

# COMMUNITY COFFEE & ANNUAL MEETING



# A MESSAGE FROM CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE

Good morning! Thank you for joining us today at The Edgewater for our Clean Lakes Community Coffee & Annual Meeting. We're excited to share some important progress we've made as a community, as well as a look ahead to future lake projects.

Thanks to our presenting sponsor, Foley & Lardner LLP, for not only sponsoring this event, but for also providing us in-kind office space and legal services since 2012. Foley & Lardner LLP has been an important Clean Lakes Alliance partner since our organization's start in 2010 and we are continually thankful for all they do for us and for the Yahara lakes.

I also want to thank the major sponsors Alliant Energy, CG Schmidt, The Edgewater, Lands' End, Madison Gas and Electric, and National Guardian Life Insurance Company. Additionally, I want to thank our media sponsor, WKOW 27, and all of the table sponsors at today's event.

On the following pages is important information about the work we are doing to help the lakes, as well as what you can do in your own life to improve water quality in our community. We are proud to include in this booklet the first publishing of the executive summary, which is the work of the Yahara CLEAN Compact team. For more than two years, 19 partners have worked on *Renew the Blue: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed*. The executive summary gives you a look into how this plan will help shape lake improvement for years to come.

Thank you for joining us this morning, and for continuing to be a champion of the lakes. We hope to see you at one of our monthly Clean Lakes 101 Science Café talks right here at The Edgewater, at our Loop the Lake Bike Ride on Saturday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, or at any other Clean Lakes Alliance event this year.

In partnership,



James Tye  
Founder & Executive Director  
Clean Lakes Alliance



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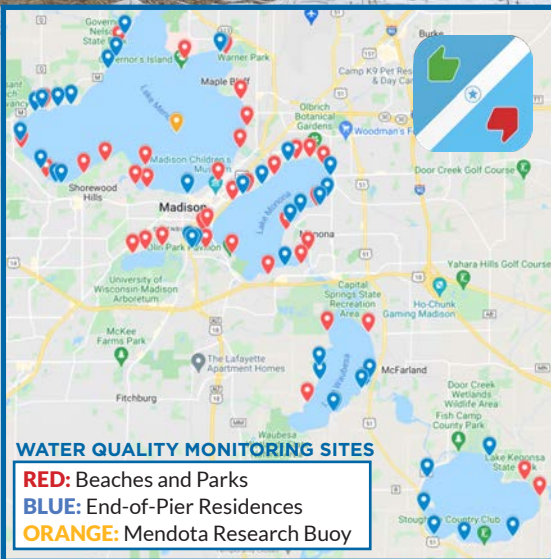
## SUSTAINING FOUNDERS



# CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE – EMPOWERING ACTION TO BENEFIT OUR LAKES

*Healthy lakes make for healthy communities. Clean Lakes Alliance envisions a future in which everyone realizes the lakes are the center of our community. For the lakes to be treated this way, it will take all of us to appreciate their value and act on their behalf. This is what motivates and provides focus for our work.*

Photo: Ceremonial seed spreading at Pheasant Branch Conservancy in March 2022



## LAKEFORECAST MONITORING

In 2012, only one deep-water reading was taken from three of the five lakes. Today, we now have over 100 trained volunteers keeping close tabs on water quality changes occurring around all five lakes between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Real-time information is uploaded to interactive maps on the free LakeForecast app. Our network of volunteer monitors is often the first to report harmful cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms, alerting both the public and public health officials of potential problem areas.

[Learn more: lakeforecast.org](http://lakeforecast.org)

## CLEAN LAKES GRANTS

Since 2011, Clean Lakes Alliance has provided more than \$1,300,000 in project support! This year, \$100,000 in grants are being allocated to projects, ranging from “Seed the Need” to restore a new addition to Pheasant Branch Conservancy, to offering outdoor educational experiences for underrepresented youth. Our grants continue to honor our goal of helping to build partner capacity while supporting critical projects and initiatives.

