

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh
and
City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING is hereby made and entered into by and between Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh, hereinafter referred to as Friends of the Marsh, and City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department, hereinafter referred to as City.

PURPOSE:

This MOU sets forth the understanding between Friends of the Marsh and the City for the purpose of cooperating and defining roles of each organization.

OBJECTIVE:

Friends of the Marsh and the City have the mutual goal to preserve and enhance the environment, habitat and recreational values of the marsh. This MOU is intended to act as a guide for continued cooperation between Friends of the Marsh and the City. This document may be amended by mutual agreement as the parties may desire. It is not intended to be a legally binding or enforceable document in any respect, and nothing hereinafter creates any legal obligations of any kind for Friends of the Marsh or the City.

INTRODUCTION

As a Department of the City of La Crosse, the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department is dedicated to managing parks owned by the City of La Crosse for the benefit of the community. The marsh is not, technically, a park, but a 1200 plus acre riparian wetland over which the City Board of Public Works has assigned Parks, Recreation and Forestry broad authority for property owned by the city. The marsh provides for a variety of uses and activities, including bike/ped commuting, outdoor recreation, as well as simple and quiet exposure to nature that many seek for physical and mental well-being in our increasingly hectic modern lives. The City recognizes high public demand for diverse outdoor experiences, as illustrated by increasing use on existing trails, events and public meetings, which for many includes experiencing the wonder of an intact vibrant native ecosystem. The City is interested in providing a variety of outdoor experiences in the marsh. The City recognizes that a system of high-quality trails and a vibrant ecosystem within the marsh contribute to local and regional economies and quality of life.

The Friends of the Marsh is a 501(c) 3 private, non-profit organization, incorporated in 2013 with the State of Wisconsin. Its mission is to preserve, protect, and enhance the La Crosse River Marsh and serve the community through action, advocacy, and education. Through this MOU or subsequent agreements Friends of the Marsh will provide support and volunteer labor for its mission driven purposes.

The public increasingly recognizes that the marsh provides important services to the community: fish and wildlife habitats, natural water quality improvement, flood storage, and opportunities for recreation and aesthetic appreciation. Protecting wetlands can, in turn, protect our health and safety by reducing flood damage and preserving water quality. Friends of the Marsh and the City share a common interest to provide these resources to residents.

STATEMENT OF MUTUAL GOALS

- Protect, manage, and maintain the marsh.
- Direct use to designated trails and away from environmentally sensitive areas
- Provide a variety of sought-after user experiences, including sustainable pedestrian/bicycle trails, while reducing conflicts between different user groups.
- Carefully limit the density of trails to prevent loss of habitat and aesthetic value.
- Provide consistent public education and information, including meetings, events and signage
- Enhance enjoyment and the health benefits of being in nature by supporting educational activities.
- Work together to identify and secure funding to support restoration efforts. Funding sources include direct funding, private donations, volunteer contributions and grants.

The Primary actions for accomplishing these goals may include:

The City is committed to:

- Work with Friends of the Marsh to identify appropriate partnership opportunities and jointly pursue such projects contingent on availability of funds and personnel.
- Encourage continued participation between Friends of the Marsh and City departments and officials in the development of mutually beneficial work projects and educational activities.
- Continue to recognize the need to protect the conservation value of City-owned land.
- Facilitate introductions between Friends of the Marsh and other stewardship groups so that multiple groups can work together towards enhancing the experiences of a wide variety of users.
- Cooperate with Friends of the Marsh on maintenance work outings.

- Coordinating with Friends of the Marsh, as applicable, when planning activities for the marsh, implementing management plans, planting and maintaining native vegetation, and controlling invasive vegetation.
- Review this agreement with Friends of the Marsh annually for the purpose of making revisions as necessary.

Friends of the Marsh is committed to:

- Work with the City to set goals, plan, design and monitor the marsh restoration plan through to its conclusion.
- Work with the City to plan and complete the restoration of the River Point Natural Area (wetland and floodplain forest).
- Work with the City to set goals, review research, plan, and monitor water quality.
- Work with the City to identify appropriate partnership opportunities and jointly pursue such projects contingent upon availability of funds and personnel.
- Produce a 5-year strategic plan for Friends of the Marsh, which will include any proposals for new restoration projects.
- Provide labor and resources as available to preserve and enhance areas of the marsh that have high conservation value. Identify and coordinate volunteer work projects and other efforts to achieve conservation goals.
- Provide an annual summary of work completed, including volunteer hours.
- Provide technical assistance for conservation and education projects and activities.
- Monitor projects over time to obtain quantitative measures of success.
- Plan, update and assist in the design and installation of educational and trail safety/use signage.
- Provide damage assessments for weather-related events.
- Encourage its members to work with local City officials to discuss and identify opportunities for cooperative work on mutually beneficial projects or activities, when appropriate.
- Obtain City written approval prior to implementation of any new conservation or educational projects, trail maintenance, or publication or distribution of any printed material regarding recreational or other uses on city-owned lands.

- Review this agreement with the City annually for the purpose of making revisions.

It is mutually agreed and understood by all parties:

1. The cooperators will develop management plans for ongoing conservation projects located within the marsh as part of this MOU, which will be reviewed and updated annually.
2. The cooperators will jointly seek funding/grants to assist with all aspects of natural habitat improvement in the marsh.
3. NON-FUND OBLIGATING DOCUMENT This instrument is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Any endeavor or transfer of anything of value involving reimbursement or contribution of funds between the parties to this instrument will be handled through separate contracts or agreements subject to appropriation of funds by governing body.
4. COMMENCEMENT/EXPIRATION DATE. This instrument is executed as of the date of last signature and is effective through May 1, 2025, at which time it will expire unless mutually extended by written agreement.
5. NON-AGENCY PROVISION. It is understood that the City and Friends of the Marsh are independent parties and are not agents of each other.

Designated Points of Contact and Signatures:

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