

Southeastern Wisconsin **Regional Planning Commission**



Lake District Overview

Moose Lake Public Hearing
Town of Merton
August 29, 2025

➤ What is a lake district?

- Enabling legislation
- Examples in Waukesha County

➤ Forming a lake district

- Proposed boundaries
- Approvals
- District board

➤ Operating a lake district

- Typical duties and responsibilities
- Tax levy
- Annual meeting



What is a lake district?



- Lake districts are special purpose units of government formed for protecting and rehabilitating lakes with authorities granted by *Wisconsin Statutes*

- *Wisconsin Statutes* Subchapter IV (33.21 – 33.37)
 - Legislation passed in 1974
 - Provides powers of and process for creating lake districts
 - District has defined boundaries in which it can operate – must cover entire lake
 - ❖ Property owners and resident voters in district can vote in annual meetings
 - District governed by board of commissioners with three-year terms
 - ❖ Partially elected and partially appointed
 - District must hold annual meeting to hold elections and pass budget
 - District can levy tax for lake protection efforts using tax rate set at annual meeting



●●●●● Waukesha County Lake Districts

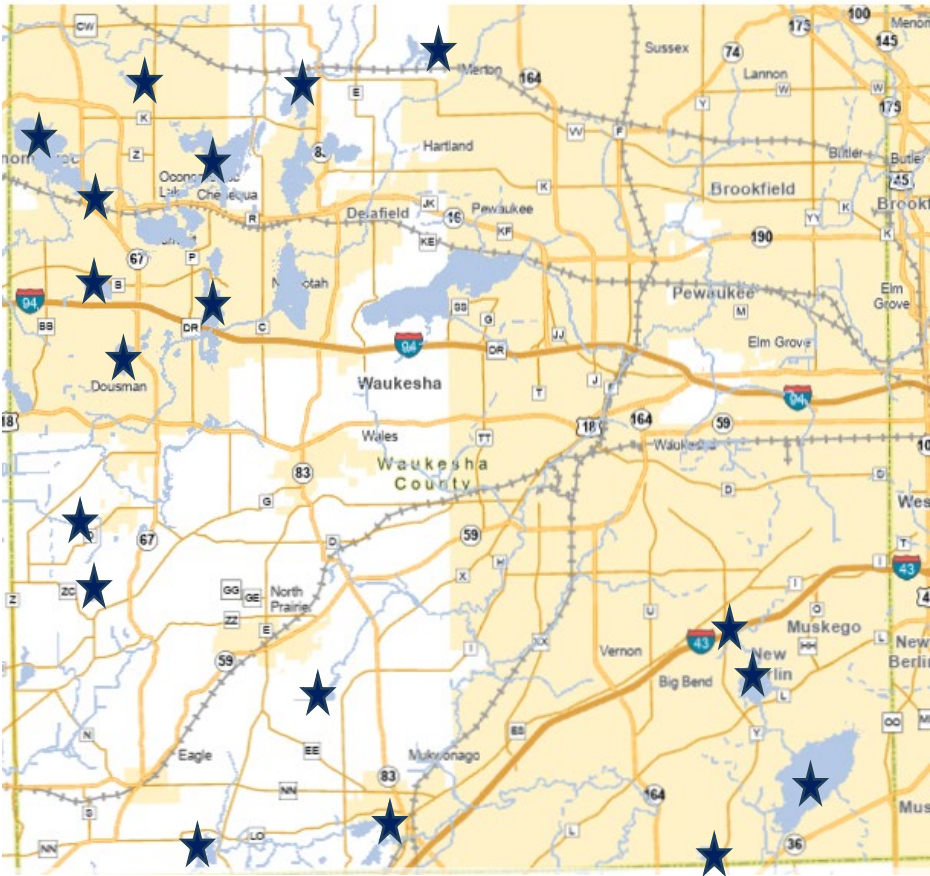


Lake districts:

Ashippun Lake
Okauchee Lake
Phantom Lakes
School Section Lake
Linnie Lac
Lower Genesee
Spring Brook Watershed

Lac La Belle
Little Muskego
Pretty Lake
Eagle Spring Lake
Fowler Lake
Silver Lake

North Lake
Big Muskego
Lake Keesus
Upper Nemahbin
Middle Genesee
Lake Denoon



Other example lake organizations:

Lake associations: Beaver, Friess, Golden, Hunters, Lower Nemahbin, Lower Nashotah, Pine
Municipal committee: Beaver, Nagawicka, Oconomowoc, Pine
Sanitary district: Pewaukee Lake



Forming a lake district: district boundaries

- District boundaries must be proposed at time of formation and must include entire lake
- Considerations
 - Typically include all riparian properties
 - May extend to include properties with lake access and/or in lake watershed
 - Determines number of eligible voters and potential tax levy
- Expansion
 - Contiguous parcels can petition to join district
 - District can propose expansion – repeat process of district formation with County board



