

Oconto County Lakes Project

OCONTO FALLS POND STUDY

SUMMARY REPORT

2018

*University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and
Oconto County Staff and Citizens*

Oconto County Lakes Project Reports:

**State of the
Oconto County
Lakes**

**Lake Study
Summary
Reports**

**Operational Strategy and
Plan for Surface Water
Management and
Protection**

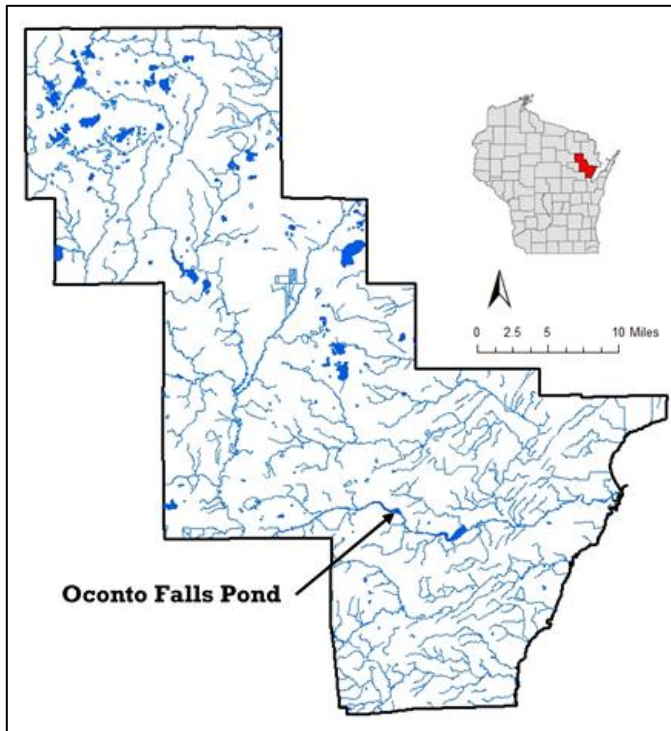
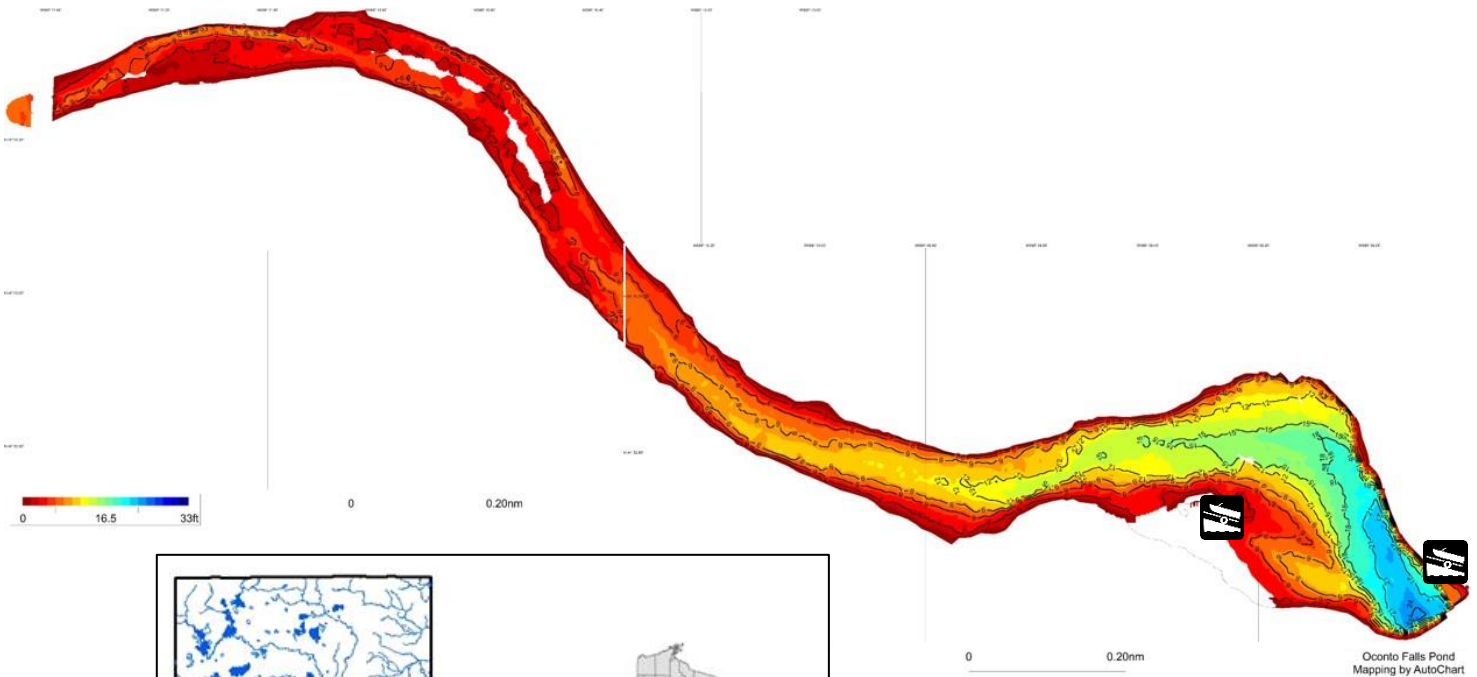
**Lake
Management
Plans**



Center for Watershed Science and Education
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Background

- ◆ Oconto Falls Pond is a 180-acre impoundment in southern Oconto County with a maximum depth of 28 feet.
- ◆ Water enters Oconto Falls Pond from the Oconto River (and groundwater) on the west end and leaves via a dam on the east end. Surface water runoff and direct precipitation also contribute water.
- ◆ Visitors have access to the lake from two public boat landings.
- ◆ This report summarizes data collected during the 2016-2017 lake study.



