

# LAKE--GRAM

FALL 2023

## RUNOFF MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DEPUTY DIRECTOR & CHIEF SCIENCE OFFICER

What an interesting summer we experienced! At the time of this writing, below-normal rainfall has meant less runoff washing fertilizers, eroded soil, cow manure, and other sources of phosphorus into our lakes. Those conditions helped contribute to fewer cyanobacteria blooms and much clearer water than we're used to seeing. Thanks to condition reports provided by our LakeForecast monitoring volunteers, the graph on page four shows how average near-shore clarity across the five major lakes compared to last year and the 2015-2022 median.

The Yahara lakes have relatively short-term memories and can respond quickly and positively to the right kind of change. If we can successfully reduce sources of phosphorus runoff to our lakes, we can improve their water clarity and general health. The effect of drought-like conditions on our lakes repeatedly proves this point. Protecting landscape sponginess produces a similar effect by capturing rain where it falls, allowing it to sink into the ground before it turns into runoff. Rain gardens, farm cover crops, porous pavement, rain barrels, and wetland and prairie restorations are just some of the ways we can effectively make this happen.

Now that summer is over, the leaves are starting to fall. Did you know that raking those fall leaves out of the street gutter and up onto your terrace (or into a compost bin) will help reduce the top source of urban phosphorus pollution from reaching the lakes? Each time it rains, those decaying leaves act like a teabag, sending a phosphorus-rich tea directly into the storm sewers that lead to the lakes (page 5). Taking this small action each autumn has the potential to generate big, cumulative impacts as more people make it part of their fall routines.

If you're a current supporter, thanks for helping us run the programs and advocate for the changes that are making a difference. If you've never donated, I'm hoping you'll join us so we can expand the impact of our work to benefit these incredible natural resources right in our own backyard. Better lake quality is clearly achievable, but it's going to take a community working together to make it a reality.



Paul Dearlove  
Clean Lakes Alliance  
Deputy Director & Chief  
Science Officer





A bird's-eye view of cutting paths in Monona Bay reflect guidance found in Dane County's aquatic plant management plan. Some rooted aquatic plants — which are essential to a healthy lake ecosystem — can reach (and even extend above) the water surface in shallower depths. Mechanical harvesters are used to cut and collect this near-surface growth in approved areas where necessary to maintain boating channels. Photo courtesy Robert Bertera.

# WHAT'S FLOATING IN THE WATER?

Lakes grow, produce, and collect a lot of fascinating things. Some of these phenomena can appear and disappear suddenly, often with little warning or apparent cause. Others can develop more slowly and linger for days and even weeks. Smells can vary from odorless to septic. What we see floating on the lake surface can reveal much about water quality, lake ecology, and even the type of vegetation growing along the shoreline.

The following photos are some of the more common sightings on our local lakes. While most of these phenomena are both naturally occurring and harmless, a couple can be indicators of potential water quality problems (i.e., cyanobacteria blooms). To address the root causes of these concerns, Clean Lakes Alliance works to educate and engage the community around needed stewardship actions.

## CYANOBACTERIA (BLUE-GREEN ALGAE)

While not a true alga, this ancient group of microscopic bacteria have been present on Earth for over two billion years. They are the only known bacteria to utilize photosynthesis to generate energy from sunlight. Scientists have described 2,700 species, but the total number is probably thousands more. They have evolved to survive in almost every terrestrial and aquatic environment. In nutrient-enriched waterbodies,

they can buoy to the surface in concentrated “blooms,” especially during hot, calm, sunny days. They may live as single cells or colonies that create filaments, spheres, or irregular globs. Their distinctive blue-green color comes from a pigment used to capture sunlight, called phycocyanin.

**Precautionary note:** Cyanobacteria can release harmful toxins that are a danger to people, pets, and wildlife.

**Identification tips:** During a large bloom, cyanobacteria can make the water look like pea soup, especially on windier days. Cyanobacteria can also collect at the surface and look like spilled paint. It is not uncommon to see them form irregular, multi-colored patterns, streaks, and swirls on the lake surface. If what you are seeing can't be picked up with a stick, there's a good chance it's cyanobacteria.