[Learn more: cleanlakesalliance.org/grants](http://cleanlakesalliance.org/grants)

## VOLUNTEER DAYS

Clean Lakes Alliance works with groups around the watershed to be able to offer hands-on volunteer opportunities for our Friends and Lake Partners looking to make a difference. Whether it's a beach or prairie restoration, invasive plant removal, native seed collection, or a shoreline cleanup, these opportunities match Clean Lakes Alliance-organized volunteer teams with vital project needs. More than 1,000 volunteers roll up their sleeves and tackle a project each year, benefiting our beaches, parks, and natural areas.

[Learn more: cleanlakesalliance.org/volunteer](http://cleanlakesalliance.org/volunteer)

Volunteers work to clean up Esther Beach on Lake Monona

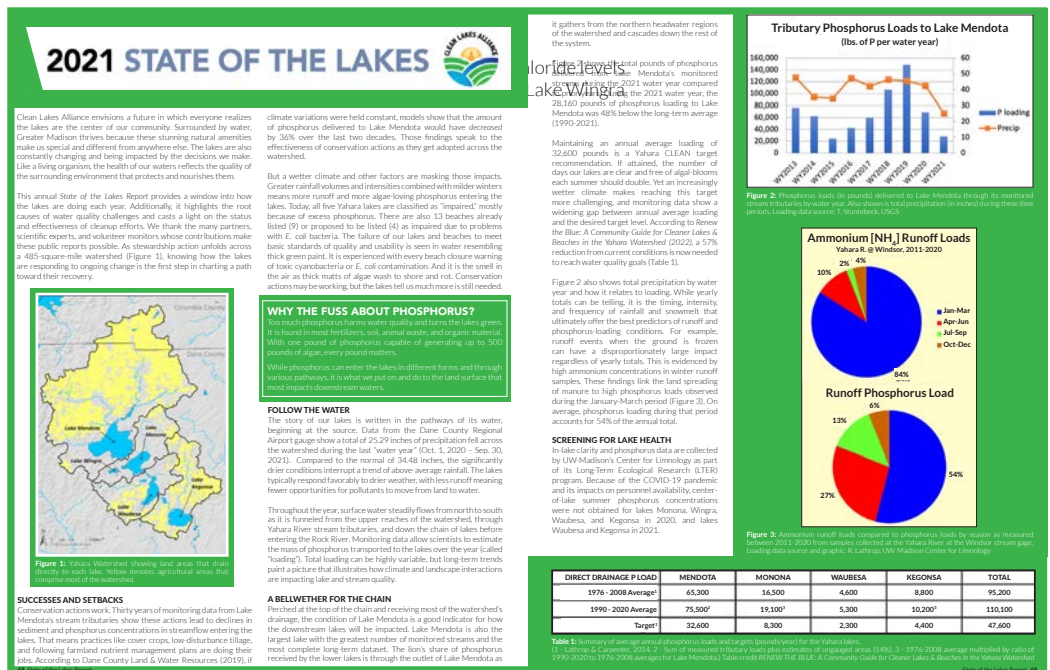


## STATE OF THE LAKES

The all-encompassing *State of the Lakes Report* sheds light on how our lakes are doing and what kind of progress is being made on cleanup efforts. In addition to reporting on beach closures, trends in lake clarity, and successful phosphorus-reduction projects, the *State of the Lakes Report* also highlights the good work being reported by our many partners.

As the Yahara CLEAN Compact's Renew the Blue initiative moves ahead (Pg 5-10), our *State of the Lakes Reports* will continue to provide the public with a means of tracking progress and maintaining accountability. This year's report will be released in our Greater Madison Lake Guide later this month.

**Learn more:** [cleanlakesalliance.org/state-of-the-lakes](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/state-of-the-lakes)



## RESILIENT LANDSCAPES

We found that if everyone takes small actions at home and at their places of business, people become more invested in the solutions and more inclined to advocate for the types of policies, projects, and investments that will make a real difference. Whether it's creating beautiful rain gardens and directing roof downspouts into rain barrels, or raking fall leaves out of the street gutter and using less winter salt, our actions matter and clean water depends on them.

