Aquatic Vegetation Harvesting to Establish Boat Travel Channels

Very large dense beds of aquatic vegetation in Lake Onalaska reduce and restrict boat access to significant portions of the lake for boats using traditional outboard motors.

Lake Onalaska Protection and Rehabilitation District (LOPRD) worked with US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to receive a permit to establish connected boat travel channel corridors on Lake Onalaska

Sailboat Club Bay, Mosey Landing, 1989 Dredge Channels and Brice Prairie Channel are connected by the boat travel channels.

Aquatic Vegetation Harvesting was initiated by LOPRD in 2020 in partnership with the FWS La Crosse District. The vegetation cutting plan and permit provide for up to three cuttings per year to maintain the boat travel channels.

Each cutting removes from the Lake several tons of vegetation containing organic matter and nutrients that are used beneficially as a soil amendment.

Vegetation Harvesting Contractor is a local business Schafer Marine.

Funding donations for vegetation cutting have been provided each year to Lake Onalaska District starting in 2019 by citizens, local organizations and local government.

The lake district budget for annual aquatic vegetation harvesting and removal has been $18,000.00 per year.

The Driftless region in Western Wisconsin has few natural lakes.
Water surfaces that can accommodate power boating in Western Wisconsin are reservoirs.The Mississippi River dams create a large majority of the Driftless Region surface water that can accommodate traditional power boating.

Lake Onalaska is an important destination for tourists to access and use for surface water based outdoor recreation.

During Covid large numbers of people accessed the lake to experience healthy outdoor recreation. In mid and late summer aquatic vegetation growth limits access and use for traditional power boats and paddle craft in significant areas of the lake.

Lake Onalaska aquatic vegetation beds have expanded significantly since the 1977 Lake Onalaska Rehabilitation Study by the UW-L River Studies Center. The expansion has been fueled by sediment and nutrients from the Mississippi River and its tributaries. The extensive expansion of aquatic vegetation beds have impacted fish habitat, water flow and recreational boat travel.

--Marc Schultz, November 5, 2025