

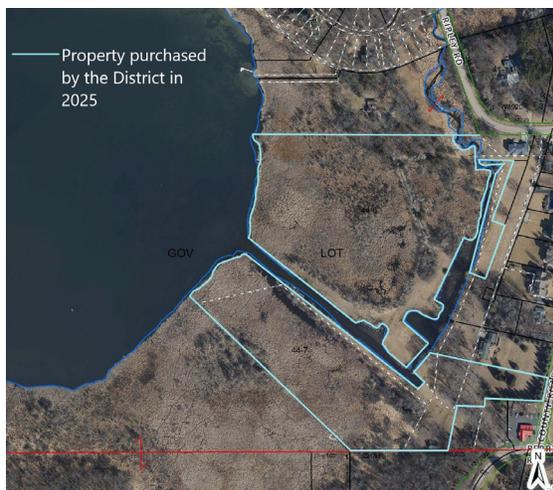


FROM THE HELM

District Buys Two Key Properties Along Inlet Stream

The Lake Ripley Management District recently purchased 29 acres of mostly wetlands that are directly adjacent to the inlet stream – right where the inlet meets Lake Ripley! The Board has been pursuing parcels along the stream that could have the potential to improve the water quality entering Lake Ripley. Late last year, two parcels bordering the inlet stream became available and the

Board voted to buy the land that runs along both sides of the creek entering the lake. With this addition, and the start of 'Phase 2' of the 'Inlet Stream Restoration Project', we are now able to begin creating conceptual designs for watershed-scale projects, brainstorm best management practices (BMPs) on District property as well as supportive landowner's property, and plan for the future of all 4.1 miles of inlet stream.



The boundaries of the two parcels that were recently purchased by the District.

The District has been meeting with landowners whose property borders the inlet stream to gain their support for this project. One of the goals

for 'Phase 2' of this project is to focus on some hotspots in the watershed and work with those landowners to begin developing BMPs for that section of their property. The goal for these BMPs is to reduce the amount of sediments and nutrients before they enter Lake Ripley. For decades, the sediment from runoff and streambank erosion have been silting in the inlet to our lake, from Ripley Road to mouth of the lake.

This year, we are focusing our efforts on gaining adjacent landowner support and modelling how specific BMPs would work on specific areas of land along the inlet stream. We have been collaborating with other agencies and organizations to help us brainstorm these ideas, including the Jefferson County Land and Water Department, Natural Resources Conservation Service, United

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INLET STREAM CONTINUED

States Department of Agriculture and the Wisconsin Wetlands Association. We will continue to apply for grants to help fund this work, and we plan to put together a fundraising campaign for these new pieces of property in the next few months. If you are interested in learning more about our 'Inlet Stream

Restoration Project', please come to our monthly board meeting, check out our website, or give us a call!

Chairperson,

Jimmy DeGidio



The view looking northwest from one of the parcels. You can see the lake!

LIFE UNDER THE ICE

After the last of the leaves fall and American Robins wing their way south, winter slips quietly into the Town of Oakland. Cold winds sweep through the streets, lakes seal themselves in ice, and the world seems to hit a pause button. Ground squirrels and woodchucks vanish into cozy underground burrows. Deer and tree squirrels stay on the move, forever hunting for food and shelter. Adventurous humans bundle up, strap on snowshoes, and crunch their way through the District's Preserve. Savvy anglers are out because they know the fish are still biting, but what else is going on under the ice?

Lakes freeze from the top down. This is crucial for the over-winter survival of aquatic organisms. If our lakes froze from the bottom up, all life in them

would also freeze solid! Ice acts like a thick winter blanket, insulating the water below from extreme cold, preventing it from freezing solid. Under this frozen ceiling, aquatic life finds refuge.

Make no mistake, life continues under the ice — albeit at a much slower pace than in summer.

Fish, turtles and frogs are “ectothermic,” — often called “cold-blooded.” Unlike birds and mammals (including us humans), they can't generate enough heat on their own to maintain optimal internal body temperatures. Instead, they borrow warmth from their surroundings. That's why a frog on a chilly day might sit tight instead of hopping away. When temperatures drop, food becomes scarce, and

UNDER THE ICE CONTINUED

oxygen levels dip, these animals enter torpor—a low-energy state where they rest for days or even weeks, conserving precious fuel.

Below the frozen surface, the eggs and larvae of dragonflies, damselflies, stoneflies and mayflies burrow in mud and other organic matter. Most of their adult relatives have already completed their life cycle, but the next generation waits patiently for warmer days. Aquatic plants and algae may continue growing beneath thin, clear ice, but when snow piles up and blocks sunlight, they retreat—dying back to their roots or resting as inactive spores.

Sunlight can pass through clear black ice with ease, but white ice and snow make things tougher. Less light means less photosynthesis, which means less oxygen in the water. A long, harsh winter can slow the springtime comeback for aquatic plants. On the flip side, a warm winter with less ice can kickstart algae blooms and plant growth much earlier than usual.

Even when the world above the lake seems frozen in time, life below the ice is quietly carrying on—waiting, adapting, surviving. That's why protecting our freshwater matters all year long. Winter or summer, seen or unseen, these ecosystems are always alive.



Ice covers Lake Ripley in December 2025.

PESTICIDE SPRAYS MAY 'BEE' KILLING OUR NATIVE POLLINATORS

A recent study in the "Stacks" Journal took a close look at backyard mosquito sprays—and the results offer an important reminder to tread carefully. Researchers found that these sprays can leave behind insecticide levels high enough to harm pollinators, and that the chemicals don't always stay within the yard where they're applied. In fact, they can drift into neighboring spaces as well.

The highest levels were found in yards treated by private mosquito-spray companies. On average, these yards had more than six times the amount

of insecticide known to be lethal to honeybees, with some samples reaching much higher levels. Nearby yards showed a wide range of results, from no detectable contamination to amounts that could still be harmful to beneficial insects.

"This study is concerning on two counts," said Aaron Anderson, lead author and pesticide program specialist at the Xerces Society. "One, because in every yard that hired a backyard mosquito spray service, we found insecticides at levels that are going to kill off bees, butterflies,

RESTORING THE WESTERN BANDED KILLIFISH IN LAKE RIPLEY

For decades, fisheries management in Wisconsin has largely been centered around game fish – walleye, bluegill, and other familiar favorites. Meanwhile, the majority of fish species in our lakes are nearshore nongame species, quietly living out their lives beneath the surface, largely unnoticed and undervalued. For people who aren't devoted "dickey fish" enthusiasts, the vibrant world of small fish is often invisible—out of sight, out of mind.

One of those overlooked species is the Western Banded Killifish (*Fundulus diaphanous menona*). These small, beautifully patterned fish once thrived in Lake Ripley, darting through nearshore vegetation. Sometime after 1975, the species was extirpated from the lake, along with several other nearshore nongame fishes—a pattern echoed across southern Wisconsin.

The timing of these losses is telling. In Lake Ripley and elsewhere, declines in nearshore fish coincided with widespread habitat degradation, fragmentation, and environmental pollution. Aquatic herbicide use began on Lake Ripley in 1977 and continued until 1990, including the application of 2,4-D to control invasive Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM). Research has shown that herbicides like 2,4-D can disrupt the reproductive health of small fish. For species like the Western Banded Killifish—fish that rely on aquatic vegetation for shelter and survival—