Clean Lakes Alliance believes it is going to be the power and contagiousness of individual action that will propel us toward that better future.

**Learn more:** [cleanlakesalliance.org/top10](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/top10)

## CLEAN LAKES 101 SCIENCE CAFÉ

Open to the public and FREE to Friends of Clean Lakes and Lake Partners, these monthly lectures are a great chance to learn more about the science behind the issues impacting our lakes. Each month, we feature a different expert to make the science accessible and interesting to technical and non-technical audiences alike. Events are held at The Edgewater and broadcast live online.

**Learn more:** [cleanlakesalliance.org/clean-lakes-101/](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/clean-lakes-101/)



# RENEW THE BLUE

## A COMMUNITY GUIDE FOR CLEANER LAKES & BEACHES IN THE YAHARA WATERSHED



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UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies • Yahara Lakes Association  
Yahara Watershed Improvement Network


## RENEW THE BLUE

### A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed

Clean and healthy lakes are a benchmark of a healthy community. We, the undersigned, recognize that the Yahara Watershed's five majestic lakes—Mendota, Monona, Wingra, Waubesa, and Kegonsa—define our sense of place and contribute to the region's natural heritage, economic vitality, and local quality of life. We are proud of our prior work and investments to protect and enhance these assets, but more needs to be done for the lakes to meet their potential.

On this 18th day of May 2022, we come together under the Yahara CLEAN Compact to renew and strengthen our partnership, uniting around a shared vision and path forward. We pledge through our signatures to champion the Compact's goals and objectives, to support implementation of this RENEW THE BLUE guidance, and to stay the course to build a better water quality future for this and future generations.

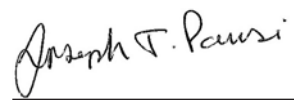
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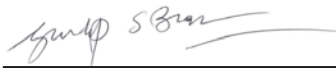


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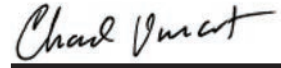
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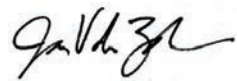
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The following is the executive summary of **Renew the Blue: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed**. Published by the 19-member Yahara CLEAN Compact, the guide serves as an updated community roadmap toward achieving cleaner and healthier lakes. Visit [cleanlakesalliance.org](http://cleanlakesalliance.org) for the full document.

## OUR YAHARA LAKES

Lakes Mendota, Monona, Wingra, Waubesa, and Kegonsa provide 29 square miles of interconnected waters that bolster regional identity, pride, and quality of life. All this water—roughly 193 billion gallons worth—is held in the public trust, and 48% of the 66 miles of encircling lakeshore are owned by public entities.

The Yahara lakes have a long history of attracting people to their shores. They are natural wonders of incalculable value, literally and figuratively, putting our surrounding communities on the map as special places to live, work, and play. Property values, tax base, mental health, tourism, subsistence fishing, local employment, and biodiversity are but a handful of measures by which this value is gauged, appreciated, and experienced. Just as they provide for us, it is our responsibility to provide for them through our collective actions and stewardship.

So, how are the lakes doing? On one hand, they continue to support diverse aquatic life, provide scenic beauty, and offer an abundance of recreational opportunities. On the other hand, they can be so green and thick with algae that few people would want to swim in them. Their conditions are always changing, making it difficult for the average person to know when our lakes are safe. Perhaps not surprisingly, the lakes and beaches periodically fail to meet basic standards of water quality and usability.

We now stand at a crossroads where our collective choices have the power to lead us down one of two paths. One path takes us to a future in which stewardship actions prevail and the community is doubling down on cleanup efforts, transforming the lakes back into our greatest natural assets. The other leads us to a day when our lakes are widely seen as liabilities of neglect and underinvestment.

History is replete with past decisions that undervalued the lakes and underestimated our ability to degrade them. The very conception of how they *should* be is clouded by the slow pace of change and our lack of experience with their past condition. Although weather and other short-term events can influence their day-to-day status, an overall trajectory is set by the cumulative effect of how we use the land. It is time we made the lakes a higher priority in our decision-making and commit to guiding them back to a healthier state. *Renew the Blue* offers guidance on how to do just that.

