Rock Lake Improvement Association Annual Report 2025-2026

RLIA remains a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of Rock Lake and its watershed. At the August 2025 Annual Meeting, four Board members renewed their commitment to the board and were reelected: Cynthia Chmell, Danny Durow, Tom Krejcie, and Jeff Schmoeger. In addition, John Crump expressed his desire to rejoin the Board and was elected by the membership. Subsequent to the Annual Meeting, Doug Mulay resigned from the Board and the board appointed Jim Colegrove to fill Doug's open Board position (per our bylaws) giving the RLIA a full complement of 10 members.

RLIA Vision: ***Our Rock Lake: Enjoy. Protect. Enhance.***

RLIA Mission: ***We will collaborate, educate, and build community engagement to protect and improve Rock Lake and its watershed for today and tomorrow.***

RLIA Snapshot 2025:

Membership as of December 31, 2025: 202 / consisting of 163 Families, 32 Individuals, and 7 Affiliates/ Corporations

→ Our 2025 membership was down 13 members from last year's record membership of 215.

Membership Breakout (approximately): City: 35%, Town: 55%, Other/out of town: 9%. It is interesting that the City to Town ratio is very close to the ratio of Rock Lake shoreline located in the City versus the Town (60:40).

Riparian Owners represent 52% of RLIA's memberships (104). There are approximately 275 shoreland properties around Rock Lake meaning that only about 38% of all riparian owners are members of RLIA.

It is concerning that the majority of lakefront owners do not support the only organization dedicated to protecting the asset which significantly impacts their property value. Interestingly, other lake associations across the state face the same situation.

In 2026, for the second year in a row, we've been unable to maintain our focus on social media. We are looking for some members to step forward and lead this effort. The community of Lake Mills appears to value Facebook engagement. Undoubtedly, there are other social media outlets with which RLIA should engage in. Please let us know if you have any interest in this area.

Membership Recruitment Summary for 2026:

In May 2026, RLIA sent out 285 membership appeals by USPS bulk mail. This list included anyone who had paid dues in the last five years (2021-2025). We had a reasonable response to this first appeal (162 paid as of our annual meeting on Saturday, 8/15/2026). There are 53 members who paid dues in 2025 but have not yet renewed in 2026; 39 members paid dues in 2024 and 2025 but have not yet renewed in 2026. The good news is that we gained four new members this year, and ten previous members who came back and renewed in 2026 after not paying dues since at least 2025. While around 50% of our members are lake front property owners, only about 30 percent of ***all*** riparian owners are RLIA members-- as currently we are the only group overseeing the welfare of Rock Lake.

Board members 2025-26: Cynthia Chmell (secretary), Jim Colegrove (vice president), Danny Durow, Mary Ann Jackson, Jim Kerler, Tom Krejcie (treasurer), Jeff Schmoeger (resigned February, 2026), John Thode, Susan Trier (president).

Volunteers for 2026:

Name	Project
Jeff Schmoeger	Water Quality Monitoring (Deep Hole)
Cory Nelson	Water Quality Monitoring (Deep Hole)
Sue Nesemann	Water Quality Monitoring (Miljala channel input, Millpond, Rock Creek / south of Hwy A & Hope Lake Rd, unnamed creek in Miljala Park)
Mike Nesemann	Water Quality Monitoring (Miljala channel input, Millpond, Rock Creek / south of Hwy A & Hope Lake Rd, unnamed creek in Miljala Park)
Bob Volenec (2017)	Water Quality Monitoring (Mud Lake)
Sue Volenec (2017)	Water Quality Monitoring (Mud Lake)
Carl Glassford (2010)	Water Quality Monitoring (Cty A/Rock Creek)
Steve Bower (2016)	Water Quality Monitoring (Cty A/Rock Creek)
Dan Thousand (2026)	Water Quality Monitoring (Cty A/Rock Creek)
Jim Kerler (2010)	Water Quality Monitoring (Cty A/Rock Creek)
Jim Colegrove (2026)	Water Quality Monitoring (Dam/Rock Creek)
John Crump (2026)	Water Quality Monitoring (Dam/Rock Creek)
Barb Smith	Frogs
Elaine Thousand	Frogs
Julie Ecklund	Frogs
Scott Kampmeier	Frogs
Cynthia Chmell	Turtles
Char Jaschob (2023)	Turtles
Sue Nesemann	Turtles
Mike Nesemann	Turtles
Susan Trier	Turtles
Jeff Schmoeger	Woody Habitat for Fish
Cory Nelson	Woody Habitat for Fish
Bruce Ward	Woody Habitat for Fish
Jim Kerler	Woody Habitat for Fish
Jim Colegrove	Woody Habitat for Fish
Mike Nesemann	Ice On/Off Monitors
Sue Nesemann	Ice On/Off Monitors
Bruce Ward	Maintain/Replaces labels for City AIS tools

