

HOW DOES WATER GET INTO YOUR LAKE?

By Wisconsin Lakes staff

Water can enter lakes from a variety of sources including groundwater, runoff from the watershed, surface waters (like streams and rivers) flowing into the lake, and direct precipitation into the lake. Water leaves lakes through groundwater or surface water flow and evaporation. Lakes can be classified into five main lake types based on how water enters and exits the lake. For some lakes, all or most of their water enters the lake through one source (such as groundwater), other lakes may receive water through several sources. The water quality of a lake and species of fish present are significantly influenced by the lake type.

Seepage lakes

These lakes do not have an inlet or an outlet, and only occasionally overflow. As landlocked water bodies, the principal source of water is precipitation or runoff, supplemented by groundwater from the immediate drainage area. Since seepage lakes commonly reflect groundwater levels and rainfall patterns, water levels may fluctuate seasonally. Seepage lakes are the most common lake type in Wisconsin.

Seepage lakes frequently have a less diverse fishery because they are not influenced by streams. Seepage lakes also have a smaller drainage area, which may help to account for lower nutrient levels

Spring lakes

These lakes have no inlet, but do have an outlet. The primary source of water for spring lakes is groundwater flowing into the bottom of the lake from inside and outside the immediate surface drainage area. Spring lakes are the headwaters of many streams and are a fairly common type of lake in northern Wisconsin.

Drained lakes

These lakes have no inlet, but like spring lakes, have a continuously flowing outlet. Drained lakes are not groundwater-fed. Their primary source of water is from precipitation and direct drainage from the surrounding land.

Frequently, the water levels in drained lakes will fluctuate depending on the supply of water. Under severe conditions, the outlets from drained lakes may become intermittent. Drained lakes are the least common lake type found in Wisconsin.

Drainage lakes

These lakes have both an inlet and outlet where the main water source is stream drainage. Most major rivers in Wisconsin have drainage lakes along their course. Drainage lakes support fish populations which are not necessarily identical to the streams connected to them. Drainage lakes usually have higher nutrient levels than many natural seepage or spring lakes.

Impoundments

Artificial lakes are human-made bodies of water referred to as impoundments. A lake is considered an impoundment if one-half or more of its maximum depth results from a dam or other type of control structure. An impoundment is considered a drainage lake since it has an inlet and outlet with its principal water source coming from stream drainage. Impoundments may support fish populations which are not necessarily identical to the streams connected to them. Impoundments usually have higher nutrient levels than many natural seepage or spring lakes.