



NEWSLETTER

FALL
2025

"Protecting the Headwaters. Connecting the Community."

From the Board of the Friends of the Yahara River Headwaters

Dear Friends,

As we move through the heart of summer, we want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible momentum building around our shared mission to protect and restore the Yahara River. This season has brought exciting progress, from habitat restoration efforts to expanded community education and river monitoring projects.

We're especially grateful to all of you — our dedicated volunteers, DeForest and Windsor officials and staff, partners, donors, and neighbors — who make this work possible. Whether you joined a river cleanup, attended a board meeting, helped monitor water quality, or simply shared our message with a friend, your support is why the river continues to heal and thrive.

As we look ahead, we encourage you to stay connected and stay involved. There's more to do — and we can't do it without you. Join us for an upcoming paddle, volunteer event, or planning meeting. Every action makes a difference.

Thank you for standing with the river. Let's keep the current moving forward — together.

Warm regards,

Justin Sargent
President, Friends of the
Yahara River Headwaters
YaharaHeadwaters@gmail.com



Thanks to improved water quality and habitat restoration, trout have made a comeback on the Yahara River.

Trout Return to the Yahara River DNR Updates Stream Classification Amid Signs of Recovery

After decades of absence, trout are making a remarkable comeback in a stretch of the Yahara River near DeForest, Wisconsin. Sparked by improved water quality and habitat restoration efforts, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has officially reclassified a portion of the river as a Class II trout stream — a major milestone for the Yahara and a hopeful sign for its ecological future.

What the Reclassification Means

The WDNR designates trout streams in three classes:

- Class I: High-quality, self-sustaining trout populations with no need for stocking.
- Class II: Some natural reproduction, but populations supplemented by stocking.
- Class III: Marginal habitat, fully dependent on stocking to maintain trout presence.

In its 2025 update to the state's trout stream map, the WDNR moved a northern segment of the Yahara River from non-trout designation to Class II, acknowledging consistent observations of trout surviving through summer and evidence of limited natural reproduction.

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Threats Facing the Yahara River

The Yahara River and its headwaters are crucial for the local ecosystem, Dane County lakes, and communities. However, it faces several environmental challenges that threaten its health, many of which are linked to both natural and human-induced factors.

1. Pollution and Nutrient Runoff

Excessive nutrients, primarily phosphorus and nitrogen, from agricultural runoff, lawn fertilizers, and wastewater, are a constant threat to the water quality of the Yahara River. This nutrient pollution leads to harmful algal blooms, which deplete oxygen levels in the water, threatening fish populations and aquatic life.

2. Sediment Erosion

Erosion along the riverbanks contributes to sedimentation in the water. This increases turbidity, disrupts aquatic habitats, and smothers critical areas for fish spawning. It also reduces the ability of the river to naturally filter water.

3. Invasive Species

Invasive species, such as zebra mussels and non-native plants, are threatening the biodiversity of the river. These species often outcompete native organisms, changing the balance of the ecosystem and potentially disrupting water quality and habitat availability.

4. Development Pressure

As DeForest continues to grow, increased development is putting significant pressure on the Yahara River and its surrounding ecosystems. Urban sprawl, and construction of buildings, roads, and other infrastructure near the riverbanks lead to habitat loss, increased runoff, and a higher risk of pollution. Additionally, development can reduce the natural filtration and flood mitigation provided by wetlands and riparian zones, which are critical to maintaining the health of the river. Two proposed developments at our headwaters are of special concern, the proposed Data Center on Hwy V and the planned Buc-ees expansion.

5. Climate Change

Climate change is causing more extreme weather events, such as intense storms and fluctuating temperatures. These changes can increase the frequency and severity of flooding, leading to further erosion and pollution runoff, while altering the habitat for fish and wildlife.

While these threats pose significant challenges to the Yahara River, efforts from local organizations, government agencies, and the community are underway to mitigate these impacts. Initiatives include better land-use planning, erosion control, water quality monitoring, and habitat restoration projects. Community involvement is essential to safeguard the river's future, ensuring that it remains a healthy and valuable resource for generations to come.



Proposed developments near the Yahara River headwaters raise concerns about habitat loss, pollution, and the health of this vital ecosystem.