Township of Oconto Falls

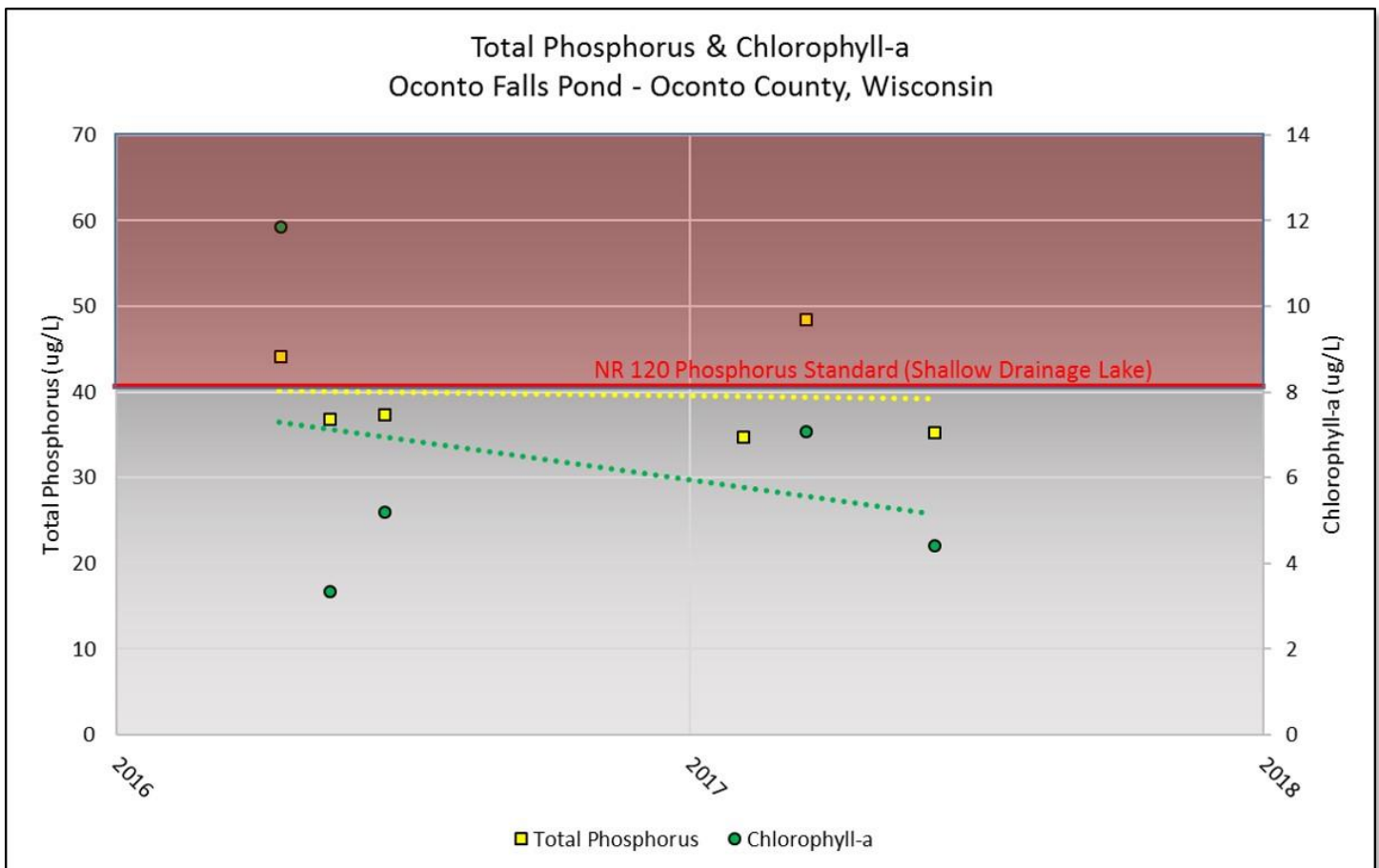
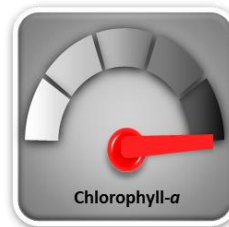
Surface Area: 180 acres

Maximum Depth: 28 feet

Water Quality

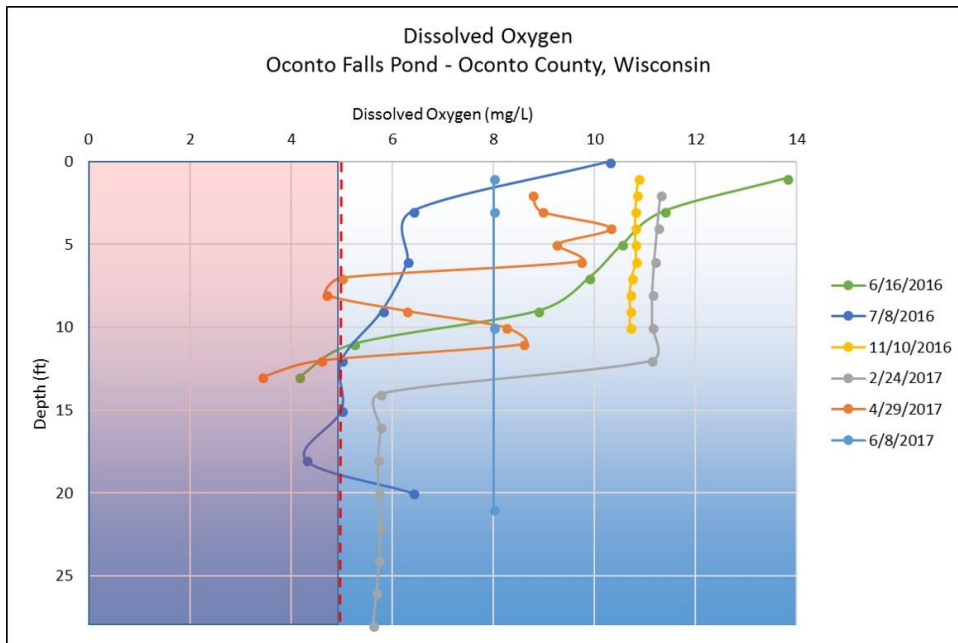
Nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen are what feed aquatic plants and algae in a lake. Excessive amounts of nutrients delivered to a lake will result in abundant plant and algae growth. Disturbance within a watershed combined with the landscape's inability to infiltrate and filter runoff is what primarily delivers nutrients to a lake.

