# AIS Education and Outreach Grant Final Report

Wheeler Lake Association

Grant Project: AEPP82125

# Wheeler Lake Association

Our purpose is to preserve and protect Wheeler Lake and its surroundings, and to enhance the water quality, fishery, boating safety and aesthetic values of Wheeler Lake, as a public recreational facility for today and for future generations.

2025 President: Kristine Cominsky

WLA Internship Coordinator: Greg Jensen

wheelerlakeassociation@gmail.com

# Grant Project Description

The Wheeler Lake Association (WLA) is sponsoring a project to develop an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Education and Outreach Program to build resident engagement and enhance resident comprehension of WLA's AIS management. To sufficiently achieve this level of participation and sustained support, activities and deliverables include offering free and accessible AIS educational trainings, events, and materials led by WLA's Summer Interns.

# Project Problem Statement

The WLA's development of an AIS Education and Outreach Program for Wheeler Lake will increase outreach opportunities for residents and visitors to learn about and participate in aquatic invasive species management. Garnering more collaboration between lake residents and the lake association fosters decisions that accommodate both groups and more importantly the AIS management for Wheeler Lake. Increased resident education and monitoring efforts will facilitate better discussion, informed management decisions that coincide with both parties' intent, and overall unity between residents and WLA.

# Grant Project Deliverables

A final report discussing program and event survey results, participant feedback, and raw reflections from each intern of their own successes, challenges, and necessary improvements will be submitted by the two WLA interns by the end of the grant cycle.

# Grant Funded Activities

WHEELER LAKE

# 2025 AIS Education Grant Activities

- Hiring of two interns for WLA's AIS Management Internship Program
- Piloting of AIS Monitoring Program
- Organizing and hosting AIS Discovery Day

# WLA Internship Program

WHEELER LAKE

# Wheeler Lake AIS Management Summer Internship Program

## 1.a. Activity:

To ensure the WLA's AIS Education and Outreach program will be organized and subsequent events offered to residents, the WLA will hire two interns for the 2025 summer by April 2025: one intern will be rehired for the first half of the 2025 summer and the second intern will be hired for the entire 2025 summer.

The trainings, events, and overall AIS Education and Outreach Program mentioned below will serve as the guide for the WLA Summer 2025 Interns to complete by end of summer. At the end of each program, a reflection using a survey will be offered and completed by participants to determine overall thoughts and comprehension of presented information. Results and feedback from these surveys will determine what improvements are necessary in order to foster success and futurity of each program.

# Meet the 2025 WLA Interns


Grace Farrell

Claire Pommerich

# Meet the 2025 WLA Interns

## Grace Farrell

UWSP Class of 2027 - Fisheries and Water Resources
Soil Science and Political Science Minors
Wetland Science and GIS Certificates

Second Summer as WLA Intern

Favorite Internship Memory: AIS Monitoring Surveys

## Claire Pommerich

UWSP Class of 2028 - Fisheries and Water Resources

First summer as WLA intern
Favorite Internship Memory: Boat breaking down on 3 separate occasions

# AIS Monitoring Program

WHEELER LAKE

# Wheeler Lake AIS Monitoring Program

## 1.c. Activity:

The two interns will organize, promote, and head WLA's AIS Monitoring Program. The program will align with the active goal stated in Wheeler Lake's CLMP: implement and maintain an aquatic invasive species monitoring program that will survey for invasive species, and if found, monitor their locations and extent of population spread. The program will be introduced at WLA's Spring member meeting to outline recruitment opportunities and train volunteers. The program itself consists of increasing opportunities for residents to become involved and proficient in identification and monitoring of Wheeler Lake for aquatic invasive species. The WLA's AIS Monitoring Program will increase the quantity of available data for AIS location and density which will aid in earlier and more effective responses to WLA's EWM and AIS management plans.