Dan Geerdts	Made AIS tags for the Town
Jim Kerler	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Cynthia Chmell	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Candace Diaz	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Hope Oostdik	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Tom Krejcie	Uniform 200 foot Slow No Wake setback
Tom Krejcie	Enhanced Wake Recreation
John Thode	Enhanced Wake Recreation
Susan Trier	Enhanced Wake Recreation
Susan Trier	Sandy Beach Re-design
Tom Krejcie	Sandy Beach Re-design
Tom Krejcie	Municipal collaboration (JRLC, Town, City)
Lauren Eggert	City of Lake Mills, Zoning Board of Appeals
Norm Goeschko	City of Lake Mills, Zoning Board of Appeals
Mike Nesemann	City of Lake Mills, Zoning Board of Appeals, Secretary
	City of Lake Mills, Parks Board
Karen Goeschko	City of Lake Mills, Ethics Board
Liesa Kerler	City Council, Member
	City of Lake Mills Housing Authority
	City of Lake Mills Parks Board
Mary Schmoeger	City Council, President
	City of Lake Mills Economic Development Commission
Pam Lazaris	City of Lake Mills, Ethics Board
Richard Mason	City of Lake Mills, Plan Commission
Steve Quandt	City of Lake Mills, Economic Development Commission
Barb Smith	City of Lake Mills, Board of Review, Chair
Dan Thousand	City of Lake Mills, Board of Review, Friends of Korth Park
Margy Krueger	Municipal collaboration (Town)
Steven Nass	Jefferson County Board of Supervisors, Chairman
	Jefferson County Supervisory District 15
	Town of Lake Mills, Plan Commission, Chair
Lee Peterson	Joint Rock Lake Committee, Town representative
	Extraterritorial Zoning Committee, Town representative
John Thode	Town Board Supervisor
Susan Trier	Public Works Board, Town representative
Cory Nelson	Legendary Lake Mills, Board of Directors
Hope Oostdik	Legendary Lake Mills
Anita Martin	Rotary
Beth Naughton	Rotary, President
Candace Diaz	Friends of Korth Park
Julie Ecklund	Friends of Korth Park

Stan Smoniewski	Website
Danny Durow	Website
Cynthia Chmell	Instagram, Facebook
Tom Krejcie	Membership Letters, Thank you letters
Susan Trier	Membership Communications, Database

Additional Resources:

Colton Hutchinson	Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept
Dave Hoffmann	Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept
Sam Peterson	Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept/Soil Builders
Mark Baldock	DNR Fish Biologist
Arthur Watkinson	DNR Water Resource Management (Watershed Management)

Brief Summary of 2025-2026 activities:

Shoreland Initiatives:

-RLIA continues to encourage riparian owners to manage their stormwater and modify their shorelines to prevent pesticides, herbicides, and extra nutrients from washing into Rock Lake. The WDNR's program called "Healthy Lakes & Rivers" encourages riparian landowners to implement any of five different types of best practices through reimbursement grants. The practices include: rain gardens, 350 square feet of native plantings, fish sticks, diversions, and rock infiltration projects. Since its inception in 2015, this program has implemented 1,150 practices across 41 different counties in Wisconsin. Here, in Rock Lake's watershed, only one practice was installed in 2025-- a fish stick structure on the lake's south end which will act as wildlife and nearshore fish habitat along with being a small wave breakup for the shore. To date, there have been 10 projects installed within Rock Lake's watershed. **If you would like to, potentially, install a healthy lake project, feel free to give Colton a call at 920-674-7111 or email at CHutchinson@jeffersoncountywi.gov.** He would love to help you with ideas and start a design process.

Water Quality:

- Twelve volunteers continued their work monitoring Rock Lake's water quality at eight locations on Rock Lake, as well as Mud Lake. RLIA funds testing at seven of these locations. We also continue to monitor all of Rock Lake's inlets and outlets.

- RLIA and Jefferson County LWCD are continuing to work on gaining a better understanding of Rock Lake's watershed by capturing flow measurements at four locations on stream sites around Rock Lake. Why did RLIA feel it was necessary to supplement our existing total phosphorus testing with flow measurements? Because creating a Total Phosphorus Budget for Rock Lake is complicated. For example, one research team's work indicated that although wetlands reduce phosphorus loads to downstream lakes, they also reduced water inflow to downstream lakes and thus increased the phosphorus concentration of inflows to lakes.

By collecting actual stream flow data, we hope to better understand the amount of nutrients coming through Rock Lake's inlets at a given time. With continued data, we can begin to see patterns along with

potential highs and lows. This can also help to see what the concentrations of phosphorus and flow rate may be at “baseflow” conditions vs. around high rainfall events. This season has seen times of low flow along with higher flow events with our changing weather patterns throughout the year.

