

History of Lake Onalaska Protection and Rehabilitation District

The Lake Onalaska Protection and Rehabilitation District (LOPRD) was established by La Crosse County in November of 1975 under Chapter 33 of the Wisconsin Statutes in response to a petition by citizens.

Three years of property tax were levied to provide funding for a Feasibility Study and other studies as required under Chapter 33 WI Stats. The Feasibility Study was done by the River Studies Center of UW-L. in 1976-77. Other studies were done to document lake conditions and biological makeup. The Feasibility Study is available on the LOPRD website www.lakeonalaska.org

Since being established lake district meetings have been noticed to the public, local government, and river management agencies. River management agencies including the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) regularly attended lake district meetings and participated in meeting discussion. A regular meeting agenda item includes agency reports.

In the fifty years since creation of the LOPRD numerous river agency initiatives, plans, policies, projects and programs were developed, established and carried out. The LOPRD worked with the agencies regarding those initiatives and encouraged its members to provide their individual comment and input. Some of the major initiatives were the 1978 Great River Environmental Action Team study by US Army Corps of Engineers St Paul District; 1984 The Upper Mississippi River Management Master Plan; 1986 Upper Mississippi River System Management Act; 1989 Pool 7 Habitat Enhancement and Rehabilitation Project; 2011 Upper Mississippi River Land Use Allocation Plan; 2004 Brice Prairie Barrier Islands Protection Plan; 2003 Rosebud Island Protection Project; 1980-81 and 1991-92 Hydrodynamic Conditions in the Black River Delta/Lake Onalaska Area; 1994 Sommers Chute closing Structure; 1995 Brice Prairie Landing Fisheries Habitat Rehabilitation Project; 20__ Fred Funk Landing Project

The Minnesota Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission and the Upper Mississippi River Basin Commission both had important roles in creating the Upper Mississippi River Management Master Plan. The Boundary Area Commission and Basin Commission do not exist today. The Upper Mississippi Basin Association is a five state compact authorized by the US Congress and has been designated by the US Congress as Keeper of the Plan. The LOPRD provides comment to the Basin Association on their various initiatives.

--Marc Schultz, November 5, 2025