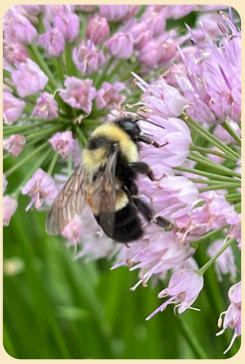
WINGRA WATERSHED NEWS

Promoting a healthy Lake Wingra through an active watershed community

FALL 2026

This summer I set out to find the Rusty-patched Bumble Bee, an endangered species found in the Lake Wingra Watershed. Their populations have plummeted in recent decades, and there are several areas in the watershed that have the native plantings required to sustain them. After learning to identify bumble bees and examining them whenever I was outdoors, I was delighted to find them in two locations, including the UW Arboretum. Searching for these tiny treasures changed how I experience the outdoors. A patch of flowers became more than a beautiful view; it became a place of discovery. The more we notice, the more we connect. This year, I invite you to learn something new in nature and discover how it can change the way you see Lake Wingra and its watershed. *– Sarah Pabian, Executive Director*



Support Friends of Lake Wingra This Season

As the year wraps up, please consider a gift to Friends of Lake Wingra. Your donation—no matter the size—helps protect our beloved lake through education, community action, and clean-water initiatives.

Every drop counts, and so does every Friend. Stay engaged, join our events, and help keep Lake Wingra healthy for generations to come.

Online donations:
lakewingra.org/donate

Mail donations:
Friends of Lake Wingra
PO Box 45071
Madison, WI 53744

Thawing of Lake Wingra

By David Ortiz, Board Member

Have you noticed that Lake Wingra seems to freeze later and thaw earlier than it once did?

Across the globe, lakes are experiencing shorter periods of ice cover, and Lake Wingra is no exception. The winter of 2023–2024 brought the shortest period of ice cover on record: just 63 days. That's 50 days fewer than the historical average of 113 days, based on records dating back to 1877.

A lake is classified as frozen when its surface is covered by at least 50% ice. Scientists at the Wisconsin State Climatology Office at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus monitor ice cover on Madison's lakes from the rooftop of a 13-story building to determine the date each year that the lakes freeze. Lakes can have multiple freeze dates in a single season if warm or windy conditions melt the initial ice cover and are followed by another cold period.

(Continue on page 6)



Frozen Lake Wingra. Photo by Sarah Pabian

Coyotes Around the Lake Wingra Watershed

By David Drake, UW-Extension Wildlife Specialist and Professor

Have you spotted a coyote near Lake Wingra or Vilas Park—or heard one howling in response to a barking dog or a first responder's siren? If so, it is likely the coyotes you've seen or heard live as part of a pack that inhabits the UW Arboretum. This time last year there were a number of coyote observations in this area.



Coyote hanging out at Vilas Park.

Urban coyotes tend to spend a majority of their time in green-spaces like the Arboretum. When they move outside of green-spaces, they try to move through green corridors or along railroad tracks and primarily at night to avoid people as much as possible.

However, in the coming months you may see or hear coyotes more often. That is because they are entering their breeding season (December to March) and are more active during these months than during other times of the year.

In addition, their breeding season coincides with a time of the year

(*Continue on page 5*)

Meyer Avenue Is Ready for Rain!

New Rain Gardens and Permeable Pavers Help Protect Lake Wingra

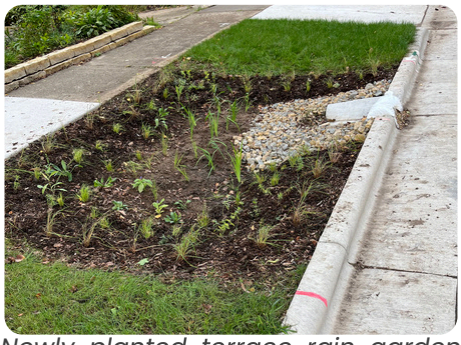
By Phil Gaebler, City of Madison Engineering

Fourteen new terrace rain gardens, more than 2,000 native plants, and 760 feet of permeable pavers are now in place on Meyer Avenue in the Westmorland neighborhood! This summer, the final pieces of the street reconstruction project came together, creating a greener, more beautiful street designed to help protect Lake Wingra.

The last item on the project's to-do list was planting the 14 terrace rain gardens constructed earlier in the summer. More than 2,000 native plants were ordered, sorted to match the planting plans selected by homeowners, and carefully planted.

Over the next three years, these plants will become established, providing food and habitat for pollinators visiting this Westmorland street. Some pollinators might even decide to call one of these rain gardens their forever home!

(*Continue on page 5*)



Newly planted terrace rain garden on Meyer Ave. Photo by Sarah Pabian



Welcome New Board Members!

