



Horsehead Lake Fall 2025 Newsletter



Brought to you by the Horsehead Lake Protection & Rehabilitation District #1



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Message from the Chair

“As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, Horsehead Lake takes on a new kind of beauty - reflections of autumn colors on calm water, migrating flocks overhead, and cozy evenings by the fire. Thank you for being part of this community and for helping us protect the lake we all cherish. Here’s your fall update to keep you connected, informed, and ready for the season ahead.”

- Dusten Tornow, Chairperson

Weed Harvesting

Horsehead Lake's dense aquatic plant population sometimes obstructs boat travel, necessitating mechanical harvesting. However, harvesting is limited by strict environmental guidelines to prevent ecological harm. We follow guidelines and protocol established in the “Comprehensive Management Plan 2020” completed by Onterra, which can be found on our website at www.horseheadlake-wi.org.

On July 2, 2025 the Weed Harvesting Committee (Dusten Tornow, Deb Bursik and Dennis Batchelet) toured the lake and determined the west side of the lake required mechanical harvesting due to the weed density. The Committee noted that the east side of the lake had very light vegetative growth. Aquatic Plant Management was contacted and they were able to schedule the mechanical harvesting for July 16th - July 18th.

Summary of Mechanical Harvesting:

- 4.17 acres harvested

- 8,400 cubic feet of vegetation removed
- 24 hours of harvesting (3 day @ 8 hours)

Map of the area that was harvested:



Annual Meeting Update

On August 2nd at 9:00am we held our Annual Meeting at Sloan Center in Lake Tomahawk. We had 15 members attend the meeting along with 2 guests from North Two Lake and an Oneida County commissioner.

The following motions were made and passed.

- Rescind catch and release recommendations for bluegill on Horsehead Lake
- Add \$4,000 to the budget for 2026 Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) survey.
- Add \$3,500 to the budget for 2026 to remove AIS weeds, if necessary.
- Increase 2026 Weed Harvesting budget to \$20,000.

Budget Updates:

The Fiscal Year 2025/2026 budget was approved at the annual meeting.

The final budget as approved:

- Administration and Operations = \$4,125
- Information and Educational = \$1,700
- Lake management = \$39,150
- Contingency fund = \$3,000

- 2nd aerator loan payment = \$13,217
- Total Budget for FY25/26 = \$61,192 (verses FY24/25 budget of \$53,242)

The approved budget includes several amendments proposed, debated and voted on at the meeting. The changes were:

- To increase the weed cutting budget from \$10,000 to \$20,000
- Delete the \$300 for the weed cutting permit (the current permit covers 2026).
- Added \$4000 for an Aquatic Invasive Species survey in 2026 (originally planned for 2027).
- Added \$3500 for aquatic invasive species removal (if any are found).

*The full budget will be posted on the [Horsehead Lake P&R District](#) website.

Tax Levy

The tax levy for FY 25/26 will be \$44,962 (versus \$25,485 for FY 24/25). The increase is driven by:

- This year's carryover was \$11,527.46 less than the carryover to the fiscal year 24/25 budget. The main reason for the larger carryover to the FY 24/25 budget is that weed cutting was budgeted for but not required the prior year.
- The budget is \$7950 more this year. The main changes were an increase of \$10,000 to the weed cutting budget, dropping \$10,000 for fish stocking and adding \$4,000 for aquatic invasive species survey and \$3,500 for aquatic invasive species removal (if required).

2025 Water Quality Results

This year, while the quality perception of the lake may have been tarnished by the amount of weeds, the water chemistry continues to show slow improvement in better clarity, lower phosphorus and lower chlorophyll values. Clarity (secchi disk) measurements on the lake have been obscured by weeds rather than the cloudiness of the water. We're seeking clarification from the DNR on the observation. There are numerous environmental variables that affect water quality so a single year cannot be used to quantify a lake. This year was unusual in that it was warmer and we had more wild fire ash deposition in the lake. How did that affect the water quality and weed growth? We will see if our lake's trend continues in the right direction.

Our trophic state is borderline between mesotrophic and eutrophic and is trending toward meso over the last few years.

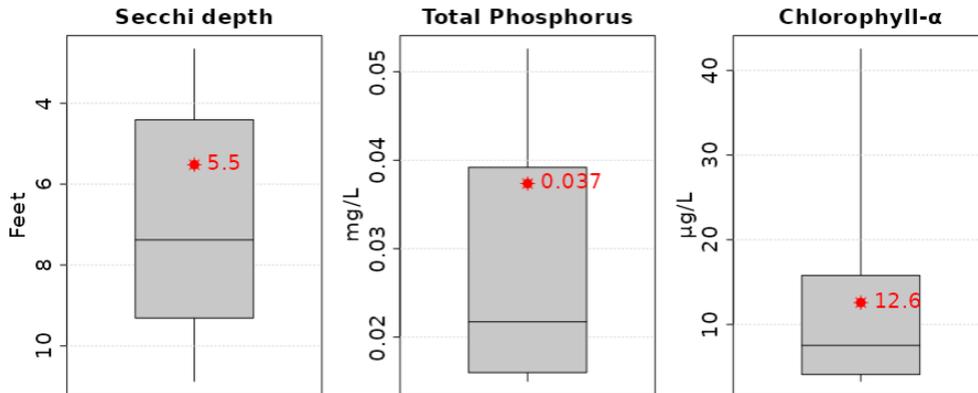
Eutrophic (Trophic State Index: 50 +): excess nutrients, lower clarity, and greater risk of harmful algal blooms and hypoxia (low oxygen)