The program will consist of identifying at least 5 volunteers to preform bi-monthly meander littoral zone surveys and meander survey in historically EWM populated areas. The surveys and volunteer training will follow the Early Detection Monitoring protocol. Location of EWM and new AIS colonies will be recorded and mapped with points while the density of EWM and new AIS colonies will be decided by the rake fullness scale 0-3, with 0 being none to a few plants and 3 equaling the entire rake head covered. To collect data, the WLA will purchase the Garmin GPSMAP(r) 64 to record the coordinate mappings.

# AIS Monitoring Program

Six shoreline meander surveys were conducted by the 2025 summer interns between April and August

| | |
|---|---|
| 4/28 | 6/16 |
| 5/5 | 7/25 |
| 5/31 | 8/4 |

These surveys documented the location and density of EWM plant communities.

This data was sent to Flambeau Engineering in which maps were generated to better analyze seasonal and historical trends between EWM location and density.

The 2025 surveys assisted in determining priority treatment areas during Wheeler Lake's DASH treatment in August 2025.

# AIS Monitoring Program

Throughout the summer, the interns and volunteers conducted multiple Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) surveys around Wheeler lake using the new GPS system recently purchased with grant funds. While there was a learning curve at first, the interns were able to conduct successful surveys. Fifteen volunteer hours were recorded.

With help from Flambeau Engineering, maps were generated to identify the location and density of EWM around Wheeler Lake. Throughout the AIS Monitoring program, several small, dense colonies were found; nothing as extensive as Summer 2024 growth.

Most EWM was concentrated on the north side of the lake, particularly around rocky areas. The densest patches were in the Northeast Bay and in the boat landing bay. The surveys also documented scattered or single EWM plants across various parts of the lake.

A few key takeaways from this survey include the importance of having a reliable boat. Unfortunately, there were reoccurring mechanical issues, which prevented completing surveys on time and with ease.

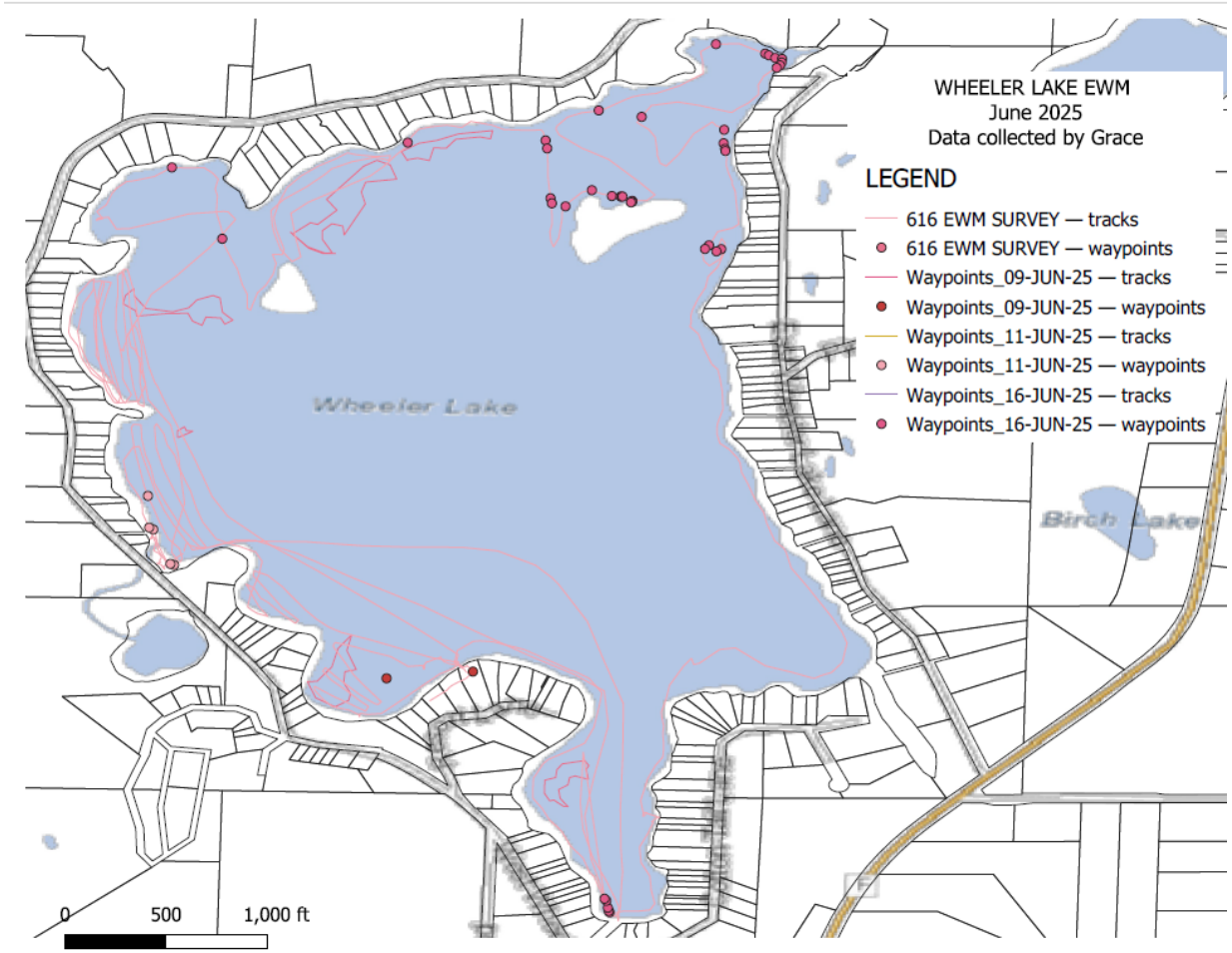
Another improvement would be adding a third person to the team. With only two people, one operating the boat and GPS and the other surveying, it was difficult to maintain accuracy, and we likely missed some areas and plants. Adding another team member, especially a Wheeler Lake resident, would help increase efficiency and coverage for future surveys.