In June we elected three new board members, changed a few board positions, and we said good-bye to three board members. Thank you to Emmy Kriehn, Adrianna Gorsky and Doe Han for all their hard work on the board!

Our new board members are:

- Sylvia Ramirez, Treasurer
- Jake Griffin
- PJ Solomon

Returning board members and their positions include:

- Lisa Grueneberg, Chair
- Ben Becker, Vice-chair
- Ann Kinsley, Secretary
- Peter Gascoyne
- Amy Callies
- Brett Jones
- Sarah Kraszewski
- David Ortiz
- Maddie Smith

To learn more about our wonderful board members, check out their bios at lakewingra.org



Weird But True: The Wild Wonders of Lake Wingra

By Sarah Pabian
Executive Director

The natural world around Lake Wingra can be downright weird! From gooey globs on the beach to tropical-looking growths on oak trees, our watershed is full of surprises. Here are four of our favorite weird wonders of Lake Wingra!

Gooey Globs on Vilas Beach



Did the Lake Wingra Monster sneeze giant green boogers onto Vilas Beach? Thankfully, no! Last year, a local resident discovered green globs that were most likely colonies of cyanobacteria.

Gina LaLiberte, an algae expert with the Wisconsin DNR, identified them as likely *Aphanothece stagnina*, a type of cyanobacteria that grows on the lake bottom. When photosynthesis produces enough oxygen, tiny bubbles can lift the colonies to the surface. The good news? This species is not known to produce toxins.

Tropical Fruit growing on Oak Trees?



Did Lake Wingra's oak trees suddenly start growing tropical fruit? Not quite! The bright pink and red growths spotted on oak trees this summer were the handiwork of the pinecone oak gall wasp.

These tiny wasps lay their eggs on white oak trees, and their larvae use hormones to trick the trees into growing unusual structures called galls. The galls look a bit like miniature pinecones growing right out of the branches! They provide a safe place for the larvae to feed and develop, without harming the tree.

Mysterious Purple Splotches in the Lake



Purple and pink might look a little out of place in Lake Wingra's waters. Is it pollution? An alien organism? Nope! The colorful patches of purple sulfur bacteria seen in Ho Nee Um Pond and other parts of Lake Wingra are a perfectly natural phenomenon.

These bacteria thrive in stagnant, low-oxygen waters, where they use hydrogen sulfide as an energy source. Their unusual colors can create striking purple or pink patches in the water.

Carnivorous Plants Lurking in Lake Wingra



Floating among Lake Wingra's aquatic plants lurks a fierce little predator: common bladderwort, the only carnivorous plant known to live in the lake!

This underwater hunter has tiny, bladder-shaped traps that capture small aquatic creatures using negative pressure. When prey brushes a trigger, the trap snaps open in a fraction of a second, sucking the unsuspecting creature inside. You can even see the tiny organisms trapped inside the bladders!













What Have We Been Up to Since Spring?

By Sarah Pabian, Executive Director

It's been a busy spring and summer for Friends of Lake Wingra! From getting our hands dirty in rain gardens to connecting with our community through science, education, and our annual bike ride, we've been working to promote a healthy Lake Wingra. Here's a look at what we've accomplished!

Growing a Rain Garden Community

- Consulted with 15 homeowners about establishing rain gardens and qualifying for up to $500 in City of Madison reimbursements.
- Hosted a terrace rain garden workshop in the Westmorland neighborhood.
- Removed countless wheelbarrows of sediment from the hardworking Odana Hills rain garden.
- Planted more than 200 native plants to expand the rain gardens at Thoreau Elementary School.
- Provided input on the Odana Hills Golf Course redesign to encourage rain gardens, native plantings, and improved stormwater management.

Inspiring the Next Generation

- Taught stormwater science through our "Creek Talks" program for fifth graders at Thoreau Elementary School.
- Led rain garden lessons for fourth graders at Thoreau Elementary School.
- Shared Lake Wingra's history and ecology with teens in the Vilas Zoo Conservation Teen Program.
- Sponsored the return of Science Thursday at Wingra Boats and hosted a session exploring Lake Wingra life.
- Screened "An Invitation to Wonder" in partnership with the Neighborhood House.

Thank you to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's Go Outside Grant for supporting our Thoreau Elementary program materials!

Protecting Lake Wingra's Watershed

- Partnered with Wingra Boats for the annual Lake Wingra Clean-up.
- Removed invasive yellow iris from the shorelines of Vilas and Wingra parks.
- Participated in the Salt Wise Policy Summit at the State Capitol.
- Met with the City of Madison's Building Inspection Division to discuss sidewalk over-salting reporting.
- Explored local springs and searched for migrating warblers on a hike with our Executive Director.

