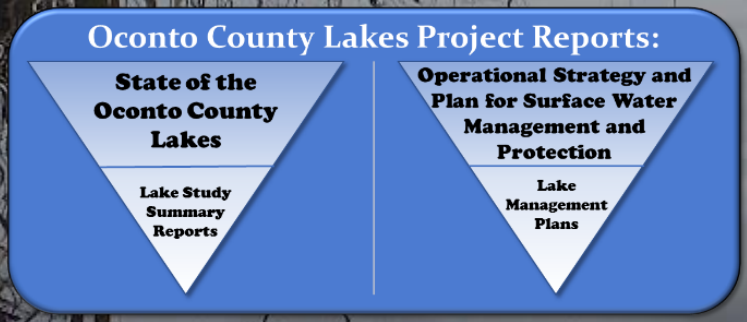
Oconto County Lakes Project

GILKEY LAKE STUDY

SUMMARY REPORT

2025



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

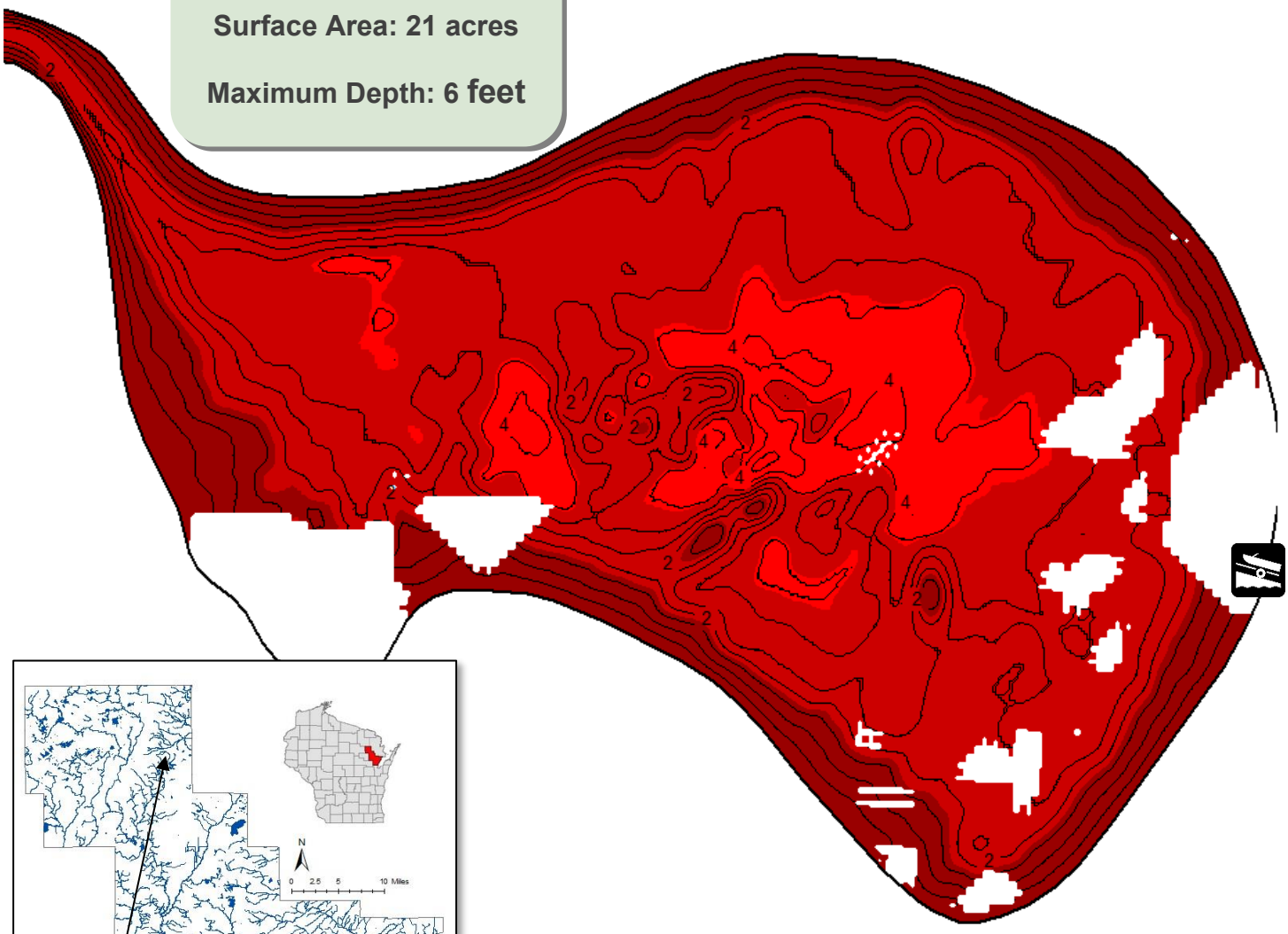
Background

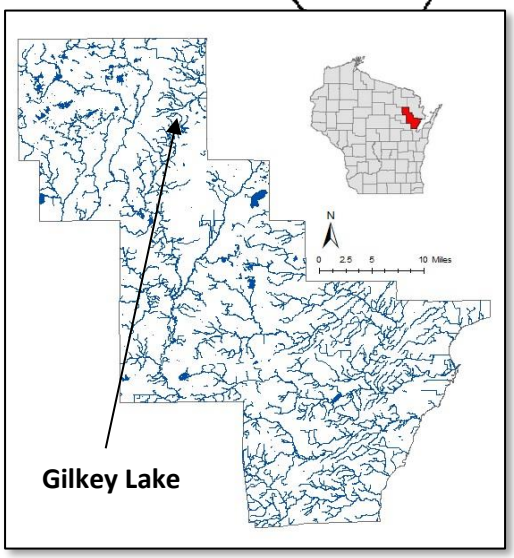
- Gilkey Lake is a 21-acre spring lake (part of the Crooked Lake chain) in northeast Oconto County with a maximum depth of 7 feet.
- Most water enters and leaves Gilkey Lake through groundwater and its connection to Crooked Lake. Direct precipitation and surface runoff also contribute water.
- Visitors have access to the lake from one public boat launch located on the lake's east side.
- This report summarizes data collected during the 2023-2024 lake study.

