

Heartland

ECOLOGICAL GROUP INC

506 Springdale Street, Mount Horeb, WI 53572

November 1, 2024

Sarah Lerner – City of Madison
City-County Building, Room 115
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703
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RE: Prairie Hills Ponds Herptile Capture and Relocation Summary, City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

Description of Project

In August of 2024, the City of Madison contracted Heartland Ecological Group, Inc. (Heartland) to provide herptile capture and relocation services prior to a construction project within the Prairie Hills Ponds. The area, outlined on the attached map, is located at the corner of McKee Road and Dorchester Way in the City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin. The purpose of these efforts was to avoid and minimize impacts to herptiles during the construction process. Heartland completed the following tasks:

Task 1: Complete 3 meander surveys to capture and relocate any present herptiles.

Task 2: Install and maintain three turtle traps on site for the purpose of removing most of the turtles before construction work could begin.

- Two additional floating style traps were added for the final week of capture.

Task 3: Using the installed turtle traps, remove turtles from the pond prior to construction activities.

Task 4: Submit a report detailing capture efforts and numbers of herptiles removed.

Summary of Work Completed

Heartland staff installed and baited turtle traps on August 20, 2024, and removed them on September 13, 2024. During that time, six painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) were captured and relocated to Nesbitt Pond, and Wexford Ponds. Wexford Ponds was chosen because a similar effort in 2023 had been made to remove herptiles prior to a winter construction project. After construction was completed, this area became a proven, ideal habitat with an already low herptile population. Nesbitt pond has been used in the past for turtle relocations.

Meander surveys were completed on August 21, September 24, and September 16, 2024. A total of 355 frogs were captured during meander surveys and one was caught in a turtle trap. While on site, Heartland staff did not observe any salamanders or snakes within the unit. Heartland did observe some tadpoles and captured some frogs in late tadpole/early adult stage. All frogs were released at the large pond in Manchester Park. Because of the heat during capture events, no effort was put into identification, but Heartland believes that most of the frogs were Bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*).



Turtle Trapping

Heartland staff installed and baited turtle traps on August 20, 2024, and removed them on September 13, 2024. During that time, six painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) were captured and relocated to Nesbitt Pond, and Wexford Ponds. During a frog capture event, one juvenile Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) was captured and released in Manchester Park. Wexford Ponds was chosen because a similar effort in 2023 had been made to remove herptiles prior to a winter construction project. After construction was completed, this area became a proven, ideal habitat with an already low herptile population. Nesbitt pond has been used in the past for turtle relocations.

One of the largest challenges faced during the trapping efforts was muskrat damage to turtle traps. Timely repairs were made to all damaged traps during trap checks and placement of traps to discourage muskrat use was implemented. Muskrat proof solar-style traps were also deployed for the last week of trapping.

Conclusions

This secluded pond is an excellent frog sanctuary but likely not big enough to hold a large population of turtles. The dense vegetation on all sides except for a few private lawns creates a barrier that keeps most humans out. While these ponds are still subject to runoff and other sources of pollution the animals residing in them do not experience much, if any, direct pressure from humans.

While we did capture two kinds of native turtles that appeared to be in good health, we did not see any evidence of reproduction. I believe that any turtles residing in these ponds most likely came from larger bodies of water somewhere else on this drainage. During the two weeks of turtle trapping, success declined significantly leading us to believe that the majority of turtles in the ponds have been removed.

Our frog capture numbers indicated that we also removed most resident frogs. The first night we captured 173 frogs without much effort, including many very large adults. The second night we captured 100 even and it was apparent that most of the large frogs we had seen the first night had been removed. The third night we struggled to catch 82 frogs and of those only 2 were large adults. Based on this progression, I believe that the majority of the frog population, and almost all the breeding adults, have been removed.

Please feel free to reach out to us directly if you have any questions or require any additional information.