How You Can Help Protect the Yahara River

Become a Member

Join our growing community of river stewards and stay connected through updates, events, and opportunities to get involved.

Volunteer at Events

Lend a hand at cleanups, habitat restoration days, educational outings, and more—your time makes a real impact.

Make your Support Known

Let your local and state officials know that you want a clean and healthy Yahara River and encourage conservation investments.

Adopt-a-Spot for Cleanup

Take personal pride in the health of the river by committing to care for a section of shoreline or trail.

Donate to Support Conservation Efforts

Your financial support helps fund water monitoring, restoration projects, youth programming, and ongoing advocacy to keep the river thriving.

How You Can Help Keep Our Yahara Clean

Proper Leaf Disposal

- Avoid dumping leaves or yard waste into rivers or storm drains, as decaying leaves can deplete oxygen levels in the water, harming aquatic life.
- Compost leaves or dispose of them through local yard waste programs to keep them out of waterways.

Use Fertilizers Responsibly

- Apply fertilizers sparingly and at the right times, preferably during the growing season, to minimize runoff that can carry harmful nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus into rivers.
- Use organic or slow-release fertilizers that are less likely to leach into the water and contribute to algae blooms.

Limit Salt Use on Roads and Sidewalks

- In winter, reduce the use of road salt, as excess salt can run off into rivers, harming freshwater ecosystems and making water undrinkable.
- Use alternative de-icers or apply salt only where necessary to minimize environmental impact.

Promote Riparian Buffer Zones

- Protect and restore natural riparian buffers (vegetation along riverbanks) to filter runoff, absorb nutrients, and stabilize the soil.

Reduce Pesticides and Herbicides

- Minimize the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, which can be carried by rain into rivers, contaminating the water and harming aquatic life.

Control Sediment Runoff

- Plant native vegetation along riverbanks to reduce soil erosion and prevent sediment from washing into rivers during rainstorms.
- Use silt fences or other erosion control methods during construction projects to keep soil from running off into nearby waterways.

Practice Responsible Lawn Care

- Avoid over-watering lawns, as excess water can wash fertilizers and chemicals into rivers. Use drip irrigation or water-efficient methods instead.

Maintain Septic Systems

- Ensure that septic systems are properly maintained and do not leak waste into the environment, which can contaminate rivers with harmful bacteria and nutrients.

Advocate for Better Wastewater Management

- Support local efforts to improve wastewater treatment and reduce pollution from industrial, agricultural, and residential sources.

Engage in Community Education and Clean-Up Activities

- Educate neighbors and community members on the importance of controlling runoff and reducing pollutants that can enter rivers.
- Participate in river clean-up events that address waste, debris, and other pollutants, including leaves and sediment.

FYRH Calendar

These events offer excellent opportunities for community members to get involved, contribute to environmental conservation efforts, and enjoy the natural beauty of the Yahara River. For more information, visit yaharariver.org.

16th Annual Riverfest

Saturday, September 6, 2025 | 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Family fun and river awareness at Conservancy Commons.

2025 Fall River Clean-up

Saturday, September 20, 2025 | from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
This event invites volunteers to help clean the Yahara River, focusing on removing debris. Meet at Veterans Memorial Park in DeForest.

2026 Spring Community Cleanup

Saturday, May 2, 2026 | 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
This event invites volunteers to help clean the River and enhance paddler safety and navigability. Participants will gather at Veterans Memorial Park in DeForest for a safety briefing before dividing into teams.

