



Name of Property: University of Wisconsin Arboretum
City, State: Madison, Wisconsin
Period of Significance: 1933-1966
NHL Criteria: 1
NHL Theme: VI. Expanding Science and Technology
1. Experimentation and invention
2. Technological applications
3. Scientific thought and theory
VII. Transforming the Environment
1. Manipulating the environment and its resources
2. Adverse consequences and stress on the environment
3. Protecting and preserving the environment
Previous Recognition: NRHP, January 2019
National Historic Context: XXXII. Conservation and Natural Resources
C. The Conservation Movement Matures, 1908-1941
5. Soil Conservation Movement
10. The Great Depression and Conservation

NHL Significance:

- The University of Wisconsin Arboretum in Madison, Wisconsin, is nationally



significant under Criterion 1. The Arboretum was conceived as a laboratory for investigating how to reclaim and repair damaged and degraded landscapes, primarily prairies, forests, wetlands, and savannas. The research and experimentation carried out in the Arboretum beginning in the 1930s led to a better understanding of these ecosystems and contributed importantly to the development of standardized conservation, restoration and management practices, and ultimately helped define the field of restoration ecology.

- The Arboretum embodies Aldo Leopold’s ‘land ethic,’ of humanity taking responsibility for healing the land. Leopold played a leading role in setting the purpose of the Arboretum and guided its development as the Arboretum’s first research director. Speaking at the dedication in 1934, he emphasized the interdependence of humans, plants, and animals, and expressed alarm over the damage humans were causing to the environment noting, “This...is the function of the Arboretum: a reconstructed sample of old Wisconsin, to serve as a benchmark, a starting point, in the long and laborious job of building a permanent and mutually beneficial relationship between civilized men and a civilized landscape.”
- The Arboretum’s ecological communities have provided models for ecological restoration, and sparked practical and applied research that has generated knowledge leading to theoretical and practical principles important in the development of ecological restoration. The two most important contributions were the necessity of prescribed fires for fire-dependent ecosystems (beginning with prairies and extending to other ecosystems), and the adaptive approach to the restoration and management of ecosystems (building experiments into the project, and adjusting the project based on the results).
- The Arboretum illustrates an important aspect of the history of conservation in the United States: investigation and experimentation to develop practical, science-based methods of assisting the recovery of degraded ecosystems. A review of the literatures shows that it has taken until the twenty-first century to begin to identify and put into perspective the significant places and people in the history of ecological restoration and the field of restoration ecology in the United States. Other resources may demonstrate a part of this history, but they remain to be evaluated.

Integrity:

- The Arboretum possesses a high level of integrity in the aspects most critical to conveying its significance: association, design, location, and setting.
- The Arboretum as a site, with its fourteen major ecological communities, conveys its association and retains its design as a laboratory of ecological restoration. Plants have been added and others removed as part of the restoration, investigation, and maintenance of ecological communities. The integrity of the communities cannot be measured by a lack of change, but rather, in their evolution toward the vision of restored ecological communities articulated by Leopold and other founders of the Arboretum. They recognized the long-term commitment of restoration ecology, even as the carried out research and



developed practices that would help pioneer the field, and they envisioned that the ecological communities would change over time as the land healed. Although some of these changes have been unexpected, and the research and experimentation in restoring and managing ecological communities have required adjustment and revision, change in the Arboretum reflects the process of restoration ecology.

- The Arboretum remains in its original location, wrapping around the south, east, and west shores of Lake Wingra and extending south past the Beltline Highway. Physical features of the land in the Arboretum have not been altered since the period of significance. The setting of the Arboretum is urban residential with minimal commercial development. This setting retains much of its original character. The high level of integrity of the location and the setting contribute to a high degree of feeling.
- The level of integrity of the materials and design of the built components of the Arboretum is also high, contributing to the high level of integrity of feeling. Most of the buildings and structures were constructed during the period of significance, and display few alterations. Resources that post-date the period of significance are either confined to the service area, minimizing their impact on the site, and/or are compatible in appearance with the historic character of the Arboretum. These resources do not impact the excellent integrity the Arboretum possesses.

Owner of Property: Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin System

Acreage of Property: 1200 acres

Origins of Nomination: Nomination to National Register of Historic Places

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Advisory Board Recommendation: