November 2026

Oconto County Waters Annual Newsletter

Oconto County Land & Water Conservation Department (LWCD)

Lake group spotlight:

Anderson Inland Lake District

On July 12, the Anderson Inland Lake District (AILD) held a Eurasian water-milfoil (EWM) training and removal event. Volunteers learned to distinguish invasive EWM from native northern water-milfoil, and proper removal. They then cleared EWM from shore areas that professional removal teams don't typically reach.



AILD volunteers take part in an EWM training and removal event. (Photo: Jim De Goey)

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Introduction

2026 marked the first year Oconto County LWCD had a full-time Water Resource Specialist on staff, bringing a dedicated focus to protecting and improving the county's lakes and waterways. From aquatic invasive species (AIS) monitoring and management to volunteer lake monitoring, boater education, and youth outreach, it was a busy year. Oconto County LWCD worked alongside lakes and waterways organizations, volunteers, partner agencies, and residents to protect local waters. Here's a look at the season's accomplishments, discoveries, and opportunities.

Field Season Highlights:

Rearing and releasing purple loosestrife biocontrol beetles on White Potato Lake

Oconto County LWCD partnered with Menominee County Land & Water Conservation and the Waterways Association of Menominee and Shawano Counties (WAMSCO) to rear and release purple loosestrife biocontrol beetles, targeting the dense purple loosestrife population along White Potato Lake.

Purple loosestrife is an invasive plant that can crowd out native shoreline and wetland vegetation, reducing wildlife habitat. The Galerucella beetles used for biocontrol were introduced to Wisconsin in the mid-1990s and are now established across the state. They feed on purple loosestrife leaves and stems throughout the growing season, reducing plant growth and seed production. While they won't eliminate the plant, they can help control its spread.

This spring, purple loosestrife plants were grown in pots inside an outdoor enclosure and stocked with parent Galerucella beetles. Over the summer, the beetles fed and reproduced, producing thousands for release. Once released, they can continue feeding on purple loosestrife and establish self-sustaining populations that reproduce in future years.



Galerucella beetle collection.



Galerucella beetle on a purple loosestrife plant.



Galerucella beetle rearing cage.



Purple loosestrife population on White Potato Lake.

Early Detection Surveys

Early detection surveys help us identify new or emerging AIS populations while they are still small and localized, giving lake communities the best chance to respond before they become widespread and more difficult and costly to manage. Each year, Oconto County plans to survey a selection of lakes for new AIS populations and follow up on potential sightings.

This summer, McComb Lake, Farr Lake, and Halfmoon Lake were surveyed for any AIS present. We are happy to report that McComb Lake and Farr Lake remain AIS free! Purple loosestrife was detected on Halfmoon Lake for the first time, alongside previously known AIS including phragmites and Chinese mystery snail.

Three additional waterbodies – Machickanee Flowage, Leigh Flowage, and Townsend Flowage – were surveyed specifically for European frog-bit (EFB). Because EFB has not yet been found in an inland Wisconsin lake, monitoring these waterbodies helps us prepare for a rapid response if it's detected. They were selected based on risk factors such as suitable wetland habitat and moderate to high boater traffic.

Field Season Highlights (cont):

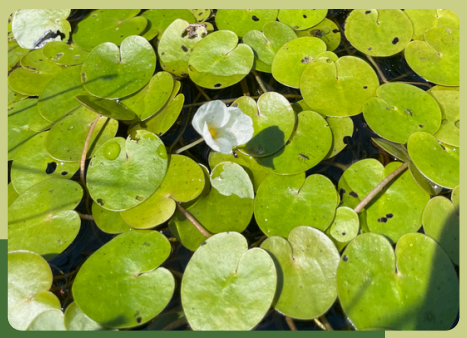
Statewide Invasive Species Action Award

Oconto County LWCD received a 2026 Invasive Species Action Award in recognition of the county's response to European frog-bit. Through early detection surveys, Clean Boats, Clean Waters inspections, inventories, and manual removal efforts, county staff removed more than **15,000 pounds of EFB** from the Bay of Green Bay. These efforts have helped improve habitat for migratory and nesting birds while protecting recreational opportunities along the shoreline.

We're grateful for our supervisors, board, partners, and the many who've contributed hours to EFB removal. We're proud to see Oconto County's invasive species response recognized at the state level.



Recipients of the 2026 Invasive Species Action Award. (Photo Wisconsin DNR)



European Frog-bit: Keeping EFB Out of Our Inland Waters

European frog-bit is a free-floating aquatic invasive plant that resembles a small water lily. Its rounded, heart-shaped leaves float on the surface, with roots dangling beneath. Classified as a prohibited species under Wisconsin's NR 40 rule, EFB is illegal to possess, transport, or introduce due to its potential to cause significant environmental and economic harm. It can reproduce rapidly due to its ability to clone itself, forming dense mats that interfere with recreation and alter fish and wildlife habitat.

