



The Newsletter of the Yahara Lakes Association

NOVEMBER 2018

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

By Dan Schultz, YLA President



I famously said in our August newsletter that I didn't consider summer to be almost over because I measured summer from pier in day to pier out day. Since I normally take the last of my pier out in November, we were only half way through summer by my measure. In a "be careful what you wish for" irony, I took my pier out in September. Summer is now over!

Many of you took the first steps of understanding the complexities of managing our lakes when you attended the May YLA seminar on managing lake levels. John Reimer, Assistant Director of Dane County Land and Water Resources Department, had an excellent presentation on the hydrology of our lake system and the increasing challenges of managing our lake levels. John and Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi, have recently been giving an updated version of that presentation at a number of different venues this Fall as they discuss the flood initiatives included in the 2019 budget. We were happy to see that the flood initiatives included the three main requests contained in our September letter to the County Executive. A copy of the letter is included in this newsletter. If you can't catch one of the sessions throughout the area, you can find the October 10th presentation at CLA's Yahara Lakes 101 on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s4_47Kj2vc.

I would not be surprised if one of your conclusions from those presentations would be that there is no silver bullet to solve the flooding issue. I hear a lot about changing the target lake levels and while I believe there needs to be a serious consideration to changing the target lake levels on all of our lakes, (not just Lake Mendota), the solution to mitigating the risk of flooding more likely rests with adopting measures to reduce the flow of water into the lakes and increasing the flow out of the lakes.

(continued on page 2)

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FOR MORE LAKE-RELATED INFORMATION

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE	1,2
EXPERTS FOCUS ON LAKE MGMT	3
DANE COUNTY 2019 BUDGET FOR LAKES	3
YLA FLOOD LETTER	4,5
VIEW FROM LAKES & WATERSHED	6
SETTING A WINNING AGENDA FOR LAKES	7
CLA VOLUNTEERS HELP INFORM PUBLIC	8
YLA SURVEY RESULTS	9
CURRENTS	9

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PRESIDENT'S UPDATE *(continued)*

(continued from page 1)

Taking some poetic license, here are my main takeaways from John Reimer's presentation:

- The total amount of water that flows through the Yahara lakes in a typical year far exceeds the targeted lake level range on Lake Mendota. Therefore, efforts to reduce the flow of water into the lake or increase the flow out of the lake offer a greater possibility of success than just changing the lake level.
- With Lake Mendota nearly twice the combined size of Lakes Monona and Waubesa, increasing the storage capacity of Lake Mendota by 6 or 12 inches would have double the effect on the levels in the lower lakes. However, there is a real question whether a lower target lake level could even be reached or if so, consistently maintained.
- The Babcock and Lafollette Dams have been effectively fully open since August of 2016. There is no realistic possibility that the lakes can be managed to stay within their target ranges until we get to the point where we can move more water out of the system than the flow of water into the system. It doesn't matter how many electronic controls we have on the dams downstream if they are always wide open.
- So the key to any long term solution are the dual efforts to control the flow into the system - be it with increased infiltration standards, holding ponds, diversion efforts and the efforts to enhance the flow out by aggressive weed harvesting, removing the chokepoints and obstructions in the river downstream and exploring the potential of developing alternative avenues to divert the flow out of the system. These are the items the technical group created by the County to develop solutions to the flooding issue will have to consider if we are going to have a long term solution to our flooding problems!

This will be my last President's column, as Sal Troia will take over as YLA President in January 2019.

Thank you for your support during a very challenging year. It has been greatly appreciated.

Dan Schultz
President, Yahara Lakes Association

EXPERTS TO FOCUS ON LAKE MANAGEMENT

By Laura Hicklin, Director - Dane County Land & Water Resources Department

Dane County has convened a technical group of experts to assess alternatives for managing the Yahara Chain of Lakes to alleviate flooding. The primary questions that the technical group will consider are: 1. How to manage water levels with increasing volumes of water entering the system, and 2. How to improve the volume of water leaving the Yahara River system.