## GREEN ALGAE

Green algae make up the foundation of a healthy aquatic ecosystem. They help sustain life by producing dissolved oxygen and acting as a food source for many organisms that form the base of the food web. Green algae can come in many forms. While not harmful to humans, they can concentrate in large blooms when provided with enough nutrients and sunlight. Free-floating, microscopic varieties can tint



the water green, while filamentous varieties will often grow like stringy moss on the lake bottom. Filamentous algae can detach, break apart, and float to the surface where they collect as buoyant mats. Wind can push large, floating mats into shore where they will decompose and can smell like sewage.

**Identification tips:** Like cyanobacteria, green algae may appear bright green or even brown, but only cyanobacteria will display hues of blue and white. Since many species of green algae grow as long, interconnected filaments, they will cling like wet hair to the end of a stick.

View a short video on the "algae stick test":  
[cleanlakesalliance.org/cyanobacteria](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/cyanobacteria)

### WHITING EVENTS

Whiting events are a natural phenomenon that can make the water appear milky. They are usually short-lived events that occur in hard-water lakes rich in calcium carbonate. When calcium carbonate chemically converts into a solid state, it can turn the water white and form a precipitate that will eventually settle on the lake bottom. Whiting events are believed to be triggered by the resuspension of lake-bottom sediment and high levels of photosynthesis caused by abundant phytoplankton (microscopic plant-like organisms suspended in the water).

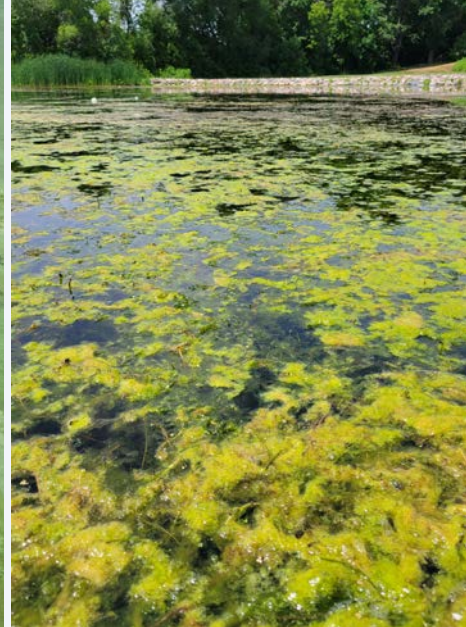
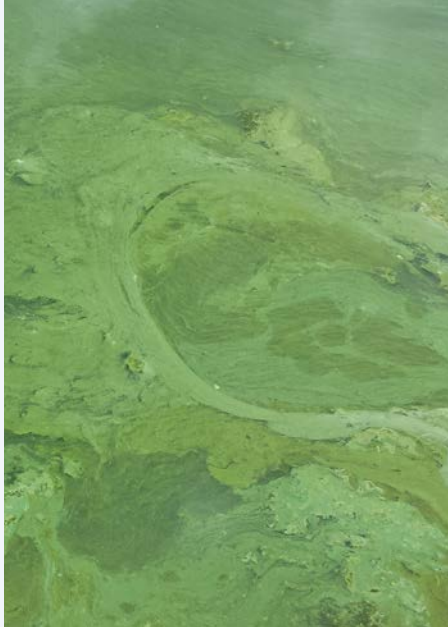
### FOAMS

Frothy white or gray foams may be observed developing on windy days along the shoreline. The foam is usually the result of organic compounds that get released during the decomposition of plant material. Those compounds reduce the surface tension of the water so it can more easily mix with air to create bubbles.

Foams can also develop due to water pollution. Harmful PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals" that have been found in our lakes, are an example of contamination that can lead to the generation of foam. Since the cause of foaming is not possible through simple observation, it is always safest to avoid contact as the foam can concentrate the contaminant.

