

Lake District Formation & Dam Reconstruction Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ is an attempt to provide straight-forward, timely and concise answers to questions about the formation of a Lake District and the potential reconstruction of a dam on Callahan-Mud Lake. The goal of this format is to create a common understanding of essential questions and to focus on facts that will enable us to effectively pursue a path that is in the best interest of those who want to continue enjoying our shared resource.

Please know that it is not an exhaustive list of all of the possible questions and, by design, it does not attempt to answer the covered questions in detail. Also, it is what we know at the time it was created and/or updated – in other words, it is the best information that we have at this moment and it is subject to change as we learn more. As such, it is a living document and it will be periodically updated.

Finally, your feedback and involvement is welcomed. If you have suggestions for questions to be added or questions about the answers provided, please reach out to one of the individuals listed at the end of the FAQ.

Why do we need a Lake District?

A Lake District provides lake residents and stakeholders with several benefits including: (1) creating a legal entity for ownership of the area that includes the existing dam, (2) establishing a state recognized organization that makes us eligible to take advantage of state grants and loans for lake management purposes including milfoil management, dam reconstruction, etc., (3) enabling the Lake District to efficiently tax property to raise funds and to hold insurance on the dam, and (4) providing a forum for organizing activities, sharing information and building community in order to maintain the ongoing health of our lake.

More specifically, the need for a Lake District now is related to the importance of being able to effectively explore the potential design and installation of a dam on Lake Callahan in order to prevent failure of the existing dam or its potential removal by the DNR, and to successfully manage lake water levels on an ongoing basis in the years ahead.

What happens if we don't form a Lake District or take action regarding the dam?

The existing dam was assessed by a DNR inspector in 2022 and its condition was deemed to be "poor". Although near-term dam failure is not predicted, its poor condition increases the possibility that the dam will fail which would result in the loss of our lake and the associated lake benefits, as well as diminished home values.



By not having a Lake District, both the ownership of the dam and its ongoing maintenance remains uncertain which means that it poses a risk to others if it is not actively managed and if it were to fail.

As a result, the DNR has informed us that continued inaction would lead to them deeming the dam to be "abandoned". An abandoned dam would ultimately result in its removal by the state in order to restore the natural flow and thereby eliminate our lake in its current form. However, this outcome is avoidable and the formation of a Lake District is the first in a series of steps to ensure a positive outcome that is within our control.

Who currently owns the dam?

The ownership of the dam is uncertain despite hours of research by multiple individuals including government resources. The passage of time, the transfer of the property to and from various parties, and the lack of clarity



An image of the lakes before the dam was constructed. Notice how the vast majority of the current lakes was originally marsh.

in publicly available documents has contributed to the uncertainty. A DNR representative specifically said that ownership was indeterminable based on the documents that he reviewed and that attempting to figure it out would both be a lengthy process and one that would likely not provide a definitive answer. Uncertain ownership of dams is not an uncommon situation and the DNR has shared that there are more than 400 such dams within the state of WI.

Even if an owner were to somehow be identified, it is unlikely that the party would be able or willing to fund the cost of building a dam that met code requirements. The DNR has recommended that the best alternative would be for us to form a Lake District.

Additionally, based on conversations with Sawyer County and Round Lake Township personnel, there is no interest by either municipality to assume ownership of the dam. However, there would be support for having a Lake District take ownership in order to maintain the health of the dam, the lake, and the property tax revenue that it generates.

Didn't we try to form a Lake District before? What was the outcome?

Yes, an initial attempt was made to form a Lake District in 2012. Unfortunately, despite 77% voting to form a Lake District, the submitted paperwork lacked some of the information and formatting that was necessary to gain approval from the Town of Round Lake Board. At that time, the effort was focused on creating an organization to help manage the milfoil which has subsequently been successfully handled via our Lake Association.

In order to form a Lake District and to successfully complete the application process, a group of individuals were voted into existence as the Dam Committee by the Lake Association. The committee has already begun researching the process and requirements, in addition to specifically resolving any gaps in the prior application to ensure a positive result.