Back in 2024, LWCD staff installed RLIA-funded staff gauges at three locations hoping to be able to build a model that could determine flow without ‘real-time’ flow measurements. Unfortunately, this original modeling plan appears more difficult to create since LWCD discovered that the environment can hold water back showing higher staff gauge readings than what the actual ‘real-time’ flow measurements indicate. ‘Real-Time’ flow data will still be collected to build a library of high and low measurements for Rock Lake’s inlets and outlets. Over the last two years, LWCD staff have been able to collect flow readings at the following locations: Rock Creek at County Road A, Unnamed Tributary at Cedar Lane, Unnamed Tributary adjacent to Miljala Shores Park, and Rock Creek at Stony Road downstream of the City Water Treatment Plant.

Starting most upstream in the watershed, Rock Creek at Hope Lake Road, we have collected Total Phosphorus since 2019. Streamflow, however, cannot be taken due to unsafe conditions for accessing the stream at this crossing. Moving downstream, the County Road A crossing for Rock Creek is next. The next inlet for Rock Lake is an unnamed stream crossing under Cedar Lane which feeds the Miljala Channel on the eastside of Rock Lake. Another inlet is an unnamed stream that discharges from what’s locally known as “Lost Lake” after rain events, and is otherwise mostly dry, which is called an ephemeral stream. The outlet for Rock Lake is the dam location, where volunteers sample for phosphorus. LWCD requests the discharge rate from the City of Lake Mills on the days when samples are taken. The final location, Rock Creek at Stony Road, just upstream past the connection of Rock Creek to a ditch, is monitored to see what’s likely discharging into the Crawfish River.

This table helps to illustrate the data over the past 6-7 years in the minimum, maximum and average for each of these locations. The Rock Creek locations certainly have the most flashy and varying values for streamflow. You can see that the concentration of phosphorus is greatly reduced from Hope Lake Road to County Road A with the average going from 162 to 60 ug/L. The WI DNR guideline for impairment for Total Phosphorus for a stream is 75ug/L and right now **Rock Creek upstream of Mud Lake is classified as impaired for Total Phosphorus.** As for the other two inlets, these both have TP averaging between 240-290 ug/L. Their load is lower due to the smaller amount of streamflow and water moving though these locations. This increase in TP for the unnamed stream crossing near Miljala Shores Park is likely due to the flashy nature of this stream from when “Lost Lake” overfills during rain events. There is also some erosion taking place near the park, evidenced by visible undercutting on the stream bank. As for the stream crossing under Cedar Lane feeding the Miljala Channel, this stream has a more consistent flow year-round and cooler water likely from some groundwater input and field runoff. This stream could be targeted for upstream bank edge practices such as what was studied and recommended back in 2022 on creating a two-tier ditch. This could help reduce nutrient loading along with reducing sediment load into the channel over time. There will still likely be some sediment entering but at lower quantity. At Rock Lake’s outlet, average TP drops by another 10-15 ug/L. The location further downstream of Rock Lake’s dam, Stony Road crossing just past the City of Lake Mills’ sewage treatment plant, shows that Rock Creek is again impaired for TP. Efforts to reduce TP between the dam and Stony Road could focus on streambank restoration, reducing road runoff and grass clippings from lawns getting into the creek. This impairment is also seen further downstream near Milford as well.

	Total Phosphorus (ug/L)			Streamflow (CFS)			Load (lbs/day)		
Site	Min	Max	Ave.	Min	Max	Ave.	Min	Max	Ave.
Rock Creek @ Hope Lake Road	49.40	717.00	162.45	**No Streamflow Due to**			**Conditions of Stream**		
Rock Creek @ County Road A	27.20	126.00	59.67	0.12	18.55	3.20	17.9	12575.4	1027.3
Unnamed Tributary @ Cedar Lane	155.00	762.00	289.70	0.10	1.02	0.26	79.2	4169.3	405.2
Unnamed Tributary @ Miljala Park	65.60	730.00	242.00	0.00	0.54	0.06	0.0	2120.8	78.1
Rock Creek @ Dam of Millpond	17.10	195.00	48.04	0.00	396.34	53.60	0.0	415800.3	13853.2
Rock Creek @ Stony Road	45.30	204.00	129.00	2.01	58.10	7.10	489.9	63765.9	4929.6

At some point, RLIA may need to understand how groundwater seepage may be contributing to phosphorus loading. In the meantime, RLIA continues to try to reduce incoming TP to Rock Lake by: educating board members on watershed dynamics through attending agriculture events around the area; donating to LWCD to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as cover crops and buffer strips; and helping with funding the water quality monitoring so we can see current levels and track these changes overtime to gather a better understanding of this watershed as a whole.