### DUCKWEED AND WATERMEAL

Duckweed and watermeal are tiny, free-floating aquatic plants. These prolific plants often accumulate in large masses and are known to entirely cover small bodies of water. If you look closely, duckweed will have roots that extend from their undersides, allowing them to absorb nutrients from the water. Watermeal, which is smaller in size, will not have these roots. Both can become abundant in nutrient-rich water that is sheltered from wind and waves.



#### PHOTOS (THIS PAGE)

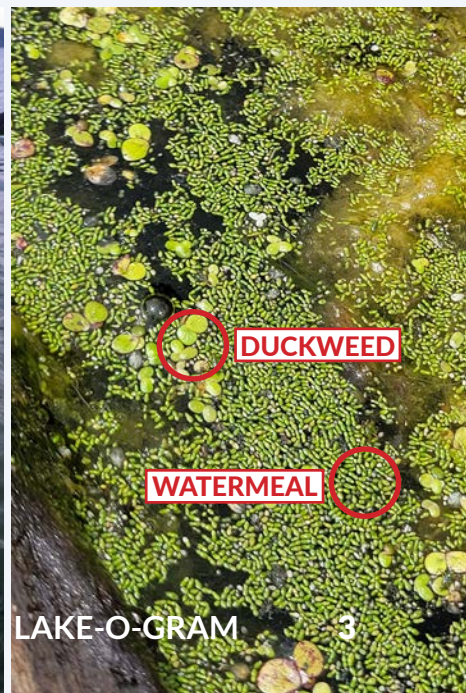
Above Left: Cyanobacteria showing paint-like swirls on the water surface

