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Administration • Lake Management • Land Conservation • Parks • Water Resource Engineering • Watersheds & Ecosystem Services

Date: May 5, 2025

To: Riparian Property Owners for Yahara Lakes and River

From: David Rowe
Lake Management Supervisor

Subject: Updates for 2025 Lake Management Programs and Services

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information and updates regarding the programs and services provided by the Land & Water Resources Department - Lake Management Division for the summer of 2025. This letter contains information regarding:

- Staffing and Contacts
- Lake Levels
- Aquatic Plant Management Program
- Pier Pick Up Program
- Aquatic Invasive Species Awareness and Prevention
- Yahara River Sediment Removal
- Door Creek Restoration
- Ordinance Review of Winter Lake Access

Staffing and Contacts

I would like to introduce myself, David Rowe, as the new Lake Management Supervisor for LWRD. I come to the County after serving as the DNR Fisheries Management Supervisor for South Central Wisconsin for the past 14 years. I grew up in Middleton, and attended UW- Madison where I completed a degree in Zoology. As an undergrad I worked for the Center for Limnology as part of the Long-Term Ecological Research monitoring the Madison Lakes. I have also completed a Master's Degree in Fisheries Biology at Iowa State University and then took a position as a Fisheries Biologist with WDNR in Green Bay before returning to the Madison area as the Region Team Supervisor. I have a great fondness for the Madison Lakes and am thrilled to be responsible for the management and protection of these resources.

This summer we intend to work a Monday through Thursday schedule for the Aquatic Plant Harvesting and Pier Pick up Programs. The intent is to both increase efficiencies and prevent crowding and conflicts on the water and at lake access points on Fridays. This will mean that services like pier pick up or organized cooperative efforts will occur only on Mondays through Thursdays.

Feel free to contact me regarding any Lakes Management issue

rowe.david@danecounty.gov

(608) 575-3375

To contact other Lake Management Staff regarding specific issues please contact:

Pete Jopke, Water Resources Planner, for Aquatic Plant Management and Aquatic Invasive Species:
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(608) 228-4202

John Reimer LWRD Assistant Director for Lake Levels and the Yahara River Sediment Removal Project.
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Use this QR code to quickly access our lake management website, where you will find more information on the topics covered in this mailing.



Lake Levels

As with last spring we are experiencing lower than normal lake levels for this time of year. The lack of snow and spring precipitation has meant a slow transition from the winter levels to summer levels. Dane County operates the three dams on the Yahara River following the lake levels orders set by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) in 1979 and those orders have not changed since they went in effect. We experience varying lake levels, sometimes well outside of the target range, because the weather is the most significant factor in how high or low the lakes are. In 2021, following the flooding of 2018 and 2019, the County has managed lake levels more proactively guided by weather forecasts to reduce the severity and occurrence of flooding events. The target ranges are:

- Summer goals (first runoff event after March 1st) - maintain water levels at the mid-range of summer minimum/maximum target levels
- Winter goals (starting November 1st) - maintain water levels between winter minimum and summer minimum target levels

For current and historic lake levels please see our website at: <https://lwr.danecountyofdan.com/Lake-Levels>

Aquatic Plant Management

Aquatic plants provide many benefits and are critical components of the lake ecosystem. They create food and shelter for aquatic organisms. They compete with nuisance algae for nutrients and help to improve water quality. Emergent and submergent plants act to dampen wave energy and protect shorelines. The fact that we cut and harvest aquatic plants has led to confusion as some people now mistakenly believe that aquatic plant growth is unnatural or constitute “weeds”. Aquatic Plant

Management Plans are written with the intent to protect and enhance desirable plant growth, while recommending management of nuisance conditions.

Because aquatic plants can cause nuisance conditions for recreation and river flows Dane County manages aquatic plants in the Madison lakes through mechanical harvesting. The County operates a fleet of 11 harvesters and three transport barges. The harvesting of aquatic plants is permitted and approved by the WDNR. The majority of harvesting occurs along the outside edge of piers and docks to promote recreational access for all lake users.

Harvesting is not allowed in less than 3' of water to prevent the resuspension of nutrients and sediments. Harvesters are restricted from navigating into these shallow areas due to risk to private property, damage to harvesters, and because it is a permit violation. Lakeshore residents can hand remove aquatic plants in a 30-foot corridor following DNR regulations and place them on their piers for collection by the pier pickup program (additional information below).

Please do not make requests of staff, offer compensation or take any other actions that pressures or encourages staff to break the rules by harvesting between piers or in less than 3' of water.

For more information on our aquatic plant harvesting program please visit our website at:
<https://lwr.d.countyofdane.com/what-we-do/lake-management/aquatic-plant-management>

Pier Pick Up Program

As an additional service to riparian property owners, Dane County operates two barges that collect lake-generated material that is placed on docks and piers. This service allows property owners to place lake vegetation on the end of their piers for collection. Any brush, limbs, grass clipping or other terrestrial material will not be collected. This type of material interferes with and can damage conveyors used for offloading. If any of this material is found, it will not be collected and the material will be left on your pier with a placard explaining why. All Lake Monona, Waubesa, and Kegonsa shoreline residences are eligible for this service. On Lake Mendota, the shorelines in the City of Madison, Town of Westport, and City of Middleton will receive pickup services. Shorelines in the Village of Shorewood Hills and Maple Bluff will not receive pickup services because those municipalities chose not to participate in the program. In 2025 we will be collecting on Monday through Thursdays.