What is the purpose and history of the existing Lake Association that is known as the Callahan-Mud Lake Protective Association (CMLPA)?

The CMLPA was formed in 2007 with the general purpose of preserving and protecting the ongoing health of Callahan and Mud Lakes. The focus of the organization since its inception has largely been devoted to successfully managing invasive aquatic species, including most specifically, milfoil. With the combination of annual voluntary contributions of Lake Association members and state grants, the lake has received regular milfoil treatments. These treatments have resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of milfoil and an improvement in the overall health of the lake's biological ecosystem. Nonetheless, milfoil is nearly impossible to eradicate and ongoing treatment will be necessary.

If a Lake District were to be formed, it would be able to fulfill the purpose and role of the existing Lake Association, including the ongoing treatment of invasive species, and the CMLPA would likely be dissolved.

If we already have a Lake Association, why do we need a Lake District and how do they differ?

While the Lake Association has been very beneficial in curbing the milfoil and restoring the lake to a healthy and manageable level, it is not recognized as an entity that has standing for owning a dam or for being able to receive government grants or loans. A lake district is a special purpose unit of government with powers focused on lake management and the provision of services to property located within its established boundaries.

There are currently ~250 Lake Districts in WI. Although a Lake District can be formed for a multitude of reasons, they have been formed to specifically address issues that mirror the situation that we have on our lake with the dam.

Other than completing the necessary paperwork and receiving municipality approval, what is required from residents/stakeholders in order to form a Lake District?

Prior to seeking approval by a government body such as Sawyer County or the Round Lake Township, residents and stakeholders will need to vote on their interest in forming a Lake District. Greater than 50% of

eligible voters will need to vote in favor of the formation in order for it to be considered by the sanctioning body. (In 2012, 77% voted in favor of forming a Lake District)

If a Lake District is formed does that automatically mean that we have committed to building a dam?

No. Deciding to build a dam and the type of dam to be built is a separate decision that will be made by the Lake District Board of Commissioners once all of the necessary information has been gathered and evaluated. The Board of Commissioners is made up of 3-5 elected lake residents and 2 appointed commissioners from local government.

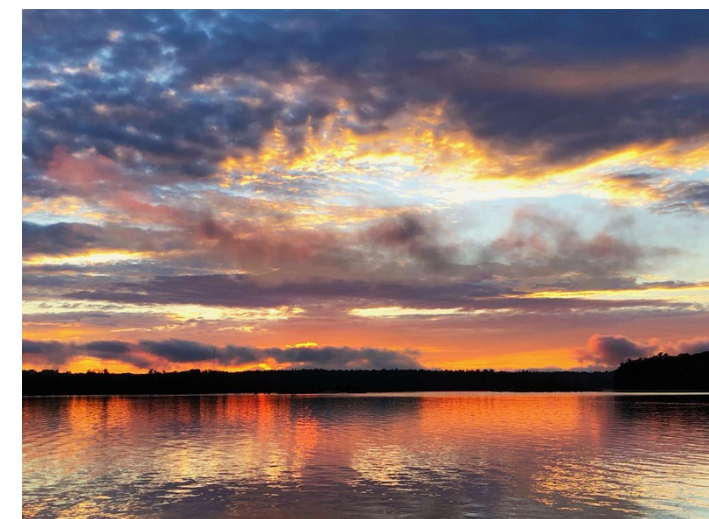
Who is helping to coordinate this effort?

Currently, a small group of individuals is volunteering their time as the Dam Committee for the CMLPA to understand the requirements and to advance the formation of a Lake District with an initial goal of constructing a safe and permanent dam that can be managed in perpetuity.

Anyone who is interested in supporting this effort is welcome to join the Dam Committee by contacting one of the existing members. (The list of committee members and contact information is at the bottom of this FAQ.) Later this summer, this information along with ongoing FAQ's, research findings, upcoming tasks, accomplishments, etc. will be available on a newly created CMLPA website which will make it easy for any stakeholder to access facts and progress updates.