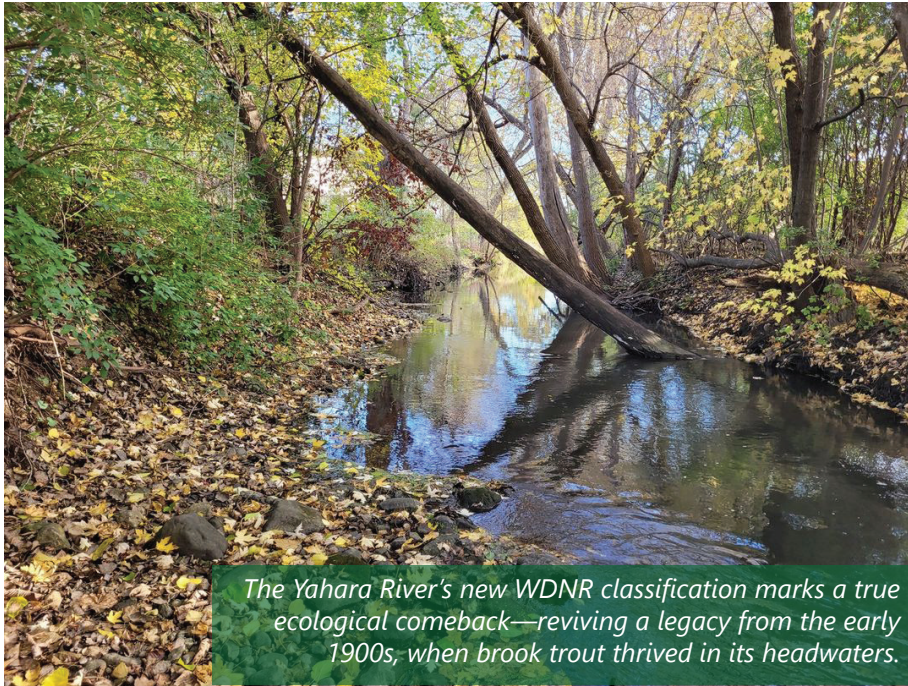


2026 FYRH Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 16, 2026 | 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
At the DeForest Public Library.

2026 Fall River Clean-up

Saturday, September 19, 2026 | 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
This event invites volunteers to help clean the Yahara River, focusing on removing debris. Meet at Veterans Memorial Park in DeForest.



The Yahara River's new WDNR classification marks a true ecological comeback—reviving a legacy from the early 1900s, when brook trout thrived in its headwaters.

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This reclassification is not merely symbolic — it opens the door to enhanced conservation support, new angling opportunities, and stricter standards for development and discharge near the river.

The Journey Back: Why Trout Are Returning

For much of the 20th century, the Yahara River suffered from degraded water quality, eroded banks, and excessive nutrient runoff from agricultural and urban sources. Warm temperatures and low oxygen levels made the river inhospitable to cold-water species like trout.

But over the last 15 years, coordinated efforts have changed the trajectory:

1. Habitat Restoration. Local groups like Friends of the Yahara River Headwaters (FYRH) and governmental partners have invested in bank stabilization, native vegetation planting, and in-stream habitat improvements such as riffles and pools that create better flow and shelter for fish.

2. Cleaner Water. Improved agricultural practices, stormwater controls, and reductions in nutrient pollution — especially phosphorus — have led to clearer, cooler water, critical for trout survival.

3. Groundwater Inputs. Near DeForest, cold groundwater seeps into the river, creating microhabitats where trout can thrive even during summer heat. Recognizing the importance of these thermal refuges, conservationists have focused on protecting them from development impacts.

4. Stocking Success. In recent years, the WDNR stocked small numbers of brook and brown trout in test segments of the Yahara. Surprisingly, many survived, and some even showed signs of spawning—something not seen in decades.

A Milestone for Conservation and Recreation

The WDNR's reclassification is more than a label — it reflects a genuine ecological turnaround. It also reawakens the Yahara River's historic identity. Early 20th-century accounts describe local kids catching brook trout in the headwaters before post-war development and agricultural expansion degraded the stream.

For anglers, the news is a welcome surprise. Though fishing pressure remains light, the new designation invites

fly fishers and families to rediscover this accessible stretch of river. Local conservationists emphasize, however, that sustainable recreation will depend on continued stewardship.

Challenges Ahead

While the trout's return is encouraging, the river still faces challenges:

- Climate Change threatens to warm water temperatures, especially during drought periods.
- Urban Growth in surrounding communities could increase runoff and reduce baseflow if not managed carefully.
- Invasive Species and sedimentation remain ongoing concerns that can degrade habitat.

To protect the gains, conservationists are urging a continued focus on riparian buffer zones, stormwater control, and public-private partnerships that prioritize watershed health.

Community-Led Success

This reclassification is a triumph for grassroots environmental work. Organizations like FYRH, working alongside the Village of DeForest, Dane County Land and Water Resources, and state agencies, have shown that even modest investments in habitat restoration and citizen engagement can yield outsized results.