The technical group will include a core group of hydrology and hydraulic experts, including John Reimer, Assistant Director of the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department, Chin Wu, Professor UW Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and Ken Potter, Professor Emeritus in the UW Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The group will also include experts from the University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Dane County, WDNR and others. Experts, such as limnologists, fishery biologists, and wetland ecologists, will be consulted as ideas emerge. The technical group will prepare a report by February 1, 2019 and will be available for public comment and review when it is complete. A task force convened by the Lakes and Watershed Commission and the Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee will use the technical report to make policy and management recommendations for the Yahara Chain of Lakes. The task force will make their recommendations by March 31, 2019.

DANE COUNTY 2019 BUDGET FOR THE LAKES

Summary compiled from Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi's, Press Release

On September 25th, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and Dane County Board Chair Sharon Corrigan announced \$18 Million to be included in the 2019 Dane County Budget to move water more quickly through the Yahara Chain of Lakes, restore damage to natural areas from flooding, reduce the amount of storm water that comes into the lakes and invest in new equipment to mitigate the impact of future flooding. The budget recommendations include:

- \$2.5 million to address blockages in the Yahara river. This will include dredging compacted sediment, adding additional aquatic plant harvesters and debris removal equipment and addressing bridge crossings that collect debris and slow water flow.
- \$75,000 to model different scenarios on how to best manage lakes levels and identify restriction points in the river. A technical group will be formed to complete the modeling.
- \$1 million matching grant for park and trail repair.
- \$50,000 for stream bank restoration.
- \$750,000 for a new Dane County Conservation Reserve Program to help farmers and property owners convert parts of their at-risk run-off land into prairie and grass.
- \$8 million to secure properties to reduce storm water run-off.
- \$308,000 for fast-fill sand bagging machines, sandbags, flood barriers, pumps and generators.
- \$110,000 for a second Dane County Sheriff's Office airboat, 911 Web reporting and emergency housing for people with special needs.

Please see the YLA letter to Executive Joe Parisi (in this newsletter) which recommended many of these items.

YLA LETTER TO ADDRESS THE RISK OF FLOODING IN THE YAHARA LAKES

By YLA Board of Directors to Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi

September 18, 2018

To: Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

RE: Addressing the risk of flooding in the Yahara Lakes

The Yahara Lakes Association (YLA) appreciates your efforts and leadership to improve the quality of our lakes. The extensive flooding in our community this summer and the potential for even more extreme weather events make it clear that we now need your leadership to address the real risk of catastrophic flooding in the Yahara Chain of Lakes.

The catastrophic impact of the recent flooding on both public and private property owners in Dane County has been estimated to be more than \$154 million. The modeling of the Yahara Lakes flood risk has used parameters from the June 2008 storm that led to the Lake Delton Dam break (the what-if the Lake Delton storm had happened in Madison scenario). Now we have “what-if the August 2018 storm that inundated Middleton/Black Earth and Cross Plains had been located five miles to the east”. We don’t need to settle the question of whether these storms were made more intense by global warming or that there will be an increasing number of storms in the future. We just need to understand that in the last ten years, two storms, within an hour of Madison, have dropped over 12 inches of rain in 24 hours. The recent flooding on the lakes was from 4-5 inches of rain on August 20th and followed by several weeks of on and off rain. Just imagine the damage from one 12 inch rain event.

This is a risk we can no longer ignore and we must take steps now to mitigate the impact. So once again, we need your leadership to address the real risk of catastrophic flooding on the Yahara Chain of Lakes.

As a first step, we request that you include three items in your 2019 Budget.