Connecting Our Community

- Organized our second annual Lake Wingra Community Bike Ride.
- Shared information about Lake Wingra at First Fridays: Music by the Water.
- Connected with neighbors at the Good Neighbor Gathering.

As we head into winter, we're looking forward to building on this momentum, strengthening our organization, and finding new ways to bring our watershed community together for a healthier Lake Wingra. Thank you to everyone who joined us, volunteered, learned with us, and helped make this work possible!

Continued from page 2, Drake

when we have the least amount of vegetation on our trees and shrubs, so it is easier to see coyotes as they move across the landscape patrolling their territory and getting ready to welcome the next generation of coyotes into the world.

If you see a coyote as you're out and about, take a moment to enjoy watching a very cool animal that has done a fabulous job of adapting to urban life and sharing the same spaces we live in. From a safe distance, watch how the coyote moves, how it looks around, what it does. Coyotes are in the Canid family, same family as your domestic dog. Do you see similarities between what the coyote is doing and how it moves with your own dog's behavior? If you have kids with you, use this as a teachable moment to appreciate the wildlife around us and strengthen the human-nature connection.

Once you enjoy watching the coyote, please haze it. Hazing is not harmful to the coyote and is intended to instill and reinforce the fear of humans. When hazing a coyote, always stand your ground and do not retreat. As you're standing still yell "Go away" or something similar and wave your arms in big circles to make yourself look as large as possible.



Coyote tracks can often be seen on frozen Lake Wingra.

Alternatively, if you have a noisemaker available like an airhorn or whistle or have the opportunity to spray the coyote with a hose, those can also be effective hazing techniques. For a short tutorial about hazing, please watch this brief YouTube clip - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIC8KTDiIRs

Hazing is one of the most effective ways to promote a positive human-coyote co-existence.

When you see a coyote (or red fox), please report it to the UW Urban Canid Project's iNaturalist page - https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/uw-urban-canid-project

If you don't already have an iNaturalist account, you can create one by clicking on "sign up" in the upper right-hand corner of the web page.

Continued from page 2, Gaebler

But these rain gardens do more than add beauty and habitat to the neighborhood. They also do important work for Lake Wingra. Designed to capture dirty water running off the street, the gardens filter stormwater through the soil, allowing it to soak into the ground and recharge groundwater. That groundwater may eventually find its way to one of the many springs along the shore of Lake Wingra.

Meyer Avenue has another stormwater management feature helping water soak into the ground: 760 feet of permeable pavers installed between Toepfer Avenue and Glenway Street. Small gaps between the pavers allow water from the street to flow into a rock-filled trench, called a rock crib, beneath the road.

The trench extends four to seven feet deep, with its bottom resting in a layer of sand. Water can move through this sand into the groundwater much faster than through the soil in the upper layers. Although the pavers cover a five-foot-wide strip along the south side of the road, that area is large enough to manage runoff from all the adjacent asphalt pavement.

It was exciting to see all the pieces of this project come together this summer! I look forward to visiting Meyer Avenue during a rainstorm next year to watch the street, permeable pavers, and rain gardens in action—and see how these improvements help keep stormwater where it belongs: soaking into the ground rather than carrying pollutants downstream to Lake Wingra.



Permeable pavers on Meyer Ave. Photo by Sarah Pabian

Continued from page 1, Ortiz

As lakes cool through fall and winter, the density of the water changes. Freshwater is densest at 4° C (39.2° F), causing it to sink to the bottom and leaving slightly warmer water near the surface. However, on especially cold days, the surface water can cool enough to freeze. Ice is approximately 9% less dense than water, allowing it to float. This is the same property that allows oil to float on top of water. As the ice expands across the surface and thickens, it insulates the water below, preventing the entire lake from freezing solid.

Local records show a reduction in ice duration across all Madison lakes. Lake Wingra has lost an average of 0.4 days of ice cover per year since 1968 (Figure 1A). Shorter periods of ice cover affect both lake ecology and recreational opportunities. For a community engaged in outdoor activities year-round, this means less ice fishing, skating, and unique walks on a frozen lake.

