

Friends of Sauk Creek: Neighborhoods fight forest fire air pollution with lawn sign campaign

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MADISON, WI—(June 16, 2023)—Unhealthy Air Quality warnings in Madison this week prompted Madison residents to ramp up action to protect the city's mature trees due to their role in mitigating pollution such as forest fire particulates.

More than 80 families have posted lawn signs urging the city to save mature trees threatened by a city engineering project along the 30-acre Sauk Creek Greenway and retention ponds on the city's West Side. The neighbors argue the leaves of mature trees absorb particulates and other carbon pollution that grasses and newly planted trees cannot.

The Friends of Sauk Creek, an environmental advocacy group for neighbors in Oakbridge, Sauk Creek, Sauk Creek Estates, Tamarack Trails, and Walnut Grove areas, organized the lawn sign campaign this week after government experts issued an unhealthy air alert for parts of Dane County due to air pollution from Canadian forest fires that have destroyed 10 million acres of heat- and drought-ridden landscapes.

"Neighbors this week got a wake-up call with the air quality warnings to keep children, our elders, pets and others inside our homes to avoid the dangerous and invisible particles from the forest fires in Canada," said Gwen Long, an organizer of the Friends of Sauk Creek. "Scientists and experts say it's only going to get worse."

Michael Notaro, a Sauk Creek area neighbor and director of the Nelson Institute Center for Climatic Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the dangerously high air quality indices are continued evidence of the vulnerability of

our community to climate change.

“One of our greatest tools in the fight against climate change is our tree canopy, not only due to carbon sequestration to slow the rise of atmospheric greenhouse gases, but due to the tree cover’s ability to capture particulate matter out of the air onto leaf surfaces and to extract gaseous pollutants through leaf stomata, thereby improving our air quality,” Notaro said. “It is critical that we strive to protect our urban tree canopies, such as in the Sauk Creek Greenway, as those trees are key allies in our battle against climate change and air pollution.”

The Friends of Sauk Creek support cleanup and some flood mitigation for Sauk Creek but oppose a proposed bike path that would require unnecessary removal of many mature trees for a project that does not connect to any city paths in an area that already has many bike paths for commuters, said Long.

About Friends of Sauk Creek

Friends of Sauk Creek is a volunteer environmental group with a focus of protecting the 30-acre Sauk Creek Greenway and its 7,500 trees. The Friends research environmental issues and local nature resources that support the dogwalkers, hikers and nature lovers on the creek trails that run between Tree Lane and Old Sauk Road.