Township of Riverview

Surface Area: 21 acres

Maximum Depth: 6 feet



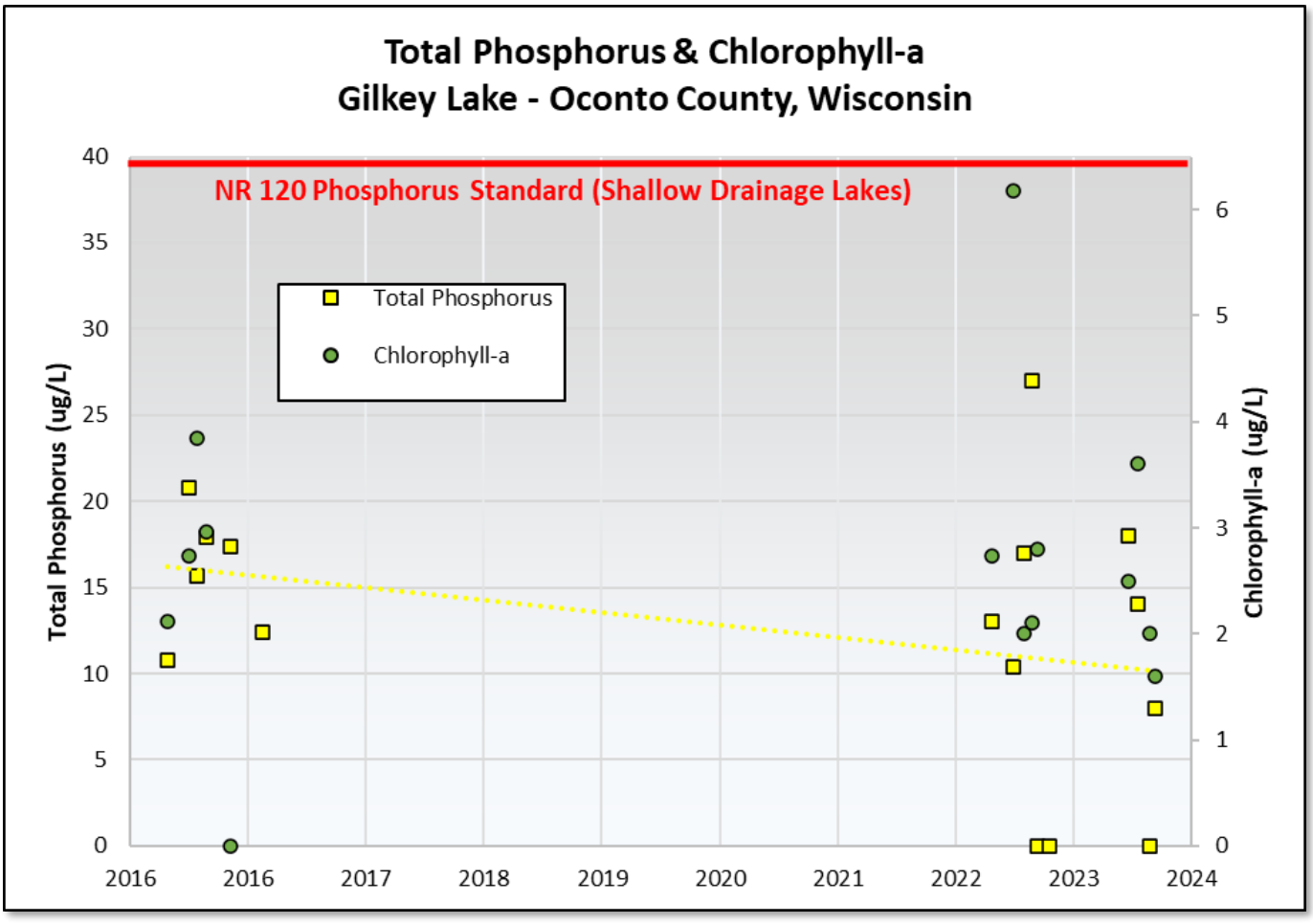


Map created by WDNR.

Water Quality

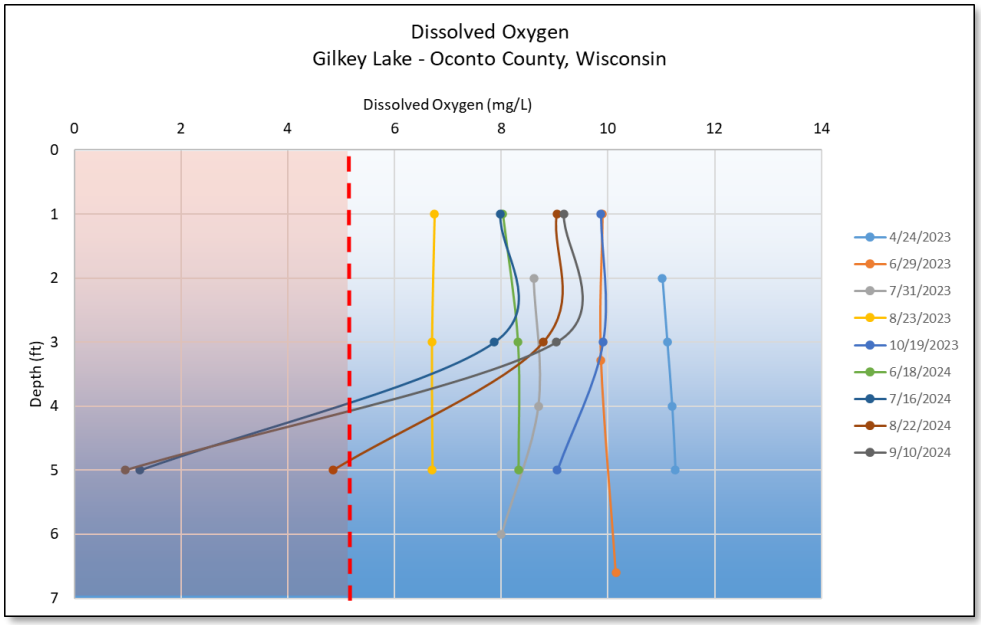
Nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen are what feed aquatic plants and algae in a lake. Excessive amounts of nutrients delivered to a lake will result in abundant plant and algae growth. Disturbance within a watershed combined with the landscape's inability to infiltrate and filter runoff is what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