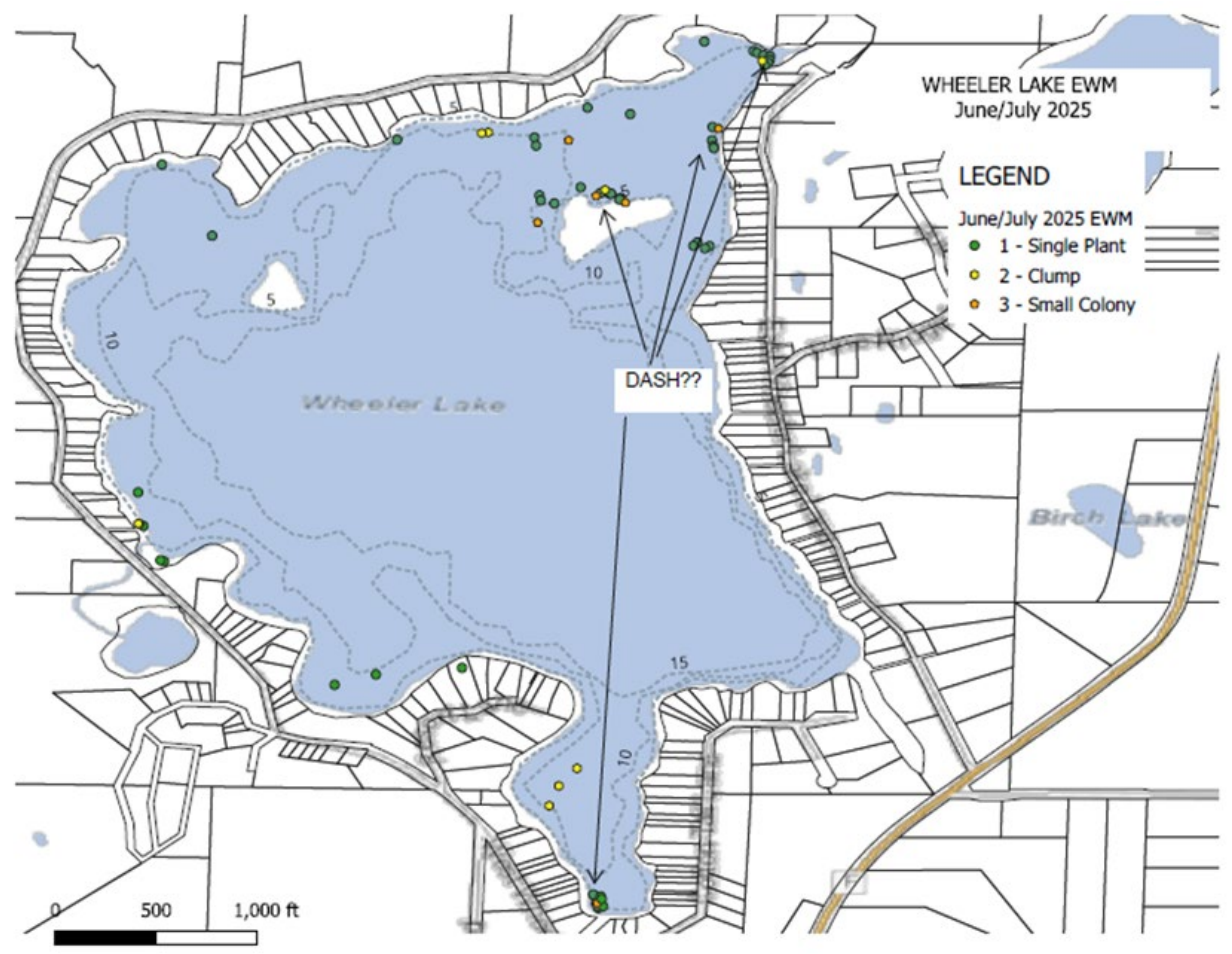
# AIS Monitoring Survey Results

**Observations:**

- Dense patches of EWM were found along the north shore of Virgin Island and within Boat Landing Bay
- Many scattered single plants and small developing colonies were observed throughout the lake

**Please note:**
GPS coordinates were collected at each sampling location for all six surveys. However, due to the learning curve and challenges using the mapping software, only two maps were successfully generated over the course of the summer.




June Survey

July Survey

# Intern Reflection - Claire

On June 16th, Grace and I conducted a Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) survey around the lake using the new GPS system recently purchased by the Association. While there was a learning curve at first, we were able to figure it out through some trial and error. Grace successfully uploaded the data and generated a map highlighting all identified areas of EWM. The survey went well overall. We found several small, dense colonies; though nothing as extensive as last year's growth. Most EWM was concentrated on the north side of the lake, particularly around rocky areas. The densest patches were in the Northeast Bay and near the boat landing. We also observed scattered or single EWM plants across various parts of the lake. There is ongoing discussion about the need for a DASH boat this year, and it's likely that one will be engaged on Wheeler Lake. A few key takeaways from this survey include the importance of having a reliable boat. Unfortunately, we experienced mechanical issues twice on the first day, which prevented us from completing the survey in one trip. Although we were eventually able to finish on another day, the boat is currently not working again, delaying further surveys. Another improvement would be adding a third person to the team. With only two people, one operating the boat and GPS and the other surveying, it was difficult to maintain accuracy, and we likely missed some areas and plants. Adding another team member would help increase efficiency and coverage for future surveys. I'd like to advertise more of what we are doing and have more people interested in conducting these surveys with us. Hopefully our discovery day helps people see what we are doing and gets them more engaged and willing to help with more surveys.

# Intern Reflection - Grace

The GPS was not delivered until the second week of June; however, training surveys were completed before the second week mark, just not with GPS data. Once the GPS was delivered, Claire and I went out on June 11th to begin the survey. We used the previous summer GIS maps to identify survey sites based on the Early Monitoring Detection Protocol. The sites were determined based on areas that were chemically treated during the summer of 2024 as well as the public beach and boat landing bays. A complete-lake shoreline survey was also conducted and EWM populations were marked when found. On June 11th, we had difficulty with our boat and could not complete the survey in its entirety; only two sites were completed. We went out again on June 16th and completed the rest of the meander and shoreline surveys.

