



CLEAR THINKING

CLEARLAKECONSERVANCY.ORG

FALL 2026 | ISSUE: 67

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Photo by Tracy Hughes

Autumn Trees and the Lakeside Breeze

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It's officially sweater season here at Clear Lake. The summer breeze that once delivered sweet relief on warm days has since changed to a cool bite, reminding us to grab our favorite knit hats. The season has certainly arrived, and it brings vibrant colors of red leaves, orange pumpkins, and yellow prairie grass. This fall, we invite you to take a break, a breath, and experience the nature display around you.

As we admire the scenery around us, we reflect on the amazing work that our community has accomplished this year. We've reached more than **200 youth at educational programs**, and more than **600 attendees through our events**, made possible through the help of **112 volunteers**. These numbers show our collective goal – for past, present, and future generations to steward this place we love.

Behind the scenes, we have been working with our state, federal, and scientific partners to analyze three years of year-round Watershed Diagnostic Data. What we've discovered is fascinating – seasonal patterns of ecosystem shifts, predictable responses to large storm events, and so much more. While this data-driven analysis continues, we know some eager minds are ready to dive into water quality. If that sounds like you, you'll want to visit Page 5 for the official launch of our **Water Quality Monitoring Dashboard**.

On the land, you've continued to support restoration of the natural spaces we love most. This year, we've focused on planting species that help our water and soil for full ecosystem health. Our properties have been refreshed with over **1,200 native seeds and trees**. Even outside of the nature preserves, this community has collectively planted **63 Bur Oak, Chokecherry, and Ninebark trees** on residential properties during our Oaktober planting program.

As we recognize this progress, we can't help but to reflect on the growth we've seen in the last five, ten, and thirty-five years within the Conservancy. Through shared values and a common goal, this community has been the foundation of conservation. When you see the autumn leaves and feel the lakeside breeze, we hope you can admire the tremendous efforts to conserve this special place and feel hope in the promise of a clear future.



Photo by Don Luepke



CAROLINE BARTH
Executive Director



BARB WENGER
President

EVENTS

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US THIS SUMMER!



Feeling energized after a group fitness hike at Brennan Woods led by Claire Timmer.



Making memories and carrying on family traditions at Clear Lake.



Documenting wildflowers during an iNaturalist BioBlitz at Spangler Grove.



Handing out snacks and smiles during Run Day, Fun Day.



Volunteers helping conduct water quality testing.

GIVE THE GIFT OF CONSERVATION



12 note cards for \$15



Scan to purchase



Sun shirts, crewneck sweatshirts, hoodies, EWM t-shirts, mugs, 3x5 flags, burgee flags – while supplies last. Some youth sizes are available.

Contact our office (info@clearlakeconservancy.org) to order and arrange pickup or delivery.

LOCAL CONSERVATION.
LASTING IMPACT.

LAND

A YEAR OF PLANTING!

Have you ever wondered how we continue conservation work on our Nature Preserves? Much of this work involves removing invasive (bad) plants from these natural spaces. However, through years of dedicated efforts, we've found less invasive growth and more space available for native (good) plants. This summer, we placed a stronger emphasis on planting locally sourced native plants in identified areas that need a friendly boost.



WHAT DID WE PLANT THIS YEAR?

- **200** Bur Oak, Ninebark, and Chokecherry trees at Waterfield Preserve
- **20** acres of tallgrass prairie seeded at South Bridge Preserve
- **210** native wildflowers and grasses at Kasota Island
- **220** native wildflowers and grasses at Brennan Woods
- **570** wildflowers and grasses at Waterfield Preserve
- Over **75** gallons of seed collected for future plantings

A grand total of 1,200 Flowers, grasses, and trees planted across our Nature Preserves



A special thanks to our Land Steward, Joe Bernard, and the many volunteers who assisted with these planting and seed collection programs!

WATER

YOUR LAKE. YOUR DATA. YOUR DASHBOARD.

Visit Our New Water Quality Dashboard

For more than 35 years, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and grant partners have helped us build a valuable record of Clear and Round Lakes. Today, that history gives us a deeper understanding of our lakes, their ecosystems, and the seasonal changes that affect them.

Our most recent three-year Watershed Diagnostic Study took that work further, collecting data throughout the year and helping establish a strong foundation for our 2025 National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Readiness Award. As we move through the final stages of the NWQI Readiness program, we are excited to share a related passion project that puts water information directly into the hands of our community.

Water Quality for All

Whether you're a year-round resident, a summer visitor, a boater, a fisherman, or simply someone who loves Clear Lake, understanding current water conditions can help you make the most of your time on and around the lake.

In 2026, we're introducing our new **Water Quality Monitoring Dashboard**, created in partnership with Ecosystems Connections Institute. With just a few clicks, you can explore near real-time data from major streams flowing into Clear Lake and the sole outflow at Round Lake dam. **What can you learn?**

- A big storm just rolled through. How much water is flowing into the lake?
- Planning a trip to Round Lake? Is the water level high enough for your boat to pass under the bridge?
- Family coming to swim today? What's the current water temperature?
- Has the lake level seemed lower recently? How does it compare with the last 30 days?

The dashboard makes it easier to explore these questions and many others with current information at your fingertips.

