



By Curtis Honeycutt

I've been getting into native perennial gardening this year. Of all the plants I'm growing, I love milkweed the most. Seventy-three species of native milkweeds grow in the United States, and these plants are the exclusive host plants for monarch butterflies. When people hear "milkweed," they think of something ugly and undesirable. In an effort to rebrand milkweed, I think we should start calling it "butterfly happy plant." It could work!

I apologize for getting into the weeds about milkweed. This brings me to discussing and distinguishing a pair of flora phrases, "in the weeds" and "in the woods." Let's take a quick hike down a linguistic path in order to better understand these expressions.

Let's get into the weeds. This term has multiple applications and definitions. First, a golf shot can land in the rough, which is tall grass or weeds, as opposed to on the shorter grass of the fairway or green. Being in the weeds is a precarious position for your golf ball and can lead to killer divots.

If you've ever worked in the restaurant industry, you know that "into the weeds" means that the kitchen and wait staff are busy to the point of total disorder. Being "in the weeds" happens when a server has too many tables to handle or if several patrons order entrees at the same time, leading to a backlog in the kitchen.

Political policy wonks love to get into their version of "the weeds." In this case, getting "into the weeds" means going into unnecessary detail about a policy or initiative. My opening paragraph is an example of getting "in the weeds" about milkweed. Don't ever ask a triathlete about how his last race went, because he'll get into the weeds about every agonizing detail of his recent competition.

Being "in the woods" means something altogether different. When someone "isn't out of the woods yet," it can mean that she is quite ill and hasn't gotten better yet. By this logic, being "in the woods" means someone is on death's door or incredibly sick. Getting "out of the woods" can also mean a person is trying to come out of a difficult situation. You might hear a person who lands a good job after being unemployed say, "I finally got out of the woods with this new job."

In general, being in the woods or in the weeds are negative situations, unless you're a nerdy type who, say, reads an entire column on parsing out two similar-sounding phrases.

-Curtis Honeycutt is a syndicated humor columnist. He is the author of Good Grammar is the Life of the Party: Tips for a Wildly Successful Life. Find more at curthoneycutt.com.

Your Right to Know / Christa Westerberg

Fee recovery is key to transparency

Many states, including Wisconsin, have public records laws. But that doesn't mean requesters always get the records they seek, or even that the laws are followed.

What provisions in a state's laws are most associated with compliance?

The answer may surprise you. It's not the strength of a law's penalty provisions or whether a state has an ombudsman office to mediate records disputes (Wisconsin does not).

Instead, a 2019 study by University of Arizona journalism professor David Cullier found a significant correlation between compliance and laws that "mandate judges to impose attorney fees" to requesters deemed to have been wrongly denied access to records.

That's why a recent Wisconsin court of appeals decision, in a case known as *Meinecke v. Thyes*, is good news. It held that if a court orders the release of records—even if it's only some of the records—the requester has "prevailed" in substantial part and is thus entitled to attorney fees. While Wisconsin's open records law has a mandatory fee-shifting provision, this case for the first time established that getting an order for records was sufficient to trigger it.



Christa Westerberg

At issue was a village trustee's request for five categories of records from the village she served. A circuit court found the village had unlawfully withheld some of the records and ordered them released, but then denied the trustee's request for attorney fees because the trustee did not obtain access to all the records she sought and that village officials did not act with "wanton disregard" for the law, among other considerations.

That ruling was appealed, with the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, Wisconsin Newspaper Association and Wisconsin Broadcasters Association filing a "friend of the court" brief in favor of the trustee. (My law firm authored the brief.)

The appeals court ruled that the trustee was entitled to fee recovery, citing the open records law's statement that "all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government" and its direction that the law be liberally construed in favor of public access.

Laws that allow requesters to recover attorneys fees have always been important to ensuring access to information. For example, they allow people who could not otherwise afford an attorney to hire one on a contingent-fee basis to bring an open records case.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court is also considering a different attorney fees case this term. It will decide whether requesters can get attorney fees when an agency voluntarily produces records after a suit is filed, if the initial denial was unlawful.

The Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council joined with four other organizations in filing a "friend-of-the-court" brief urging a "yes" answer to this question.

A stronger fee recovery standard means a government that is less willing to test the limits of its ability to withhold records. As Cullier pointed out, "Certainly, agencies might not worry about a \$1,000 fine or other slap on the wrist, but it appears they pay attention to paying tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars to a successful plaintiff's attorney, not to mention the bad publicity that would create for the agency?"

The court of appeals decision that getting a court order directing the release of records should entitle a requester to fees is a welcome clarification to Wisconsin's records law.

Your Right to Know is a monthly column distributed by the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council (wisfoic.org), a group dedicated to open government. Christa Westerberg, an attorney at Pines Bach law firm in Madison, is the group's vice president.



Note to readers

Dear Readers, A few items for you this week.

Best of Kosh & Rock Awards Dinner is cancelled.

After much pondering, our committee agreed that the issues arising from Covid-19 and the Delta variant, which has resulted in very low registrations for our Best of Kosh & Rock Awards Dinner on Thursday, September 16th, it was best to cancel. This year the contest was expanded to include Rock River area businesses in Janesville and Beloit in addition to the businesses on Lake Koshkonong. The name was changed to the Best of Kosh & Rock. We had over 25,000 votes for 91 categories in seven different groups. There are 91 winners and we will post them on the website on September 15. We will deliver the plaques to each winner and take a photo for our winners publication to be published later this fall. Thanks for voting. We are looking forward to having an awards dinner next year.

Annual Buck Jenkins Free Fish Fry is back this year.

The Edgerton Fund's Annual Buck Jenkins Fish Fry will take place October 9, 2021 at the Red Baron.

A 42-year tradition, and more than 20 of those years supporting the Edgerton Fund, the Buck Jenkins Fish Fry serves up free fish, fries, and deviled eggs until gone, starting at noon. The event also features a raffle and live music by the MadTadders from 1-5 p.m. Edgerton native, Buck Jenkins started the event by inviting the community to visit the Red Baron to share the bounty of fish he and his friends caught throughout the season - all for free. His benevolence continues today

as he proudly passed on the benefits of it to the Edgerton Community Fund. Buck now lives in northern Wisconsin.

Help end diaper need in Wisconsin

Pregnancy Helpline of Madison is hosting its 7th Annual Diaper Dash from 8:00-11:00 am. on Sat., Sept. 25, at McKee Farms Park in Fitchburg. This family-friendly event will consist of a 5k run/walk, Kids' Dash, children's activities, diaper drive collection, and more. Prizes will be awarded for top fundraising and diaper donations. The cost is \$30 for an individual registration, including a race day t-shirt. Family registration is \$75, which includes two t-shirts. Group rates are available for junior and adult teams. All event information can be found at www.pregnancy-helpline.net.

Watch out for scammers claiming to be from the Social Security Administration

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is warning people to be on the lookout for suspicious calls that claim to be from the Social Security Administration. Several consumers have reported receiving calls and being told that their social security number is being suspended because illegal activity, including money laundering, has been tied to their account. This same thing happened to me last week. I was told I was being investigated for illegal behavior and I needed to talk to a "representative" now by pressing 1. I pressed the button and was connected to a person that tried to scare me with the legal difficulties my account was facing. I asked for his badge number and told him the Social Security Administration does not call people.

He immediately hung up the phone. I called BBB, as the newspaper is a member, and asked if they were following this scam. They said yes, and that it is a very old scam that resurfaces every once in a while. They have sent some information that I will share in this note. Remember Social Security will not call you. If there is a problem, they will send you something in the mail. According to the BBB, here is how the scam works.