Above Right: Floating mat of filamentous green algae on Lake Wingra in July 2023

Below: Whiting event on Lake Waubesa in 2021, courtesy Robert Bertera

Bottom Left: Foam along the Lake Mendota shoreline at James Madison Park in 2020

Bottom Right: Duckweed and watermeal

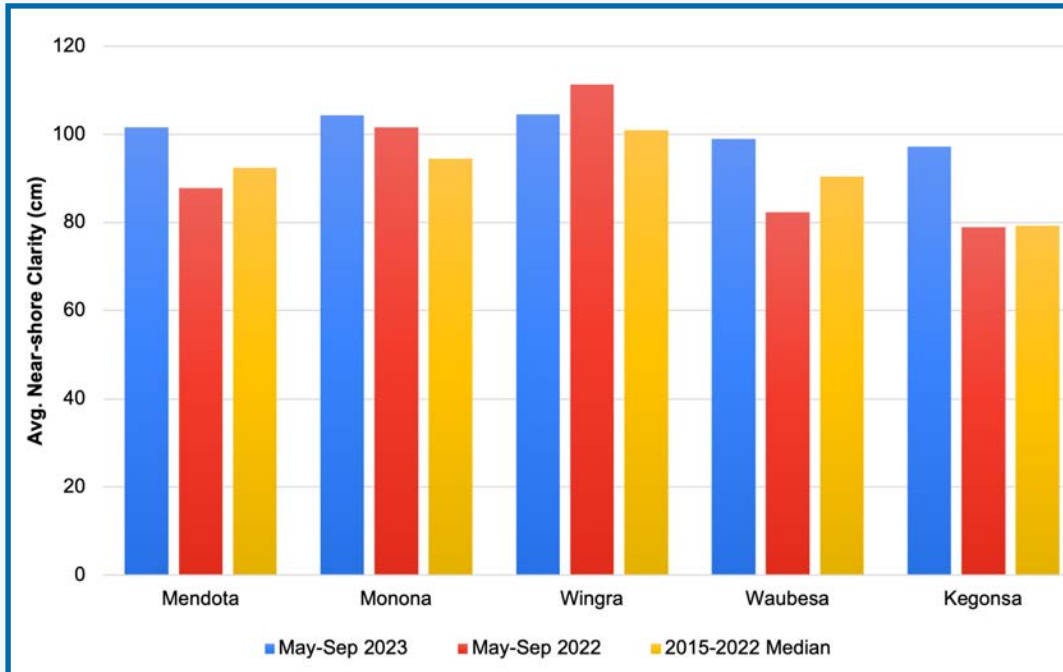




# WATER CLARITY SNAPSHOT

The bar chart below shows how average near-shore water clarity in each of the Yahara lakes compares to 2022 and the 2015-2022 median. All data are provided by trained Clean Lakes Alliance volunteers participating in the

LakeForecast monitoring program. Clarity values are based on measurements taken with a 120-cm turbidity tube, with 120 representing maximum transparency as measured on the device.



Clean Lakes Alliance volunteer water quality monitor uses a turbidity tube to measure near-shore water clarity, 2023

## STORMWATER EDUCATION WIN

CITY, COUNTY, CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE PARTNER FOR "SUMMER AT THE STORM DRAINS"

The City of Madison Engineering Division, in partnership with Dane County and Clean Lakes Alliance, wants to thank the community for a successful first Summer at the Storm Drains 2023 Selfie Contest. The contest led up to Wisconsin Stormwater Week 2023 (August 5-13, 2023). The contest ran for three weeks from the end of July until mid-August.

Summer at the Storm Drains is a community selfie contest. People were encouraged to visit different storm drain murals across Dane County, snap a selfie, and enter it into a raffle for prizes. Prizes included rain barrels, a free consultation with a City stormwater engineer to build a rain garden, and \$1,000 worth of local lakeside restaurant and business gift cards.

"Our stormwater sewer system is separate from our sanitary sewer system," City of Madison Engineering Division Public Information Officer Hannah Mohelnitzky said. "What we put in our storm drains goes directly to our area waterways. We had fun working with Clean Lakes Alliance and Dane County on this contest. The more ways we can make stormwater education interactive and fun, the better for our community."

The contest had nearly 200 entries, and winners were announced on the Engineering Division Facebook Page.

### 4 CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE



Above: Posing with a storm drain mural

Below: Dog poses with storm drain mural near Upper Mud Lake







# LEAF-FREE STREETS FOR HEALTHY LAKES

Helping the lakes at home has never been so easy. Each fall, as winter approaches, we are treated to a colorful display on our oak, maple, ash, and other trees that line the streets. Unfortunately, when these leaves fall, they set up a potential problem for our lakes.

## PHOSPHORUS "TEA"

Leaves in the streets that pile up along the curb create a barrier that rainwater must pass through before it gets to the storm sewers. The problem isn't the leaf itself, it's the stored phosphorus that can leach from the leaf when wet. The stormwater passes through leaf piles, like water through a tea bag, taking the phosphorus with it to the storm sewers that lead to the lakes. As a reminder, it takes just one pound of phosphorus to generate up to 500 pounds of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)! The problem can then sit dormant until warmer temperatures return and cyanobacteria feed on the phosphorus. The more phosphorus in the lake, the higher the chance of a cyanobacteria bloom that is harmful to people, pets, and aquatic life.

## YOU CAN HELP!

It seems simple, but simply raking the leaves out of the street gutter in front of your house, apartment, or business and

up onto the terrace ahead of a rainstorm can help the lakes. Raking leaves onto your terrace can also help your lawn if they get mowed and mulched into the grass.

A study by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) shows that we can cut urban phosphorus loading to our lakes by up to 80% by keeping leaves out of the street. Simply put, if we all remove leaves from the street gutters in the fall, our lakes will be healthier for it.

## SPREAD THE WORD

Raking the street gutter may look odd to your neighbors and friends. To help normalize this action, we need you to spread the word and lead by example. Like recycling in the late 1970s and early 1980s, change comes from everyday folks being more aware and doing something about it. Help us help the lakes this fall, next summer, and beyond!

