public. Flood mitigation efforts were ongoing before the flooding, and the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department (LWRD) has amped up its efforts since, at the recommendation of the task force.

Aquatic weeds, a main area of focus, hinder the movement of water because of friction between the plants and water. They can also impede public access to beaches and support toxic algae growth by releasing phosphorus during decomposition. Additionally, invasive aquatic plants compete with native plants for sunlight and nutrients, which disrupts the ecosystem. In 2018, Dane County aquatic plant harvesters cleared away 8,496 tons of weeds, approximately one-third of which was removed to alleviate flow restrictions. After the flooding in late August, aquatic plant harvesters managed to double the rate of water leaving the Yahara Watershed.

The 2019 budget saw an increase of over 53% devoted to lake weed management from the previous year, bringing the total up to $773,400. The added funds went toward hiring more employees and purchasing new equipment, including two plant harvesters.

https://lwrd.countyofdane.com/Simpson-Street-Free-Press

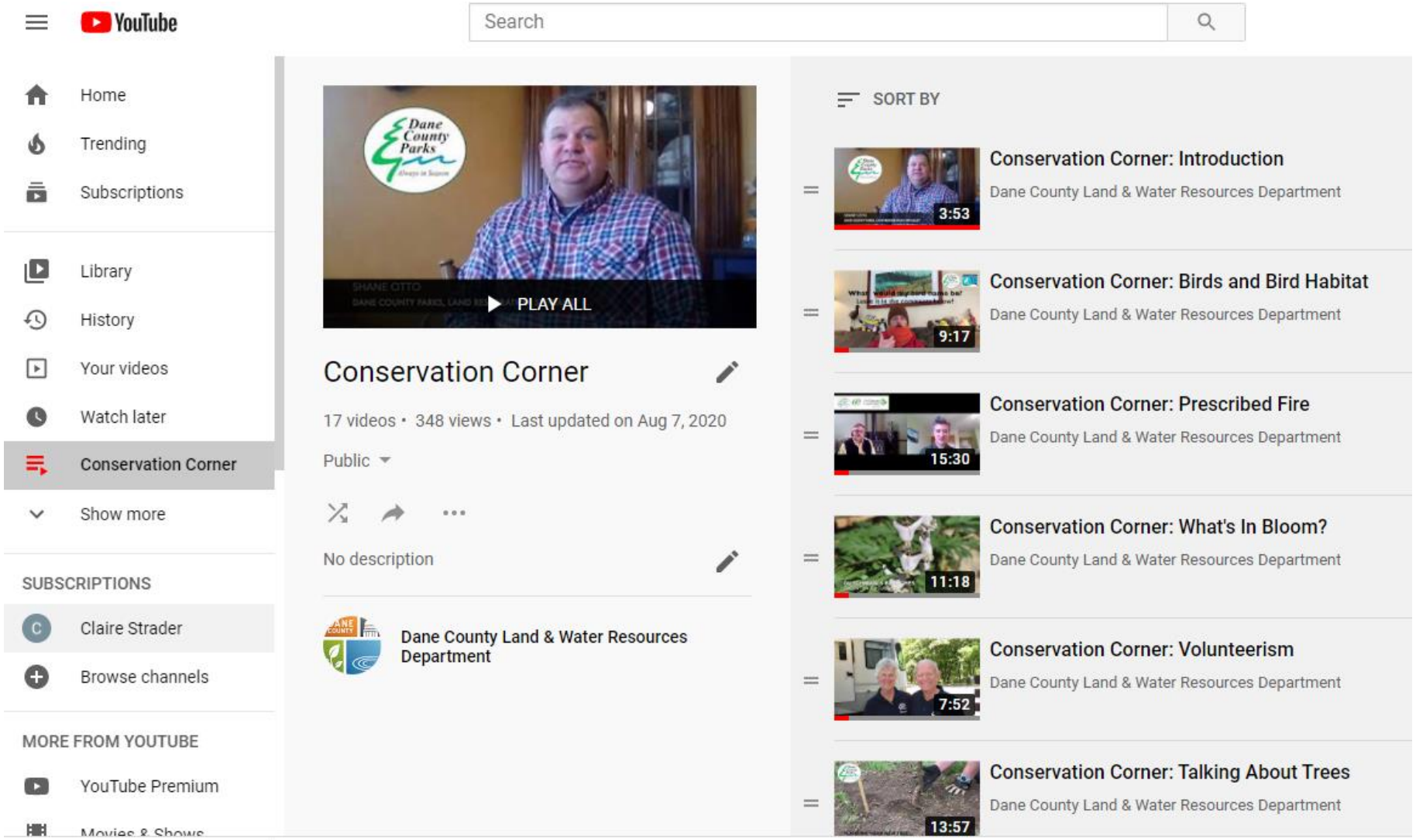
Plant Dane: Free Plants Program



Since 2016, **15,000 + plants** have been distributed to **86 different groups** including schools, neighborhood associations and community centers.

https://lwrd.countyofdane.com/Native-Plants-for-Schools-and-Community-Projects

Conservation Corner



https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh8oo2r5VTzAxfcEO5KF01H_cQqWDcl0k