

July 2026

## Draw-Down Dredging to Start Fall 2027

The Waterford Waterway Management District (WWMD) voted to push a potential start date for the draw-down dredging project to Fall 2027.

On June 26, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) approved the WWMD for a three-year drawdown order. This is a significant milestone in the effort to improve the waterway and marks the first time the WWMD received approval by the DNR to address the sediment buildup across the waterway. This is not the only permit/order needed to start the project. The drawdown order and dredging are permitted separately. The WWMD needed to secure the drawdown order prior to applying for a dredging permit. The current plan is to draw down the river by five feet each fall over three consecutive years. Year one allows the project management team to evaluate how the river system draws down and to assess how to best remove dredged material. During this time riparian owners could complete shoreline improvements and personal dredging projects (appropriate DNR permits still apply). In years, two and three exposed sediments would be mechanically removed using excavators and bulldozers.

After negotiations with the DNR, a start date of **September 15** of each year was agreed upon. At a drawdown rate of 4 inches per 24 hours, it will take 15 days to achieve a drawdown of 5 feet. The drawdown process would be completed by October 1 of each year with no additional drawdown activities permissible after October 7th. The water level will retain the 5-foot draw-down until the spring thaw (*see draw-down dredging summary below for more details*).

The draw-down dredging project has several milestones to reach before the project gets the final go-ahead of the DNR. The WWMD is in the process of completing the dredging permit application. Additionally, the DNR is requiring the WWMD to apply for an Incidental Take Permit which will allow us to proceed with the draw down even if it might unintentionally "harm" or "harass", a protected species, provided the impacts are minimized and mitigated. This permit process is expected to take 4-6 months.

With additional permits needed and an earlier start date to draw down than WWMD was hoping for, the board made the unanimous decision to push the project's start date back to Fall 2027. This allows for an additional 12-14 months to communicate with key stakeholders and pursue additional grants to help offset costs of the project. In June the Racine County Board awarded the WWMD \$750,000 from Monsanto settlement funds. This initial seed money is a significant contribution to the project, but the board will seek additional state and federal funding as the total cost for this project is more than the settlement funds awarded. Conversations with elected officials have been ongoing and with approval from the DNR our project has developed significant momentum at the county and state levels.

The WWMD recognizes the significant impact this project will have on riparian owners, community members, visitors, and valued businesses. The WWMD acknowledges there will be many questions and challenges ahead and would like to share our plan for communication between now and the Fall of 2027, and until the project's completion.

The WWMD is working with Baxter and Woodman, our project management team, to develop a Riparian Owner Resource Guide to address the following:

- Project outline, dates, details and impacts o What riparian owners can do during draw-down
- Links to guidance from DNR regarding the process for necessary permits and process for application for shoreline improvements and personal dredging
- What to do with dredged material o Resources to remove piers, docks and watercraft
- Environmental impact and what to do if you see something during the project o FAQs and more
- WWMD Website will host project information, resource guide and contact information, as well as links to information about necessary permits/processes, and research.
- WWMD will present an update to the project at the 2026 WWMD Annual Meeting
- Riparian owner and community engagement events will be held to inform the public about the project
- WWMD will continue to communicate on key milestones as they are reached

## **WATERFORD WATERWAY 3 CONSECUTIVE YEAR DRAW DOWN – SUMMARY**

### **Year 1 (Sept. 15, 2027 – Ice out Spring 2028)**

- Draw-down river level by 5ft
- Allows for assessment and evaluation of the draw-down
- Contractors can inspect the site and evaluate for bidding purposes
- Riparian owners can perform shoreline, dock, and pier repairs and improvements
- If riparian owners have previously applied for and been awarded permits for individual dredging and shoreline improvements, these projects can be performed during draw-down

### **Year 2 (Sept. 15, 2028 – Ice Out Spring 2029)**

- Draw-down river level by 5ft (or recommended level based on year 1 assessment)
- Main navigational lanes and channels are dredged using mechanical means
- Riparian owners can perform shoreline, dock, pier, repairs and improvements
- If riparian owners have previously applied for and been awarded permits for individual dredging and shoreline improvements, these projects can be performed during draw-down if owners have worked in collaboration with the WWMD dredging contractor to avoid any interruptions or interference with the main dredging project.
- Pre and post draw down assessments

### **Year 3 (Sept. 15, 2029 – Ice Out Spring 2030)**

- Draw-down river level by 5ft (or recommended level based on year 2 assessment)
- Remaining main navigational lanes and channels are dredged using mechanical means
- Riparian owners can perform shoreline, dock, pier, repairs and improvements
- If riparian owners have previously applied for and been awarded permits for individual dredging and shoreline improvements, these projects can be performed during draw-down if owners have worked in collaboration with the WWMD dredging contractor to avoid any interruptions or interference with the main dredging project.
- Pre and post draw down assessments

# Latest Information

## May 13, 2026

The WWMD commissioners held a stakeholder workshop with the project leads for the draw down dredging. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss communications strategies moving forward with the working assumption that we get DNR approval.

This meeting discussed a Riparian Resource Guide, communications strategies and the hosting of information on our website. The commission also discussed future work and needs of the district as the project moves forward.

The WWMD is aware that communication to internal and external stakeholders will be critical moving forward. As of this meeting the board and project team were waiting for the necessary approvals from the Wisconsin DNR.

## April 13, 2026

Vote by riparian community passes to modify annual budget for the purposes outlined in our dredging project request. The WWMD will now move forward with soil sampling and approvals from the DNR. At the same time the WWMD and our engineers will be working to develop an updated timeline for riparian owners.

The vote suggested strong support for a draw down dredging approach. Many riparian comments were heard and noted to be addressed by the WWMD and Engineers at future riparian owner workshops. The WWMD thanks the community for coming out and sharing their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions as this process moves forward.

## February 2026

The WWMD has taken the first step on January 15th towards permitting a major draw-down dredging project that would potentially start in 2027. The WWMD has partnered with Baxter & Woodman to serve as the project managers and coordinators for a draw-down dredge approach. Baxter & Woodman have extensive experience working with draw-down dredging projects across the state and region. They bring the experience and necessary expertise necessary to assist the WWMD in attaining our dredging goals.

We will do an initial draw down in October of 2026 that will allow our engineers to test the sediment, monitor the river's path and let our owners clean up their shorelines. In early spring the river and lake will be returned to the ordinary high-water mark, and typical lake and river recreation will return.

In winter of 2027, the major project will remove a minimum of 189,000 cubic yards of sediment from our waterway, after the river level has been reduced by 5 feet. Heavy machinery will be brought in to bulldoze and excavate the muck, restoring depths to the original hard bottom. It may take two seasons to remove the total desired amount of muck, but it will be worth it.

## **Please note that this is only an initial step - we are working toward a final plan**

Once this plan is finalized we will be able to provide more information and address questions posed by the riparian community. The WWMD will only post updates on our official communication channels which include: WWMD website, Facebook posts/events/live updates, and official email listserv.

If you have questions please direct those to [info@waterfordwwmd.com](mailto:info@waterfordwwmd.com).