- ◆ Total Phosphorus was occasionally **above** the Wisconsin state phosphorus standard of 40 ug/L for shallow drainage lakes during the two-year study, however, the 2-year trend is stable.
- ◆ Inorganic nitrogen (0.28 mg/L) was just below the threshold of 0.3 mg/L when algal blooms increase.
- ◆ Chlorophyll-a, an indirect measure of algae, was occasionally above the threshold of 6 ug/L when algae blooms tend to increase. Limited data shows a decreasing trend.



Water Quality

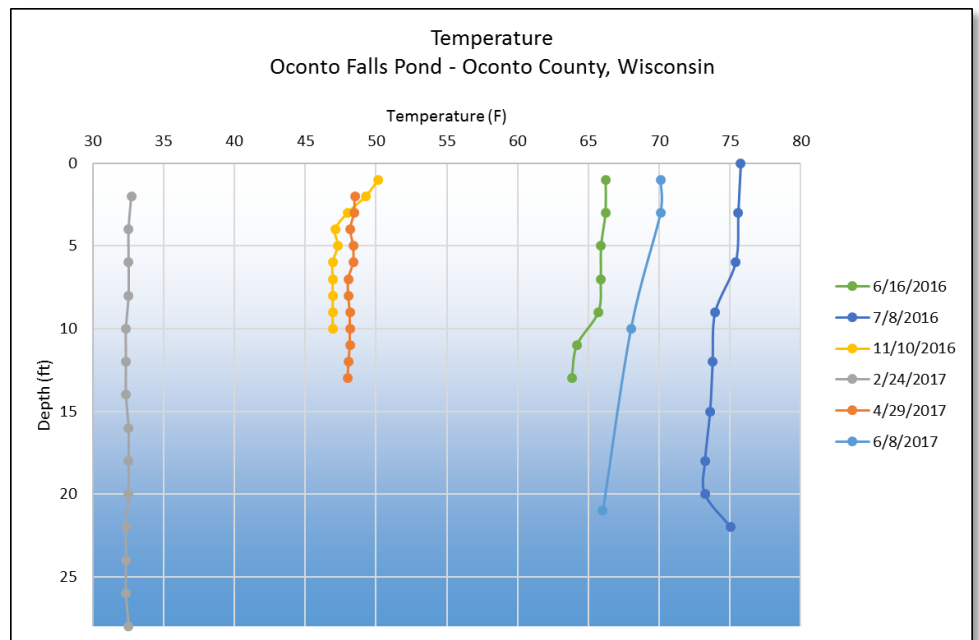
Sufficient **dissolved oxygen** in lake water is essential to the survival of aquatic organisms. The amount of dissolved oxygen present within a lake varies by season and depth. It is determined by the biological activity that consumes or produces oxygen, by water mixing through wind, changes in temperature, and inputs of surface and groundwater. Generally, at least 5 mg/L oxygen is required for fish.



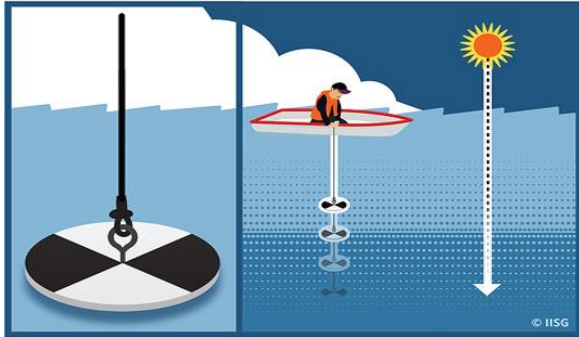
◆ The lake is well mixed with sufficient oxygen available in the top 8 feet of the water column in Oconto Falls Pond throughout the year.

Lake water **temperature** has a significant impact on water chemistry, spatial distribution of fish, microbial growth and oxygen content.

◆ There is little temperature gradient in Oconto Falls Pond. Profiles are relatively uniform most of the year, typical of a shallow, mixed lake.

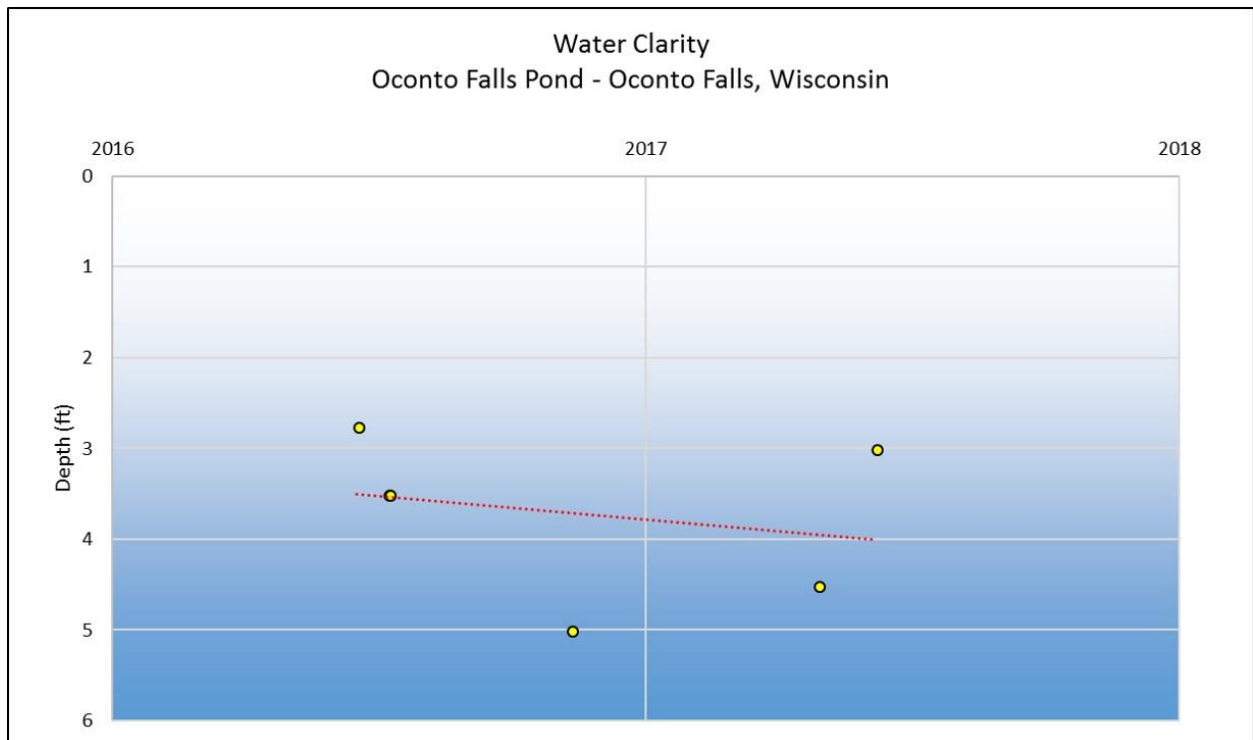


Water Quality



Water clarity is a measure of how deep light can penetrate (Secchi depth). Clarity is affected by water color, turbidity (suspended sediment), and algae. Water clarity helps determine where rooted aquatic plants can grow.

- In general, water clarity is considered poor in Oconto Falls Pond. No trend is apparent from the limited data available.



Other chemistry data was collected from lake water samples, such as basic cations, pollutants and acid rain input, and physical parameters. Results of such analyses can provide insights into a variety of other potential impacts to the lake. While concentrations of these compounds in lake water is usually low, higher concentrations can be indicators of other potential issues.

- ◆ Concentrations of potassium (1.6 mg/L), chloride (5.7 mg/L) and sodium (3.5 mg/L) were all relatively low. This suggests minimal impact from septic systems, road salt, animal waste and fertilizers.
- ◆ DACT, a screening tool to determine if your lake is being impacted by pesticides, was not detected.
- ◆ Water in Oconto Falls Pond is moderately hard (107 mg/L CaCO₃), having an elevated level of dissolved minerals which can bind with phosphorus making it less available to algae blooms.

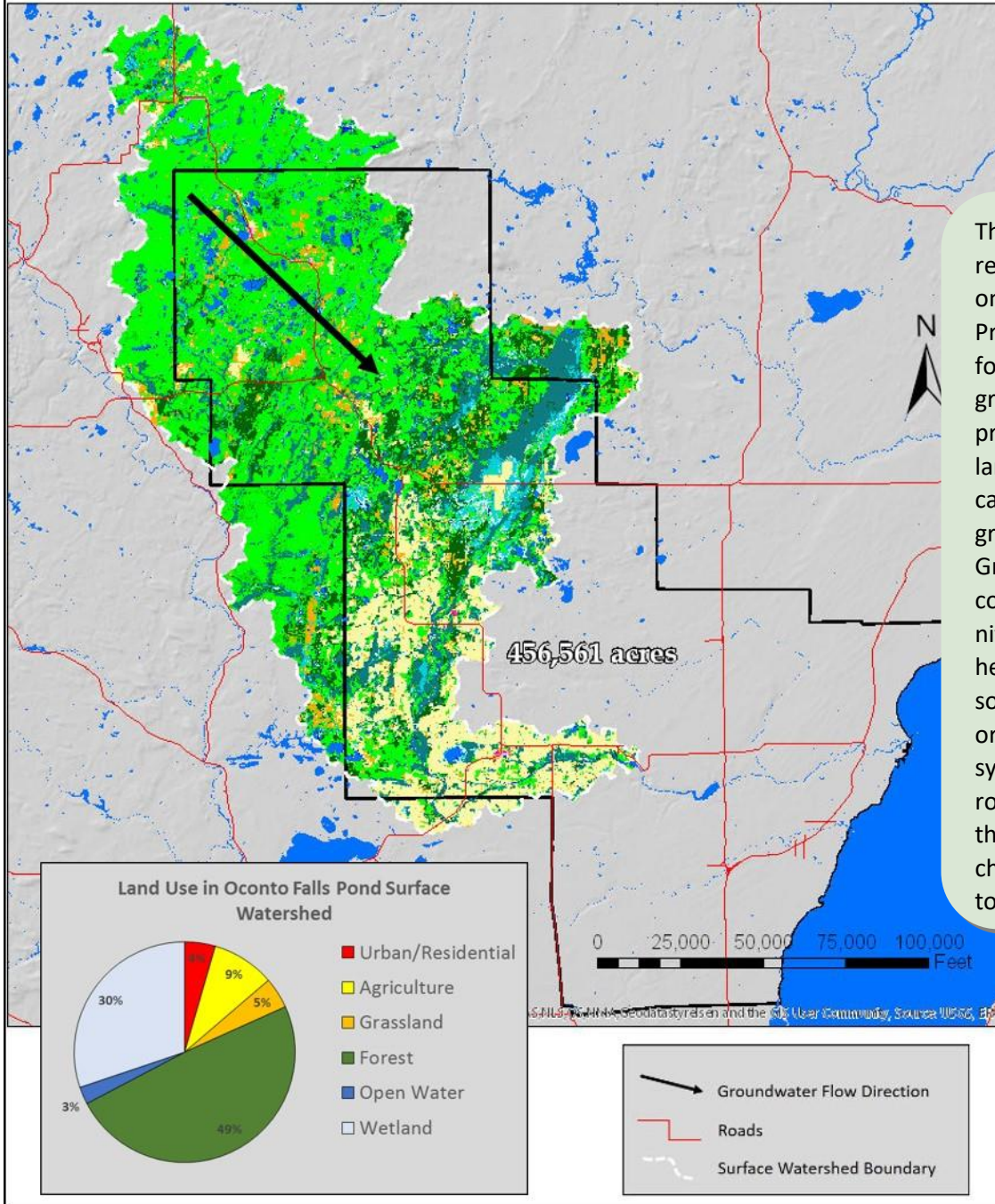


For more information on how to interpret your lake's water quality data, please refer to the "State of the Oconto County Lakes Report" that is on file with Oconto County.