What agencies and organizations have been involved so far to provide information and guidance on the formation of a Lake District and the potential construction of a dam?

The initial efforts of the committee have focused on gathering information in order to understand what is



needed and to be able to communicate with stakeholders. Thus far, the committee has gathered information from Sawyer County Board members, the Town of Round Lake Board members, the DNR, the UW Extension Office, individuals who participated in the prior Lake District application, and two engineering firms who have historically helped lead similar efforts including one that managed the recent completion of the dam on the Tiger Cat flowage. Going forward, the committee will continue to seek input from these organizations and others including Lake Districts who have already undergone this process in order to benefit from their knowledge and experience.

If a dam were to be built, how much would it cost and how would it be funded?

The cost would be determined with the help of engineers who have done this type of work previously here in WI. The costs would be incurred in three primary areas – the administrative efforts to scope and manage the process/project, the construction, and the ongoing maintenance which will be relatively small compared to the one-time construction expense. Prior to having an engineering-informed cost estimate, the Dam Committee will be contacting other Lake Districts who have undertaken this process in order to better understand the range of costs that have been previously incurred. However, it is worth noting that there are many types of dams, each environment is unique, and the inflation costs of construction are currently unpredictable, so there is a meaningful risk in attempting to estimate the realistic cost of a future dam based on the cost of one that has already been built elsewhere.

It is understood how important this piece of the decision process is and, as more is learned, it will be openly shared with stakeholders.

Funding sources include assessments raised from lake residents and stakeholders who are part of the Lake District, in addition to state grants that could fund up to 50% of the construction costs. Additionally, low interest loans are available to Lake Districts which would enable construction to begin and for the costs to be paid over a period of up to 20 years. In general terms, based on conversations with those who have been through this before and the successful completion of other similar projects elsewhere in the state, it is believed that the costs would not be insurmountable and that they would likely be far less than the property value loss incurred if the lake were to no longer exist.

How long will it take to complete the process of forming a Lake District and building a dam?

Based on the input from the state, county and regional engineering firms who are familiar with this process, we

have consistently been told that it is a multi-year effort to form a Lake District and to construct a dam.

It is also true that the timing is greatly influenced by the collective effort of us as residents and stakeholders. The work of the committee has been focused on understanding the requirements, developing a plan, and communicating to all stakeholders in a way that generates understanding so that we can enlist the needed resources to move forward at the pace that reflects our shared interest.

Your interest, questions and involvement are an essential part of this process. In order to build understanding and momentum, the committee has been developing plans with the existing Lake Association to make information readily accessible and to increase the frequency of activity. Specific examples include moving toward the creation of a website, moving the association meetings to the Round Lake Town Hall to accommodate more people (as they had been prior to COVID), amending the CMLPA bylaws to allow for meetings to occur beyond just the summer months, and to enable remote access to meetings so those who are not here locally can still participate.

How can I help?

There are lots of opportunities to help out. As mentioned previously, the committee would love for you to join our effort. However, it is understood that not everyone has the time to make this commitment. Nonetheless,

volunteering to help complete specific tasks in support of the process/project is also exceedingly valuable and will be increasingly important over time. In the near term, proactively asking questions, seeking facts to be informed, and sharing knowledge with friends and neighbors are all helpful actions.

Finally, if you are not a member now, **please join the existing Lake Association**, attend meetings when you can and stay informed of our plans and needs.

For information on how to join or upcoming meeting dates, contact Denise Kohl at richard.denise.kohl@gmail.com

How can I get more information and stay informed?

There are several ways to stay informed including; attending the Lake Association meetings and reading the meeting minutes that are distributed following each meeting via email; contacting one of the committee members (names and contact info listed below); staying attuned to the website once it is live; and of course, volunteering to join the work of the committee.



Callahan-Mud Lake Protective Association (CMLPA)

Website (launching soon!):
www.callahanandmudlake.org

Mail: PO Box 13040, Hayward, WI 54843

Please join the CMLPA and support our efforts. Dues are \$50. Find a form on at www.callahanandmudlake.org. We also accept donations above the \$50 membership fee.