- Total Phosphorus remained well below the Wisconsin state standard of 40 ug/L for shallow seepage lakes during the two-year study. Limited data suggests this average concentration is coming down.
- Inorganic nitrogen remained below the threshold of 0.3 mg/L when algal blooms increase.
- Chlorophyll-a, an indirect measure of algae, remained below the threshold of 6 ug/L during the study.



Water Quality

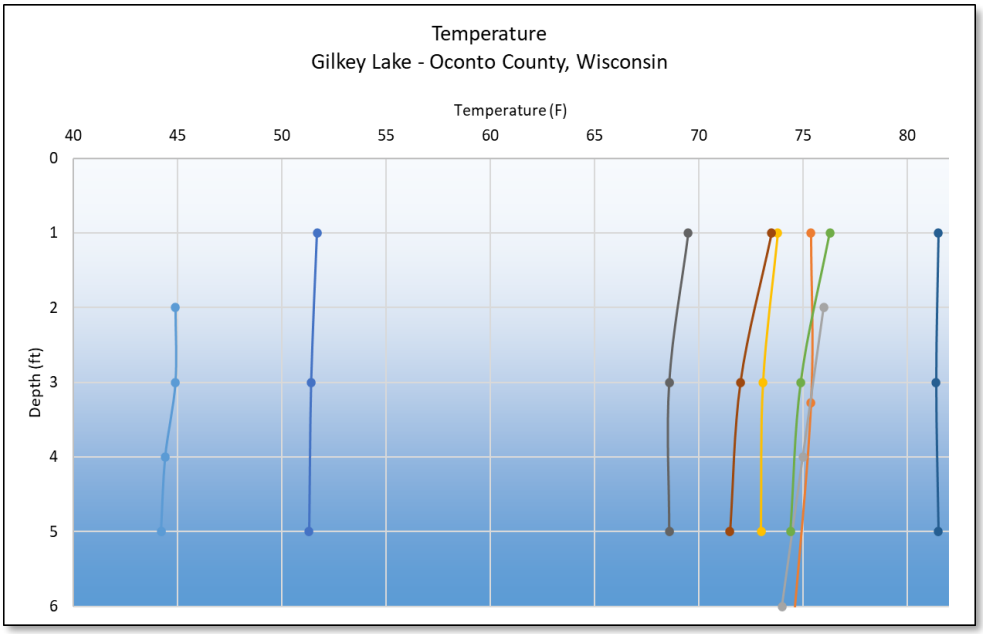
Sufficient **dissolved oxygen** in lake water is essential to the survival of aquatic organisms. The amount of dissolved oxygen present within a lake varies by season and depth. It is determined by the biological activity that consumes or produces oxygen, by water mixing through wind, changes in temperature,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



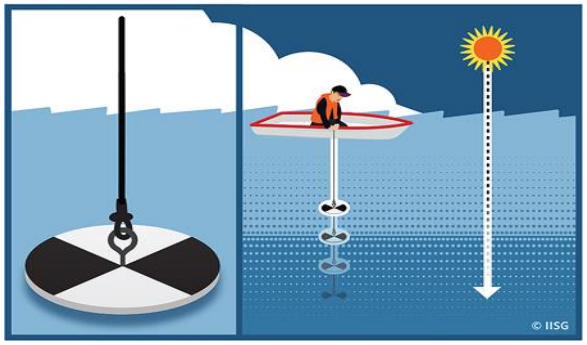
- Sufficient **dissolved oxygen** is available in the water column of Gilkey Lake throughout the year. Generally, the top 4 feet maintains enough oxygen to support most fish species.

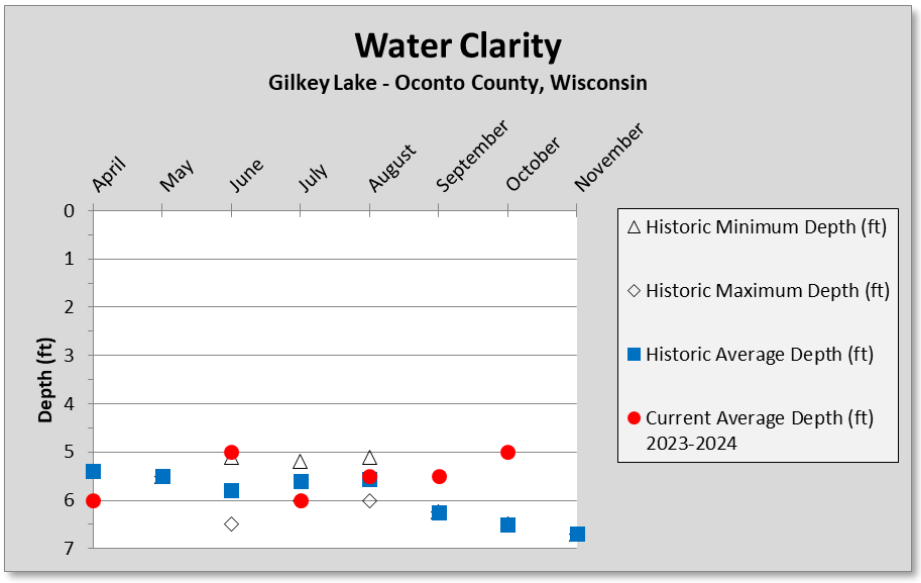
Lake water **temperature** has a significant impact on water chemistry, spatial distribution of fish, microbial growth and oxygen content.