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





## 63CLUB MEMBERS

(As of August 31, 2023)

\* Donations received at the \$1,000 level or more are also recognized as part of the Yahara Society (denoted with asterisks below).

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Boy plays at Tenney Park Beach on Lake Mendota

GOAL  
\$719,000

# JOIN US AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Clean Lakes Alliance is not alone in helping improve the lakes – it's a community effort that is led by individual Friend and business/organization Lake Partner donors. Since our founding in 2010, we have given out more than \$1.4 million in grants to fund important lake programs and projects. We're hoping to keep that momentum going this year with one of our most aggressive annual campaigns yet!

Our 2023 goal is \$719,000. The thermometer shows we still have a ways to go, but we are confident we can get there with your help. If you've already donated this year – thank you very much for your support. If you haven't contributed this year, we hope you'll consider joining us now so we can keep funding improvements for our lakes.

## FUNDING THE FUTURE

Your donation is put to work immediately on projects making a difference now and in the years to come. We're working on your behalf on important projects like:

**Volunteer Monitoring** – Celebrating its 10th year, our one-of-a-kind volunteer monitoring program tests water conditions at over 80 spots around all five lakes. With your support, we can add more monitors and more features to LakeForecast, the free app that provides the public with near-real-time condition reports.

**Programs & Advocacy** - Last year we published *RENEW THE BLUE: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed* with 19 partnering organizations. This year we are working with our partners to put the plan in action. Initial planning around a community-scale manure-treatment facility, spearheaded by Dane County (page 8), is just one of the ways that is already happening. Continued funding will allow us to put more of the plan in action which will result in more clear water days.

**Clean Boats, Clean Waters** - This watercraft inspection program is a front-line defense against the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). For the last two summers, Clean Lakes partnered with the DNR and Dane County to fund the placement of inspectors at four additional boat landings in our area. As we build capacity and increase funding, we hope to include inspectors at more boat landings throughout the watershed as a first line of defense against the spread of AIS.

## MAKE DONATIONS EASIER WITH THE 63CLUB

If you like supporting initiatives like these but you don't like writing a check each year or remembering to go online to donate, consider joining our 63Club. Starting at just \$8.63 (\$103.56 annually), this donation is withdrawn each month directly from your account. It benefits you because it means no more remembering to donate. It benefits us because we know a steady stream of donations will come in each month to fund projects. Plus, if you join the 63Club now, we'll send you a tumbler or mug, courtesy of Lands' End (shown on the lower right).

Join the 63Club and join the hundreds of people listed on the following page who have already committed to this fantastic way to help the lakes.

### 63CLUB LEVELS

- \$8.63 monthly (\$103.56 annually)
- \$19.63 monthly (\$235.56 annually)
- \$41.63 monthly (\$499.56 annually)
- \$83.63 monthly (\$1,003.56 annually)







Yahara River sediment removal southeast of Lake Kegonsa near County Highway B. This is Phase II of a five-phase plan that will help reduce flooding for all lakes once completed in 2026. Photo courtesy Robert Bertera.

# UPDATES AROUND THE WATERSHED

## MANURE DIGESTER

Last fall, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced budget approval for a \$3 million feasibility study for a community-scale manure treatment facility. The study will look at potential sites, technology options, and cost. In August, the County announced it released a Request for Proposal (RFP) to obtain bids from consultants to perform the feasibility study. Dane County Land and Water Resource Department staff is working with a technical work group of local farmers and agronomists who will assist in the selection of consultants.

This community-scale manure processing facility would be a huge win for the lakes as it tackles a top-priority need identified in *RENEW THE BLUE: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Beaches in the Yahara Watershed* (2022), ([cleanlakesalliance.org/renew-the-blue](http://cleanlakesalliance.org/renew-the-blue)). The updated roadmap, developed and lead by a diverse coalition of 19 community groups, offers an updated blueprint for cleaner lakes and beaches.

