



# Sustainability at UW–Madison 2023–2024

Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin announced an ambitious environmental sustainability initiative on February 8, 2024, before the Board of Regents. The initiative established five institutional goals that will set UW–Madison on a path towards a more sustainable future.

## Launch the Sustainability Research Hub in 2024

- Successfully launched Hub in January with six staff on board
- Met with faculty from 22 departments and 11 schools, colleges, and divisions through events and outreach activities
- Supported a total of \$77M in grant submissions while building toward major calls (\$100M+) and reaching divisions across campus

## Reach STARS Gold by 2025

- Began data collection and projected successful Gold status for 2025
- Recertified UW–Madison as a Bee Campus
- Initiated planning for organic landscape management pilot program; kicked off biodiversity assessment
- Hired new senior sustainability analyst

## Offer sustainability educational experiences to all interested students by 2030

- Released a campus-wide sustainability literacy and campus culture survey (2nd distribution), receiving 1500+ responses
- Hosted nearly 400 attendees, 30+ posters, 19 lightning talks, and featured a keynote by Dr. Weslynn Ashton at the second annual Sustainability Symposium
- Launched a graduate certificate in sustainability through the Nelson Institute, which is available to any graduate and PhD candidates across campus
- More than doubled student participation in the Corporate Sustainability Internship Program; interns are working with corporate leaders across the state on projects ranging from scope 3 emissions reporting to solar array siting and permitting

## Create a Zero Waste campus by 2040

- Students and staff completed Stage 3 (Action Planning) of the PLAN Atlas Zero Waste Fellowship program
- Released a draft Zero Waste Action Plan for public comment
- Initiated pilot projects that leverage Artificial Intelligence to assist user behavior and use dumpster sensors to optimize collection routes
- Launched Free Food Alert pilot program to reduce food waste and insecurity

## Achieve Net Zero Emissions by 2048

- Completed feasibility study for a solar canopy at Linden parking structure (Lot 67)
- Working with students, completed initial study of campus rooftop solar potential
- Completed initial solar suitability study of UW–Madison-owned properties as well as Fleet Electric Vehicle Charging study
- Held campus and community engagement sessions for Utility and Energy Study
- Design underway for campus's first net-positive energy building, the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Frautschi Center



*Bucky Badger joins staff and students from the Office of Sustainability next to a new, 60-foot-long Madison Metro electric bus. The new buses, nine of which UW-Madison helped to purchase, feature an articulated section that will allow for 50% more riders than current buses.*

## Campus Highlights

- Thanks to a \$14.3M gift from alumnus Jerry Frautschi, the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Frautschi Center will be a world-class visitor and education center as well as a net-positive energy building.
- Building on growing momentum for sustainability and environmental efforts on campus, the Office of Sustainability and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies launched UW-Madison Earth Fest. With 50+ events hosted by more than 30 campus partners, Earth Fest became one of the largest cross-campus events of the year – and one of the largest sustainability events in UW's history – with more than 7,000 attendees.
- At the kick-off celebration for Earth Fest on April 19, Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin announced the next area of focus under the Wisconsin Research, Innovation and Scholarly Excellence (RISE) Initiative: RISE-EARTH. The initiative will focus on two themes: reimagining economic and environmental systems, and building sustainable energy and technical systems.



**\$36M**  
proposals submitted  
by the Sustainability  
Research Hub team  
in Spring 2024



**11,000+**  
attendees of events  
certified by the  
Green Events team  
at the Office of  
Sustainability



*Jacob Breit, Sanauz Alaei, Katie Piel, and Christina Treacy, all of whom served as ASM Sustainability Committee chairs, participated in a panel discussion reflecting on UW-Madison's sustainability progress at the Earth Fest kick-off event.*