EFB was first confirmed in Wisconsin in 2021, when it was discovered in the Bay of Green Bay in Oconto County. The shallow, slow-moving waters and wetlands along the bay's western shore provide suitable habitat for the plant.

For the past five years, Oconto County LWCD has worked with partners, including Marinette County LWCD and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to combat EFB along the Bay. As the species has become well established, efforts have increasingly focused on preventing its spread into inland lakes and rivers.

This summer, Emily regularly checked all public boat landings and parks along the county's Green Bay shoreline, removing EFB from these high-traffic areas to reduce the risk of spread to other waterbodies. She also spoke with boaters about identifying the plant and how to help prevent its movement. By knowing what to look for and inspecting boats and equipment, we can all help keep EFB out of our inland waters.

Monitoring Oconto County's Waters:

Clean Boats, Clean Waters

# of lakes involved	**7**
# of boats inspected	**1,700**
# of people contacted	**4,203**
# of hours spent	**1,393**



Archibald Lake boat landing CBCW station. (Photo: Sam Olsen)

Snapshot Day

Snapshot Day is a statewide effort to detect invasive plants and animals that threaten Wisconsin's lakes, streams, and wetlands.

On August 8, Oconto County LWCD hosted a Snapshot Day event at the Chute Pond County Campground. **6 volunteers** received AIS monitoring trainings and surveyed **9 different sites**.

Because AIS can be difficult, if not impossible to eradicate once established, volunteer efforts like Snapshot Day are crucial to help us catch new populations early, when there's the best opportunity to respond.

Great Lakes Landing Blitz

Clean Boats, Clean Waters (CBCW) inspectors across Oconto County greeted boaters at landings, shared information about aquatic invasive species, and answered questions during the Great Lakes Landing Blitz, held June 29—July 12, 2026. This collaborative education effort among Great Lakes states and provinces coincides with the busy Fourth of July boating season.

Thank you to the eight organizations who participated in the 2026 Landing Blitz!

Inland Lakes P&R District	**Maiden Lake Club Association**
Wheeler Lake Association	**Berry Lake Community District**
Boot Lake Improvement	**Pickerel Chain Lake Association**
Chute Lake P&R District	**Boulder Lake Association**



2026 Snapshot Day volunteers.

Citizen Lake Monitoring Network

27 lakes participated in CLMN this year, with volunteers collecting data on water clarity, water chemistry, ice-on/ice-off, and AIS. Thank you to all the volunteers whose contributions help inform lake management!

Monitoring Oconto County's Waters (cont):

New AIS Occurrences Verified in Oconto County Waterbodies in 2026

Early detection, monitoring, and reports from the public resulted in several newly verified AIS occurrences in Oconto County waterbodies this year. These records document species newly identified in these waterbodies, but don't necessarily mean they were introduced in 2026.



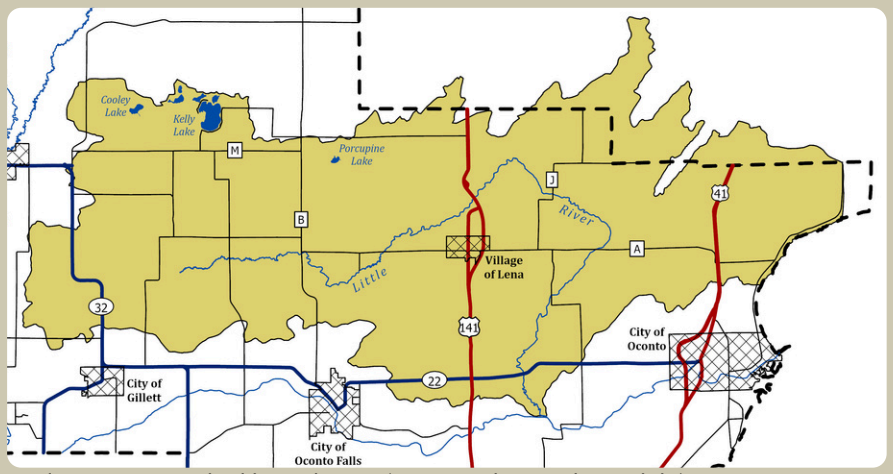
Zebra mussels found on Munger Lake in June 2026.

Waterbody	AIS Verified
Grindle Lake	Yellow iris
Bass Lake (Townsend)	Zebra mussel
Munger Lake	Zebra mussel
Halfmoon Lake	Purple loosestrife
Oconto River	Banded mystery snail

Monitoring the Little River Watershed

In 2014, the Little River was added to the WDNR's 303(d) impaired waters list due to elevated total phosphorus levels, with testing results reaching twice the criteria of 0.075 mg/L. The Little River is a major tributary to the Oconto River, which feeds into the Bay of Green Bay.

