



October 2026

<https://oronolid.org>

CHAIR'S CORNER

With summer in the rear-view mirror, many of you have turned your attention to dock and lift removal, pontoon storage, and cleaning up the impending deposit of a bumper crop of fall leaves. Fall also can mean cozy campfires, homemade chili and crisp moonlit nights on the lake. Fall brings me an enhanced urgency to 'seize the day' as I observe the fleeting of warm days, the waning daylight hours, the finite time of perfect fall colors, and the inevitable seasonal change to winter. I hope you can soak it up!



OLID's annual meeting was held on August 25th, and this newsletter provides a recap of the accomplishments of OLID's committees through the 2026 year. **Tom Binsfeld** was re-elected to a three-year term on the OLID Board, and OLID members unanimously approved an annual service charge of \$124 per full unit (unchanged from 2026) for 2027 taxes. Thanks Tom, for your continued service to our membership!

—Charlie Blesener, OLID Chair

2026 Funding Committee Report

Begun in 2025, the Funding Committee's purpose is to build relationships, partnerships and funds to assure and sustain long-term quality recreational use and navigation of Lake Orono. The committee's annual task is to maximize the impact of OLID member-paid annual assessments, to track current and past OLID budget trends and continue pursuit partnerships and outside funding and grants to support annual and long-term OLID needs. Its longer-term focus is to plan for the ongoing need to fund recurring (approximately every 8-10 years) sediment removal.

In a May, 2026 work session with the City of Elk River, the OLID Board shared data on sedimentation accumulation and estimated a timeline of 2028-2030 for the next sedimentation removal. OLID presented an approximate 87,000 cu yards of sediment for removal from areas it identified as most

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Funding Committee Report *(continued from pg. 1)*

in need. Further, OLID requested the City include funding for an engineering study and Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the next sediment removal project in its 2027 budget. Completion of these two studies would make the next project ‘shovel ready’ in the eyes of any outside granting or funding agency. Estimated inflation-adjusted cost for this project was approximately \$2.7M, and the City Council, while not taking any formal action, was receptive to again advocating for local option sales tax (part of *Active Elk River* 2019-21) as a pathway for the City contribution to the project. (*Note: any local option sales tax would need to be legislatively approved at the state level and also be approved by a vote of Elk River citizenry to be implemented.*) Other pieces of funding the previous 2020-21 removal project were \$1.5M in state bonding and OLID homeowner assessments.

At the August 2026 annual meeting, a suggestion was made to consider a significant increase in annual member-approved service charge to specifically increase the financial capacity of OLID. For example about \$1.3M in grant funds is available every two years for lakes within the One Watershed One Plan program from the MN Board of Soil and Water Resources. These grants require a local match of 10%. The suggestion is to prepare to pre-fund OLID’s 10% to get a 90% return to support improved lake health of Orono. No action was taken on this idea, but it was verbally supported by those in attendance, and will need much further discussion, explanation and survey of stakeholders before any vote.



*Lake Orono Restoration & Enhancement dredging project
2020-21 (part of Active Elk River)*

A second line of potential future funding was also shared at the annual meeting. The Sherburne County Coalition of Lakes (SC COLA) is seriously examining a process by which it could play a 501c(3) fiscal sponsorship role to receive tax deductible donations for its member organizations from sources such as donor advised funds, family trusts from individuals or from estates in support of lake associations. The SC COLA could be the vehicle to allow OLID to also receive such funds.

Regardless, OLID will need help in strategizing and advocating local and legislative leaders, in grant writing and in demonstrating the need and value of continued investment in Lake Orono for the sediment removal project. If you have experience or skill in these areas, or if you’d like to learn these skills, we need you!

—Charlie Blesener, Funding Committee Chair

Lake Orono This Season: Vegetation, Water Quality, and What's Ahead

Vegetation Management and Water Quality Committees' Report 2026

If Lake Orono's vegetation felt heavier this summer, you weren't imagining it. At the Annual Meeting, our Vegetation Management and Water Quality Committees walked members through what we saw this season, why it happened, and where we go from here.