## Students in Sustainability

- The Office of Sustainability presented the Bucky Award for Conservation and Sustainability to the Food Recovery Network for its outstanding commitment to reducing food waste on campus.
- The Office of Sustainability Campus Intern Program entered its twelfth year, with fifteen students in the 2023–2024 cohort. The interns hosted campus-wide events, served as sustainability consultants, and engaged the campus community, including:
  - Certifying nine campus labs, 11 offices, and 23 events serving over 11,000 attendees.
  - Publishing 15 articles in the Office of Sustainability e-newsletter and Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies digital magazine.
  - Producing 12 episodes of The SustainUW Podcast on topics ranging from the Great Midwest Crane Festival to PFAS pollution and lessons from the Barbie movie.
  - Hosting a variety of events centered around local BIPOC birding, campus food sustainability, inclusive farming practices, UW-Madison land acknowledgments, access to campus natural spaces, and more.
- The Sustainability Writing Awards gave three UW-Madison students scholarship prizes for essays that examined this year's theme of "resolution" from a range of perspectives, bearing witness to the beauty, strangeness, wonder, desperation, loss, and urgency of our global moment.



Office of Sustainability intern Elisabeth Bautista participates in a prescribed burn of Biocore Prairie at the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, as part of LA 581: Prescribed Fire Ecology & Implementation.

## Campus as a Living Lab

- The UW–Madison Green Fund received requests for over \$250,000, funded 11 proposals, and involved 104 student participants for 2023–2024, all of which were record numbers. A selection of funded proposals includes:
  - A three-year pilot project to use organic practices to manage campus landscapes on Library Mall, Henry Mall, Ogg Residence Hall grounds, and the Divine Nine Plaza, while connecting faculty expertise with the Grounds staff who maintain campus.
  - A three-year pilot project to analyze food and beverage purchasing data in Dining, Union, and Athletics food service outlets to improve the sustainability of sourcing.
  - Energy-efficient LED lighting upgrades at Walnut Street, King Hall, and West Madison Agricultural Research Station greenhouses, contributing to our net zero goal by saving 833 MWh of electricity and over \$90,000 a year.
  - Construction of a demonstration-scale agrivoltaics system to be used at the Campus Farm at Eagle Heights Community Garden to offer sustainable education learning opportunities for students.
- The Office of Sustainability expanded a partnership with Marketing 355 and instructor Katie Krueger, in which students designed, published, and analyzed digital advertisements promoting Earth Fest and The SustainUW Podcast.
- In collaboration LSC 561: Writing Science for the Public and instructor Hannah Monroe, the Office of Sustainability connected campus sustainability experts with students



342

courses across  
UW–Madison  
submitted for the  
virtual sustainability  
course attribute

and published feature articles that showcase the breadth of the UW–Madison sustainability community.

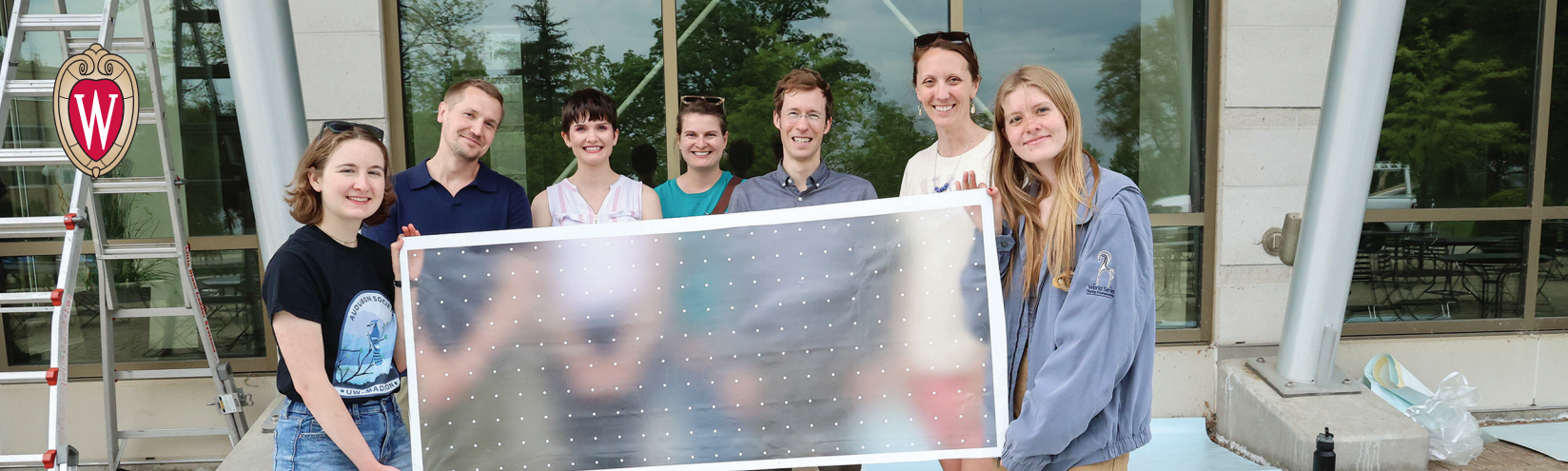
- The Lakeshore Nature Preserve awarded 55 teaching and research permits representing 15 UW–Madison departments, 13 student organizations and involving 1,504 students in applied learning and research conducted on Preserve lands. An additional 10 student group permits were awarded to organizations like the People’s Farm, Outdoor UW, the Multicultural Student Center, and Campus Farm, while 13 permits were awarded for non-UW entities for DNR bat research, citizen science projects, and more.