Rock Lake Watershed Water Quality Testing 2026:

Funding passed: 2/18/2026
Not to exceed: $ 1500

Volunteer	Location	Test	Frequency	Sponsor	Cost
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Miljala tributary / 100 feet west of Cedar Lane INLET to Rock	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA	6 Total Phosphorus (TP) at $31 per Sample = **$186**
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Lost Lake Tributary / north of Miljala Shores	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA	6 TP = **$186**
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA	6 TP = **$186**
Mike and Susan Nesemann,	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A	Chlorides	April, July, October	RLIA	3 Chloride at $30 per sample = **$90**
Steve Bower, Carl Glassford, Jim Kerler, Dan Thousand	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A	Flow, temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Monthly Apr-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV)	
Steve Bower, Carl Glassford, Jim Kerler, Dan Thousand	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A	Macroinvertebrate sampling Biotic Index*: 2.56 (Average since 2010)	2x per year Apr and Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV)	
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Rock Creek / south side of bridge/culvert on Hope Road INLET to Mud	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA	6 TP = **$186**

Mike and Susan Nesemann	Millpond / just below the dam OUTLET	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA	6 TP = **$186**
Jim Colegrove John Crump	Rock Creek at Stony Rd / just downstream of wastewater treatment plant	Flow, temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Monthly May-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV)	
Jim Colegrove John Crump	Rock Creek at Stony Rd / just downstream of wastewater treatment plant	Macroinvertebrate sampling Biotic Index*: 2.23 (Average since 2010)	Monthly May-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV) state program	
Jeff Schmoeger Cory Nelson	Rock Lake / Deep Hole	Temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Monthly Apr-Oct	RLIA	
Jeff Schmoeger Cory Nelson	Rock Lake / Deep Hole	Total phosphorus, chlorophyll-a	Spring turnover, June, July,	Citizen Lake Monitoring Network	
Jeff Schmoeger Cory Nelson	Rock Lake / Deep Hole	Chloride	Spring & Fall Turnover, Winter	RLIA	3 Chloride = **$90**
Jeff Schmoeger Cory Nelson	Rock Lake / Deep Hole	Total phosphorus	May, September, October	RLIA	3 TP = **$93**
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	Temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Spring turnover, June, July,	Citizen Lake Monitoring Network	
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	Total phosphorus	Spring turnover, June, July,	RLIA	4 TP = **$124**
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	chlorophyll-a	June, July, August	RLIA	3 Chl. A = **$108**
				2026 Season Grand Total Costs for Samples	$1435

**Jefferson County LWCD can help cover monitoring if needed throughout the year*

DNR Collection Mid-Summer Includes: Alkalinity, Conductivity, pH, Color, Chlorophyll A, Nitrate + Nitrite, Chloride, Sulfate, Organic Carbon, Phosphorous, TKN.

Internal Loading Testing was done: During turnover Fall 2021 / Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 / Twice Fall 2025

Turnover: when lake is fully mixed from top to bottom. Confirmed with DO Meter noting temperature uniformity.

* Biotic Index is estimated through the quality of the creatures observed on the form. In this case, 4 is very healthy. This is the scale used by our stream samplers via the Water Action Volunteers (WAV) Program.

Great: 3.5-4.0 / **Good:** 2.5-3.5 / **Fair:** 2.0-2.5 / **Poor:** 1.0-2.0

Internal Loading (at the Deep Hole, deepest part of Rock Lake; 60 ft):
Internal loading is a situation when phosphorus, trapped in the bottom sediment, is released into the water column and becomes a notable source of phosphorus for the lake. Since Rock Lake's total phosphorus values from surface water samples over the last two decades have been increasing, LWCD and RLIA decided to test for possible internal loading. Testing is typically done during lake turnover which is where the bottom waters come to the surface and the surface waters sink towards the bottom. Consequently, testing was done: Fall 2021 / Spring 2022 and Fall 2022. This testing indicated that internal loading was **not** a factor for Rock Lake. However, RLIA and LWCD decided additional data would be desirable. LWCD noticed that the spring data was more uniform and less useful, perhaps due to the complications of ice off. Some lakes, such as Devil's Lake, collect multiple fall readings instead of the spring/fall turnover reading. This year, LWCD decided to use that protocol and tested at depths of 25, 30, 40, 50, and 60/bottom in late August and then again in September to catch the fall turnover. Analysis of this data can be found at: https://rocklake.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2026/08/Internal_Loading_Sum2026.pdf
Interestingly; Green Lake in Green Lake County will be funding an in-depth internal loading study for their lake. We'll monitor that project to see if there's anything we can learn from it for Rock Lake.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS):

Current verified AIS in Rock Lake: Curly Leaf Pondweed (1969), Eurasian Water Milfoil (1990), Chinese Mystery Snail (2005), Zebra Mussel (2005), Spiny Naiad (2010), Yellow Iris (2025), Banded Mystery Snail (2025), Purple Loosestrife (Marsh Lake)
Nearby AIS of concern: For Rock Lake: Quagga Mussels (Walworth), Spiny Water Flea (Dane), Starry Stonewort (Waukesha, Walworth). For our stream inlets and outlets: New Zealand Mud snail (Dane) and Asiatic Clam (Rock, Waukesha, Walworth)

Zebra Mussels:
-Zebra mussels were verified in Rock Lake in 2005. In 2024 and 2025, Jefferson County LWCD staff decided to participate in a long-term DNR study looking at zebra mussel population dynamics. LWCD worked to get two types of samplers placed in four locations spread across Rock Lake. Unfortunately, the funding for the study fell through so monitoring did not occur in 2026. LWCD staff will work with the citizens who gave permission in the recent years to install the brick samplers for general zebra mussel monitoring in the coming year (2027). If you would like to learn more about this monitoring and install a

sampler yourself, feel free to reach out to Colton at the Jefferson County LWCD to learn more and get details. Phone: 920-674-7111 or CHutchinson@jeffersoncountywi.gov.