Curly-leaf pondweed

Two treatment efforts, working together

This year's response had two parts. The first was a public waters treatment aimed at curly-leaf pondweed, an invasive plant that grows early in the season and dies back in summer, releasing nutrients that fuel further growth. Treatment areas were

mapped directly from this and last season's rake-fullness survey results. The second was the Private Shoreline Program, which lets riparian homeowners enroll their shoreline for targeted herbicide treatment through Lake Management, Inc.

Grouping shoreline enrollments into one coordinated OLID program lowers the cost per property, simplifies permitting, and allows treatment of whole bays and shoreline sections rather than isolated docks.



Aerial imagery of the northwest bay shows the combined effect of many neighbors signing up together for shoreline treatments

Why 2022 and 2026 look alike

Water stargrass surveys taken from the same annual sample grid tell a clear story. Density was high in July 2022, dropped sharply in the wetter, more typical year of 2023 (and stayed fairly low through 2024 and 2025), then surged back to nearly 2022 levels in July 2026. Mid-May surveys this year looked mild, but that early read didn't hold.

Water Clarity: The Smoking Gun

Secchi disk readings at the Lake Orono bridge sampling site show exactly why 2022 and 2026 got so bad.

Secchi disk clarity at the bridge sampling site

NORMAL WEATHER YEAR

~3 ft

Sunlight reaches a normal depth – light penetration limits how far down the littoral zone can support dense growth.

JULY 2022 & JULY 2026

8 ft

Nearly triple the normal depth. Light reached far deeper sediment, fueling both water stargrass and filamentous algae overgrowth.

Source: OLID Water Quality Committee bridge sampling site, Secchi disk readings, July 2022 & July 2026.

Water clarity appears to be the common thread. Secchi disk readings at the Lake Orono bridge sampling site reached 8 feet in both July 2022 and July 2026, nearly triple the typical 3 feet. Clearer water lets sunlight reach deeper sediment, which fueled both water stargrass and filamentous algae growth. Warmer June and July temperatures likely amplified the effect, but the matching readings suggest clarity is the more consistent driver.

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Vegetation and Water Quality *(continued from pg. 3)*

Drought is the backdrop. Per the Minnesota DNR, low water shrinks the water column and lets light reach more of the lakebed, expanding the zone where rooted plants can grow. The DNR has described this year as a “storage drought,” and the USGS gage on the Elk River near Big Lake, just downstream of Lake Orono, agrees: it read 0.91 feet on July 30, 2026, compared with 2.95 feet on the same date in 2025.

A possible funding pathway

If stargrass density returns to 2022/2026 levels in the 2027 surveys, Minnesota Statute § 103G.625 gives municipalities and towns authority to fund control of harmful aquatic vegetation, including through a property tax levy, with a DNR permit required before work begins. OLID could pursue this route if needed with the City of Elk River to help fund a harvesting response.

Good news on Eurasian watermilfoil

Last year's targeted treatment is paying off. This year's point-intercept survey found only a handful of scattered points, mostly sparse or visual-only. On the advice of Sherburne SWCD and our vegetation surveyor, OLID plans to recruit and train volunteers for very targeted hand-pulling next year, an approach that has worked well on other Minnesota lakes.

On the watch list

Please keep an eye out for **yellow iris** and **purple loosestrife** along the shoreline. Both spread aggressively, crowd out native plants, and degrade fish and waterfowl habitat. Early infestations of loosestrife are hand-pullable, but they become costly to control once established. Yellow iris is also toxic to pets and livestock.



Zebra mussels on Orono

Please also check boats, docks, and lifts for **zebra mussels**. They are now in 551 Minnesota waterbodies, and prevention is our best defense. Unfortunately there is a major infestation in the lower lake, but a drawdown to dry or freeze the mussels may be a viable option for Lake Orono.



Yellow iris
(minnesotawildflowers.info,
©2009 Katy Chayka)

What you can do

- **Report** new or unusual growth early, before beds establish.
- **Keep** a natural shoreline buffer to slow nutrient runoff.
- **Limit** fertilizer near the water.
- **Clean** boats and equipment to avoid moving plant fragments between waterbodies.

Thank you to everyone who attended, asked questions, and enrolled shorelines for treatment this season, and to our local partners the City of Elk River, Sherburne SWCD and Sherburne County Coalition of Lakes for their continued support.