- 1) **Funding for additional weed harvesting machines and operating funds.** Weed harvesting in the Yahara River, especially between Lake Waubesa and Kegonsa and also between Kegonsa and the Stoughton Dam insures maximum water flow out of the Yahara River.
- 2) **Funding to identify and remove obstructions in the Yahara River.** This summer, water flow out of Lake Kegonsa was effectively stopped by sediment build up under the railroad bridge below Lake Kegonsa. If this happened in one spot, it is likely happening in other locations. The county staff must proactively identify obstructions in the Yahara River that need to be removed and also where dredging is needed.
- 3) **Funding for a technical group of experts to develop options to mitigate the risk of catastrophic flooding from extreme weather events.** Although a stakeholders group along the lines of the previous YLAG groups may be necessary, we understand you also plan to organize a small group of experts to work with County staff to develop and model options to mitigate the impact of an extreme weather event. We support this concept and believe it is the most effective way to make quick progress to avoid future floods.

YLA LETTER TO ADDRESS FLOODING IN THE YAHARA LAKES *(continued)*

(continued from page 4)

We believe the group should deliver recommendations by early Spring 2019 and consider the following broad questions:

- a. What can be done to enhance the flow of water out of the Yahara lakes?
- b. What can be done to reduce the flow of water into the system during the extreme weather events?
- c. What can be done to increase the storage capacity of the Yahara Lakes?
- d. What can be done to better protect the public and private property exposed to this flood risk?

Also, below are questions for the Technical Group to consider:

- 1) What can be done to enhance the flow of water out of the Yahara Lakes? a) What should be the targets for water flow out of Lake Waubesa and out of Lake Kegonsa that will quickly identify water flow issues in the Yahara river? b) Are the plans to remove obstructions from the Yahara river sufficient to insure maximum flow of the river? c) Are there opportunities to create alternative areas to divert the water for permanent or temporary storage? d) Can the design or operation of any or all of the dams in the system be modified to enhance the rate of flow out of the lakes in high water conditions?
- 2) What can be done to reduce the flow of water into the system during extreme weather events? a) Can changes in runoff rules and regulations governing wetlands materially change the flow into the lakes during extreme weather events? b) Are there opportunities to divert the flow of water into the lakes for temporary storage?
- 3) What can be done to increase the storage capacity of the Yahara lakes? a) Can the Tenney Park Locks be fortified to allow Lake Mendota to safely reach water levels higher than current maximum of around 852.2? b) Should the target maximum levels be reduced in any or all of the lakes? What are the impacts of such a reduction? Should the target minimum levels also be reduced? c) What is the process to modify the lake level targets? d) What changes can be made to the current operating protocols to enhance the ability to stay within lake level targets? Should rules be removed on when to start moving to winter minimum or return to summer minimum? e) Do we need to consider projects (i.e. dredging lake channels) to offset the impact of lowered lake level targets?
- 4) What can be done to better protect the public and private property exposed to this risk? a) Can shorelines be raised or protective berms be built? Can we determine an appropriate level for shorelines or berm projects for each lake and provide guidelines to the public? b) Can and should we close off storm sewers that serve as passage ways to deliver water to neighborhoods not even located on the lake and river shorelines? c) Should utility lines be relocated so power can continue to be delivered to sandbagged property to support continued pumping and prevent property losses? Do we have an adequate supply of generators?

This is certainly not an exhaustive list and we are confident the group will come up with many other questions and potential solutions.

Thank you so much for your leadership on the many issues facing our lakes! We look forward to working with you on addressing this challenge. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss this issue. You can contact Dan Schultz, the YLA President via our YLA office to arrange a meeting.

Regards, Yahara Lakes Association Board of Directors

VIEW FROM THE LAKES AND WATERSHED COMMISSION

By Allan Levin, YLA Board Member and YLA Lakes & Watershed Representative

The Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission, established by the Dane County Board in 1988, is a coordinating and advisory agency within the Dane County government. There are 10 members representing both urban and rural areas and also a YLA representative to advocate for water property owners. Three of the County Board Supervisors on the Commission, Dave Ripp, Chuck Erickson and Mary Kolar, have portions of Lakes Mendota or Monona in their districts.

The Commission is charged with protecting and improving water quality, as well as the scenic, economic, recreational, and environmental value of Dane County's water resources. The Commission also conducts an annual review, invites public input, and makes recommendations regarding the water-related portions of the Dane County budget. More information about the commission can be found at <https://olw-lwrd.countyofdane.com/Get-Involved/Lakes-and-Watershed-Commission>.