Prairie Hills Ponds – Herptile Capture and Relocation
City of Madison
November 1, 2024

Sincerely,

Wesley Ellarson
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Attachments: Site Photographs Project Area Map



Figure 1 Heartland Staff with one of the adult bullfrogs prevalent in these ponds

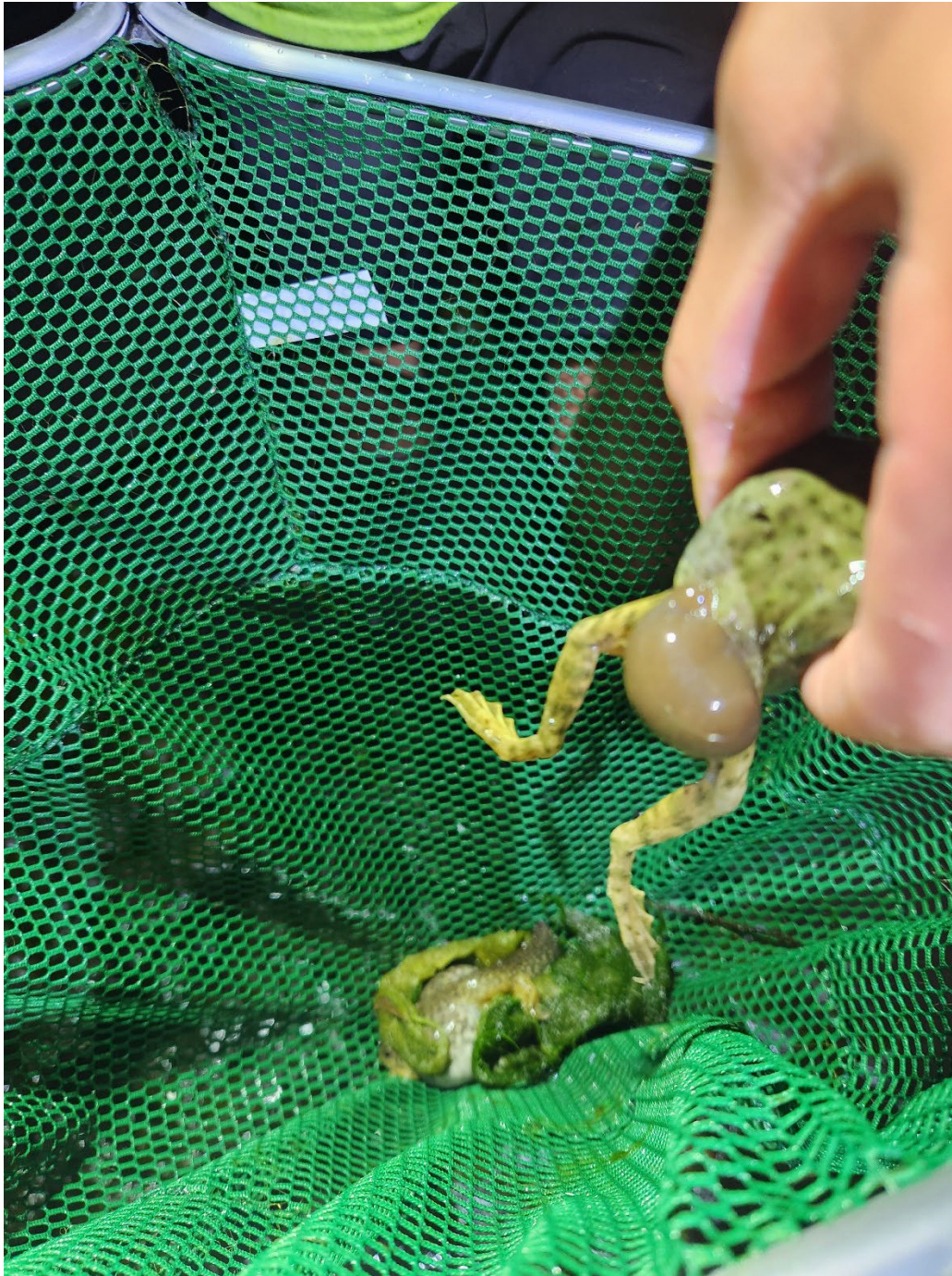


Figure 2 Captured Frog with large growth on abdomen