—Patrick Plant, Vegetation Management Committee Chair
—Tom Binsfeld, Water Quality Committee Chair

2026 Stocking Summary



The OLID completed its annual stocking initiative this summer, focusing on native species sourced from our approved supplier. With the \$2,000 budget allocated for 2026 OLID successfully stocked:

- 350 Adult Bluegill
- 400 Perch (3–5")
- 900 Adult Crappie

These additions support a balanced fish community and help maintain angling opportunities for residents and visitors. Feedback from anglers has been encouraging with many reporting strong activity and healthy fish throughout the season.

DNR Recommendations for Improving Fish Survival

The Minnesota DNR continues to emphasize the importance of responsible catch-and-release practices. These guidelines help protect fish populations, reduce stress on the lake's ecosystem, and increase the likelihood that released fish survive and thrive. These practices help ensure Lake Orono's fish populations remain strong for future generations of anglers.

Best Practices for Catch & Release



- **Set the hook quickly** to avoid deep hooking. Fish caught in the mouth have the highest survival rates.
- **Avoid deep water** when planning to catch and release, especially during periods of heavy biting.
- **Use proper tools**, such as pliers, to remove hooks efficiently. When needed, cutting the line and leaving the hook in place is an acceptable option.
- **Minimize time out of water** by landing fish promptly and keeping handling brief.
- **Handle fish carefully,**

using wet hands or rubberized nets to preserve their protective slime coating.

- **Release fish in the water** whenever possible, supporting their weight horizontally rather than lifting vertically.
- **Avoid stringers or live wells** for fish intended to be released.
- **Revive fish gently**, cradling them and moving them forward in the water until they swim away on their own.
- **Keep fish that are legally harvestable** if they are bleeding heavily or unable to right themselves.



—Chris Bickman, Fisheries Committee Chair

Sedimentation: Planning for Lake Orono's Future

Lake Orono is more than a lake – it is a reservoir at the end of the Elk River and receives water from a very large watershed. What happens upstream ultimately affects the lake. Runoff, erosion and other sources transport sediment into the Elk River, where much of that material eventually settles in Lake Orono. With a watershed many times larger than the lake itself, sedimentation is an ongoing challenge that requires long-term monitoring and management.

A History of Dredging

Lake Orono has a long history of addressing sediment accumulation. In the 1990s, residents began noticing that portions of the lake were becoming increasingly shallow and difficult to navigate. A Sedimentation & Water Quality Task Force was formed in 1995, and a sedimentation study completed by Wenck Associates in 1996 recommended dredging.

In 1998, the lake was drawn down and approximately 120,000 cubic yards of sediment were removed. At the time, studies estimated that the lake would eventually fill in and require another major dredging effort.



*John Weicht across from Simonet, Oct. 1997
(photo courtesy Sandy Weicht).*

By approximately 2014, residents were again noticing increasing sediment accumulation and impaired navigation. A 2018 Lake Orono Refresh study estimated that approximately 125,000 cubic yards of sediment had accumulated since the previous dredging project. This ultimately led to the Lake Orono Restoration and Enhancement (LORE) project.

Beginning in late 2020 and continuing into 2021, more than 140,000 cubic yards of material were removed from the lake. A catch basin was dredged to capture sediment before it spreads farther into the lake, making future sediment removal more targeted and potentially less costly. The project also included shoreline restoration and improvements intended to benefit aquatic habitat and recreation.