Since 2018, Oconto County LWCD has worked with agricultural producers and landowners in the North Branch Little River watershed to promote and implement conservation practices, including nutrient management, cover crops, no-till farming, and grassed waterways, to reduce phosphorus and sediment runoff. Throughout this time, the WDNR and LWCD have been testing water quality to evaluate the impacts of these efforts. In 2026, the LWCD monitored **five sites** in the watershed monthly from May through October to test if total phosphorus levels have decreased enough to support removing Little River from the 303(d) impaired waters list. Results to date have indicated encouraging signs of water quality improvement.



Little River watershed boundaries. (Map Credit: Brady Stodola)

Want to become a river monitoring volunteer?

Water Action Volunteers (WAV) trains volunteers to collect water quality data across Wisconsin's **86,000+ miles** of streams and rivers, helping identify areas of need for conservation work and evaluate the effectiveness of existing efforts.

Contact Emily to learn about becoming a river/stream monitoring volunteer.

Education and Outreach:

16
Education and outreach events hosted and participated in

377
People reached

6 Lakes and waterways organization meetings
5 Youth education events
4 Adult education events
1 Clean Boats, Clean Waters training



Educational paddle at the Oconto Marsh put on in partnership with UW-Green Bay and UW Extension Lakes.



Lena Middle School 7th graders learning about aquatic macroinvertebrates. (Photo: McKenzie Pawlak)



St. Anthony's 4K after learning about Wisconsin wildlife. (Photo: Renee Lemke)

Resources and Opportunities:

Extension Lakes Lake List Directory

Extension Lakes maintains a statewide directory of lake organizations to support communication and community engagement. Check whether your organization is listed and make sure its contact information is current. For assistance with updating information, email lakes@uwsp.edu.

Lakekit.net

A project of Wisconsin Lakes, LakeKit helps lake organizations build and maintain websites with professional web services support.

$125/year for WI Lakes members; $175/year for non-members

Visit their website and contact them if interested in partnering: https://lakekit.net/

Have a terrestrial invasive species problem?

The Timberland Invasives Partnership (TIP) is a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) serving Oconto County. TIP helps identify, inventory, and manage terrestrial invasive species such as buckthorn and garlic mustard.

Contact coordinator Brianna LeFebre for invasive species management recommendations and assistance.
Phone: 715-799-5710 ext. 3
Email: timberlandinvasives@outlook.com



Japanese knotweed, a woody invasive that forms large colonies of erect, arching stems resembling bamboo.

Improving Your Lake Stewardship:

10 Steps to become a lake steward:

Lake Stewardship begins on the land & continues in the water!

1. Capture water runoff before it reaches the lake.
2. Don't blow or rake leaves into the lake.
3. Minimize or eliminate chemical and fertilizer use.
4. Allow native aquatic plants and fallen wood to remain in the lake.
5. Reduce road salt use.
6. Eliminate bare soil spots on your property.
7. Maintain your septic system.
8. Boat with care.
9. Don't mow to the water's edge.
10. Respect the wildlife on the lake.

Curious how healthy your shoreline is?
Take the Score My Shore survey to find out and identify potential improvements.
https://extensionlakes.org/wi



Native shoreline habitat planted on Pickerel Lake through the Oconto County Cost-Share Program. (Photo: Laurel Haak)

Thinking about tackling a shoreline project?

Healthy shorelines protect water quality, provide fish and wildlife habitat, and help reduce erosion. Oconto County LWCD offers technical assistance to property owners interested in protecting and restoring their shorelines.

Financial assistance may be available through the Oconto County Cost-Share Program and WDNR Healthy Lakes & Rivers Grants.



Reporting AIS:

Early reports from lake residents and visitors can help us identify new invasive species before they become widespread. If you find a plant or animal you think may be invasive, or simply aren't sure what it is, take a photo, note the location, and contact us.

- Emily Schwartz, Oconto County LWCD
  - Phone: 920-834-7157
  - Email: emily.schwartz@ocontocountywi.gov
- Amanda Smith, WDNR AIS Biologist



Invasive faucet snails on Ucil Lake.

AIS Spotlight: Faucet snails

Faucet snails grow up to about 1/2" and have a light brown to black shell with 5-6 whorls. Native to Europe, they arrived to the Great Lakes through ballast water transport in the 1870s. In addition to competing with native snails for food and resources, faucet snails can clog water intake screens and pipes, and host parasites that can kill waterfowl. They can live up to a month in dry mud, making proper cleaning of equipment before moving to a new waterbody essential!



Emily at a Lake Leaders Seminar at the Aldo Leopold Center in Baraboo, WI. (Photo: UW-SP Extension Lakes)

Looking Ahead into 2027:

- **Keep an eye out for upcoming trainings and workshops! An online Grants Training is planned for Winter 2027 (date TBD), with sessions on topics such as AIS and the 'Lake Toolkit' also in the works.**
- AIS Monitoring kits and training will be available for interested lake and waterway organizations.
- Volunteer opportunities for CBCW, and lake and river monitoring.



Reach out to Emily if you'd like an AIS monitoring kit and/or AIS monitoring training, or if you'd like to volunteer!

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