Figure 3 Juvenile Snapping Turtle captured during frog survey



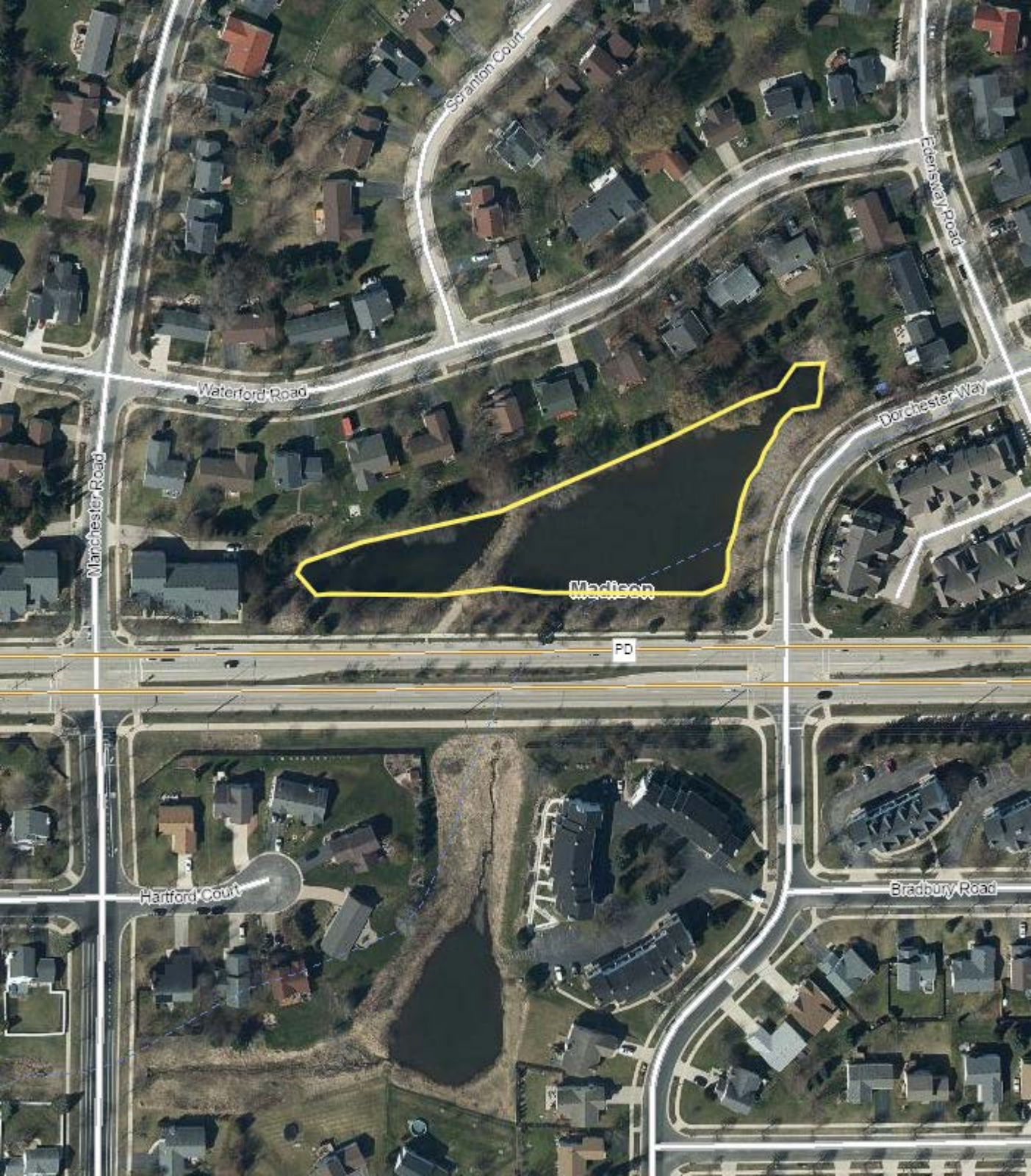
Figure 4 Captured frogs ready to be released



Figure 5 Heartland staff with 2 large Bullfrogs



Figure 6 two adult Bullfrogs ready to be released



Scranton Court

Eberly Road

Waterford Road

Dorchester Way

Manchester Road

Madison

PD

Hartford Court

Brabbury Road