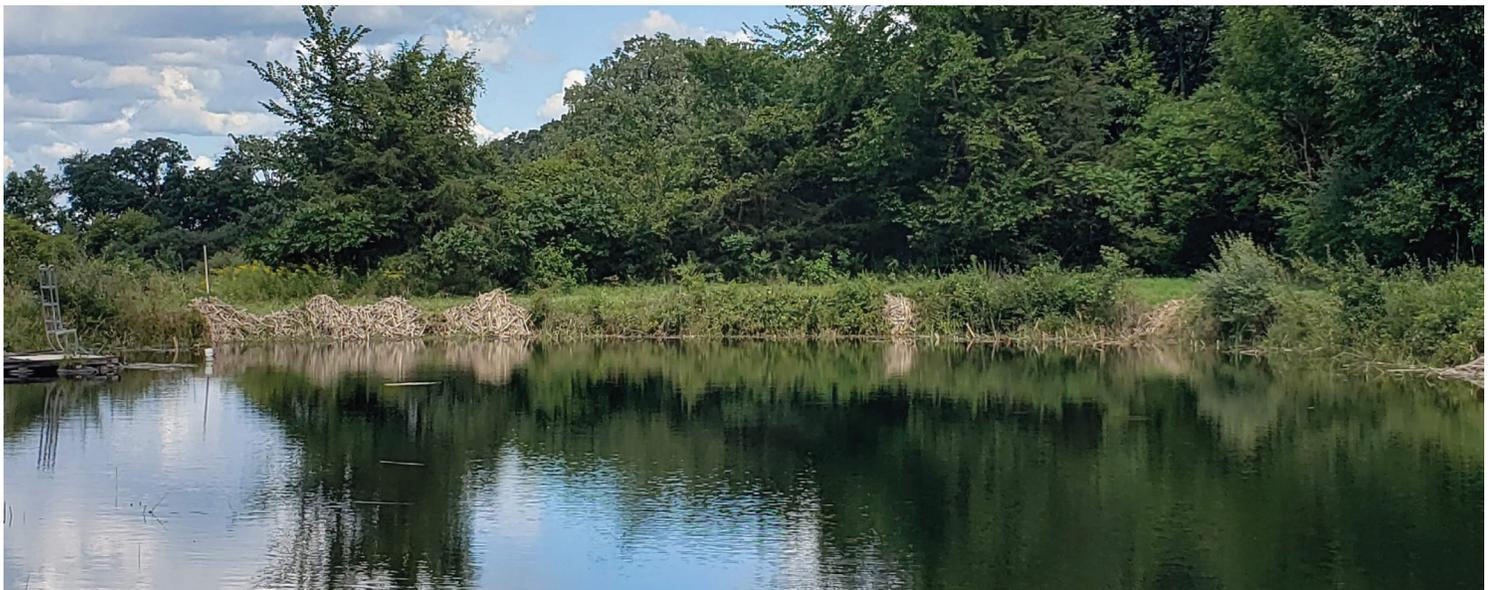
The brine tank is attached to the back of the truck. The brine mixture pre-wets the salt before the salt is spread on the roadways.

the impacts were likely severe.

Since 1990, the Lake Ripley District has taken a different approach. Herbicide use was discontinued in favor of mechanical harvesting, and sustained efforts have been made to restore habitat and protect sensitive areas of the lake. Those efforts are paying off! Native plant diversity has increased, nearshore habitat has improved, and conditions now resemble what this lake once offered to its smallest residents.

All signs suggest that Lake Ripley could once again support Western Banded Killifish.

Though easy to miss, killifish play an important role in lake food webs. They are adaptable, nearshore feeders whose subtle coloration and quiet behavior make them difficult to spot—but no less essential. Their presence is a sign of healthy, complex aquatic systems.



The rearing pond! We released over 50 Western Banded Killifish into the pond during the summer of 2025.

BANDED KILLIFISH CONTINUED

Last year, Lake Ripley's Lake Manager partnered with a team of fish biologists who have successfully restored nongame fish populations in Lake Wisconsin. Together, they began imagining what restoration could look like closer to home. That collaboration led to a five-year effort to reintroduce Western Banded Killifish to Lake Ripley, in partnership with a local fish farm.

Over the past year, major milestones have been reached: a rearing pond was secured, predators were removed, adult killifish were collected from nearby lakes and transferred to the pond, and water quality and fish health have been carefully monitored.

Our watersheds reflect who we are—sometimes healthy and vibrant, other times stressed and struggling. The quiet beauty of the Western Banded Killifish, and of other small minnows like it, remind us of what's possible when we choose to protect what's fragile. By increasing awareness of the beauty, sensitivity, and uniqueness of our aquatic communities, we strengthen our ability to care for them.

Lake Ripley is special. With continued stewardship and community support, we can help ensure that even the smallest fish have a place to call home once again.

OUR LAKE AND THE NATIVE PLANT SALE

In winter, with the piers withdrawn from the lake, we catch a glimpse of what our lake might have looked like in the long-ago, when it was surrounded by woodlands, wetlands, and prairies. These native ecosystems, with their deep root systems, absorbed rainfall, prevented erosion, and recharged the groundwater. In that long-ago time, our lake's water quality was excellent. Starting in the mid-1800s, development replaced this absorbent landscape with one that sheds water (think roofs, driveways, roads and lawns). Water that runs across the land is called runoff or stormwater. Runoff absorbs whatever is on the land (leaked oil, fertilizer, herbicides, pet waste) and carries it into our lake, where it causes problems for water quality, aquatic plant growth, and fish and wildlife health. Lawn fertilizers and pet waste create the conditions for algae blooms and excessive plant growth. Each and every yard around the lake is the first line 'watershed' of our lake. Each and every yard around the lake has the potential for helping or harming our shared, much-loved lake. That's why every winter Ripples reminds everyone about the availability of our Native Plant Sale! By combining individual orders, we can get robust plants for an incredibly low price. This gives each of you an opportunity to install a lake-edge buffer garden, which will reduce harmful runoff into our lake. Or, perhaps a raingarden on a slope higher up from the lake. Each yard and yard-owner has the opportunity to be a lake champion.