Quagga Mussels:
-LWCD is also working to determine the best location to start monitoring for quagga mussels on Rock Lake. Quagga mussels are an extremely dangerous invasive species recently found in Lake Geneva, the first inland lake in WI to be verified. Compared to zebra mussels, quagga mussels can survive in much deeper water, cling to soft substrates, survive at lower oxygen concentrations (between 2-4 mg/L), and require less calcium for the formation of their shells. If introduced into Rock Lake, they would likely inhabit down to 40 feet in Rock Lake based on past profiles taken at the deep hole location. According to our boat inspectors, boaters from Lake Geneva visited Rock Lake in 2023. In the last two years, many boaters from lakes near Lake Geneva visit Rock Lake. The best way to help reduce the risk of quagga mussels being introduced to Rock Lake is to make sure boats coming into Rock Lake are cleaned and free of quagga mussel larvae or veligers. Efforts on Rock Lake to prevent this spread relies on signage, manual cleaning stations, and intermittent Clean Boat, Clean Water staff. These educational boat inspectors are funded by the DNR, the City and Town of Lake Mills, and RLIA. Unfortunately, these veligers are also transported in the ballast water of wake boats, since the ballast tanks are designed by the manufacturers to not fully drain. If Rock Lake riparians keep their wake boats only on Rock Lake, they cannot transport new invasive species into the lake with their residual ballast tank waters**.**

Spiny Water Flea:
- The spiny water flea is a tiny, aquatic predatory zooplankton (free floating crustacean) that eats other zooplankton---particularly Daphnia. Daphnia is a native zooplankton which eats a prodigious amount of algae. Loss of Daphnia can significantly impact water quality. According to the UW-Madison Center for Limnology, Lake Mendota has lost almost a month of clear water conditions since the spiny water flea was detected. Daphnia is also the food choice of many juvenile game fish like perch and walleye.

Near us, the spiny water flea is found in the Madison chain of lakes (Lake Mendota, Lake Monona, Lake Waubesa, Lake Kegonsa) and Lake Winnebago. The last time our lake was sampled for spiny water flea was in 2022 by the DNR, and no presence was detected. This year, the RLIA board decided to purchase our own sampling equipment and Jefferson County LWCD developed a protocol for monitoring Rock Lake using protocols from UW Madison Center for Limnology and the Trout Lake Research Station as its framework. We will monitor for adult spiny water fleas September through October right before sunset to maximize the chance of collection. This is a new effort for us, if you'd like to be part of the monitoring team, please contact Susan Trier at susan.trier@gmail.com

RLIA is particularly concerned about spiny water flea since their disruption of the food web is so destructive and once spiny water fleas are introduced into a lake, there is no known effective way to control them**.**

Starry Stonewort:
-At the end of June, LWCD staff used scuba gear to survey for starry stonewort at the North boat launch and the Sandy Beach boat launch. These would be prime areas of possible infection for the aquatic hitchhiker. Luckily, it was not found.

Early Detection:
- Rock Lake is fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers looking for invasive species. A number of other lakes are interested in developing a similar program. Routes are set up for both monitoring from

a boat and monitoring from the shore from April-October. Training occurs in April. If you're interested in participating, please let us know at mail@rocklake.org.

Watershed Practices:

Soil Builders

- Formed in 2022, the mission of the Jefferson County Soil Builders is to enhance water quality and natural resources through education, collaboration and improved farming practices. The group has grown to 54 farmers and is funded through the Department of Agriculture Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP)'s Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant. RLIA has supported the Soil Builders grant application process since their formation. Last May, the Soil Builders had a Field Day in Milton demonstrating planting corn straight into last year's cover crop to show planting without plowing a field. This September, they plan on offering a farmer Field Day demonstrating planting of cover crops via drone to reduce tractor compaction. Their last event will be to partner with other producer-led groups to offer a February workshop in Whitewater. You can follow the Soil Builders at https://www.facebook.com/jeffersoncountysoilbuilders/

Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept

- Last year, an anonymous donor gave $5,000 to be used in conservation projects within the Rock Lake Watershed. Three farmers used those funds to plant cover crops on 136 acres for the very first time. This year, the donor's gift will be reduced. In an effort to continue the same level of funding for farmers in Rock Lake's watershed, RLIA will supplement the donor's gift to match last year's funding.

- LWCD outlined their program offerings to membership at the City of Lake Mills' Community Room on October 28, 2025.