- Temperature profiles in Gilkey Lake are typical for a shallow, mixed lake having similar temperature with depth at each sample event.



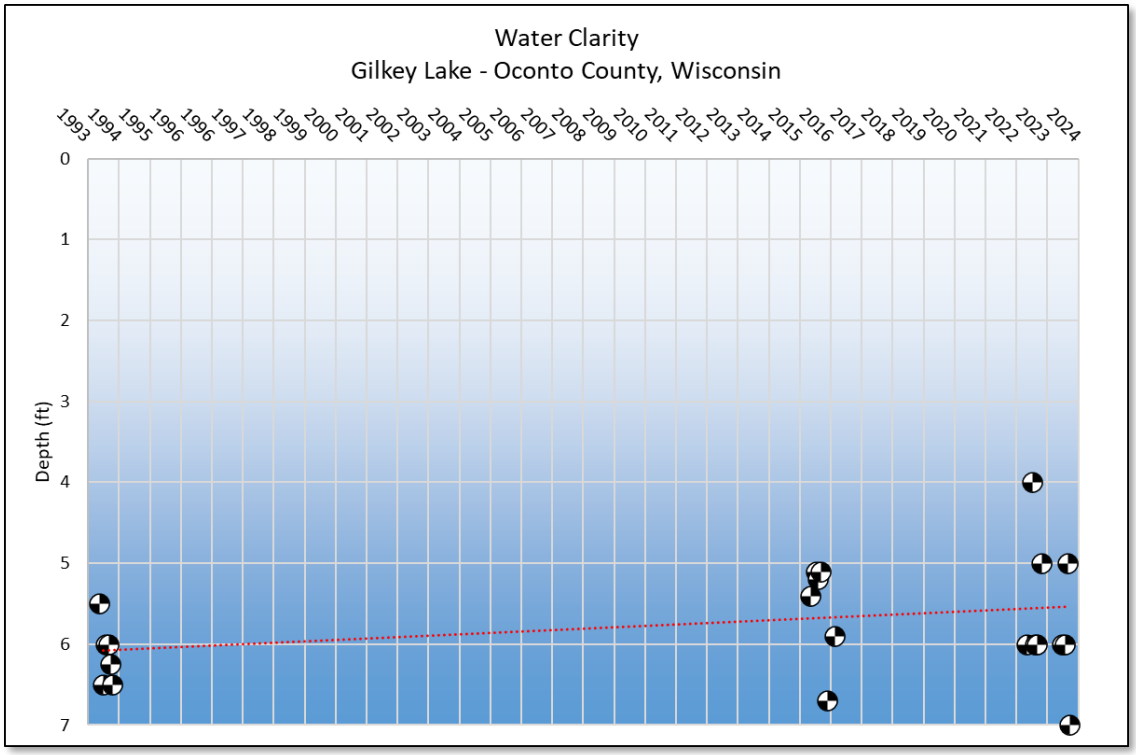
Water Quality





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. It is typical for water clarity to vary throughout the year.

- The graphs below show water clarity measurements taken between April and November. Limited data suggests a long-term trend of slightly decreasing depths.
- During 2023-24, water clarity was best in July and worst in June. These averages are generally worse than historical averages.



Water Quality

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.

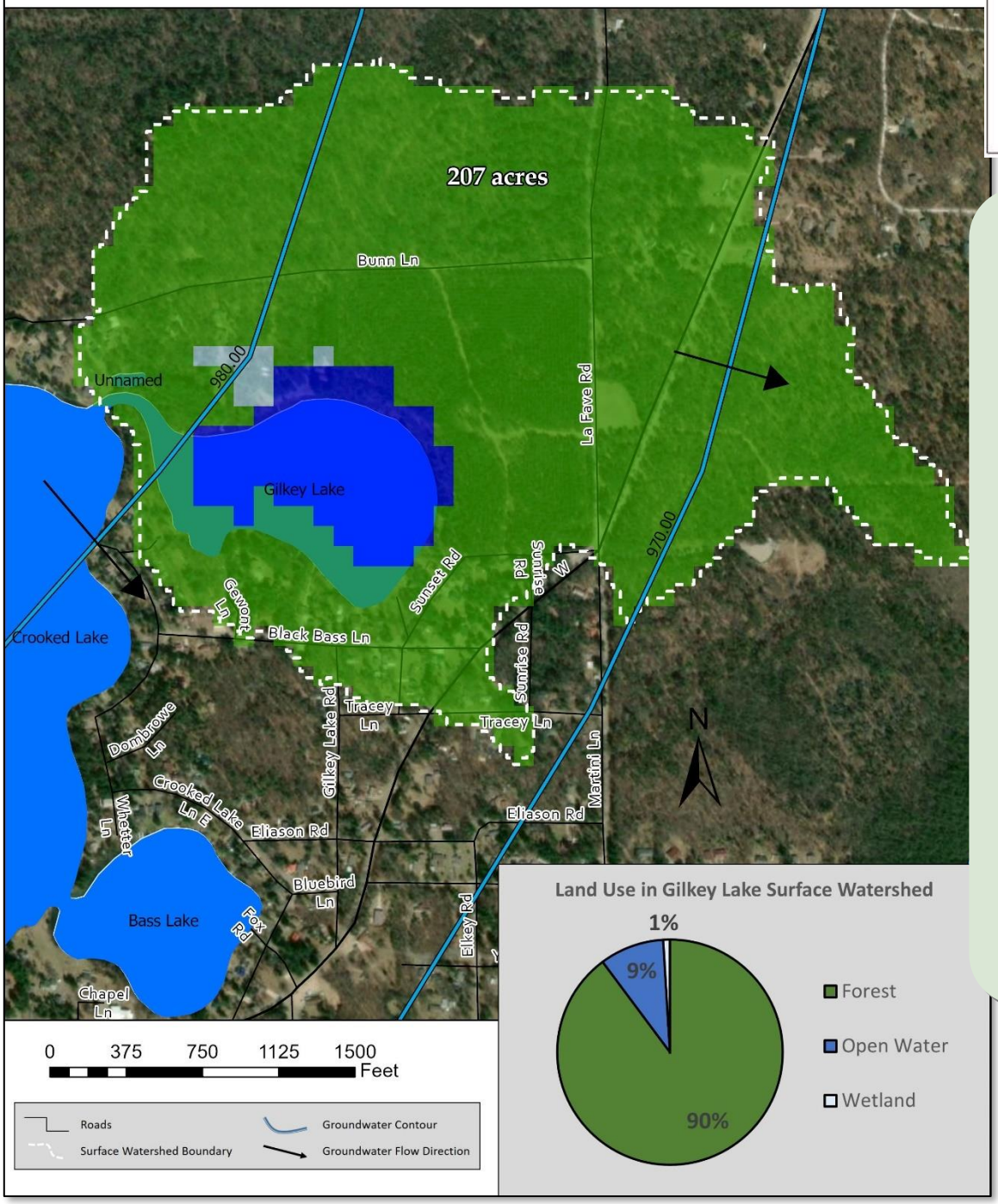
- Concentrations of potassium (0.78 mg/L) were low, but chloride (18.5 mg/L) and sodium (12.6 mg/L) were elevated. This suggests impacts from human activity such as septic systems, road salt, animal waste and fertilizers.
- DACT, a screening tool to determine if your lake is being impacted by pesticides, was detected at low levels.
- Water in Gilkey Lake is moderately hard (73 mg/L CaCO3), having a reduced level of dissolved minerals making it more vulnerable to algae blooms and the effects of acid rain.