Groundwater provides water to lakes in Oconto County throughout the entire year. Hard surfaces on the landscape prevent water from soaking into the ground and becoming groundwater. This results in less water flowing to the lake during snowmelt and rain events. Water that does not infiltrate to groundwater becomes **surface runoff** flowing across the surface of the landscape where it can move sediment and contaminants to the lake from within its watershed.



Oconto Falls Pond Surface Watershed & Groundwater Flow



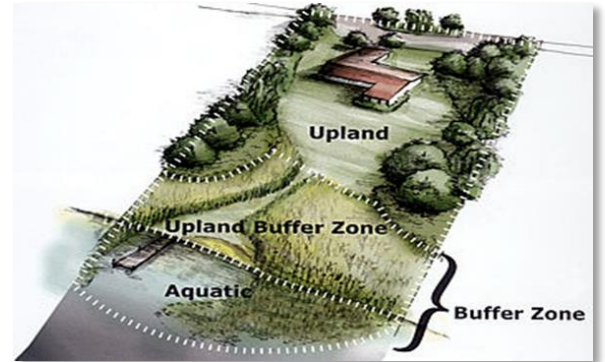
The quality of groundwater reflects what is happening on the land surface. Precipitation falling on forests produces clean groundwater, whereas precipitation falling on land that has chemical use can leach contaminants to groundwater. Groundwater contamination may include nitrogen, pesticides, herbicides and other soluble chemicals originating from septic systems, crops, barnyards, road de-icing, etc. Once in the groundwater, these chemicals move slowly towards a lake or river.

Shorelands

Shoreland vegetation is critical to a healthy lake's ecosystem. It provides habitat for many aquatic and terrestrial animals including birds, frogs, turtles, and many small and large mammals. It also helps to improve the quality and quantity of the runoff that flows across the landscape towards the lake. Healthy shoreland vegetation includes a mix of tall, native grasses/flowers, shrubs and trees.

- Shorelands around Oconto Falls Pond were surveyed in August 2017. Much of Oconto Falls Pond's shoreland is healthy, but many stretches are in need of restoration.

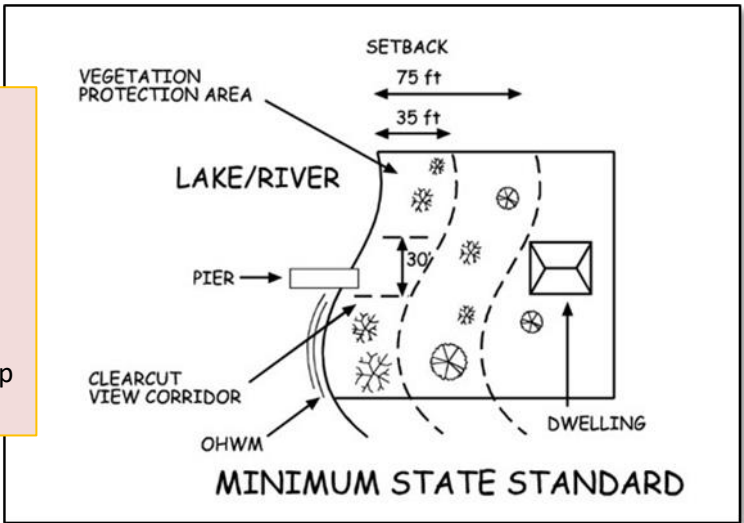
Total lakefront footage	No. Riparian lots	Measured shoreland disturbance (feet)	Measured shoreland disturbance (%)
28,100	88	9,626	34%



State Shoreland Zoning Ordinance
NR 115 Wisc. Adm. Code for Unincorporated Municipalities

No vegetation within 35 feet of the lake's edge shall be removed except for:

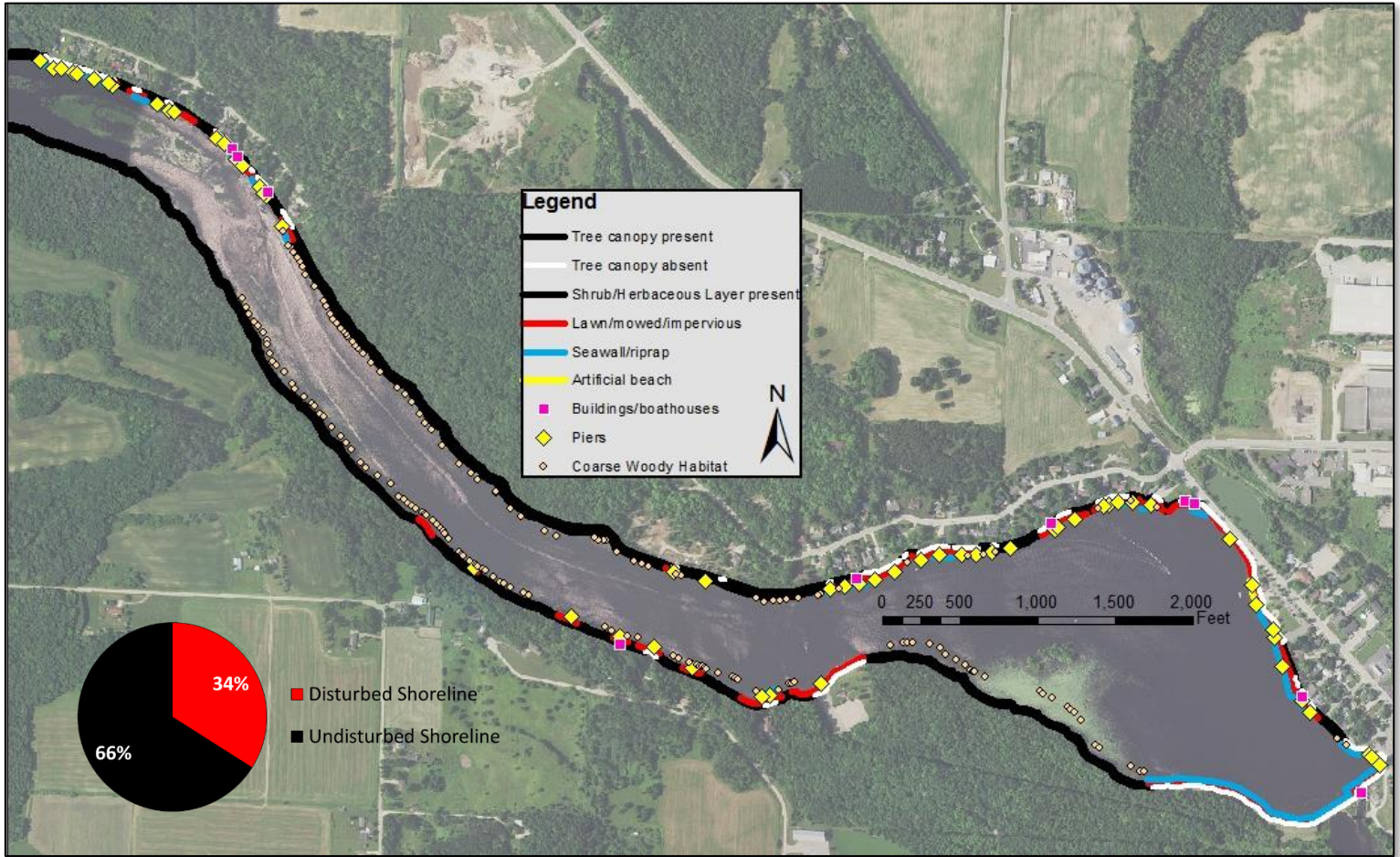
- Up to 30% of shoreline may be removed of shrubs and trees for a view corridor
- A mowed or constructed pedestrian path up to 5 feet wide to access lake