So what have we done? The commission helped write and pass County Board resolution 227 setting up a technical work group to focus on lake flooding and managing the lakes. A task force will also be implemented to work on the recommendations and present information to the public. (For additional information about the two groups, please see Laura Hicklin's article in this newsletter).



The Commission's 2019 lake-related budget recommendations to the County Board included funding for an additional weed harvester and operations, a new deputy for the Dane County Sheriff's Lake Patrol and storm water control measures. Other recommendations can be found at: <https://olw-lwrd.countyofdane.com/documents/PDFs/2019LWCBudgetRecs.final.pdf>

One more thing of importance is our goal as riparians to have a larger voice on lake-related matters. The YLA Board of Directors advocates for members' interests and keeps you up-to-date on lake-related information. Currently, about 20% of the riparians on the Yahara area lakes and rivers are members. Please talk with your neighbors and riparian friends about becoming a YLA member to increase our collective voice.

I will try to schedule a column from the Lakes and Watershed Commission in future newsletters. Important items will continue to be emailed to you from YLA.

SETTING A WINNING AGENDA FOR OUR LAKES

By Clean Lakes Alliance (CLA)

The time has come to put our Yahara lakes at the top of the community agenda. Recent flooding and historically large cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms are symptoms of a changing climate and a harder, less resilient landscape.

The [Center for Climatic Research](#) has documented southern Wisconsin's increasingly wet climate, with more frequent, heavy rain events causing flooding throughout the region. Increased runoff is impacting lake water quality by bringing sediment and nutrient pollution into our lakes and streams. We need to change how we manage the landscape around our homes, farm fields, and city streets to accommodate a wetter climate.

It will take all of us to protect and improve our lakes. Here are some things citizens can do to improve water quality and minimize flooding.

- Use rain barrels and rain gardens at home to increase infiltration and reduce runoff.
- Join the city-wide movement to keep our streets leaf-free by raking street edges and keeping storm drains clear.

CLA is funding support for projects in the Yahara Watershed. This year, we provided \$160,000 in Clean Lakes Grants to:

- Reduce phosphorus through the Yahara WINS program
- Promote leaf-free streets in the City of Madison & with the Friends of Lake Kegonsa Society
- Increase erosion control site inspection by Dane County
- Study the feasibility of bubble barriers to exclude carp from Pheasant Branch Creek
- Connect youth with water in Madison Parks
- Provide tools to agricultural advisors for promoting conservation practices to local farmers

At Clean Lakes Alliance, we believe part of the solution will also come from the [recommendations](#) of the Dane County Healthy Farms Healthy Lakes Task Force. The task force was created by the Dane County Board to generate a better understanding of the issues and needs affecting agriculture and lake quality. With Clean Lakes Alliance as an original champion of the effort and subsequent participant, this diverse group of farmers, farm business representatives, university researchers, government experts, and concerned citizen groups developed a set of action goals. We appreciate farmers working alongside government and nonprofit leaders, crafting practical ways to protect both agriculture and water quality.

Clean Lakes Alliance Volunteers Help Inform the Public

By Luke Wynn, Clean Lakes Alliance - Watershed Engagement Specialist

Clean Lakes Alliance's water quality monitoring has concluded its sixth successful season on the Yahara Lakes. Monitors across all five lakes were kept busy throughout a summer of historic rainfall events, high lake levels, and harmful cyanobacteria blooms. A record setting 82 citizen monitors provided over 2,600 condition reports by increasing sampling frequency over previous years and providing more consistent data collection.



Photo credit: Clean Lakes Alliance

The improved monitoring intensity proved invaluable in providing an early warning system for the massive cyanobacteria blooms that plagued our lakes this summer. On June 2, reports of cyanobacteria blooms began coming in on Lakeforecast.org. Less than 12 hours later, all 19 public beaches monitored by Public Health Madison and Dane County (PHMDC) were closed due to the risk posed by cyanobacteria blooms spanning all five lakes. Volunteer reporting is an excellent early warning system that can help officials respond more efficiently to conditions that may warrant additional beach testing.