You answer the phone, and it's someone claiming to be from the Social Security Administration (SSA) or another government entity. The name on your caller ID may even back up that claim. The caller says your social security number has been used to fraudulently apply for a credit card or commit another crime. In order to fix the situation, the caller needs you to confirm your SSN and other personal information. If you don't cooperate, the caller threatens to take you to court or have your Social Security number blocked or revoked.

No matter the details, the stories are designed to induce fear. Scammers hope that under pressure you will tell them your SSN and other sensitive personal information. Scammers can use SSNs to commit identity theft and file tax returns in your name to steal your refund. Here is what to do:

1. Never give personal information to unsolicited callers. If someone contacts you without your permission, refuse to tell them any personal information.

2. Don't trust your caller ID. The internet has made it possible for scammers to use fake IDs when they call your home. If you receive a suspicious call, don't make any important decisions based on what your caller ID says.

3. Contact the Social Security Administration: If you are concerned about a call you received from someone who claims to be with the SSA, you can call the real SSA at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778).

We want to produce the best weekly newspaper possible for you. Let us know your ideas.

Diane Everson, publisher

THE EDGERTON REPORTER Letters to the Editor Policy

The Reporter welcomes Letters to the Editor, however, letters must have a written signature, address and telephone number in order to be published.

Letters must be submitted by 5 p.m. Monday for Wednesday's publication. We will run as many letters as possible each week, but space is limited. For that reason, letters must not exceed 350 words. Letters will be run as soon as possible. We give priority to letters from area residents. We reserve the right to edit letters as necessary. Letters submitted to The Reporter should not be personal attacks, but should concern issues.

Letters on political issues will not be run in the publication the week prior to an election of candidates or referenda. This will prohibit someone from raising a question about a candidate or issue without allowing time for a response.

Open Meetings and Open Records Law Section 19.31, Wisconsin Statutes

"In recognition of the fact that a representative government of the American type is dependent upon an informed electorate, it is declared to be the public policy of this state that all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them.

Further, providing persons with such information is declared to be an essential function of representative government and an integral part of the routine duties of officers and employees whose responsibility it is to provide such information."

The Edgerton Reporter supports this policy.

Legal News Today



Full text of these legal notices appears on 14 & 15

- Town of Porter Plan Commission Hearing
- City of Edgerton City Ordinance 21-09
- City of Edgerton Common Council Minutes
- Edgerton Fire Protection Agenda
- City of Edgerton Public Hearing - Vets Committee
- City of Edgerton Public Hearing - Yeske

SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
WNA
ISWNE
America's Newspapers
Edgerton Reporter established as the Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter in 1874
 Active member of America's Newspapers, International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors, National Newspaper Association, Society of Professional Journalists and Wisconsin Newspaper Association

Publisher.....Diane Everson
 Editor, Advertising Manager.....Diane Everson
 Bookkeeper.....Deena Weltstein
 Production.....David Andrews, Barb Fiore, Jason Francis, Ellen Knutson, Susan Siemens, Sharon Wright
 Contributing Writers.....Jeff Brown, Mary Hookham, Sam Martino, Tristan McGough, Jack McLaughlin, Janice Redford, Carol Stai, Cynthia Swanson, Amy Trees
 Delivery.....Stacy Teniente
 Best of Kosh reader Choice Awards.....Laurie Dies, Tristan McGough, Megan Purlell

Office Hours: We are closed to the public due to the pandemic. You may call us and leave items in our mailbox. Periodicals Postage Paid at Edgerton, WI

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
 PRINT: Edgerton address \$49 per year, \$26 six months.
 State of Wisconsin \$51 per year, \$28 six months.
 Out of State \$53 per year, \$32 six months.

EDGERTON REPORTER
 Mission: To be the Best Community Newspaper
 Published weekly by The Reporter Co., Inc.
 21 N. Henry St., Edgerton, WI 53534 • Phone 608-884-3367 • Fax 608-884-8187
 e-mail: info@edgertonreporter.com USPS# 167-900