Some of the difficulties I noted during our survey was less-than-thorough data collection. As we did not have any volunteers for this survey, it was just Claire and I in the boat. One of us had to drive and follow the GPS while the other had to conduct the visual scan and record population densities. With just two people, it was difficult to accurately mark the spots on the GPS while keeping up with the surveyor as well as record densities. One solution to this would be to announce when there will be a survey on the lake and solicit a volunteer. Including a third person would ensure better data collection as well as promote the educational goal of our AIS Education grant. Getting lake residents involved can harbor a greater appreciation for Wheeler Lake as well as a greater responsibility for better stewardship. The data collected from the GPS was sent to Flambeau Engineering and a GIS map was curated. This map is included in the flash drive. This data will be useful when we have DASH on the lake, so we can direct them to problem areas.

Going forward, the AIS Monitoring surveys will be announced on the website and Facebook groups in an effort to connect lake residents to lake management efforts. Hopefully, as the summer goes on, the surveys will become easier to conduct as we become more comfortable with the protocol and help of volunteers.

# AIS Monitoring Program

## Challenges

- General learning curve with survey methodology and GPS technology

- Less than optimal survey conditions during first half of summer
  - Rainy and windy
  - Decreases underwater visibility

- Poor volunteer recruitment due to program's piloting year

## Improvements

- Better communication and advertisement of surveys to ensure increased volunteer participation

- Ensure all waypoints and tracks can be transferred to mapping software

For the future, the AIS Monitoring Program will grow to include more resident volunteer participation. One source of feedback from the WLA Board was to better announce these surveys, so interested board members and other WLA members could assist

# AIS Discovery Day

WHEELER LAKE

# Wheeler Lake AIS Discovery Day

## 1.b. Activity:

The Intern will collaborate with Lumberjack RC&D and FLOW AIS Coordinator, Derek Thorn, to develop and host a Wheeler Lake AIS Discovery day during Invasive Species Action Month (June) to increase public interest and knowledge of AIS I.D. and prevention. Like the state-wide Snapshot Day, this event is Wheeler Lake specific and will focus on documenting Wheeler Lake - specific aquatic invasive species.

# WHEELER LAKE ASSOCIATION

## AIS DISCOVERY DAY

The WLA is hosting an Aquatic Invasive Species Discovery Day to teach participants how to identify AIS and apply those skills out on the lake!

**TRAINING JUNE 21ST @ WAUBEE LODGE**

*AFTER THE ASSOCIATION LUNCH-IN*

**DISCOVERY DAY JUNE 28TH @ 10 AM**

Following the WDNR Snapshot day protocol, the Wheeler Lake Association hosted its own Wheeler Lake-specific Discovery Day with help from WLA interns and FLOW AIS Coordinator, Derek Thorn.

The event was held during Invasive Species Action Month in June. There was a training held before the actual event in which Derek Thorn gave a presentation. This presentation included life history of AIS, identification methods for prevalent AIS in the area, and Snapshot day methodology.

The AIS Discovery Day training was held on June 21$^{st}$ and the AIS Discovery Day event was held on June 28$^{th}$.

# AIS Discovery Day Training

On June 21st, the Wheeler Lake Association hosted a pre-event training session for their AIS Discovery Day with help from Derek Thorn. This event consisted off a presentation explaining the prevalent AIS present in Wheeler Lake, preventative actions, and the overall event procedure/methodology. This training was hosted at a public restaurant in Lakewood, WI and was open to WLA residents and interested community members. Besides the WLA interns and Derek Thorn, **five** participants attended the one-hour training.

**Participant Feedback:**

Participants that attended this event suggested that the training and the actual AIS Discovery Day should be held on the same day to ensure information is retained. Also, if these events are hosted on the same day, more people would be able to attend, since some residents are not full-time residents or they don't want to lose quality time with family while up north.