Habitat:

- Volunteers continue to survey frog populations around Rock Lake and the surrounding region. Our frog monitors report that it has been a particularly good year for Leopard frogs. This is excellent news since leopard frogs have been in decline statewide. For more information on leopard frogs, check out: https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/Herps/6138

- RLIA is interested in maintaining a healthy yellow perch population in Rock Lake to manage the expected invasion of the non-native spiny water flea. To improve yellow perch populations, the DNR suggests developing and preserving complex, shallow water, woody habitat to help with spawning and refuge from predators. Beyond yellow perch, this habitat also helps all juvenile fish. According to our last Shoreland & Shallow Survey, Rock Lake has very limited wood in the waters close to shore (approximately 55 pieces). According to DNR research, Rock Lake's woody structure target should be 100 pieces.

Consequently, RLIA worked with the DNR, the City of Lake Mills, and the LWCD, to install some woody structures ("Fish Sticks") in the vicinity of the Glacial Drumlin train trestle. Four trees that were 7-9 inches base diameter were cabled together and anchored to the shore in early February. At ice off, the trees were expected to sink into the water. Unfortunately, the prevailing winds unexpectedly shifted, causing ice push and the trees to get smashed into the shoreline instead of dropping down into the lake. Volunteers took apart the structure. RLIA will work with our partners to determine next steps.

- RLIA continued to be active generating awareness on Rock Lake's turtle population. Temporary residential turtle crossing road signs and protective nesting cages were deployed again this year. With the help of Char Jaschob, RLIA has expanded our turtle awareness signs deeper into our watershed. Thank you to all our volunteers and community members who watch out for these vulnerable ladies as they seek to nest and return to the safety of Rock Lake. RLIA located two local centers who can help rehab injured turtles. If you find an injured turtle, put the turtle in a container to help prevent it from moving around. Do not manipulate any of the shell's pieces or try to fix/clean anything yourself. Call these local centers and explain the situation. They can often repair the shells, rehabilitate the turtle, and ultimately set it free. If the turtle cannot be saved, they will humanely euthanize the turtle, rescue her eggs, hatch them and then return the hatchlings to the wild. Hit turtles can linger for days---so do bring them in.

Members are encouraged to add these contacts to their phones so that they can be found easily:

Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center
5132 Voges Rd., Madison
608-287-3235
wildlife@giveshelter.org

Wildlife in Need Center
W349 S1480 S. Waterville Road, Suite B
Oconomowoc
262-965-3090 / 262-965-3067

Education:

- On 5/28/2026, RLIA sponsored another well- received (approximately 26 attendees) tour of the Lake Mills Fish Hatchery. Approximately, 26 residents had an in-depth tour of the facility and grounds. The DNR's Fish & Wildlife Account (including hatcheries, habitat improvement, research, fish monitoring, law enforcement, and threatened & endangered species) is facing significant budget constraints with a predicted $16 million structural deficit. A number of fish hatcheries are targeted to close. RLIA will keep residents informed on how they can support the DNR through this difficult period.

-This year, RLIA is partnering with Friends of Korth Park to sponsor a raptor/bird of prey program at the Rock Lake Activity Center on Saturday, September 19th at 1pm. During this free program participants will learn about the adaptations, habitats, and the ecological role hawks, owls, falcons and other birds of prey play in Wisconsin. Hoos Woods Raptor Center in Milton, Wisconsin will bring live birds to the event! Bring the whole family, but leave your pets at home.

Community Service:

-Legendary Lake Mills, Friends of Korth Park, and RLIA joined forces for a morning of action. On May 3rd, approximately 30 volunteers removed invasive species, cleaned up area parks, beaches, and natural areas. They regrouped for a pizza party afterwards.

Lake Recreation:

- RLIA developed a comprehensive webpage on beach safety which provides: a link for beach conditions; historic beach safety monitoring; and safety guidelines for beach recreation, swimmers itch, and open water swimming: beaches - Rock Lake Improvement Association

- The City of Lake Mills has made another change to their beach safety protocol which RLIA has repeatedly advocated for over multiple seasons. The City now follows the EPA and WDNR recommended

practice of using E.coli testing when testing internally to determine whether a beach advisory or closure can be removed. This summer has been a better year for Bartels and Ferry Park, however, Sandy Beach has suffered significant closures in this late summer season. Here is the listing of this year's beach closures and advisories to date:

Beach	Report	Date
Tyranena (City)	None	None
Bartel's (City)	Closure for lake foam	July 23, 2026
Sandy Beach East (City)	Closure for E.coli	July 21, 2026
	Closure for E.coli	August 4, 2026
Sandy Beach West (City)	Closure for E.coli	June 30, 2026
	Closure for E.coli	July 21, 2026
	Closure for E.coli	August 4, 2026
	Closure for E.coli	August 12, 2026
Ferry Park (Town)	None	None

NOTE: Our first blue green algae blooms occurred in September 2025. Currently, there have been none detected this year on Rock Lake.