Mesotrophic (Trophic State Index:40-50): moderate levels of nutrients, moderate clarity

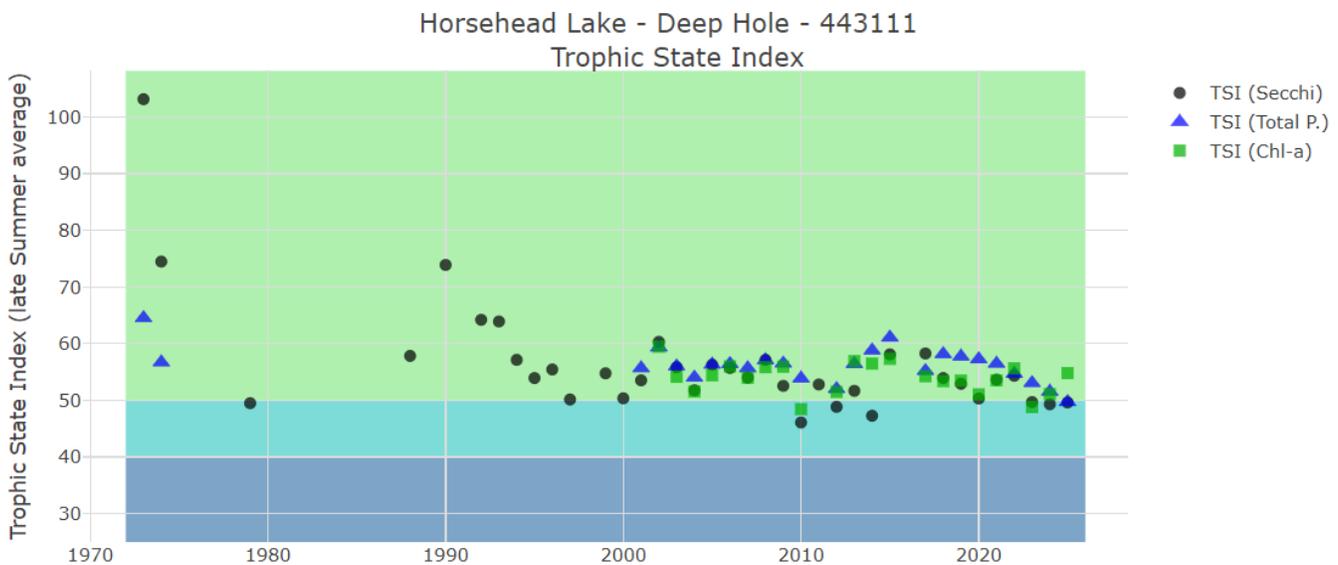
The DNR report for Horsehead Lake (thru 7/25/25) indicates that our results are comparable to other lakes of our type.

Lake natural community:

Late summer trophic indicator averages (red) from the last 10 years compared to other **SHALLOW HEADWATER** lakes (gray box and whiskers). If red dots are absent, not enough recent data exists to calculate an average.



Trophic State



Monitoring Dissolved Oxygen (DO) over winter

As most of you know, our shallow lake has a winter DO issue. Once the ice covers the lake, there is no exchange of oxygen between the air and water. Our lake fish depend on the DO to survive, and once the oxygen levels drop from 10 PPM (summer) to less than 2 PPM, the fish become stressed and die (winter fish kill). Our history of measurements shows that we typically drop to 2 PPM or less while ice is on the lake.

We have installed aerators to improve the exchange of oxygen by bubbling air thru the lake water column. The oxygen in the bubbles is then dissolved into the water and raises the DO levels. To evaluate the success of the aerators, we are monitoring the DO levels thru manual and remote sensor testing. This year will be the second year of remote sensor testing. We will be measuring DO in two locations

this year (DEEP HOLE and DEEP HOLE 2). The sensors will be marked by buoys. PLEASE DO NOT MOVE OR REMOVE THESE BUOYS (or the equipment). Once the ice is off the lake, we will retrieve the sensors and analyze the results. **In the past, manual DO testing was always difficult to conduct, as the weather, the ice depth and availability of volunteers to drill holes and sample the water all have to be considered. Of course, we are always looking for volunteers (call Kevin Collins for details). Ideally, someone who lives on the lake with snowmobile access.**