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.

Watershed

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.

Gilkey Lake Surface Watershed & Groundwater Flow



The quality of lake water 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 produce runoff and groundwater that contains these chemicals. Groundwater contamination may include nitrogen, pesticides, herbicides and other soluble chemicals originating from septic systems, crops, barnyards, and road de-icing. 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.

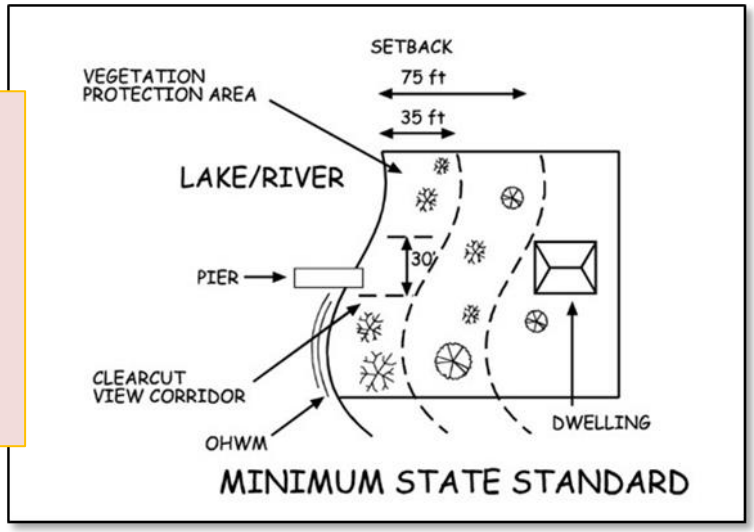
- Shorelands around Gilkey Lake were surveyed in June 2023. Much of Gilkey Lake's shoreland is healthy, but many sections are in need of restoration.

Total lakefront footage	No. Riparian lots	Measured shoreland disturbance (feet)	Measured shoreland disturbance (%)
5,039	22	2,590	51%

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:

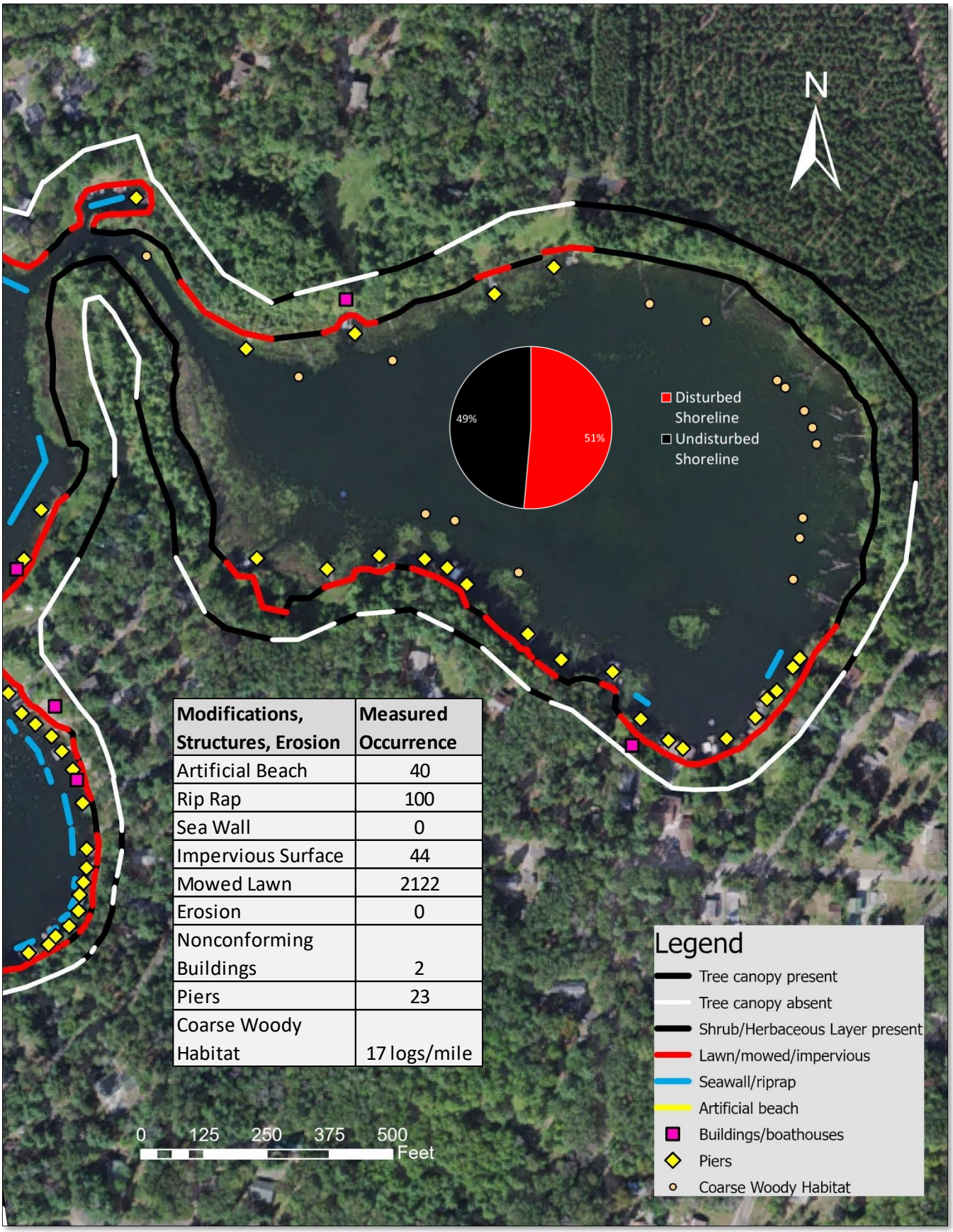
- Up to 30% of shoreline may be removed of shrubs and trees for a view corridor
- A mowed or constructed pedestrian path up to 5 feet wide to access lake



What Can You Do To Help Gilkey Lake?