Update on Sandy Beach Re-design:

-Last year, RLIA's recommendations to the City's Park Board on the Sandy Beach redesign were sent to City Council. Essentially, our recommendations are meant to keep stormwater from carrying E.coli, other bacteria, nutrients, sediment, and chemicals from the upper park area down to the beach. We also want to make it less inviting for geese to move from the lake onto the grass to feed. At these transition areas, deep-rooted native plant communities can infiltrate and bioremediate these pollutants. RLIA offered to fund a professional restoration ecologist to work with Strand and Mead & Hunt to come up with an effective plan.

Last month, the Council accepted our offer, and Native Range Ecological (NRE) was selected. RLIA will donate to the City of Lake Mills $9,000 to help fund NRE. Of that amount, a donation of $6,000 came from one RLIA member. NRE's contract has two main deliverables:

- The first deliverable is a Restoration Retrofit Plan for the stormwater swales and outfall areas south of the boat launch parking lot. This detailed technical plan will include a native buffer along the shoreline and around the main outlet culvert area. It will also include an

erosion control plan, a native plant species list, guidance on where to source plants, a planting plan or schematic, and a maintenance and monitoring plan.

- The second deliverable is to develop native vegetation and restoration strategies for Phase One of the Sandy Beach Redevelopment Plan. This will be an ongoing, back-and-forth planning process to ensure that native vegetation, stormwater performance, and ecological function are fully integrated into the park design from the start.

On the first deliverable, the Restoration Retrofit Plan, NRE has already started collecting field data, and they found that the ground in this area is heavily compacted, poorly graded, with very little elevation change to the outlet. Water is not soaking in. During some rain events, it just ponds and evaporates. During heavier rains, it runs off at a similar rate as asphalt. There is also clear evidence that geese are using the area, and geese are a known source of E. coli in Wisconsin's inland lakes.

On the second deliverable, Phase One design, timelines are undetermined and contract awards for Strand / Mead & Hunt have not been determined. They will probably be awarded in August.

Bringing a restoration ecologist onto the design team is an important first step. It gives us a real chance to make this recreational area healthier and more resilient. It can also help build trust among City staff, Strand, and Mead & Hunt as everyone works through some new approaches. It also sends a clear message that the City Council is putting Rock Lake's health front and center. The design is important, but how it gets implemented matters just as much, as we saw with the current swale. Native systems can cost more at the beginning, but they pay off over time. As an organization and as residents, we need to stay engaged and keep this moving. We will also need to help care for the park once it is built. Across Wisconsin, including in our state parks, Friends groups play a big role in taking care of public recreational spaces. Our community will need to do the same.

As this project moves forward, NRE will meet with RLIA members to walk through their findings and recommendations. Our goal is to build community support to move this project into implementation. Let's keep the conversation going---

-*Update on Enhanced Wake Recreation*

December 2024: RLIA surveyed our membership to gather your opinion on enhanced-wake recreation. Eighty-six percent of RLIA members wanted some type of meaningful regulation concerning enhanced-wake activity, with almost two-thirds advocating for a ban of the activity. Based on the survey, the RLIA board had a split-decision vote to recommend a ban on the recreational use of enhanced wakes—not a ban on the boats.

February 2025: Joint Rock Lake Committee presented their recommendations to the Town Board: Enhanced-wake recreation should occur no closer than 700 feet from shore and in a minimum depth of 30 feet. RLIA presented their recommendation to the Town Board: an ordinance which would have banned enhanced-wake recreation.

April 2025: the Town Board, during their last meeting before a new Board would be elected, decided not to proceed with the next steps in reviewing an ordinance. Fear of litigation featured prominently in the concerns of the Town Chair.

What has happened since our Town Board decided not to move forward with an ordinance?

The statewide Coalition for meaningful regulation has grown significantly.

The statewide Coalition for meaningful regulation of enhanced-wake recreation has swelled to just under 100 organizations. It is the largest coalition in Wisconsin's history. Wisconsin legislators continue to be impressed with the wide interests and passion of Coalition members.

Ninety-Five different municipalities have ordinances in place covering approximately 420 lakes.

Forty-nine towns/villages/cities have passed bans on enhanced-wake recreation since April 2025. Close to home, Blue Spring Lake in Palmyra (Jefferson County) and Fox Lake (Dodge County) have both passed bans. Blue Spring Lake occupies 136 acres with a maximum depth of 27 feet, and Fox Lake is a 2,713-acre lake with a maximum depth of 19 feet. Additional bans have been passed in towns in Waukesha, Racine, Sauk, and Walworth counties. As wake-enhanced enthusiasts shift to other lakes to enjoy their recreation, lake capacity concerns may shift other boats to a new lake as well. With this re-shuffling, the chances of Rock Lake seeing more boats increase.

Two lawsuits have ruled in favor of Wisconsin Town ordinances and against enhanced-wake plaintiffs. No lawsuits have been ruled in favor of enhanced-wake advocates over the Town.