## SOLVABLE CHALLENGES

Considered among the most studied in the world, our Yahara lakes are both complex and dynamic. We know them well and their fate is in the math. With every pound of phosphorus capable of producing up to 500 pounds of algae, our waters mirror an upstream landscape that is out of balance. Watershed lands that surround and drain to the lakes will be the keys to their recovery.

That path to recovery begins with good news in the watershed's predominantly rural headwaters. More than ever, agriculture is adopting conservation practices that are helping to restrict sediment-bound phosphorus from washing off fields and into nearby streams. Conservation-minded farmers, producers, and land stewards are responsible for these gains, and their efforts to improve soil health and curb erosion merit continued celebration and support.

But a warmer and wetter climate is masking these gains, sending more snowmelt and stormwater runoff sweeping across the landscape. January, February, and March are particularly noteworthy months for their disproportionate impact. It is from thawing farm fields—made more vulnerable by winter and early-spring runoff—where most of the lakes' phosphorus originates. Phosphorus has accumulated in soils over decades of farming, but it is the fraction contained in raw manure spreading that is most mobile during this critical time. These early-season pulses of phosphorus then cascade down the rest of the chain, affecting each lake along the way. We are fortunate that farmers continue to innovate and adapt by composting manure and planting more grasses and forages in their rotations, efforts that provide for the more beneficial use and timing of manure applications. Although promising steps are underway to increase manure storage, digestion, and composting, more action and support are needed in these areas if current trends are to be reversed.

Meanwhile, in our urban settings, the autumn leaf-fall period presents its own challenges and opportunities. Dissolved phosphorus easily escapes from the wet, decaying leaves that accumulate on residential streets and parking lots, resulting in the largest source of urban phosphorus pollution. With each rainfall, a nutrient-rich “tea” washes down street gutters, into storm sewers, and eventually out to the lakes. Municipalities are increasingly stepping up to address the concern by expanding leaf collections, street sweeping, and composting operations, but more is still needed.

Great strides are clearly being made to rectify the past and find better paths forward. That progress is owed to a strengthening culture of leadership, investment, and cooperation that is getting more of the right practices adopted. Over the last 30 years, monitoring data show declining phosphorus and sediment concentrations entering Lake Mendota during the growing season. If it were not for increased rainfall and runoff during this same period, conservation efforts would have resulted in a 36% decrease in phosphorus delivered. These same measures often produce benefits extending well beyond water quality, such as improvements to soil health, wildlife habitat, air quality, flood abatement, drought resilience, weed and pest resistance, and cost savings.

We also know it will take more than these current “Best Management Practices” alone to reach our water quality goals, and rising phosphorus loads are the proof. With urban boundaries expanding to accommodate a rapidly growing population, the hardening of the landscape coupled with a shrinking rural land base is sure to magnify challenges in the years ahead. But the more we can build soil health, reduce runoff, and address the known sources of phosphorus and *E. coli*, the better the outlook for our lakes and surrounding communities.

## A PATH TO RECOVERY

The 19 member organizations of the Yahara CLEAN Compact believe a better future is possible in which “*all community members feel connected to, proud of, and responsible for our lakes and streams in the Yahara Watershed.*” With a commitment to “*clearer lakes, open beaches, and fewer cyanobacteria blooms,*” Compact members sought to build upon prior work to address the root causes of today's lake impairments: excess phosphorus, *E. coli*, and runoff.

Grounded in science and informed by public input, priority actions are set forth in which all major stakeholders can participate, focusing effort where it can make the biggest difference. Action recommendations recognize that everyone has a part to play, that we are all in this together, and that more must be done to reach our goals. They are therefore allocated among five stakeholder groups believed

to have the greatest agency to affect change:

- Agriculture
- Builders & Developers
- Government
- Parks & Open Space Managers
- Residential & Commercial Landowners

A vision of cleaner and clearer lakes with fewer cyanobacteria blooms and beach closures is attainable. While past plans focused attention primarily on the Government and Agriculture stakeholder groups, this plan seeks to empower participation by a broader cross-section of the community. As more individuals implement changes at their homes and places of business, the more likely those same individuals will advocate for policies, incentives, and funding models that will help support and sustain the overall effort.

