

To: Wild Ones National Board and Executive Director

Date: 4/6/2025

From: WILD Center Planning Committee Members: Kathleen Hallett, Sue and Dave Peck, Pat Fischer, Deb Benada, Ivy Fischer, Theresa Granados, Leslie Bellavance, Denise Valenti-Hein, Chuck Hein, Donna VanBuecken, Sharon Duerkop, Vicky Redlin, Karen Syverson

Title: Proposal to Retain and Maintain the WILD Center Within the Wild Ones Organization

Action Requested:

Reconsider August 26, 2024, board resolution to divest the WILD Center property and approve this proposal to support the Wild Ones continued ownership of the property including the formation of a Friends of the WILD Center Committee.

Introduction:

The WILD Center: A Place of Great Encounters Connecting People with Nature and Native Plants since 2007

This proposal supports the mission of the Wild Ones by promoting native landscapes through education, advocacy, and collaborative action. The vision of this proposal is the same as the vision of the national organization - promoting native plants and natural landscapes thriving in every community. Retaining the WILD Center by the Wild Ones with the support of a manager, the Friends of the WILD Center Committee and a volunteer workforce is a practical, cost-effective strategy that enhances the organization's ability to ensure the WILD Center remains a valuable organizational, community, and ecological asset. The approach includes multiple tactics to achieve substantial expenditure reduction and potential revenue increases while building on the value of continued stewardship of the existing native landscape.

We urge the Wild Ones leadership to approve this proposal to keep the WILD Center within Wild Ones.



WILD Center Trail Map, March 2015

Proposal

Key Benefits and Cost Avoidance

1. MISSION AND VISION SUPPORT

- **Physical Headquarters:** Maintaining a physical place in an existing nature conservancy property at the WILD Center demonstrates Wild Ones' vision of native plants and natural landscapes thriving in every community. Our organization received significant directed in-kind and monetary donations for this property to be owned in perpetuity. We own this property without encumbrance, and it is tax exempt. It is an asset to the organization.
- **Demonstration:** The WILD Center's diverse environment promotes ecological education and scientific research, preserves and conserves the west shore of Little Lake Butte Des Morts, protects the Fox River and Great Lakes Watershed, and serves as a model for sustainable landscaping practices.
- **Observation:** The WILD Center provides citizen science opportunities and enables collaboration with national agencies, environmental groups, individuals, and schools for observing and monitoring nature.



2. ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE

This 16 acre property is located in northeast Wisconsin's Fox River Valley on the shores of Little Lake Butte Des Morts in an area that is part of the larger Great Lakes watershed and an important conservation area. This area has been vital for human and wildlife activities for centuries, serving as a resource for Native Americans and later becoming an industrial hub. The WILD Center's habitat diversity - marsh, forest, and savanna - offers many wildlife species a rare opportunity to thrive in an urbanized environment and helps to mitigate environmental concerns.

Throughout the seasons, the area showcases rich wildlife activities: spring brings migratory waterfowl and turtles, summer sees an influx of pelicans and butterflies, fall attracts geese and ducks, and winter features bald eagles, creating a dynamic natural environment year-round.



3. MULTI-PURPOSE USE OF THE BUILDING

The building serves to support programs, volunteers, property maintenance, and the activities of the organization. The WILD Center hosts workshops, environmental education programs, and community outreach activities, reinforcing its value as a

learning hub. The facility serves as a convenient venue for internal meetings, volunteer gatherings, fundraising and collaborative discussions.

Access to many events can also be made available online, extending the impact to include a national audience. A series of articles featuring the WILD Center in the national newsletter could introduce the WILD Center to members, providing education as to its history, ecological importance, and purpose going forward. This would give members opportunities to be involved. Webinars that show the property and incorporate walk-throughs by native plant specialists and DNR naturalists can demonstrate its unique ecological value.



4. COST AVOIDANCE

- **Volunteer-Driven Maintenance:** The WILD Center native landscaped areas will be maintained by a dedicated group of volunteers, reducing labor costs. There is a track record of very robust volunteer responses to this effort.
- **Designated Work Areas:** These areas can be used for administrative tasks, in-person meetings, and planning sessions, avoiding rental fees.
- **Hosting Events at the WILD Center:** Having the resources of the WILD Center building reduces venue rental costs and enhances our ability to generate revenue to sustain operations.
- **Facility Utilization:** By keeping the WILD Center in active use, we avoid deterioration costs associated with an unused or underutilized building. The

WILD Center continues to be a vibrant asset that fulfills an intentional purpose and benefits our organization and local community.

Implementation Plan

- 1. Friends of the WILD Center Committee:** Establish a Friends of the WILD Center Committee that would work with Wild Ones staff and Board of Directors to initiate planning. Immediate goals for the Friends Committee would include collaborating with the board on a strategic plan for the WILD Center with a proposed budget and support for fundraising and endowment initiatives. The Friends of the WILD Center would establish and organize a structured volunteer program.
- 2. Designate a full- or part-time manager for the WILD Center:** This person would be responsible for the WILD Center. This should be someone with a background in native plants and landscaping who could also monitor the property. This person would work together with the Wild Ones staff, the national board, Friends of the WILD Center Committee, and volunteers to fulfill the plan for the property.
- 3. Facilities Utilization Protocol:** Review and update protocols for usage of WILD Center and partner with local organizations, schools, and businesses to maximize facilities usage and participation.
- 4. Regular Assessment:** Monitor revenue, expenditures, fund raising, and community and member impact to ensure continued success and adjust plans as needed.

Conclusion

Retaining the WILD Center within the Wild Ones organization with the support of a manager and Friends of the WILD Center Committee and a volunteer workforce is a practical, cost-effective strategy that supports Wild Ones mission and vision. It enhances the organization's ability to ensure the WILD Center remains a valuable organizational, community and ecological asset. By reducing executive staff workload and increasing usage of the WILD Center, substantial cost reduction and potential revenue increases can be achieved while building on the value of continued stewardship of the existing native landscape.

We urge the Wild Ones leadership to approve this proposal to keep the WILD Center within Wild Ones.