Town of Manitowish Waters: Wake boat advocates filed a suit seeking both an injunction and a temporary restraining order to prevent an ordinance banning the activity of enhanced-wake recreation on the chain from taking effect in July 2025. The judge in the case ruled against the wake boat advocates saying that there was "a rational basis" for the ordinance which is the standard that a municipality must meet since the state gives considerable authority to local municipalities in managing their lakes. The case was dismissed and the wake boat advocates took no appeal.

Town of Scott (Burnett County): In July 2026, A U.S. District Court judge granted the Town's motion for summary judgment, refusing to strike down the town's ordinance, not granting a damage award to the plaintiffs, and dismissing the case. The town has also indicated that it will not enforce this ordinance for the foreseeable future. This lawsuit was filed by wake boat advocates against the Town of Scott (Burnett County) concerning Birch Island Lake. Birch Island Lake is a 768-acre lake averaging 6 feet deep (per the DNR) with a greatest depth of 13 feet. The plaintiffs sought to invalidate the ordinance and requested $190,000 in damages.

NOTE: A very similar lawsuit has been filed against the Village of Elkhart Lake in April 2026 by a water sports group. It is anticipated that the group will not have legal standing in bringing this case. A group of enhanced-wake advocates recently filed a new suit against Manitowish Waters, trying again to invalidate the ordinance. In both suits, the towns have already filed motions to dismiss.

No state-wide legislation has been able to advance.

With the 108th Wisconsin Legislature being seated in January 2027 it is expected that this issue will resurface. The water sports industry's legislative goal is two-fold: 1. Pass statewide regulation supporting enhanced-wake recreation on as many Wisconsin lakes as possible (200 feet from shore with no depth requirement), and 2. Prevent local municipalities from passing more restrictive ordinances. The Coalition's goal is three-fold: 1. Pass statewide regulation that shifts enhanced-wake recreation to lakes large and deep enough to support the activity, 2. Ensure that local municipalities can continue to pass ordinances for their lakes without threat of

punitive lawsuits, and 3. Determine a clear path to prevent spread of aquatic invasive species through mandating manufacturer-recommended decontamination of ballast tanks.

RLIA's Current Position on Enhanced-Wake Recreation:

RLIA will continue to participate in the statewide Coalition for meaningful regulation of enhanced-wake recreation. We will continue to monitor what is happening with statewide regulations and will keep our membership informed. In the meantime, a subcommittee will work to further refine a Wake Sport Zone defined by GPS mapping software, network with riparian owners who participate in enhanced-wake recreation by providing education and encouraging self-enforcement of a zone, and network with local boat patrol officers and Town Board supervisors on the feasibility of an ordinance.

-NEW Rock Lake Water Level Order:

On 1/29/2026, the DNR issued a new Rock Lake Water Level Order to the City of Lake Mills:

Winter Water Level Management:	
Dates	**Maximum Allowable Water Level**
October 11th to Ice Out* ***OR*** March 25th (whichever is later)	827.50 feet
Spring Water Level Management:	
Dates	**Target Water Level (Maximum)**
March 25th or Ice Out*to May 1st	827.63 feet
Summer Water Level Management:	
Dates	**Maximum Allowable Water Level**
May 2nd to September 15th	828.33 feet
Fall Water Level Management:	
Dates	**Target Water Level (Maximum)**
September 16th to October 10th	827.50 feet A slow, tapered drawdown over 24 days

Ice Out*: Defined as the lake being sufficiently free of ice that a boat can be navigated from Bartel's Beach to the shores of Korth Park. This determination is made by an assigned volunteer who notifies the City, the DNR, the LWCD, and the RLIA. This new order does **not** change the defined water levels for Winter nor Summer. It does allow a gradual increase in Spring retention to facilitate reaching Summer water levels and it clarifies the gradual Fall drawdown.

Municipal Collaboration:

- Continued to support the LWCD on the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Clean Boats/Clean Waters program. RLIA helps fund the program along with the DNR, the City and the Town. LWCD coordinates the program. We work with the City, Town Board, and JRLC to report missing tools at the boat cleaning stations at all five boat launches. RLIA volunteers produce replacement identification tags and then attach them on any of the cleaning tools that the City or Town replaces.

Social Media:

- RLIA Facebook page continues to be a critical link to our community. According to a recent survey by Mead & Hunt for the City, 68% of residents use social media to learn about what is going on within the community. **If any member would like to help RLIA with its use of social media, we would greatly appreciate it.** Please contact a board member with your interest! I believe that RLIA could be using this platform more effectively.

Building our organization:

-Every organization needs to understand how to recruit new board members, how to develop those members and then, ultimately, how to retain board members. RLIA is no exception. Our board hopes to work on this foundational aspect of organizational health during the winter months. **If any members have experience guiding an organization in this process, please let us know!** We could use the help.

Sincerely,

Susan Trier, RLIA Board President