On August 21, the third 100-year flood event in the past two decades began inundating lake shorelines, streets, basements, and low-lying areas across greater Madison. Photographs and reports from monitors across the lake chain poured in as fast as the unprecedented rainfall. Immediate and real-time information sharing is an incredible tool that can help inform and protect the public. Despite the early end to recreational lake use, Clean Lakes Alliance volunteers continued to provide condition reports at all public beaches throughout September.



Photo credit: Linda Malkin



Photo credit: Clean Lakes Alliance

We'd like to thank all our volunteers for their hard work and continued support of our lakes! Please visit cleanlakesalliance.org/monitoring to learn how you can become a citizen monitor and support our lake efforts! Stay tuned for a summary of the 2018 monitoring results to be released this winter on our website and make sure to follow us on Facebook, where you can view all our past Weekend Lake Reports. The Weekend Lake Report utilizes volunteer data to summarize lake conditions in a short, often humorous video.

2018 YLA MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS

By Nancy Peckham, YLA Board Member

Thanks to all our members who responded to the YLA survey sent out with our August newsletter to assess member interest in ideas to add value to your membership and improve the Yahara chain of lakes. We received 29 survey responses, an approximately 10% response rate.

The #1 issue was shoreline weed control and management including increased funding/discounts, assistance and education. The YLA board has formed an Aquatic Plant Management Committee to assist and educate our members in managing aquatic plants along their shorelines. We will research options and provide information to you in future newsletters and/or emails.

Not surprisingly, there was also a high level of interest in lake level management. This is an issue near and dear to our hearts, especially with the heavy rainfalls in May, June and August this year. The YLA is actively working with Dane County and others to mitigate future flooding and better manage lake levels. Other ideas that were strongly supported and the YLA board is exploring include:

- Conversion of storm water outlets to better capture yard waste
- Clean up of beaches, parks and other shoreline areas
- Shoreline repair and reconstruction
- Educational programs on: How Dane County manages the Yahara lakes; rules and regulations on piers; boat lifts and buoys and blue green algae

Based on member responses, we will continue to provide timely email updates, quarterly newsletters, educational seminars and annual social gatherings/events.

All respondents who provided their names and contact information were entered into a drawing for free giveaways. We are pleased to announce that George Benton and John Bottorff were the winners of the boat yeti tumblers. Thank you, once again, to all members who took time to respond to the survey.



CURRENTS

► **Keep Up to Date on the Lakes** - INFOS is a great website for information on water discharge and levels in the area lakes and rivers. The technology group that Dane County has set up will be using INFOS data in their work. <http://www.infosyahara.org>

► **Clean Lakes Alliance “Yahara 101”**- Yahara 101 lectures are on the second Wednesday of the month from 8-9 am at the Edge-water Hotel. On November 14th, Phil Gaebler, Water Resources Engineer, City of Madison will present “Rake for Our Lakes: The Importance of Urban Leaf Management. To sign up go to <https://cleanlakesalliance.org/event/yahara-lakes-101-2018-11/>

► **You can help reduce urban phosphorus** - Keeping your leaves out of the street can reduce phosphorus going into the lake. If you rake your leaves, pile them on the terrace, not in the street. Other options are bagging, mulching or composting leaves. You will find out more information if you attend the Yahara 101 in November, but if you cannot go, you can sign up for alerts about rain events to keep phosphorus “leaf tea” water out of the lakes. Go to www.ripple-effects.com

Do you know of upcoming events or interesting information to share? We'll help spread the word - contact us at info@yaharalakes.org



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Yahara Lakes Association, Ltd. is a non-profit organization dedicated to representing lake property owners and advocating for the vitality of the Yahara chain of lakes so that all citizens may enjoy them.

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