Justin Sargent, president of Friends of the Yahara River Headwaters, reflected: "We've seen the river change in our lifetimes — from a neglected dumping ground to a living river again. The trout are a vibrant symbol of what's possible when people care and take action."

Survey: Yahara River Conservation and Use

Your voice helps protect and enhance our local treasure

1 **Complete the survey:** Make sure to include your name and address!

2 **Tear out and mail to:**
Friends Of The Yahara River Headwaters, P.O. Box 139, DeForest, WI, 53532

or **Complete the survey online.** Scan this QR code.



1. How often do you visit or spend time on or near the Yahara River?

☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ A few times a year ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2. What activities do you enjoy on or near the Yahara River? (Check all that apply)

☐ Walking or hiking ☐ Canoeing or kayaking ☐ Fishing ☐ Bird watching or wildlife observation
☐ Volunteering ☐ Photography ☐ Other _____

3. How important is protecting the health of the Yahara River to you?

☐ Very important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not at all important ☐ Unsure

4. What concerns you most about the Yahara River today? (Select up to two)

☐ Water pollution ☐ Invasive species ☐ Development or habitat loss ☐ Lack of access or trails
☐ Flooding or erosion ☐ Not enough public awareness
☐ Other _____

5. Have you ever participated in a river cleanup, paddle tour, or conservation event?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet, but I'm interested

6. Would you be interested in volunteering with Friends of the Yahara River Headwaters?

☐ Yes, please contact me (name/phone #) _____
☐ Possibly, I'd like to learn more ☐ No, not at this time

7. Are you a current or past member of Friends of the Yahara River Headwaters?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I'm not sure

8. How do you usually hear about local conservation or nature events?

☐ Social media ☐ Local newspaper or newsletter ☐ Community bulletin board ☐ Word of mouth ☐ Email
☐ Other _____

9. What would encourage you to spend more time at the Yahara River? (Check all that apply)

☐ More trails or access points ☐ More family or kid-friendly activities ☐ More conservation education events
☐ Improved water quality ☐ Group paddles or nature tours ☐ Other _____

10. Any additional thoughts, ideas, or concerns about the Yahara River you'd like to share?

There are so many ways to support our mission. Contact us to find out more about volunteer opportunities, fundraising events, and ways to get our message to your friends and family: YaharaHeadwaters@gmail.com



Friends Of The Yahara River Headwaters
P.O. Box 139
DeForest, WI 53532

How to Enjoy the Yahara River

Kayaking and Canoeing — Paddle along the Yahara River to experience its scenic beauty up close. The calm waters make it ideal for beginners and families to enjoy a leisurely paddle.

Fishing — The Yahara River offers great opportunities for fishing. Cast a line for species such as bass, northern pike, trout, and bluegill. Be sure to check local fishing regulations for any guidelines or restrictions.

Birdwatching and Wildlife Viewing — The river is home to a variety of wildlife, including birds, turtles, and other animals. Bring binoculars to enjoy birdwatching or simply relax and observe nature along the riverbanks.

Hiking and Walking — Take advantage of the nearby trails and parks. Walk or hike along the river's edge to enjoy its natural beauty while getting some exercise. The Yahara River Trail is a popular option in the area.

Picnicking — Pack a picnic and enjoy a relaxing day by the river at one of the parks or green spaces. The area provides peaceful spots perfect for a family outing or a solo retreat.

Boating — While the river is more calm and narrow compared to larger lakes, motorboats and small boats can still be a fun way to explore the water. Just be mindful of local boating regulations.

Photography — The Yahara River offers picturesque landscapes, from tranquil water scenes to vibrant wildlife. It's a great spot for photography enthusiasts to capture nature's beauty.

Swimming — Although the river may not have designated swimming areas, it can be an ideal spot for cooling off on a hot day, depending on water conditions. Be cautious and check water safety beforehand.

Winter Activities — During winter, enjoy activities like ice fishing, snowshoeing, or even cross-country skiing along the frozen river and surrounding areas when conditions allow.

Attend Local Events — Keep an eye on local event listings as DeForest often holds community events and festivals near the river, such as boat races, nature walks, and clean-up days.

*Make sure to respect the local environment and wildlife while enjoying the river, ensuring it stays clean and accessible for everyone.