●●●●● Forming a lake district: timeline



- Petition to form district must be signed by 51% of landowners within proposed district and filed with County clerk
- County board must conduct public hearing on lake district formation
 - Appointed County committee must report on public hearing findings within 3 months
- County board issues order to grant or deny district within 6 months of hearing

Timeline for Lake District Petitioning Process

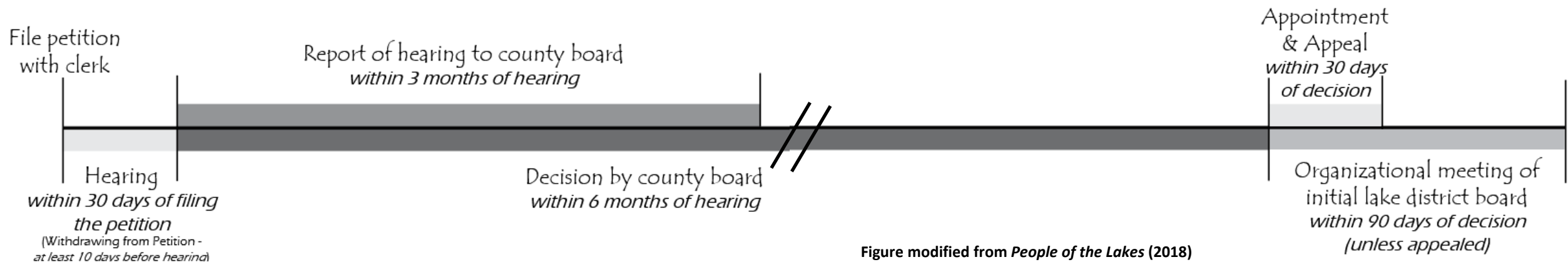


Figure modified from *People of the Lakes* (2018)

●●●●● Forming a lake district: County board decision



- County board decision must be based on four findings:
 - Petition signed by required number of owners (at least 51% of proposed district)
 - The district is necessary
 - Public health, comfort, convenience, necessity, or public welfare will be promoted by forming the district
 - The property included in the district will be benefitted by the district
 - Will lands proposed to be in district benefit as a whole?

- If district meets the four criteria, the County adopts a formal order to create district

- Persons aggrieved by this decision can petition for circuit court review within 30 days of the decision



●●●●● Forming a lake district: District board



➤ Lake district board consists of either 5 or 7 members (typically 5)

- One County representative
- One municipal representative
- Remainder elected by eligible district voters

➤ Initial district board of commissioners (5-member version)

- County appoints 4 of 5 members
 - 3 landowners within district
 - Member nominated by County land conservation committee
- Municipality with largest assessed property value appoints remaining member

➤ Non-appointed board members elected at first annual meeting



●●●●● Operating a lake district: first steps



- Initial board of commissioners sets up district and prepares for annual meeting
 - Keep copy of County board order with description of district boundary
 - Record with County register of deeds
 - File with Wisconsin Department of Revenue
 - File Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
 - Hold organizational meeting within 90 days after adopted County order
 - Select temporary officers
 - Sets first annual lake district meeting date (between May 22nd and September 8th)

- Expend funds necessary to conduct affairs until first annual meeting
 - Typically cover costs of posting and mailing annual meeting notice
 - Costs can be recouped through initial assessment of district property



●●●●● Operating a lake district: annual meetings



➤ Annual meetings

- Meeting must be held between May 22nd and September 8th
- District residents and property owners can vote on district affairs

➤ Required actions:

- Conduct an election to fill vacancies in elected positions on district board
- Approve budget for coming year

➤ Example additional actions

- Vote on tax on all taxable property within district
 - ❖ Capped at rate of 2.5 mills or \$2.50 per \$1,000 of equalized valuation
- Approve borrowing and/or appropriate funds for conservation
- Create fund to finance specified capital costs



●●●●● Operating a lake district: other considerations



➤ Typical roles and responsibilities of lake districts

- Levy taxes, apply for grants, and use funds for lake management and protection
 - Conduct aquatic plant management
 - Fund projects to enhance lake (shoreline buffers, rain gardens, fish habitat and stocking)
 - Assist with AIS monitoring (e.g., Clean Boats, Clean Waters)
 - Help with water quality monitoring (e.g., Citizen Lake Monitoring Network)
- Share lake information with district residents
- Establish and enforce boating ordinances
- Act as public forum about lake and its management

➤ Districts must abide by open meetings and public records laws

- *Wisconsin Statutes 19.81 – 19.98 and 19.31 – 19.39*
- 3 commissioners constitutes a quorum for 5-member board



More information

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➤ Chapter 33, Subchapter IV of *Wisconsin Statutes*

- <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/33/iv>

➤ University of Wisconsin Stevens-Point - Extension Lakes, *People of the Lakes*

- <https://www3.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/UWEXLakes/Pages/organizations/guide.aspx>

People of the Lakes

A Guide for Wisconsin Lake Organizations



Lake Associations
& Lake Districts

12th Edition - 2018



Thank You

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