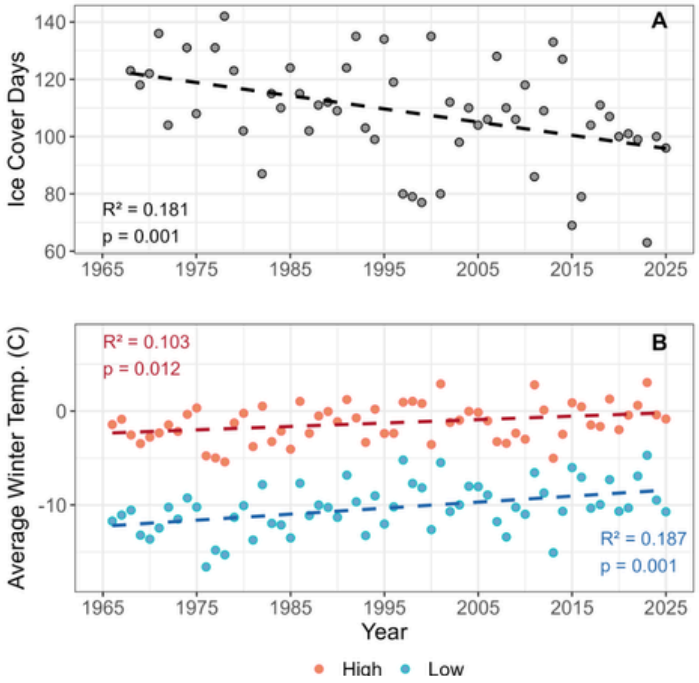


Figure 1. Temporal trends of A) ice cover duration on Lake Wingra and B) average winter temperature highs and lows. Dashed lines are significant linear regressions, with each summary of the relationship in the corresponding color.



Aerial image of frozen Lake Wingra on February 17, 2024.

From an ecological perspective, shorter ice-cover periods could affect fish in several ways. It could cause a shift in the fish community towards species that prefer warmer waters, such as carp or bass. Fish species that lay eggs under ice may experience increased predation on their eggs and young of the year by warm-water species. Changes in the timing of ice-on and ice-off could also alter the relationship between fish hatchlings and plankton. If these events are out of sync with each other, the young-of-the-year fish may experience food shortages during critical periods of development.

If a lake thaws while the surrounding watershed's soil is still frozen, nutrients may enter the lake more quickly, fueling early algal growth rather than slowly infiltrating through the soil. Later ice formation also extends the period during which aquatic plants and algae can continue growing into the fall. Finally, increasing the time lakes are exposed to the atmosphere also increases evaporation, which may intensify low water levels during drought years.

Ice cover durations have varied by as much as 80 days over the past 57 years. Although ice cover naturally varies from year to year, the general upward trends have been attributed to increasing temperatures from climate change (Figure 1). In the Madison area, average daily high and low temperatures during the winter months of

When do you think Lake Wingra will freeze this year?

Submit your guess on this **FORM** for a chance to win a free Lake Wingra Loop t-shirt or Friends of Lake Wingra t-shirt. You can also find the form at: lakewingra.org/lake-wingra-freeze

December, January, and February have steadily increased, corresponding with the loss of ice cover on Lake Wingra.

Global weather patterns can also influence lake ice cover, particularly El Niño and La Niña. This year, we are currently experiencing a strong El Niño event, meaning that the Pacific Ocean will experience weaker east-to-west winds, allowing warm water and air to travel across North America, setting the stage for a short ice period in Madison.

Ice cover is very important to the lake ecosystems and how we recreate on lakes in the winter. Although lake ice conditions vary greatly from year to year, the long-term trend is clear: ice cover is becoming shorter. We cannot confidently predict when ice will form or thaw on Lake Wingra any given year, but continued monitoring of the ice conditions and lake ecology can help us better understand the changes to come. As ice covered winters are becoming shorter, opportunities to safely enjoy Lake Wingra will also decrease, making periods when the lake freezes all the more special and worth savoring.

For entire article with references see:
lakewingra.org/thawing-of-lake-wingra



Frozen Lake Wingra. Photo by Sarah Pabian

Lake Wingra is Getting Saltier

Salt applied to sidewalks, parking lots, and roads in winter eventually makes its way into our lakes and groundwater. Lake Wingra has the highest chloride levels (a measure of salt pollution) of any lake in the Madison area, and many sidewalks are over-salted. Rising chloride levels can harm freshwater plants and animals.

You can help make a difference! This winter, help reduce excess salt in the Lake Wingra Watershed by using the City of Madison's Report a Problem website to report sidewalks that have been over-salted by property management companies or residents.

Every bit of salt we keep off our sidewalks is salt that won't end up in our lake!

For instructions on how to report sidewalk over-salting, visit:
lakewingra.org/excessive-sidewalk-salt



Chloride levels in Lake Wingra have been steadily rising. Data is from the Dane County Health and Human Services.

Upcoming Events:

Work Day with the UW Arboretum:

- December 5, 10 am - 12 pm. Meet at the parking lot on Arbor Dr. and Monroe St., UW Arboretum.

Board Meeting: Board meetings are open to the public and take place on the second Wednesday of each month.

- December 9, 7 pm - 8 pm, Sequoya Library

Find More Events at: lakewingra.org/events



WINGRA WATERSHED NEWS

Promoting a healthy Lake Wingra through an active watershed community.

FALL 2026

Friends of Lake Wingra
PO Box 45071
Madison, WI 53744