## Regional Leadership

- The Office of Business Engagement and the Nelson Institute joined forces on a new cross-campus initiative called the Business Sustainability Leadership Forum. During 2023–2024, the Forum brought together leaders from a diverse group of 24 businesses and deans and faculty from across campus. These meetings forged new relationships between UW and state business



Students and staff (Vincent Pergrossi, Shardul Singh, Hannah Stahmann, Mridula Menon, Joe Stoa, and Josh Arnold) pose near an agrivoltaic planter at a UW Board of Regents meeting at Union South.



Green Fund participants gathered to watch the installation of bird-friendly window dots at DeJope Residence Hall.

leaders, strengthened existing relationships, and charted a course forward for advancing sustainability collaboratively through research, innovation, and partnership.

- With \$9.3 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, UW–Madison established the Rural Partnership Institute, a combined effort among the Center for Climatic Research, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and the Division of Extension. Of this funding, \$1.3 million will help revitalize and expand the Wisconsin State Climatology Office, while \$3 million will go to the creation of the Wisconsin Environmental Mesonet, a statewide network of weather and soil monitoring stations.



**\$90,000**  
yearly cost savings  
thanks to lighting  
upgrades in three  
campus greenhouses  
supported by the  
Green Fund

## Research and Scholarship

- From a keynote address on improving food security through a circular economy, to lightning talks on campus sustainability initiatives and poster sessions on research projects across UW–Madison, enthusiastic attendees learned, swapped ideas and inspired one another at the Sustainability Research Symposium.
- A team led by UW–Madison scholars has a plan to turn paper mill waste into plant-based plastics, slashing greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution and creating economic opportunities in ways that benefit marginalized communities.
- A grant from Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant will help a team from UW–Madison study PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) messaging to water users in Wisconsin. The team will work to develop effective communication strategies about PFAS risks, focusing on engaging messages that encourage actions such as using water filtration systems.



**50+**  
events hosted  
by more than 30  
campus partners  
during UW–Madison  
Earth Fest

## Honors and Recognitions

- UW–Madison has been recertified as one of only nine platinum-level Bicycle Friendly Universities in the nation by the League of American Bicyclists.
- The WiscWind team's proposal for a 525-megawatt floating wind farm on Lake Michigan won the project development contest in the U.S. Department of Energy's 2024 Collegiate Wind Competition, in which teams of undergraduates develop a wind energy project and design, build, and test a model wind turbine.
- The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation recertified UW–Madison as a Bee Campus, extending its status as one of only eight universities in Wisconsin and one of nearly 200 in the U.S. to hold the designation.

## On, Wisconsin: The Year Ahead

- UW–Madison will host the Midwest Climate Summit, a conference organized by the Midwest Climate Collaborative, on campus in April of 2025.
- The U.S. Department of Energy awarded UW–Madison Extension a grant for \$1 million that will support a coordinated, inclusive, and transparent process that engages communities in siting large-scale renewable energy projects across Wisconsin.



**Office of Sustainability**  
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