What Can You Do To Help Oconto Falls Pond?

- ✓ Leave natural shoreland vegetation in place or restore if it has been removed.
- ✓ Learn to identify and look for invasive plants and animals and know who to contact if found.
- ✓ Do not purchase prohibited and restricted species. Purchase native plants when possible.
- ✓ Never transplant water garden or aquarium plants into lakes, streams or wetlands. Properly dispose of them.
- ✓ Remove invasive exotic plants from your landscape and replace them with native plants or non-invasive exotics. Scout regularly for new invasive plants.
- ✓ Avoid using garden plants from other regions whose invasive potential is poorly understood.

Shorelands



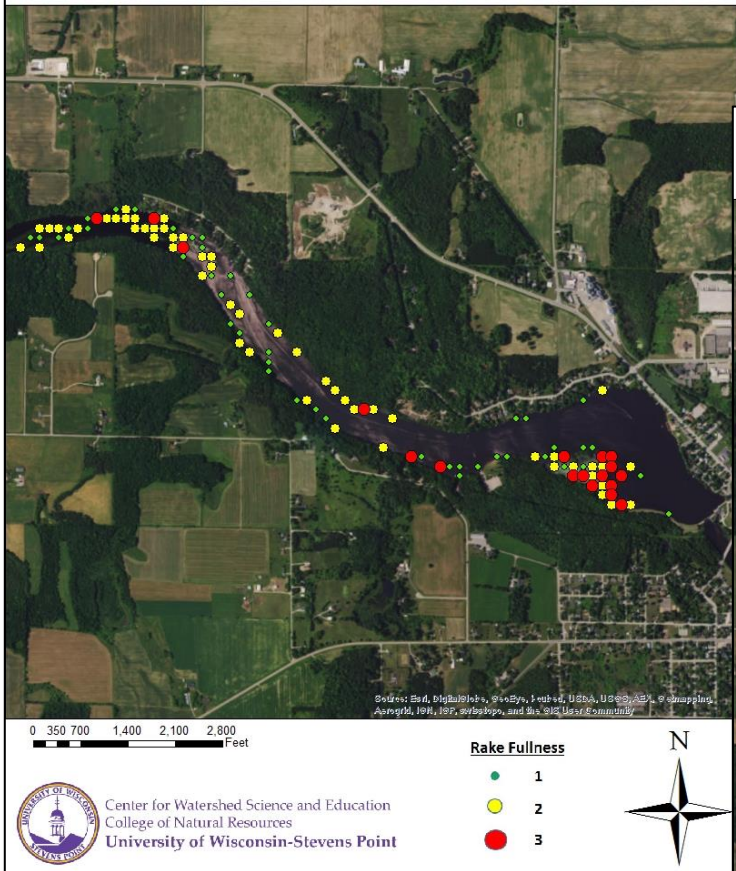
Modifications, Structures, Erosion	Measured Occurrence
Artificial Beach	115 ft
Rip Rap	2,555 ft
Sea Wall	565 ft
Impervious Surface	1,055 ft
Mowed Lawn	8,540 ft
Erosion	210 ft
Nonconforming Buildings	9
Piers	57
Coarse Woody Habitat	32 logs/mile

