

Understanding the Little Green Lake Aquatic Plant Management Plan

A Plain-Language Overview for Lake Users and Residents

Why Aquatic Plants Matter in Little Green Lake

Aquatic plants are a natural and important part of a healthy lake. They stabilize sediments, provide habitat for fish and wildlife, and support water clarity by absorbing nutrients. In Little Green Lake, however, aquatic plants do not grow evenly throughout the year. Instead, plant growth is dominated early in the boating season by an invasive species called curly-leaf pondweed. When this plant grows excessively, it interferes with boating, swimming, and other lake uses. Later in the summer, when curly-leaf pondweed naturally dies back, large areas of the lake are left with very little plant cover, which can contribute to murkier water and reduced habitat quality.

The Little Green Lake Aquatic Plant Management (APM) Plan was developed to address these challenges in a thoughtful and science-based way. The plan provides a long-term framework for managing aquatic plants while balancing recreation, habitat needs, and water quality goals.

What Is an Aquatic Plant Management Plan?

An Aquatic Plant Management Plan is a planning document, not a single treatment proposal. It explains:

- What aquatic plants currently grow in the lake
- What problems are occurring
- What management tools are available
- How decisions should be made over time

For Little Green Lake, the APM Plan serves several purposes:

- It meets Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) guidance for lake management planning
- It supports applications for mechanical harvesting permits and state grant funding
- It provides transparency and consistency in how management actions are selected
- It allows management to adapt as lake conditions change

Importantly, the plan does not lock the Lake District into using any one method every year. Instead, it outlines a flexible decision-making framework that can respond to monitoring results, lake conditions, and available resources.

Current Conditions in Little Green Lake

Little Green Lake is a shallow headwater drainage lake. Because of its depth, shape, and watershed setting, the lake is particularly sensitive to nutrients and invasive species.

Key conditions described in the APM Plan include:

- Early-season nuisance growth of curly-leaf pondweed that restricts navigation
- Rapid die-off of that plant by early summer
- Limited plant cover later in the season, reducing habitat and sediment stability
- Reduced water clarity during much of the summer and early fall

These conditions are influenced by long-term nutrient inputs, past management activities, and the biology of invasive species present in the lake.

Management Goals of the APM Plan

The APM Plan establishes clear, long-term goals to guide decision-making. In plain terms, the plan seeks to:

- Reduce nuisance plant growth that interferes with navigation and lake use
- Prevent and manage invasive species in responsible ways
- Improve conditions that support stable, native aquatic plant coverage
- Protect habitat used by fish and wildlife
- Support water clarity and overall lake health

Rather than focusing only on short-term relief, the plan emphasizes actions that work together over time to improve lake conditions in a sustainable manner.

How Management Decisions Are Made

The APM Plan uses an integrated pest management approach. This means that no single tool is relied upon in isolation. Instead, decisions consider:

- Monitoring data from aquatic plant surveys
- Timing and density of plant growth
- Past management outcomes

- Potential benefits and risks of available tools

Management options discussed in the plan may include:

- Prevention and education programs to reduce the spread of invasive species
- Mechanical harvesting to improve navigation during peak problem periods
- Targeted use of other management tools only when clearly justified
- Continued monitoring to evaluate results and guide future actions

By using monitoring and evaluation as a foundation, the plan reduces the likelihood of unnecessary or ineffective treatments while allowing adjustment when conditions change.

Adaptive Management: Learning Over Time

A key feature of the Little Green Lake APM Plan is adaptive management. This simply means learning from experience.

Each year, information such as plant survey results, water clarity observations, and management outcomes are reviewed. That information helps answer important questions:

- Did actions taken achieve the intended outcome?
- Were any unexpected results observed?
- Should future efforts be adjusted in timing, location, or method?

This approach recognizes that lakes are dynamic systems. What works one year may need refinement in another. The APM Plan provides the structure needed to make those adjustments thoughtfully and transparently.

What the Plan Does *Not* Do

It is equally important to understand what the APM Plan does not do.

The plan does **not**:

- Approve blanket or automatic treatments
- Replace required WDNR permits
- Eliminate the need for annual Lake District decisions
- Guarantee immediate or permanent results

Instead, it serves as a guide that supports informed choices and regulatory compliance while maintaining flexibility.

Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation of the APM Plan is led by the Little Green Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District, working with partners such as county staff, state agencies, professional consultants, contractors, and volunteers as appropriate.

The Lake District Board uses the plan as a decision-support tool, relying on it to:

- Evaluate management options
- Prioritize actions
- Communicate the rationale behind decisions
- Maintain consistency from year to year

This governance role helps ensure that management activities are coordinated, defensible, and aligned with long-term lake objectives.

How the Public Can Use This Plan

For lake users and residents, the APM Plan provides:

- A clear explanation of why aquatic plant management is needed
- Transparency into how decisions are evaluated
- Assurance that actions are science-based and informed by District member input
- A long-term perspective rather than short-term reactions

Reading the plan can help set expectations and clarify why certain actions are recommended or not recommended in a given year.

Looking Ahead

The Little Green Lake Aquatic Plant Management Plan is one part of a broader lake stewardship planning and implementation effort. By combining monitoring, targeted actions, and adaptive decision-making, the plan supports steady progress toward healthier lake conditions while maintaining recreational access. Long-term improvement takes time, and the APM Plan is designed to guide that work responsibly, protecting the lake today while planning for its future.