

# Open letter to public officials and decision makers regarding potential construction on the Indian Prairie site

This isn't just one of many beautiful spots in the Milwaukee County Parks system. The Indian Prairie is a known ancestral site of high importance. For thousands of years, families and friends gathered on the high banks overlooking the Milwaukee River near the proposed construction area. The two-hundred-plus-year-old oaks in construction's path are the last living witnesses to a continuous Indian presence here that extended many millennia into our collective past. Some of these gentle giants might have even felt Increase Lapham rest on their thickening trunks as he shared an apple with his horse Billie.

For sure these oaks towered tall enough to observe and participate in the last Indian burials at this location – which were still happening when Lapham mapped the Indian Prairie. In 1850, Lapham finds a well-made, above-ground Indian grave and notes that every log and even the supporting stakes are made of the same type of wood. This helps to show the reverence that Indians had for the special nature of certain trees. Oak trees have a very strong association with effigy mound sites across the state; they are grandfathers in their own right.

When opportunities arise to prevent further destruction to ancestral lands that are in the public trust, we might consider taking actions that are sensitive to our nation's natural heritage and history. This is one of these times. Forgiveness begins with words but it requires confirming actions to show that regret is authentic. Acceptance is never guaranteed, nor can it be demanded. Actions can show where our hearts lay; genuine remorse need not be accompanied by guilt or shame.

Are we really ready to cut and kill the last witnesses to Indian ceremonialism at this site? And then tear out the turf and bluff on which it stands? Might it not be time that we stand as one with the oak and whisper our support, perhaps even an apology for their loss too, even if in silence? Let's let our actions speak. They can be our words.

Jim Uhrinak and Martha Bergland, we support your call for consideration of options that provide for proper fish passage through the artificial impoundment area at Kletzsch Park on the river's east bank, to preserve the west bank's oak bluff.

Effigy Mounds Initiative  
Kurt Sampson  
Mark Olsen

Interested parties can find more information on the historic Indian Prairie site in the articles, "Effigy mounds explained" and "The Indian Prairie burial and ceremonial site at Kletzsch Park" on LocaLeben magazine's website <https://www.localeben.com/>

We ask that readers consider joining us in supporting Jim, Martha, and others in the Glendale community who want to see options considered that do not disturb remnants of the Indian Prairie at Kletzsch Park. If so inclined, these public officials can be contacted with your questions, support, or concerns with the current project's proposition to remove six heritage oak trees and the associated bluff where Wisconsin's first peoples gathered for millennia.

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