A full schedule of pick-up dates on the lakes is posted on our website at:
<https://lwr.d.countyofdane.com/what-we-do/lake-management/aquatic-plant-management/pier-pickup>

Aquatic Invasive Species Awareness and Prevention

As a lakeshore resident you should be aware of the risk of aquatic invasive species pose to our lakes. There are several invasive species already established in the Madison lakes that cause issues for the lake's health and nuisances for lake users. Zebra mussels *Dreissena polymorpha* were first observed in Lake Monona in 2002 but didn't begin to expand and proliferate until the early 2010s. Now they have spread throughout the lakes and are fouling property and infrastructure. Spiny Water Fleas *Bythotrephes cederstroemi* became established in Lake Mendota in 2009 and have become the dominant zooplankton in the lake and eat the other zooplankton who consume the floating algae. This has led to reduced water clarity and other impacts to the lake's food web.

Here is a list of AIS established/observed in the Madison Lakes

Plants:

Curly Leafed Pondweed
Eurasian Water Milfoil
Water Lettuce
Japanese Knotweed
Purple loosestrife
Phragmites
Java Waterdrop/Vietnamese Water Celery
Yellow Iris

Invertebrates:

Spiny Water Flea
Chinese Mystery Snail
Banded Mystery Snail
Zebra Mussel
New Zealand Mud Snails (observed in Token Creek upstream of Cherokee)

Fish:

Common Carp

While efforts can be made to control AIS species after they become established the best management is preventing the spread. Follow best practices for preventing the spread of AIS by:

INSPECTING boats trailers and equipment

REMOVE all attached aquatic plant and animals

DRAIN all water from boats vehicles and equipment

NEVER MOVE live fish away from a water body.

Clean, Drain, and Dry your boat or equipment when traveling to other waterbodies and make sure that out of town guests follow proper precautions before bringing their boats to visit, which could harbor AIS. Cleaning and leaving to dry for 5 days prior to traveling is an effective strategy to avoid unintentional transporting of an AIS. Vacuuming the interior of the boat has also been shown to be effective at removing unwanted guests.

Yahara River Sediment Removal

In 2025 Lake Management staff will continue work on removing sediment from the Yahara River to increase the river's capacity to convey water. This flood mitigation strategy was recommended after the 2018 flooding to address high lake levels due to larger and more intense rainfall events and their associated watershed runoff. Dane County began sediment removal in the Yahara River in 2021 and since then, over 220,000 cubic yards of sediment has been removed in sections from Wiicawak Bay downstream to Hwy B below the LaFollete Dam. Deepening the Yahara River will aid in moving water through the system; especially during high water events. In 2025 staff will be continuing on Phase 3A, from Fish Camp on Lake Kegonsa upstream to Dyerson Rd. About half of this stretch was completed in 2024 and we hope to complete this phase in 2025. Future work also includes the restoration of some areas of rock and cobble that were known to provide spawning habitat for walleye and suckers. These coarse substrates have been separated from dredged sediments with the intent of adding them back to the deeper channel and restoring habitat in those areas surveyed prior to the dredging.

For more information on the sediment removal project please visit our website at:

<https://lwr.d.countyofdane.com/CurrentProjects/Detail/Yahara-River-Sediment-Removal-Project>

Door Creek Restoration

Construction will continue this spring and summer on the restoration of Door Creek, tributary to Lake Kegonsa. This project consists of realigning the stream to its previous flow path as well as reconnecting the stream with the adjacent wetlands. Water quality benefits include the removal of phosphorus laden sediment from the existing channel, which will improve the downstream water quality. Habitat improvements associated with the restoration will benefit both terrestrial and aquatic environments with an emphasis on northern pike spawning habitat.

Planning has also begun for the restoration of roughly 160 acres of cropland within the adjacent Door Creek Wildlife Area. Activities will include the stabilization of soil erosion areas as well as the conversion of annual row crop fields to permanent prairie. This will help further protect both the Door Creek wetlands and stream restoration efforts.

For more information on the restoration of Door Creek please visit our website at:

<https://lwr.dane.gov/CurrentProjects/Detail/Door-Creek-Watershed>

Ordinance Review of Winter Lake Access

Dane County will consider potential changes to Chapter 71, Regulation of Icebound Inland Waters, Dane County Code of Ordinances starting this summer. The existing ordinance has been in place for many years and regulates the use of motorized vehicles and equipment on frozen lakes through weight and flotation requirements. More information on the issue and how to submit comments will be available online starting in June.

STAY INFORMED

For future Yahara Lakes updates, please sign up for an electronic newsletter. The Land & Water Resources Department has several electronic newsletters that provide regular updates on projects and programs. The sign up can be found on the LWRD website at:

<https://lwr.dane.gov/about/news-and-information/Newsletters>

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this update.