Scientists estimate that the number of summer days when our lakes are clear and free of algal blooms will double if average annual phosphorus loading is reduced to 47,600 pounds. This represents a 57% reduction from the current 30-year annual average (110,100 pounds), a gap that has increased by several percentage points since a decade ago. While closing the gap and reaching that target threshold is ambitious, it is achievable if enough of the right actions are taken. We also have improved understandings to help direct that action to where and when it is most needed.

#### FOUR MAIN PRIORITIES

- **Prioritize action in the high phosphorus-loading period between January and March.** During this time, runoff over frozen farm fields delivers large quantities of dissolved phosphorus to the lakes. Areas characterized by high levels of soil phosphorus and runoff, a lack of overwintering cover crops or vegetative cover, and/or the winter spreading of raw manure would be considered at greatest risk.
- **Prioritize actions that reduce urban phosphorus runoff from streets.** The autumn leaf-collection period is a time of high dissolved phosphorus delivery to the lakes. This “leaf tea” effect and urban runoff are increasing with climate change and development. Municipal efforts that strive for leaf-free streets and minimizing runoff, especially through coordinated action with area residents, can effectively address this source.
- **Prioritize actions that reduce net phosphorus availability in the watershed.** The most promising methods include transporting manure outside of the watershed (usually as digested or composted solids), transporting manure within the watershed to replace the use of commercial fertilizer, and reducing imports of phosphorus-containing fertilizers and feed supplements.
- **Prioritize action in areas most directly connected to the lakes.** Target resources to urban and rural areas where surface runoff drains directly to the lakes, rather than into closed depressions.

Reducing phosphorus helps keep our beaches open by limiting the magnitude and extent of potentially toxic cyanobacteria blooms. However, phosphorus-reducing actions should be paired with those that address the sources of *E. coli* (and associated pathogens) that threaten public health. *Renew the Blue* provides a framework for how these objectives can best be accomplished.





## Top Direct-Impact Actions

**1. Build additional manure-processing capacity.** Support farmers in using existing manure-processing facilities or to build their own on-farm systems. Pilot a manure-collection and processing program targeting the critical January-March period with the highest overall phosphorus loading.

**2. Increase the ability to handle and transport manure.** Use composting and other processing techniques to allow for improved timing and targeting of applications. Minimize chemical fertilizer use by substituting with composted manure or other sources of crop nutrients generated within the watershed.

**3. Increase farmland acres guided by a nutrient management plan.** Use plans to improve operational decision-making, ensure the most efficient use of costly nutrient inputs, and reduce the risk of phosphorus loss.

**4. Increase farmland acres under no-till (or reduced tillage) and continuous living cover.** Limit soil disturbance and maintain a living root in the soil with cover/forage crops, harvestable buffer strips, overwintering hay, etc. to build better soil health and reduce erosion.

**5. Increase municipal street-cleaning miles and frequency during fall.** Regularly remove leaf litter from streets to prevent rainwater-leached phosphorus from entering storm sewer systems.

**6. Protect internally drained lands and wetlands.** Use closed depressions (accounting for an estimated 41% of the watershed) to naturally retain and absorb runoff. Maintain and restore wetland function to achieve similar benefits.

**7. Increase green-infrastructure installations in parks, new developments, and on existing residential and commercial properties.** Incorporate nature-based solutions such as rain gardens, bioswales, infiltration trenches, and permeable pavement to capture, absorb, and filter runoff. Use tools such as stormwater utility credits, rate adjustments, and recognitions to reward action.