An array of native plants from Agrecol!

You can view the plants available in 2026 at www.agrecol.com. The descriptions will inform you about plant height, flower color, bloom period and important things like suitable soil and sunlight requirements. If that sounds daunting, call the District at 608-445-4536, or email at Lake.Manager@tn.oakland.jefferson.wi.gov. We can offer advice!

Please get your order to use by Friday, April 3, 2026. Payment must accompany your order. An important reminder: for each plant species, choose 4 (or multiples of 4). We will pick up the combined order approximately mid-May, and assemble into personal orders at the Town Hall for pickup. We will let you know what day that will be. Please join the growing number of lake-friendly champion yards!

JEFFERSON COUNTY PARKS WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The Jefferson County Parks Department is updating its Parks & Outdoor Recreation Plan. The plan update is for the next five years, and your input matters! You don't have to be a Jefferson County resident to comment. Anyone who uses the Jefferson County Parks and recreational resources is welcome to participate in the survey!

The plan takes inventory of the County's parks, trails, and open spaces, notes park improvements and achievements since the adoption of the last Plan, and identifies the community's future park and open space needs.

Throughout 2026, there will be both online and in-person opportunities to learn about the project

and share your ideas about the County's future park and open space needs. Visit the project website to explore details, sign up for email updates, and stay informed about new engagement opportunities and project milestones.

From January through March 2026, an online community survey will be available on the project website for public feedback. The first in-person event will take place in March. Thank you for taking a few minutes to help shape the future of Jefferson County's Parks and outdoor spaces! Link to survey: <https://snyder-associates.mysocialpinpoint.com/jefferson-county-porp>



HARNESS THE POWER OF NATURE WITH WINTER COVER CROPS

A hidden gem lies in the late season soil – cover crops. Their transformative power benefits farm operations large and small. The planting of winter cover crops is a conservation farming practice that benefits our lakes. Rather than leaving fields bare between the fall harvest and spring seeding, more and more farmers are tapping into the benefits of these living protective blankets.

Cover crops, such as barley, rye, oats, and wheat do more than simply cover the ground. Their roots hold valuable topsoil in place, reducing erosion and keeping nutrients out of nearby lakes and waterways. At the same time, they have been shown to improve soil health and protect against the erosion of valuable topsoil. They help replenish nitrogen, improve soil structure, increase carbon sequestration, and suppress

weeds, enhancing the productivity of the soil for future planting seasons.

Choosing the right winter cover crop depends on a farmer's goals and the crop's hardiness to ensure it survives Wisconsin's weather conditions. If a cover crop that can grow in the spring is desired, the farmer will opt for a winter-hardy variety. And if a clean slate is preferred, a cover crop that will die off over the winter is selected.

The District has been working to promote such practices by partnering with the Jefferson County Soil Builders and sharing information about their upcoming workshops. If you're a producer interested in learning how winter cover crops can work for your operation, contact your local County Conservationists at 920-674-7110 to get started!



A field that had been planted with a winter rye cover crop now has corn emerging in the spring! The key is to always have something living on the ground, says local farmer Karl Hundt. In this case, corn is replacing rye as the "cover". Photo by Karl Hundt.

POLLINATORS CONTINUED

and other valuable insects. Two, because it shows these pesticides don't stay put where they're applied and are often going to impact the neighbors' yards, too."

The good news? There's a simple, effective, and pollinator-friendly way to cut down on mosquito bites: stop mosquitoes before they start. Mosquitoes need standing water to reproduce, and their entire life cycle—from egg to flying adult—takes just 8 to 10 days. Even as little as an inch of still water left sitting for a week can become a mosquito nursery.

By regularly emptying containers, refreshing birdbaths, and fixing areas where water pools, you can dramatically reduce mosquito numbers without harming helpful insects. Since mosquitoes



A bumblebee collecting nectar from a wild bergamot plant.

don't respect property lines, teaming up with neighbors makes this approach even more effective. Planting shrubs can also help reduce pesticide drift between yards.

With a few simple steps, it's possible to enjoy a more comfortable summer while also keeping your yard—and your neighborhood—a healthier place for pollinators to thrive!

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