- ✓ 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

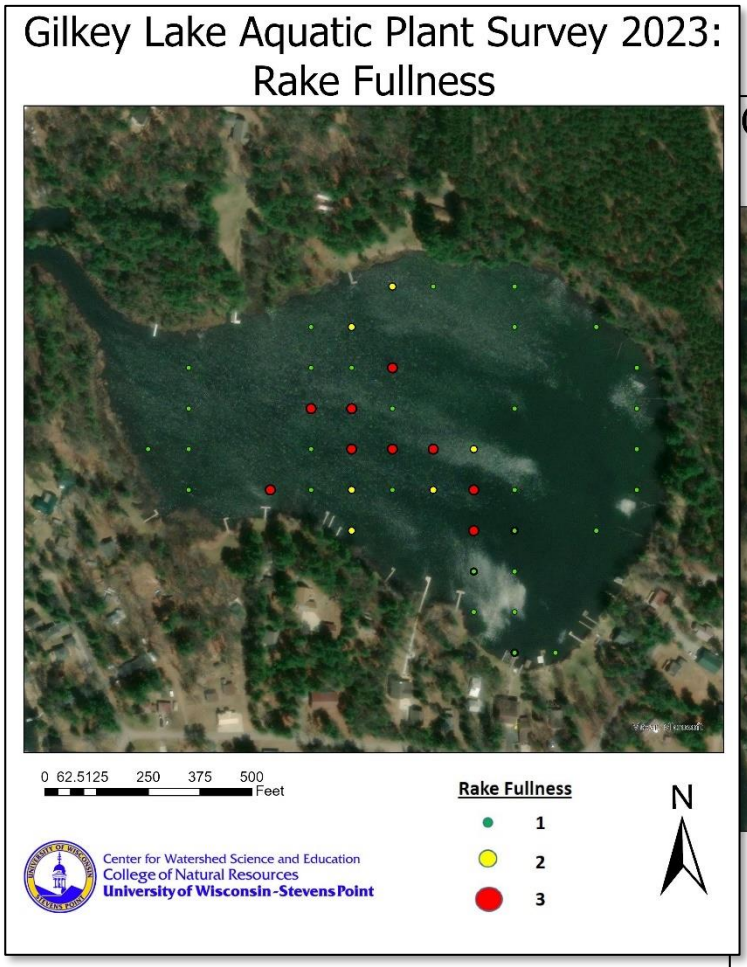


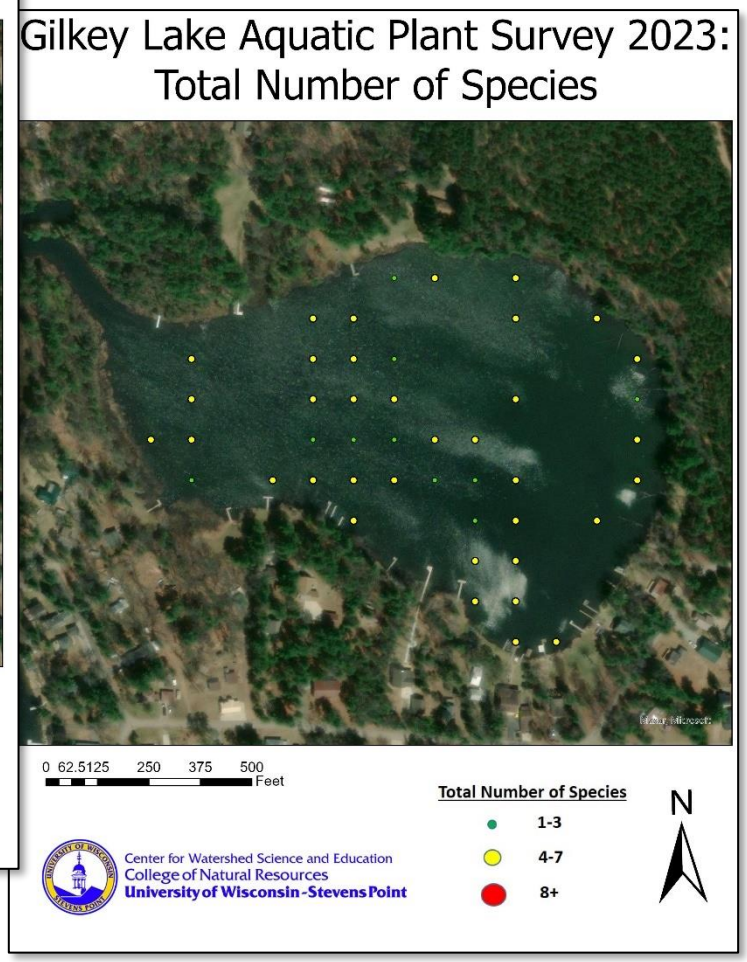
Modifications, Structures, Erosion	Measured Occurrence
Artificial Beach	40
Rip Rap	100
Sea Wall	0
Impervious Surface	44
Mowed Lawn	2122
Erosion	0
Nonconforming Buildings	2
Piers	23
Coarse Woody Habitat	17 logs/mile

Aquatic Plants

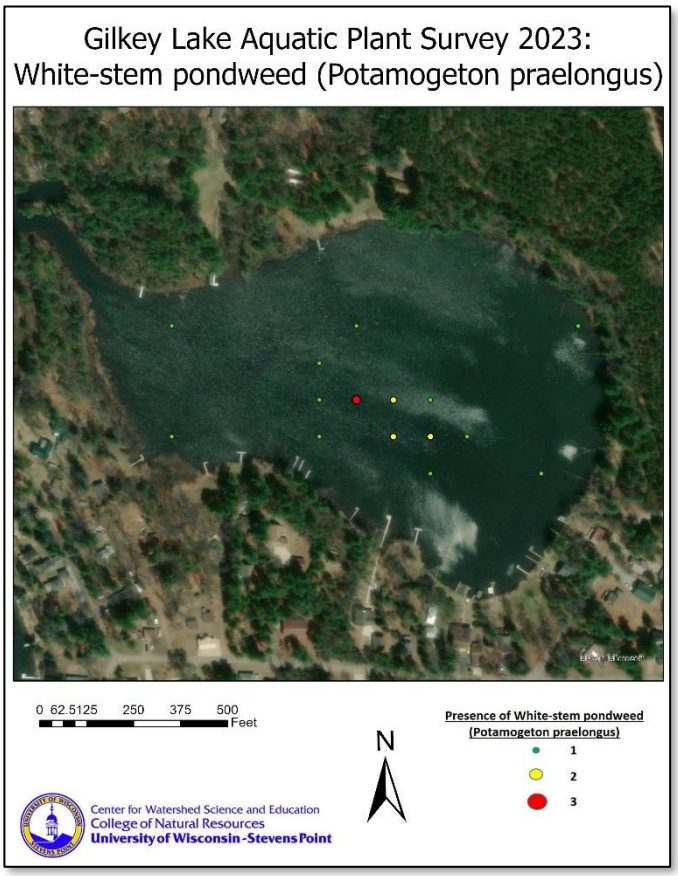
Aquatic plants are the forest landscape within a lake. They provide food and habitat for terrestrial and aquatic creatures such as fish, ducks, turtles, invertebrates and other animals. They increase oxygen levels in the water and utilize nutrients that would otherwise be used by algae. A healthy lake 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 in Gilkey Lake is characterized by slightly below average diversity of plant species when compared to other lakes in the Oconto County Lakes Project, with a total of 18 species in the 2021 survey.
- During the 2021 aquatic plant survey of Gilkey Lake, 54% of visited sites had vegetative growth. The maximum depth of vegetation was 7 feet and the Floristic Quality Assessment (FQI) was 21.7.
- The most frequently encountered plant species were white stem pondweed (33%), large leaf pondweed (29%), and white water lily (27%).
- Eurasian water-milfoil was observed in 1 location.

