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For immediate release

Parks Department Natural Areas Program Wins State Award, Grant

Milwaukee, WI (July 29, 2016) – County Executive Chris Abele announced today that the Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas Program has won the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Citizen-based Monitoring Program of the Year Award and has been selected to receive a second \$5,000 for its wetland monitoring project.

The project, “Implementing a Citizen-based Wetland Monitoring Program in the Milwaukee County Park System to Document the Presence and Distribution of Sensitive Wildlife Populations,” received \$5,000 in funding from the 2014-15 Citizen-based Monitoring Partnership Program, and the effectiveness of this project was the basis of the DNR award.

Developed by the Parks Natural Areas Division, the project engages the public in wildlife research and produces scientific data to guide restoration decisions on the county’s 10,000 acres of natural areas. Staff developed in-class training opportunities as well as hands-on field days for citizens to hone their monitoring skills. In 2015, 42 volunteers donated over 625 hours surveying 20 different wetlands within the Milwaukee County Park System.

“We place a high value on ephemeral wetlands within our natural areas—they serve as crucial habitat for various species of amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates,” said Julia Robson, who coordinates the park system’s Citizen-based Wetland Monitoring Program. “The organisms that inhabit these wetlands, particularly amphibians, can be highly sensitive to environmental change and degradation.”

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Natural Areas staff and citizen monitors have confirmed populations of tiger and blue-spotted salamanders and have discovered the first spotted salamander documented in Milwaukee County since 1934, a new population of wood frogs (previously only one population was known), and three new populations of Wisconsin's rarest native crayfish, the Digger's crayfish.

Receiving funding through the 2016-17 Citizen-based Monitoring Partnership Program was not automatic. The Natural Areas Division project competed with more than 20 others for assistance.

"We're very excited to see the wide variety and excellent quality of the projects proposed," said Eva Lewandowski, who coordinates the Citizen-based Monitoring Program for DNR. "The projects that are receiving awards will contribute high priority information about Wisconsin's natural resources across the state and will help stretch state dollars further."

Through the Citizen-based Monitoring Partnership Program, the DNR works with community and school groups, conservation organizations and other agencies to gather critical information on plants, animals, water and other natural resources. Projects are selected through a competitive review process with projects eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in funding per year. Additional information on the Partnership Program is available at wiatri.net/cbm.

"The threat of degradation is high in urban natural areas if sites are not properly managed," Robson said. "Knowing the location of ephemeral wetlands and the potential they may have for sustaining sensitive and rare wildlife populations is critical in the effective management of the natural area."

For more about the Parks program, contact Julia Robson, at (414) 257-8081 or julia.robson@milwaukeecountywi.gov or visit countyparks.com and search "Citizen Science Opportunities."

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