## Top Indirect-Impact Actions

**1. Continue to work together as Yahara CLEAN Compact members.** Maintain ongoing member meetings to collaborate on recommended actions, report progress, and coordinate around new initiatives. Ongoing collaboration should consider how actions might affect the watershed phosphorus mass balance, among other factors.

**2. Increase participation in producer-led watershed groups.** Expand farmer involvement in conservation planning and practice adoption through continued learning, information sharing, and distribution of cost-share incentives.

**3. Complete an inventory of shoreline and beach conditions.** Establish guidelines and criteria for the sustainable design, development, management, and restoration of shorelines and public beaches.

**4. Increase *E. coli* testing at public beaches.** Focus efforts on beaches shown to be most susceptible to problems. Assess *E. coli* bacteria sources at beaches with high closure rates so corrective measures can be taken.

**5. Continue to track and report progress.** Use and support the annual *State of the Lakes Report* as a means of outreach to the community. Support continued maintenance and operation of stream-gaging stations that track changes in phosphorus loading.

## TOP OVERALL ACTIONS

On page 9 are the top direct- and indirect-impact actions considered most foundational to reaching water quality goals. They are emphasized here over other important plan recommendations given their strategic significance in targeting high-loading time periods or locations, major sources of pollution or runoff, or because of their importance in facilitating effective implementation and progress reporting.

Because of their continued relevance and proven effectiveness, many recommended actions are carryovers from prior Yahara CLEAN planning efforts, highlighting continuing opportunities to expand their implementation within the watershed. For all actions, tactical approaches seeking to limit pollutant sources ("reduce") are preferred over those that "restrict" the pollutant's mobility on the landscape or try to "remove" it once it has entered a waterway.

Working to leverage and explore emerging market-based solutions and alternative funding models, many of which have proved successful in other areas, can be a game changer in moving all actions forward. *Renew the Blue* recommendations are not only meant to guide our own individual decisions as stakeholders, but to help the larger community promote policies and investments that can carry us into a new era of resource stewardship.

## TODAY'S "WATERSHED MOMENT"

Good science and sound planning are vital, but they will only take us so far. Fostering a culture of action also depends on continued trust and relationship building among the five stakeholder groups and supporting nonprofit organizations. Yahara CLEAN Compact members placed a high emphasis on expanding the umbrella of participation in the watershed, including involving more organizations, perspectives, and public input as part of the planning process. The goal is to continue building a more diverse coalition of water quality champions motivated by shared values. If successful, vital feedback loops will be created. As more people use, appreciate, and help care for the lakes, more people will start demanding what is necessary to improve them.

Every action matters. We know what is expected of us, and now we are called upon to muster the willingness and resources to follow through. *Renew the Blue* offers guidance on stakeholder roles and lays the groundwork for recruiting more champions to the cause. Compact members have already stepped up to serve as leaders on

this front. And with the arrival of new conservation organizations and partnerships in the last decade like Clean Lakes Alliance, Yahara Pride Farms, and Yahara WINS, there is renewed momentum to propel us forward.

Designed to be an inclusive and accessible menu of solutions, *Renew the Blue* complements and reinforces other regional planning goals, such as those that relate to climate and flood resiliency, renewable energy, and sustainability. Greater Madison is poised to further its water quality goals through improved outreach, funding, and land management, and phosphorus reduction remains the central lever that must be pulled to get us there. Fortunately, the road ahead is built on a solid foundation of progress and collaboration, and it leads toward a vision for our lakes that is both possible and within our grasp.

## WE SHAPE OUR OWN FUTURE

The lakes are counting on all of us. Creating a legacy of clean lakes is a shared responsibility, and we owe it to ourselves to take that responsibility seriously. Yahara CLEAN Compact members are united in the belief that while the challenges may seem daunting, the lakes are too valuable to let the difficult stand in the way of the possible. Our collective actions *do* make a difference, and the lakes *can and will* respond favorably. It may not be immediate, but undoing a long history of degradation rarely happens overnight.