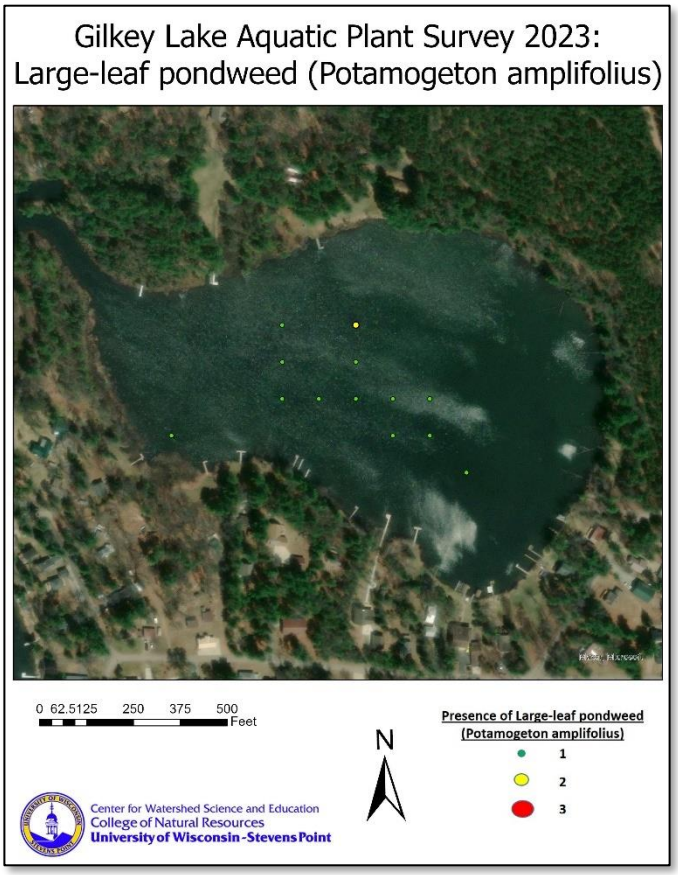




Aquatic Plants

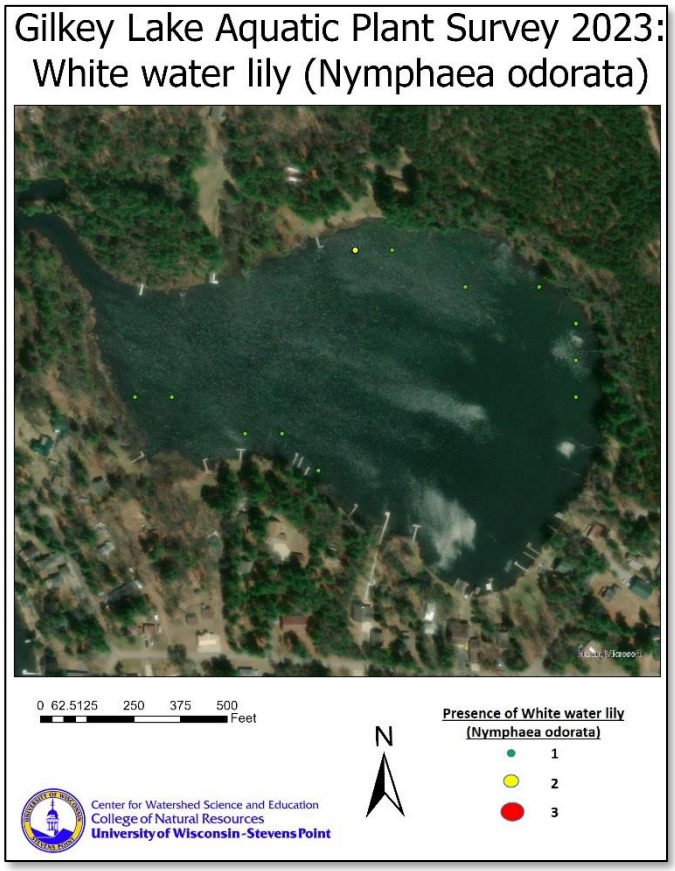


White-stem pondweed is commonly found in northern lakes in soft sediment shallower than 4 meters but does not tolerate turbidity. Its late summer fruits are common forage.

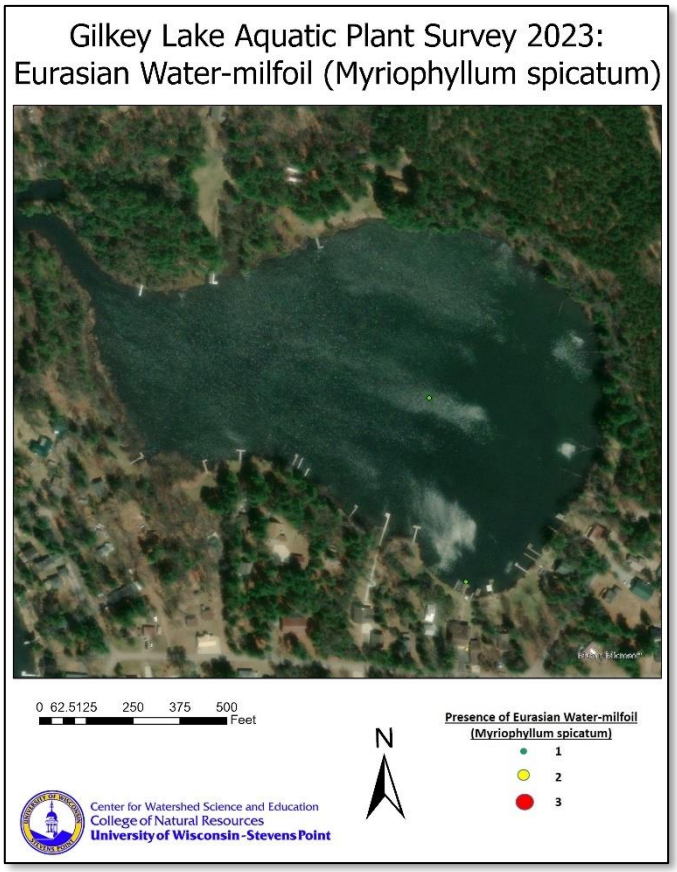


Large-leaf pondweed, with large, strongly arched submerged leaves, will hold its club-like flower spike above water. It provides excellent habitat for pan fish, largemouth bass, muskellunge, and northern pike; bluegills nest near these plants and eat insects and other small animals found on the leaves; walleyes use these pondweeds for cover.

Aquatic Plants



White water lily has round stalks that grow up from a rhizome in the sediment connecting to large round floating leaves. By mid-summer, white flowers also float at the surface. Lilies are important cover for fish, are food by many species, and help prevent erosion by slowing wave action.



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

Aquatic Plants

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, first documented in 2002, was observed in one location during the 2021 survey.
- Banded Mystery Snail (2015) and Zebra Mussels (2019) have also been documented in Gilkey Lake.

Banded mystery snails are born as fully formed snails that seem to appear from nowhere. Native to southeast US, they have the potential to serve as hosts for parasites and outcompete native snails

Zebra mussels are small mollusks that were accidentally introduced via discharged ballast water of cargo ships into the Great Lakes. They can attach to boats, plants, mud, etc. and survive outside of water for several days. Their impacts include depleting food supply for other organisms, smothering native mussels, clogging pipes and damaging equipment.

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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