Tug Lake District
LINCOLN COUNTY, WISCONSIN

TUG LAKE DISTRICT NEWS

ANNUAL MEETING EDITION · AUGUST 25, 2026 · FOR PROPERTY OWNERS AND RESIDENTS

ANNUAL MEETING

The next chapter for Tug Lake

Years of study have brought the District to a decision point. The next steps are to finish the Lake Management Plan, improve how the District communicates, and get ready to seek funding for lake projects.

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, August 29, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

Basement Community Room, Incredible Bank, 3210 E Main St, Merrill

The annual picnic potluck follows at 1:00 p.m. at the Tug Lake public park.

WHAT ATTENDEES WILL CONSIDER

- The election of a commissioner. John Greenwood has been nominated. Further nominations may be made from the floor, and a secret ballot is held only if more than one candidate stands.
- The District financial audit report.
- The proposed FY2027 budget, along with any amendments offered at the meeting.
- A proposed $14,950 property tax levy, together with $8,750 from District funds on hand, to pay for District operations.
- The planned April 1, 2027 resignation of Commissioner/Treasurer Don Olson, and a plan for the change.
- Reports on the District's progress from commissioners and consultants.

THE BUDGET IN FOUR NUMBERS

$23,700
PROPOSED FY2027 OPERATING BUDGET

$14,950
PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX LEVY

$8,750
FROM DISTRICT FUNDS ON HAND

$64.10
ESTIMATED TAX PER $100,000 OF VALUE

IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND IN PERSON

Join online at incrediblebank.zoom.us/j/84858420485

Meeting ID 848 5842 0485 · Passcode 326907 · By phone +1 305 224 1968

Planning figures based on the latest supplied 2025 equalized District value. The amount on an individual tax bill may differ. Questions about an individual tax bill: District Treasurer Don Olson, 715-536-4731, don@the-olsons.net

COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Why the District is proposing administrative support

The proposal would add paid help for specific tasks. The Board and the voters would keep control of policy and spending.

The effort to protect Tug Lake began with the Tug Lake Task Force and continued with the Tug Lake District. Residents and volunteers have carried it. They have worked with technical experts, government agencies, university researchers, and consultants, while also running the ordinary business of a public body.

The Board believes the next 16 months will ask more of volunteers than they can reliably deliver. The Lake Management Plan must be finished and submitted for DNR review. Surveys must be prepared and distributed. The website needs substantial work. Meeting notices, records, project schedules, and grant preparation all continue at the same time.

For FY2027, the proposed budget sets aside $17,500 for an Administrative Coordinator consultant. The purpose is not to replace volunteers. It is to add skilled help where the work needs steady attention, technical administration, or experience with local government and grants.

WHAT THE FIRST YEAR WOULD PRODUCE

- Surveys of property owners and residents, with the findings organized for the Board and the community.
- Clearer and more frequent updates while the Lake Management Plan is written.
- A finished Lake Management Plan, submitted to the Wisconsin DNR for review.
- A better District website carrying lake information, public records, and project updates.
- Plainer notices and summaries explaining what District meetings will cover.
- Project planning templates, and information for homeowners on practical steps they can take.
- Support for future grant applications, deadlines, contractors, and reporting.

ACCOUNTABILITY STAYS PUBLIC

The Coordinator would report to the Tug Lake District Board of Commissioners. The Coordinator would not replace the Board and would not set District policy. Commissioners would still decide budgets, contracts, spending, and lake management.

Progress would be reported at public Board meetings. Before recommending funding for another year, the Board would review the work completed, how well the position performed, and what it cost. Each year, electors and property owners would again decide what the District pays for.

> **SKILLS THE WORK NEEDS**
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> Experience with local government administration, public records, meeting support, grant preparation, environmental project coordination, and communicating with residents.

PUBLIC FINANCE

Understanding the proposed FY2027 budget

Paid for by a $14,950 property tax levy and $8,750 from District funds on hand.

BUDGET ITEM	AMOUNT	PURPOSE
Administrative	$400	Supplies and postage
Insurance	$1,200	District and Board liabilities
Professional services	$17,500	Administrative Coordinator consultant
Research	$800	Nutrient analyses and sampling supplies
Operations	$3,000	Monitoring buoy work
Community building	$500	Training and picnic
Contingency	$300	Unanticipated operating costs
Total	**$23,700**	**Proposed FY2027 budget**

The budget has no capital costs and no reserve. Electors and property owners who attend may amend it before voting. Against the District's equalized value of $23,323,062, the proposed levy is 0.6410 mills, or about $64.10 for every $100,000 of value. The FY2026 levy was $15,000, so the tax is close to flat. These are planning estimates, not the figure on your tax bill.