Today, all of us are called upon to renew our efforts and lead by example, to become participants in the solutions, and to advocate for supporting initiatives and investments that will spur us forward. Whether you are a farmer practicing regenerative agriculture that builds critical soil health, a municipality or developer promoting green infrastructure, or neighbors planting rain gardens and raking leaves out of the street, each of us can be an example of leadership and healthy change for others to emulate.

Healthy lakes lead to a healthy community that benefits us all. By adopting a new water ethic, we open the door to making Greater Madison's lakes among the best in the world. Now is the time to renew our efforts with greater knowledge, capacity, intensity, and passion to protect the lakes now and for generations still to come. We hope you join us in this worthy cause.

### LEARN MORE

[cleanlakesalliance.org/yahara-clean](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/yahara-clean)



Lake Waubesa shoreline, photo courtesy Robert Bertera



# Thank you to the following Lake Partner businesses and organizations for their generous support in 2022!

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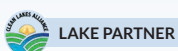
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Highway 51 Liquor and Bait  
Honeybee Cannabis Company  
Illumina, Inc \*  
In Business Magazine \*  
Isthmus Partners, LLC  
JD Hellenbrand Piers and Lifts  
JD McCormick Properties \*  
Joan Collins Publicity  
John Marshall, CPA  
Johnson Financial Group \*  
Josh Lavik & Associates

KEVA Sports Center  
Kleinschmidt Associates \*  
Kwik Kill Pest Control Inc  
Lake Effect HR & Law \*  
Lake Monona Sailing Club  
Lakeshore Apartments \*  
Lakeview Research LLC  
Lakeview Veterinary Clinic  
Lands' End \*  
Little Luxuries  
Madison Boats \*  
Madison Dentistry  
Madison Gas and Electric \*  
Madison Optical Center  
Madison School and Community Recreation (MSCR)  
Madison Veterinary Specialists \*  
Madison Water Utility  
Mazanet Marina  
Meister's K&M Tree and Landscaping Inc.  
Mendota Rowing Club  
Merrill Lynch  
Middleton Boat House  
Midnight Splash - Houseboat Charter  
Monona Bank \*  
Monona Motors, LLC  
Moren Investments, LLC  
National Guardian Life Insurance Company \*  
Off Broadway Drafthouse  
OpenHomes Realty  
Paragon Place Communities  
Perkins Coie LLP \*  
Pharo Marine \*  
Planet Propaganda  
Premier Cooperative  
Quam's Marine & Motor Sports  
ResTech Services  
Robertson Cosmetic Center  
Rutabaga Paddlesports  
Silt Sock Inc  
Singlewire Software  
SkipperBud's  
Springers on Lake Kegonsa  
Sprinkman Real Estate \*  
Stark Company Realtors \*  
State Line Distillery  
Stokes & Associates, Inc  
Studio 88

Sub-Zero Wolf Foundation \*  
Sun Valley Christmas Trees  
Susan Sutton Homes  
Susi Haviland Homes \*  
Sweeney's Aquatic Weed Removal LLC  
TAC's ALEment  
TDS Custom Construction  
Tennessee Carriers \*  
The Biergarten at Olbrich Park  
The Buckingham Inn  
The Creative Company  
The Edgewater \*  
The Livingston Inn  
Thrivent Financial - Michael Nowicki  
Tota Vita Financial Associates \*  
Town of Westport  
Trei-Four Aces, LLC  
Tully's II Food & Spirits  
UW Health, UnityPoint Health - Meriter & Quartz \*  
Village of McFarland  
Village of Waunakee  
Village of Windsor  
von Briesen & Roper, s.c. \*  
von Rutenberg Ventures  
Walden Bay Single Family Condo Association  
Waunona Garden Club  
Wealth Enhancement Group \*  
Weed Man FRI Group \*  
Wickcraft Boardwalks  
William Thomas Jewelers \*  
Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center  
Wisconsin Alumni Association \*  
Wisconsin Distributors \*  
Wisconsin Environmental Initiative  
Wisconsin Memorial Union \*  
Woodman's Food Market \*  
Yahara Lakes Association  
Yahara Software \*

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\*Denoted with asterisks above



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