Manure spread onto frozen land can lead to phosphorus delivery to the lakes, which fuels cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms in the summer. The goal of the new facility is to treat 300 million gallons of manure each year from roughly 30,000 cows.

## "SUCK THE MUCK"

Officially called Legacy Sediment Removal, but more commonly referred to as "Suck the Muck," this multi-year project run by the Dane County Land and Water Resources

Department aims to remove phosphorus-laden sediment from streambeds in the Yahara Watershed. The goal is to remove the sediment and associated phosphorus before it can make its way into the lakes.

Phase one of the project started in 2017 in Dorn Creek. Using a hydraulic dredge, the sediment is removed from the creek bed and pumped into a dewatering basin. The basins are then restored to native prairie cover that will reduce runoff and increase stormwater infiltration. The project continued each year with new areas such as Token Creek, lower Sixmile Creek, and Nine Springs Creek being tackled.

In October of 2022, Dane County purchased 128 acres along Door Creek in the Town of Dunn that will allow "Suck the Muck" progress to continue. This summer, the area was the latest "Suck the Muck" target which will help reintroduce a wetland at that location in 2024.

## MONONA WATERFRONT

In May, a plan put together by design firm Sasaki was chosen for the redesign of the Monona Waterfront. The plan calls to add such features as an elevated boardwalk, amphitheater and stage, beaches, event lawns, and playground. It also calls to expand the Monona Terrace with a waterfront restaurant, boathouse and community center, and nature center.

In June, Sasaki designers met with representatives from Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin Department of Natural





Clean Lakes Alliance, along with leading professionals in the areas of water ecology, lake health, and stormwater management, met with designers from Sasaki in June 2023

Resources, the University of Wisconsin, and Clean Lakes Alliance to talk through design elements and next steps. The ad-hock committee running the Monona Waterfront design project will present an official master plan to the Common Council this month for approval.

## WILLOW CREEK

In summer 2022, UW-Madison, in partnership with University Research Park, began a planning process to reimagine and redesign the West Campus. Development and implementation of the "West Campus District Plan" will take place over the next 30 years to improve research, teaching, learning, healthcare, industry, and community connections, as well as transform the area into a green infrastructure destination. Located in this area is Willow Creek, the end-of-pipe water course to a 1,900-acre urban watershed. So far, the team has held over 100 stakeholder meetings or events – including a Clean Lakes 101 Science Café presentation, to share and gather feedback about the different needs and priorities.

This summer, the University continued to pursue donor, grant, and internal funding opportunities along the Bakke Recreation & Wellbeing Center portion of the creek. The West Campus District Plan is nearing completion and has identified a Phase 1 development opportunity on the current Biotron Laboratory site directly adjacent to Willow Creek. If this project were to go forward, it would include completion of the portion of Willow Creek immediately adjacent. The project is holding a 75-foot setback from the creek for improvements that may include: slope stabilization and erosion control, native vegetation and habitat creation, path connection between Linden Drive and Observatory Drive, and creation of a seating node with connectivity back to any new development. Improvements would further reinforce the establishment of Willow Creek as a campus gateway while improving the ecological function of this stretch of the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve.



James Tye (Clean Lakes Alliance) speaking in September 2022 at Dane County's announcement of planning for a community-scale manure treatment facility



Rendering of final preferred conceptual master plan from "Willow Creek Master Plan - Advanced Planning Report," SmithGroup, January 2022



# CELEBRATING OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our Volunteer Day program is one of the many ways Clean Lakes Alliance works with Lake Partners and community members to build awareness and take action for our lakes. Running from spring to fall each year, this near-weekly program connects volunteers with several locations around the Yahara Watershed for hands-on, lake-benefiting work to care for the landscapes that surround our beloved water bodies.