Half of the $17,500 Coordinator cost comes from the levy and half from funds on hand, which are a one-time source. Wisconsin law requires the budget to name any single item costing more than $10,000, which is why professional services appears on its own line.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Preparing for leadership changes

A commissioner seat is up for election, and District Secretary John Greenwood has been nominated for another term. A secret ballot is held only if more than one candidate stands. Residents interested in serving may put their own names forward, and nominations may also be made from the floor at the meeting. You must attend to vote, because absentee ballots and proxies are not permitted.

Commissioner/Treasurer Don Olson intends to resign from both positions on April 1, 2027. Under a proposed plan, Dave Klecka would be named Deputy Treasurer for training, a title that would not make him a commissioner or the statutory treasurer and would not let him authorize District funds.

Any eligible District resident may ask to be considered for the seat. What the plan adds is time: Don Olson would spend the months before April 2027 training Dave Klecka on the District's budgets, accounting, tax levies, banking, and grant reporting, keeping that knowledge in place.

Don Olson has given the District many years of service. If you see him, please thank him.

WATER QUALITY

What is the problem with blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae are unpleasant to look at. The larger problem is that some of them make a toxin, and Tug Lake has measured it.

Blue-green algae are not really algae. They are bacteria, called cyanobacteria, and they have lived in lakes a very long time. Some kinds produce toxins. A severe bloom in the summer of 2016 brought strong odors and spoiled the lake for swimming and boating. That bloom is what prompted the District's first study.

Testing here has focused on microcystin, a toxin that affects the liver. In 2019 the United States Environmental Protection Agency set a recreational limit of 8 micrograms per liter. That is the number the District measures against. In 2017, 34 percent of samples at the deep hole were above it. In 2018, every sampling day was well below it. In 2022, one sample came back above 500. The risk is occasional rather than constant, so a season's average describes it poorly.

> WHERE YOU ARE ON THE LAKE MATTERS
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> In 2025, samples from the deep hole stayed near 1 microgram per liter, below the limit. Samples taken in a shoreline bloom the same season measured above 500. A safe reading at the monitoring buoy says little about the water at your dock.

Dr. Todd Miller's 2018 report recommends two practical steps: buy strip test kits so volunteers can screen for microcystin, and stay out of the water during a bloom.

WATER QUALITY

How an alum treatment could help Tug Lake

Alum can lock up phosphorus stored in lake sediment. One tool in a larger strategy, not a cure.

One possible future project is an alum treatment, designed to cut the phosphorus that feeds blue-green algae. Alum is the common name for aluminum sulfate. In water it forms a soft material called floc, which binds to phosphorus and settles. On the lake bottom it can trap phosphorus and keep it away from algae.

If internal loading is a large part of the problem, reducing it could mean fewer blooms and clearer water. The Wisconsin DNR reports that alum treatments can remain effective for several years, though results vary. Alum would not end every bloom, because weather, runoff, and phosphorus still washing in from the land all affect how much algae grows.

Any treatment would have to match the lake's chemistry, depth, and sediment, and may need buffering and testing. No alum project should be described as guaranteed. Design, environmental review, permits, funding, and public decisions would all come first.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Alum Chemical Fact Sheet, December 2022.

LAKE MANAGEMENT

From study to action

Five years of water testing have made the problem clearer. The next phase is to finish the plan and get projects ready for funding.

For five years, residents, commissioners, volunteers, university researchers, and agency partners have studied the lake to learn what causes blue-green algae blooms.

The work looked at phosphorus from two directions. External phosphorus washes in from the land around the lake. Internal phosphorus builds up in the mud on the lake bottom and moves back into the water when oxygen near the bottom runs low. Phosphorus matters because it usually controls how much algae a Wisconsin lake can grow.

The next task is to finish the Tug Lake Management Plan and send it to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for review. The District also plans to survey property owners about their concerns and their ideas, and to improve its website so residents can find test results and project updates.

RESIDENT SURVEY

Tell the District what you think

Electors should expect to receive a survey. Make sure your contact information is up to date.

The District wants to know what you value about Tug Lake and what you think should happen next. Results will shape priorities in the Lake Management Plan. A draft will be presented at the Annual Meeting on August 29, so come and tell the Board what it should ask.

WHO IS HELPING

Buzz Sorge

BUZZ SORGE CONSULTING LLC

Retired Wisconsin DNR lake management planner. Leads the technical work on the Lake Management Plan.

Daniel Guild

LGMP

Municipal administration and public budgeting. Supports the plan, prepares the financial analysis, and develops resident communications.

Sara Guild

LGMP

Executive Director, Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation. Works on grants and engagement, and assists with proofreading and minutes.

Both firms are contractors rather than District staff.

Todd Nicklaus, Chairperson · 715-571-7011
Don Olson, Treasurer · 715-536-4731
John Greenwood, Secretary · 715-218-0284

TUG LAKE DISTRICT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Lincoln County, Wisconsin · www.tuglake.com · Questions: 715-218-0284