

UW-Madison Indian Burial Sites Management Policy

Campus Planning Committee

(Approved on May 26, 2011)

Policy Statement: The university is committed to protecting the structural and cultural integrity of Indian burial mounds/earthworks through careful management, so that current and future generations may have the opportunity to view the mounds and appreciate their significance. Management practices will be informed by input from members of the Native American, ecological, archaeological and regulatory communities.

Background: UW-Madison (main campus and Arboretum) has stewardship responsibility for 34 extant ancient Indian burial mounds/earthworks. Today, one can view these mounds/earthworks in groupings at seven distinct burial sites on university lands. An additional 23 burial mounds/earthworks are known to have existed, but their above-ground contours are no longer visible.

No other university in the world manages as many ancient Indian burial mounds/earthworks, including the rare and internationally unique effigy mound form.

The university recognizes that the ancient Mound Builders left us an enduring, yet fragile, signature on the landscape as an expression of their relationship to the natural world and their fellow humans. We do not fully understand the role that mounds played in the lives of the Indian people who constructed them; however, we appreciate that individual mound shapes and their placement on the land tells us something about the beliefs and cultural practices of these early inhabitants.

The university understands that mound sites derive meaning as individual earthworks, and as elements in a cultural landscape mosaic composed of thousands of mounds across the state and beyond. As such, the university is mindful of preserving the landscape context of mounds, as well as the visual relationship of mounds within and between mound groups.

Burial mound management goals:

1. Preserve structural integrity of mounds. The university will protect mounds from soil disturbance and erosion through the use of appropriate vegetation cover and structural barriers.
2. Manage vegetation to preserve visibility of mounds. The university will control vegetation to permit visibility of mound contours.
3. Facilitate interpretation opportunities. In collaboration with knowledgeable representatives of the Native American and academic communities, the university will provide educational materials and displays that convey our current understanding of the Mound Builders.
4. Manage contemporary structures adjacent to mounds. As resources and regulations permit, the university will re-route and/or remove structures such as sidewalks, utility lines, and trails that impinge on the mound sites.
5. Facilitate compatible land uses on and adjacent to mounds. Where appropriate and consistent with preserving the integrity and sacredness of burial sites, the university will facilitate research, teaching, ecological, and recreational uses on and adjacent to mounds. Examples of appropriate uses include: data collection, academic coursework, wildlife habitat, and hiking.
6. Continue inventory and assessment of university lands to facilitate identification and delineation of burial sites.

Statutory protection: The Burial Sites Preservation Law (Wis. Stats. 157.70) protects mounds from disturbance. The university must work with representatives of the Wisconsin Historical Society on projects that may affect the integrity of burial sites.