Monitoring Instead of Waiting

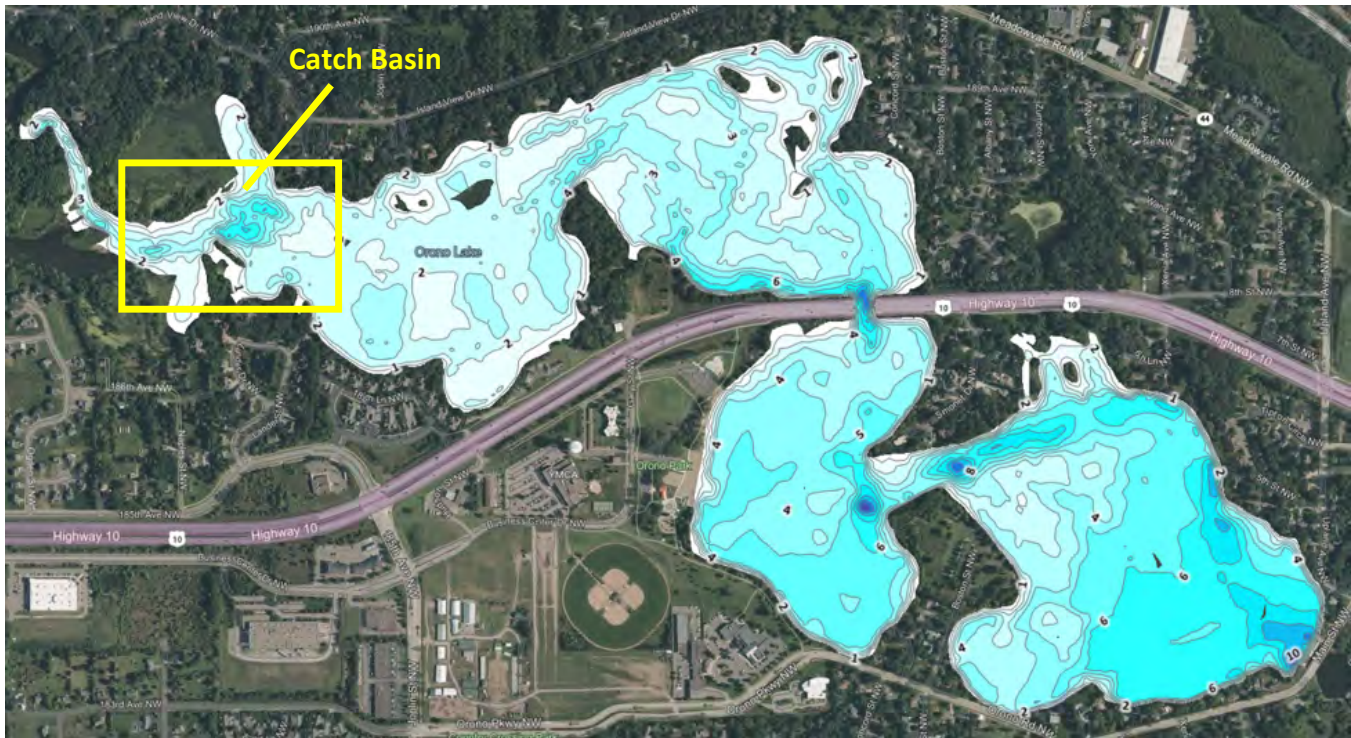
One of the most important lessons from the previous dredging projects is that Lake Orono cannot simply be dredged and then ignored for another 20 or 30 years. Sedimentation is a continuing process, and OLID is working with the City of Elk River and Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District to monitor changes and plan ahead. This ongoing work is consistent with OLID's broader mission to protect, preserve and enhance Lake Orono.

Since 2022, OLID's Sedimentation Assessment and Monitoring Committee has conducted annual surveys using sonar and BioBase technology. These surveys provide detailed information about:

- **Bathymetry** – water depth and changes in the lake bottom.
- **Bottom hardness** – information about the type and consistency of material on the lake bottom.
- **Aquatic vegetation** – the location and extent of aquatic plants.
- **Sediment accumulation** – changes in areas where sediment is collecting.

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Sedimentation *(continued from pg. 5)*



The 2026 assessment indicates:

- Approximately **16,098 cubic yards of sediment** have accumulated in the catch basin to date.
- Sediment continues to enter the lake and accumulate despite efforts to reduce sediment sources upstream.
- Based on current projections and the goal of maintaining approximately **4 feet of navigable depth**, dredging of the catch basin may be needed around **2029–2030**. Additional information can be found on the OLID website <https://oronolid.org/sedimentation/>.

Looking Ahead: Lake Orono Maintenance and Enhancement

OLID is now looking beyond the last major dredging project and considering how best to maintain the investment that has been made in Lake Orono.

The current Lake Orono Maintenance and Enhancement (LOME) planning effort considers several factors, including sediment accumulation, navigational depth, historical dredging data, future sediment loading and the cost of removing sediment.

A preliminary goal of approximately 87,504 cubic yards of sediment removal has been identified (*See map at end of newsletter*). This number is not a final dredging quantity or an approved project. Rather, it represents a planning target based on historical sedimentation information, projected accumulation in the catch basin and areas where navigation has become significantly impaired.