Many of you have supported our water-quality work for decades, and your involvement, ideas, and feedback continue to make this work possible. This dashboard represents another step forward, bringing our community and science together to better understand, protect, and enjoy Clear and Round Lakes for years to come.

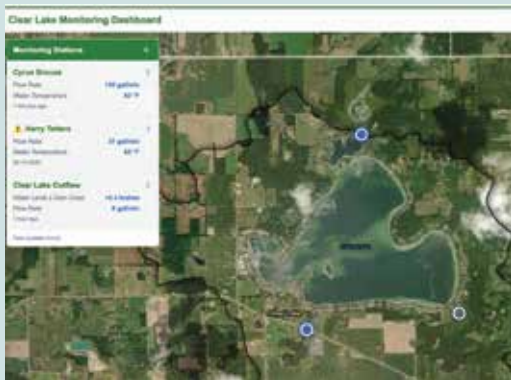
Explore the Water Quality Monitoring Dashboard

<https://eci-water-monitoring.vercel.app/clearlake>

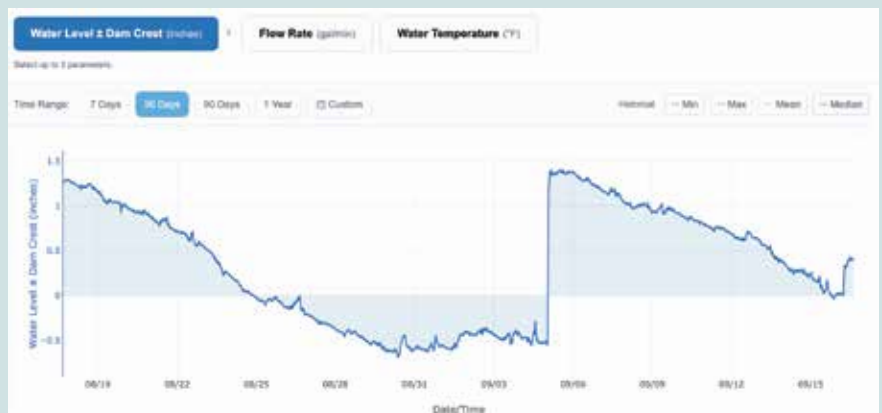


Scan the QR code to explore the dashboard on your phone.

Keep an eye on the water. Learn from the data. Be part of protecting our lakes.



The Water Quality Monitoring Dashboard homescreen displays data locations on a Clear Lake watershed map.



A graph of the water level at the Round Lake Dam over a 30-day period.

EDUCATION

KNEE-HIGH NATURALIST RECAP



For four Fridays in July, kids and adults came together to learn about, explore and enjoy the natural world around Clear Lake Township during the **22nd season of Knee-high Naturalists**.

We kicked off the season with the sounds, rhythms, and shenanigans of **The Dumpster Drummers**, who helped us refresh our knowledge about recycling and our water supply.

Nature inspired our creative side, too. Participants gathered items from nature to create beautiful sun prints, then watched with excitement as their designs slowly appeared into the sunlight.

Exploration took center stage during two of our sessions. Kids and adults hit the trails at **Brennan Woods** in search of butterflies and explored **Waterfield Preserve** with a nature-themed scavenger hunt. Each adventure offered a chance to discover something new and see our natural world from a different perspective.

Thank you to our 2026 partners! We couldn't make Knee-high Naturalists happen without the support of:

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Thank you to our 2026 partners! We couldn't make Knee-high Naturalists happen without the support of:

- The Dumpster Drummers (with special guest, Aaron Howard)
- John Brittenham, Blue Heron Ministries
- Heidi Stark, Yoga (cancelled due to weather)
- Steuben County Arts Scene
- ACRES Land Trust
- Clear Lake Yacht Club

Thank you to everyone who joined us, shared their knowledge, encouraged curiosity, and helped make this season such a memorable one!

We are already looking forward to **Knee-high Naturalists 2027**. What would you like to learn about next summer? **Send your ideas to info@clearlakeconservancy.org.**

WHY OAKS?

During our **Oaktober tree planting program**, we heard one of our favorite questions: **"Why oaks?"**

The answer begins with their remarkable role in our local ecosystem. For thousands of years, oak trees have served as a **keystone species** in our ecoregion. They support wildlife, strengthen food webs, protect natural habitats, and contribute to our local landscape and economy.

Oaks also provide benefits we can see and experience right here at Clear Lake. Their deep roots hold soil in place and can help manage and filter water. Their broad crowns slow rainfall before it reaches the ground, helping reduce erosion. And their branches, bark, leaves and hollows provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies, insects and other wildlife.

Those benefits inspire our Oaktober efforts. **Why oaks? Because when we plant an oak, we're not just planting a tree. We're investing in the future of our lake, our land, and the wildlife that calls them home.**



Photo by Ann DeWert

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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The Community Foundation of Shelby
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IN-KIND

Essentially Clean & More

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For Mark & Marianne Kramer
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Susanne Millan with employer match from AbbVie	Nancy and Bob Webster

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Culligan
Ellison Bakery
Steuben County Tourism Bureau
Matt and Claire Timmer
Barb Wenger

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SIGHTS OF THE SEASON

See the lake through the lens of our talented residents.
To submit a photo for "Sights of the Season", please
email our office at info@clearlakeconservancy.org.



Photo by E.G. McArdle



Photo by Tessa Wehrenberg