We partner with local organizations that act as host-site partners in order to facilitate this volunteerism and connect those who want to come together to make a positive difference in the health of our lakes. Host-site partners include Dane County Parks, City of Madison Parks, City of Middleton, Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Holy Wisdom Monastery, UW-Madison Lakeshore Nature Preserve, UW-Madison Arboretum, Monona Parks Department, and Wild Warner.

In 2023, we worked with 23 businesses and organizations at more than a dozen different locations around the Yahara chain of lakes. Projects included:

- Beach and litter cleanups at Olbrich Park, Vilas Park, and San Damiano
- Native pollinator planting at Warner Park
- Seed collections at Holy Wisdom Monastery, Lake Farm County Park, Pheasant Branch Conservancy, and Badger Prairie County Park
- Invasive species removal at the UW-Madison Arboretum, UW-Madison Lakeshore Nature Preserve, Warner Park, Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Cherokee Marsh, and Marshall Park

The Volunteer Day program centers on building a community of watershed stewards devoted to improving the quality of our lakes, streams, lands, and waters. These volunteer events can have far-reaching benefits for the health and wellness of both our lakes and the people that live, work, and play around them. As part of the Volunteer Day experience, many Lake Partners also participated in a Lunch & Learn educational opportunity at their place of business. A huge thank you to our volunteers and host-site partners for their dedication to our lakes!

## 2023 PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES & ORGANIZATIONS

Alliant Energy Foundation  
American Family Insurance  
American Transmission Company  
Baker Tilly US  
CG Schmidt  
Destination Madison  
Edgewater Resources  
Exact Sciences  
Greater Madison Area Postal  
Customer Council  
Heartland Credit Union  
Hovde Foundation  
Hydrite Chemical Company  
Illumina Inc.  
Johnson Financial Group  
Lake Ridge Bank  
Lands' End  
Leidos  
National Guardian Life Insurance  
Company  
Perkins Coie LLP  
Shive-Hattery Inc.  
Sprinkman Real Estate  
Yahara Software



Volunteers from CG Schmidt plant native plants at Warner Park, June 2023



Removing woody invasives from UW-Madison Lakeshore Nature Preserve with National Guardian Life Insurance Company and Hovde Foundation



Removing aquatic plants from the Olbrich Park Beach shoreline of Lake Monona with Perkins Coie LLP and Destination Madison

Lands' End Volunteer Day at Pheasant Branch Conservancy, August 2023







Ice and open water on Lake Mendota near Tenney Park on December 20, 2022, courtesy Robert Bertera. Lake Mendota officially froze on December 25, 2022.

# FROZEN LAKE FUN!

## FROZEN ASSETS 5K RUN/WALK

Join us on Saturday, February 3rd, 2024, for the 5th annual Frozen Assets 5K Run/Walk. Shake up your fitness routine and see Madison from a whole new perspective – from frozen Lake Mendota! The Frozen Assets 5K Run/Walk truly is a bucket list experience – this event is one of the only races worldwide to be held ENTIRELY on a frozen lake.

Learn more: [cleanlakesalliance.org/5K](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/5K)

Frozen Assets 5K on Lake Mendota, February 2023



## MENDOTA FREEZE CONTEST

The 12th annual Mendota Freeze Contest begins on Friday, December 1st, and brings attention to the year-round importance of our lakes. The contest asks people to guess the official ice-on date for Lake Mendota. All entries to correctly guess the date will be entered to win a prize.

To enter a guess and view the contest rules, visit: [mendotafreeze.org](https://mendotafreeze.org)

## FROZEN ASSETS FUNDRAISER

Join us on Saturday, January 27th, 2024, for the return of Madison's most fashionable fundraiser. Tickets will go on sale on Wednesday, November 1st to Friends and Lake Partners only. We anticipate all tickets will be sold to this group. To ensure you are eligible to purchase tickets, make sure to make your Friend or Lake Partner donation today!

Become a Friend or Lake Partner: [cleanlakesalliance.org/donate](https://cleanlakesalliance.org/donate)







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## CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE LAKE-O-GRAM FALL 2023

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