The objective is to remove as much sediment as is economically feasible and work toward restoring Lake Orono toward its historic baseline depth of approximately 5 feet or greater on average.

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Sedimentation *(continued from pg. 6)*

The sedimentation management strategy combines:

- Continued sonar and bathymetric monitoring
- Identification and reduction of upstream sediment sources
- Erosion-control and stormwater best management practices
- Shoreline stabilization
- Maintenance of the sedimentation catch basin
- Strategic dredging when necessary
- Continued coordination with the City of Elk River, Sherburne SWCD, DNR and other partners
- Transparent communication with Lake Orono property owners

Lake Orono will continue to receive sediment from its large watershed. We cannot eliminate that process, but we can monitor it, slow it where possible and plan for its long-term management.

The work being done today is intended to make sure Lake Orono remains navigable, healthy and enjoyable for future generations.

—Chris Rock, Sedimentation Committee Chair

Communications Committee

Over the past year, the Communications Committee has focused on community outreach, education, and keeping Lake Orono residents better connected to the work happening around the lake. We've continued to build *WaterWays* into a regular communication tool, working toward a quarterly cadence and adding features like *Chair's Corner* and *Ripples & Reflections* to combine important OLID updates with stories from the lake community. Our newsletters and other communications have helped highlight the work of OLID's committees and the many volunteers who give their time throughout the year to support and improve Lake Orono.

The committee has also worked closely with the City of Elk River and other community partners to help shape important policy changes and ensure Lake Orono has a voice in city government, while partnering with the unofficial *Best Dammed Yacht Club* Facebook group to promote events and strengthen the sense of community around the lake. The *Lake Orono Community* Facebook page and the oronolid.org website relay important notifications and information to the general public.

Overall, our goal has been pretty simple: make sure residents know what the OLID Board is working on, understand why the work matters, and have more opportunities to feel connected to both OLID and the Lake Orono community.

—Katie Ganfield, Communications Chair





Ripples and Reflections

We've lived in Elk River for 40 years, but it wasn't until we built our home on the lake that we first 'experienced' Lake Orono. We drove by it every day, but never kayaked, boated or fished. Now, eight years later, I can't imagine my life anywhere else. This lake is now woven into the DNA of our family. Neither of us had ever piloted a boat, or put in a dock or lift. But we are living proof that you CAN teach old dogs new tricks. We probably win the prize for the most frequent sunset cruisers.

I am a watcher... a noticer. My hobby is finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. The wake of the boat in the sunset. The bald eagle watching for fish while perched atop a dead oak tree. The green heron fishing along the shoreline... always just out of camera range. The haunting call of the sandhill cranes near the entrance to the river. I jokingly call myself the Jane Goodall of Lake Orono. While there are no gorillas here (although some humans may come close), there are many creatures to observe and befriend...some might call this stalking. I speak fluent animal languages. While Charlie listens to John Prine as we cruise along, I 'talk to the animals.' Dr. Doolittle has nothing on me!

We have our favorite spots. Unicorn Island with the two bridges was so named (by me) because it looks like a place where you might possibly see a unicorn. I'm still looking by the way. I've since discovered it had already been dubbed Hairball Island, so it is now Hairball/Unicorn Island. Egg Salad Bay is up by the sandbar near the entrance to the Elk River. This is the spot where we take our visiting siblings. We park there, immersed in Nature, lunching on our egg salad sandwiches and chips. Everything tastes better outdoors. If we're feeling adventurous we enter the canopy of the Elk River. Once you turn the corner, the universe shifts. The air is still. Your heartbeat quickens in anticipation. It is serenity at its finest. You are humbled by the beauty. You say a silent prayer of thanks for life itself.

I love that the river runs through our lake. Leonardo da Vinci said, "When you put your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first of what is still to come." The flowing water forces us to be reflective... to see where we fit in the Universe. As beautiful as the sunsets and animal kingdom are, the people are what makes this home. We are a community... a subset of Elk River, bonded by our love of the 'Best Dammed Lake.' May we never lose our sense of wonder. May we never take it for granted.

The sumacs along the edge of the cemetery are turning red, and the white gulls are gathering. Pontoon season is coming to an end. I'll see you on the lake... in April.



—Kathleen Blesener

Proposed areas to be dredged