Aquatic Plants

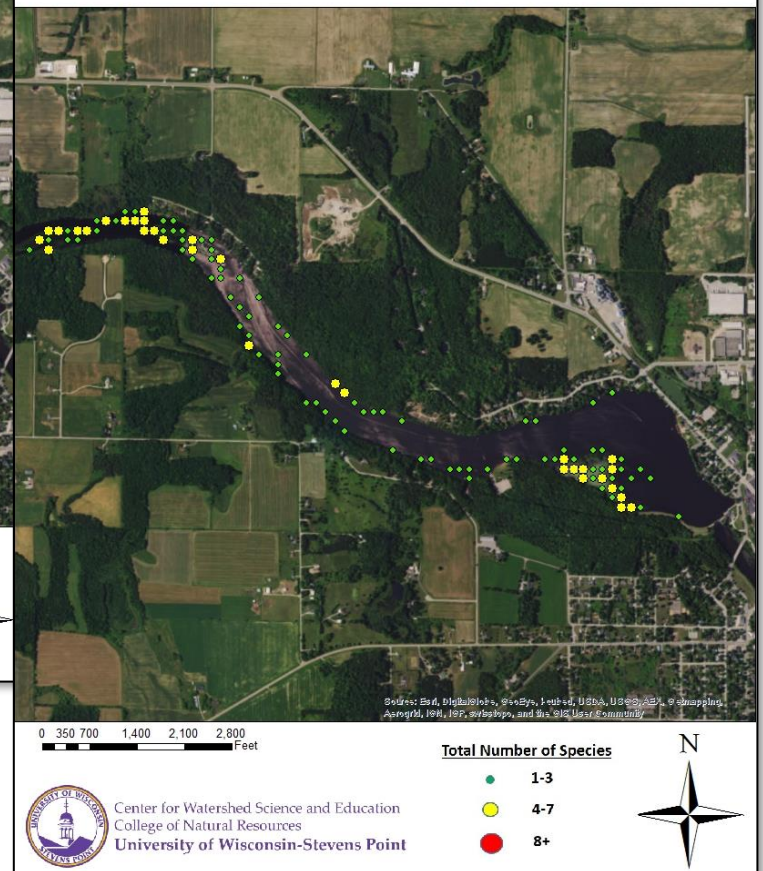
Aquatic plants are the forest landscape within a lake. They provide food and habitat for terrestrial and aquatic creatures such as fish, ducks, turtles, invertebrates and other animals. They increase oxygen levels in the water and utilize nutrients that would otherwise be used by algae. A healthy lake typically has a variety of aquatic plant species creating diversity that can help to prevent the establishment of aquatic invasive species.

- The aquatic plant community Oconto Falls Pond is characterized by quality vegetation with a floristic quality index (22.1) slightly above the regional average. A total of 24 species were observed in the 2017 survey.
- During the 2017 aquatic plant survey of Oconto Falls Pond, 31% of the sites visited had vegetative growth. The maximum depth of vegetation was 6.5 feet.
- The most frequently encountered plant species were coontail (46%), wild celery (41%) and common waterweed (36%). All three species are native to Wisconsin.

Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Rake Fullness

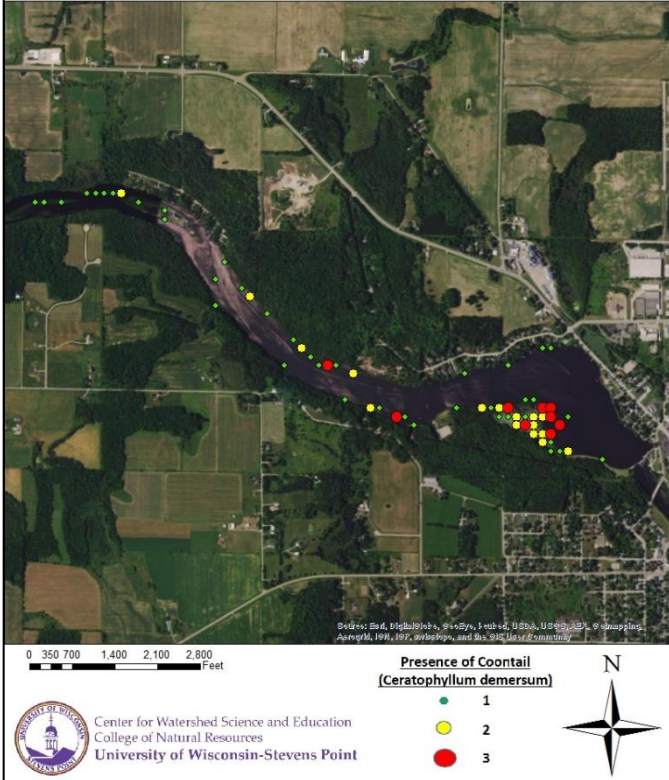


Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Total Number of Species



Aquatic Plants

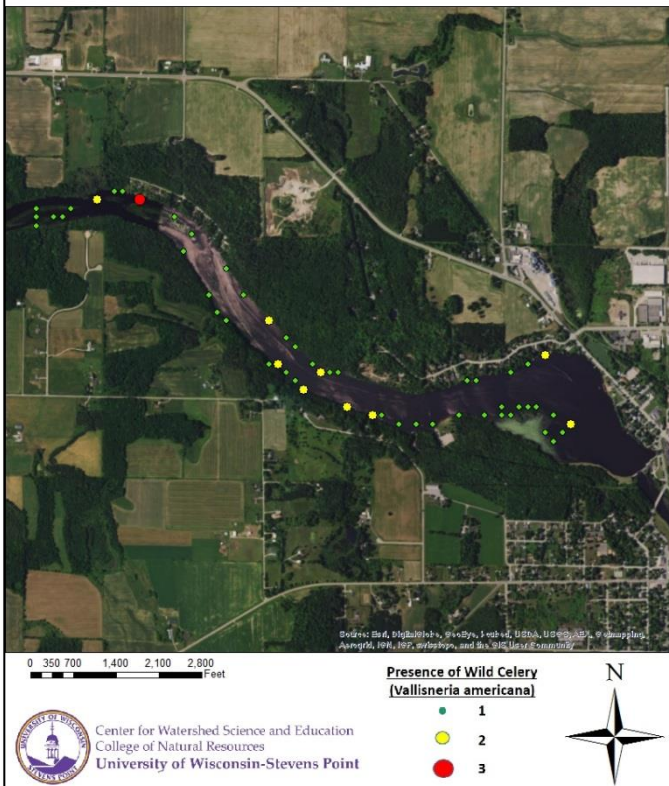
Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Coontail (*Ceratophyllum demersum*)



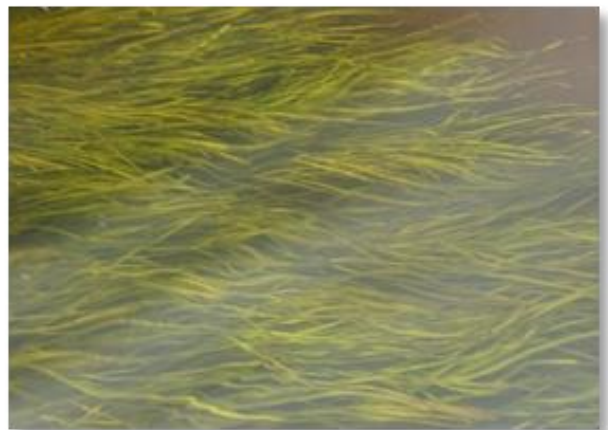
Coontail, which lacks true roots, can form dense mats just below the surface. It is usually in calm, nutrient-rich water and provides habitat for young fish and other aquatic animals. Waterfowl will eat the seeds and foliage.



Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Wild celery (*Vallisneria americana*)

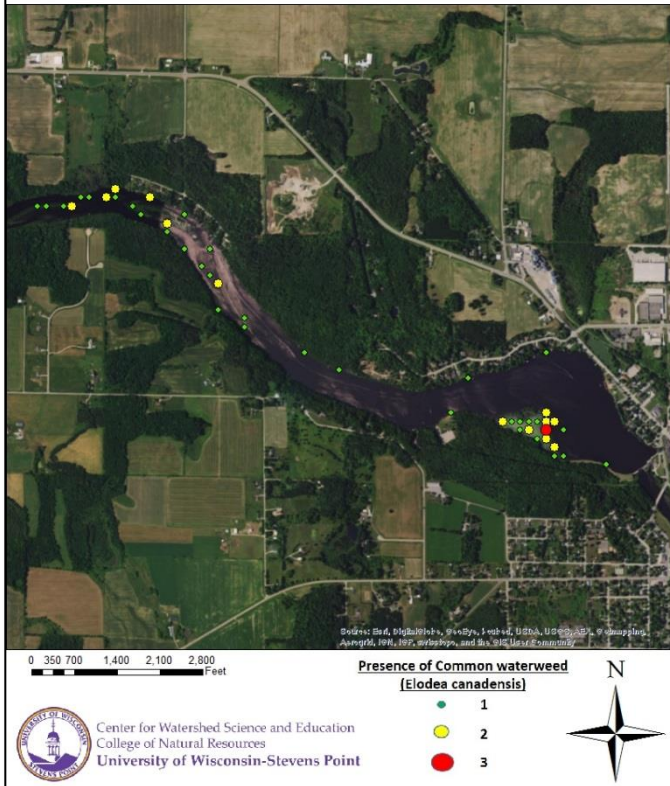


Wild celery has long, thin, ribbon-like leaves that are commonly up to four feet long. The seeds, roots and leaves are consumed by ducks and other waterfowl. Water celery provides excellent habitat for fish.



Aquatic Plants

Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017: Common waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*)



Common waterweed is a common and widespread plant in Wisconsin lakes. It is important forage and cover for aquatic animals and an important food source for waterfowl.



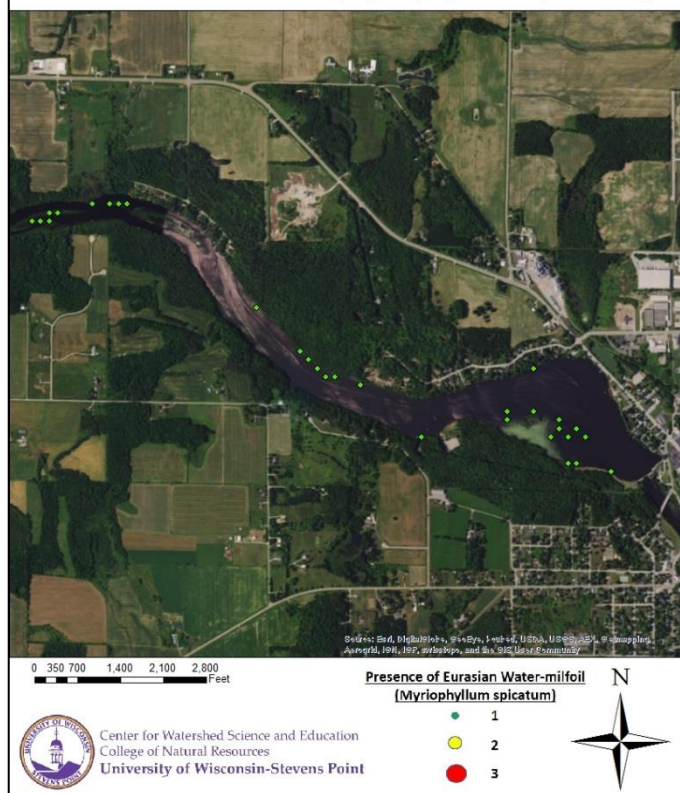
Aquatic **invasive species** are non-native aquatic plants and animals that are most often unintentionally introduced into lakes by lake users. In some lakes, aquatic invasive plant species can exist as a part of the plant community, while in other lakes populations explode, creating dense beds that can damage boat motors, make areas non-navigable, inhibit activities like swimming and fishing, and disrupt the lakes' ecosystems.

- ✓ Eurasian water-milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed were both observed in the 2017 aquatic plant survey.
- ✓ Eurasian water-milfoil (2000), Zebra mussel (2005), Chinese Mystery snail (2013), Curly-leaf pondweed (2013), Flowering Rush (2013), and Yellow iris (2014) have been previously documented in Oconto Falls Pond.



Aquatic Plants

Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Eurasian water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)



Eurasian water-milfoil is one of the most common invasive aquatic plants in Wisconsin. It can form dense mats that choke out native plants and inhibit navigation. New plants can grow from stem fragments that root on contact with the substrate.



Oconto Falls Pond Aquatic Plant Survey 2017:
Curly-leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*)



Curly-leaf pondweed invades freshwater lakes and can become dominant due to its tolerance of a variety of habitats. CLP grows primarily during the winter and dies off by June, just as water is warming up, which can drastically increase nutrient concentrations.



Acknowledgments

This report was prepared as an appendix to the Oconto County State of the Lakes Report, which is on file with the Oconto County Land Conservation Department. Written and prepared by the Center for Watershed Science and Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

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Acknowledgments

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