Fishing and Boating Regulations



- Catch and Release: per the approved motion at the annual meeting, there are **NO catch-and-release recommendations for bluegill or crappie** on Horsehead Lake.
- Per DNR suggestion, we should continue to harvest smaller northern pike from the lake to encourage better size distribution of this species. If you don't eat them, please consider freezing the fish and donating them to Wild Instincts (4621 Apperson Drive Rhinelander, WI 54501) rehabilitation center. They have coolers outside their doors for the fish.
- Boat Landing Reminder: Avoid power loading to prevent shifting the lake bottom into a berm near the boat ramp.
- Wake Boarding Ordinance: Wake Boarding Boats are becoming a concern for Wisconsin Lakes due to the damage it causes to the lake bottom. On July 10th, 2025 the Town of Lake Tomahawk enacted an ordinance to help protect shallow lakes in the area.
- The ordinance enacted on July 10th, prohibits the "use of ballast tanks/bags or fins or continuous operation at transition speed in order to create an artificially enhanced wake or operation of a motor boat in an artificially bow high manner causing wake enhancement is prohibited." This ordinance should protect shorelines, nesting loons, fish habitat and water quality on Horsehead Lake. The subject of the Land and Water Conservation committee meeting today included an ongoing project of lake classification and the identification of outside stressors that affect lake health including enhanced wakes, development density, AIS and public access.

New HLPDR Logo

As we participate with other groups and collations, we have been asked to provide contact information including a logo for the district. We settled on the following logo to represent our district.



New Board Member

At the Annual meeting Tony Ellis was elected and sworn in to the Secretary position on the Horsehead Lake Protection & Rehabilitation District #1 board. Welcome Tony!

"Hello, my name is Tony Ellis. My wife, Lori, and I recently relocated full time to our house on Horsehead Lake. We have owned the property since 2020 and moved full time in 2024. I work full time in Rhinelander as a Controller. I am originally from Indiana and have a master's degree in business administration from Indiana University – Indianapolis. We have a blended family of 7 kids (now all adults) who frequently visit, and our major holiday is a July summer bash where most of the adult kids and their significant others come to visit, play in the water and enjoy the area. We can be frequently seen walking our labradors daily in our Pigeon road neighborhood."

Shoreline Habitat

If a tree falls in a Wisconsin lake, you do not need to do anything if it doesn't pose a safety threat or block access to the water. If it does pose a hazard, such as blocking a public boat launch, you must contact the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to get permission before removing it. The DNR may have specific regulations or permit requirements for removing trees or other vegetation from waterways.

Trees, logs, root wads and branches play an important role in creating healthy, diverse lakes and streams. Research has found waters with greater habitat diversity also have more diverse populations of fish. Wood plays an important role in creating habitat diversity.

As trees fall into streams, they help shape the channel and provide shade, shelter and feeding opportunities for aquatic organisms. In lakes, fallen trees provide shelter for small fish and habitat for insect larvae and small plants. Fallen trees play such an important role in aquatic habitats that many restoration programs are working to add wood back to streams and lakes.

To remove aquatic vegetation from a Wisconsin lake, contact the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\)](#) for guidance, as most mechanical or chemical methods and large-scale removals require a [permit](#). However, you may remove up to 30 feet of lake weeds from your shore for a dock or swimming area without a permit. For small, hand-cleared areas using handheld rakes, less formal permits might be involved, or a permit might not be needed. Contacting your local DNR water regulation and zoning staff is recommended for personalized advice.

Please let the HLPRD commissioners know if you are planning to work in the lake. This will save many phone calls from concerned neighbors over illegal lake activities.

Upcoming Commissioner Meetings

- November 15, 2025 9:00am

- April 18th, 2026 9:00am
- June 27th, 2026 9:00am
- August 1, 2026 9:00am (Annual Meeting)

Stay Informed – Email Updates

If you receive this newsletter by mail, please send your email address to horseheadlakePRD.sec@gmail.com to help us save on postage and printing costs.

Thank You to Our Volunteers

- Web Site Maintenance: Dusten Tornow, James Watters, Alan Hougum
- Aerator Monitoring: Dave Averbeck
- Water Quality Sampling: Kevin Collins
- Dissolved Oxygen Testing: Paul Bursik, Kevin Collins
- Audit Committee: Charles Konsitzke
- Ice On/Off Horsehead Lake: Jane Rosner
- Welcome packet: Tracy Hougum
- Weed Harvesting Survey Committee: Dusten Tornow, Jay & Kris Balge
- Shoreline restoration: Tammy Aldrich
- Aquatic Plant Management Plan update: **LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS!**
 - Grant application is due in 2026
 - Field work & plan update in 2027

We are always looking for additional volunteers to help out with various tasks. Let a commissioner know if you are available.