# Intern Reflections – AIS Discovery Day Training

## Claire:

Our AIS Discovery Day training was held after the associations luncheon at Waubee Lake lodge. We advertised to our best abilities a month prior. We only had one person from the association show up but 4 people from surrounding lakes. Derek Thorn helped us with this presentation with training materials and how to identify EWM. Although not many people showed up the information was very helpful and those who attended were engaged. The attendees asked lots of questions, but did not attend our AIS Snapshot day.

## Grace:

The AIS Discovery Day Training was held after the Wheeler Lake Association Social Lunch at Waubee Lodge. Notice was given a month in advance with several reminder posts. This training was to give additional information for WLA's AIS Discovery Day. FLOW AIS Coordinator, Derek Thorn, presented the information and training materials, he also included a quick CBCW training as well. The collaboration with FLOW seemed helpful to the attendees as they had many questions.

# AIS Discovery Day

On June 28th, Wheeler Lake held its very first AIS Discovery Day. We advertised this event weeks before hand around town, on WLA's Facebook and website and by word of mouth. A total of 18 residents volunteered and participated in the event. FLOW AIS Coordinator Derek Thorn joined us to teach residents how to identify Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) and distinguish it from native species. Four boats surveyed five designated areas around the lake, using rake toss sampling to collect and document aquatic plants. EWM was found in several locations; however, no additional non-native species were detected, which is encouraging for ongoing lake stewardship efforts. 18 participants attended this two-hour event and four boats were used.

**Participant Feedback:**

Participants said the event was well organized and ran smoothly. They hope to attend another AIS Discovery Day event next summer. The participants enjoyed getting hands-on experience with identifying aquatic plants.






# Event Photos

# Intern Reflections – AIS Discovery Day

## Claire:

On June 28th 2025 Grace and I held wheeler lakes first every AIS Discovery day. Weeks before the event we published flyers around town, ads on wheeler lakes Facebook and added the event to our website. We found that word of mouth and text messaging was the best way for people to attend. The day of we had a total of 18 volunteers show, we also had FLOW AIS coordinator Derek Thorn come out to teach residents what Eurasian Water Milfoil is. Overall, the event went extremely well, we had 4 boats go out and survey 5 different areas of the lake. Some EWM was found but no new invasive species. Participants said the event was well organized and ran; they also mentioned they would attend next year. If I had to change anything about the event, I would urge more people to come and advertise to surrounding lakes more to hopefully inspire them to follow in WLA's footsteps.

## Grace:

The first ever WLA AIS Discovery Day was a great success. The event was held at the Wheeler Lake Public Beach and was open to the community. There were 18 eager participants and the weather was perfect. FLOW AIS Coordinator, Derek Thorn, assisted us with outreach materials, surveying rakes, and led the plant identification. Although this event was open to the public, all event participants belonged to Wheeler Lake. Among the 18 participants, 4 families volunteered their pontoons boats, which ensured that every person would get hands-on experience with plant collection methodology and plant identification. For next year, this event will be shared with all neighboring lake associations with at least a month in advance before the event.

# Upcoming Plans

- WLA has applied for another AIS Education Grant to continue their AIS Education and Outreach Program
  - This grant identifies the challenges and successes determined from this summer to build greater involvement and better accessibility within the Lakewood community, neighboring lake associations, and non-profit outreach organizations
  - WLA intern-led activities include AIS Discovery Day, AIS Monitoring Program, AIS Educational events (such as: EWM Life history, EWM management updates, fostering more receptive attitudes and behaviors towards AIS)
- WLA will increase event participation by including other Lake Assoc. thru OCLAWA. This expansion will not only improve attempts to educate WI lake residents but also reduce likelihood of transmission of potential invasive species among local lakes

# From the interns - Thank You!

All volunteers and participants

Wheeler Lake residents and WLA members + board members

Derek Thorn (FLOW AIS)

Tiffiney Kleczewski (Flambeau Engineering)

Amanda Smith + Christine Kozik (Wisconsin DNR)