



# The Lake CONNECTION

## What's an ORW?

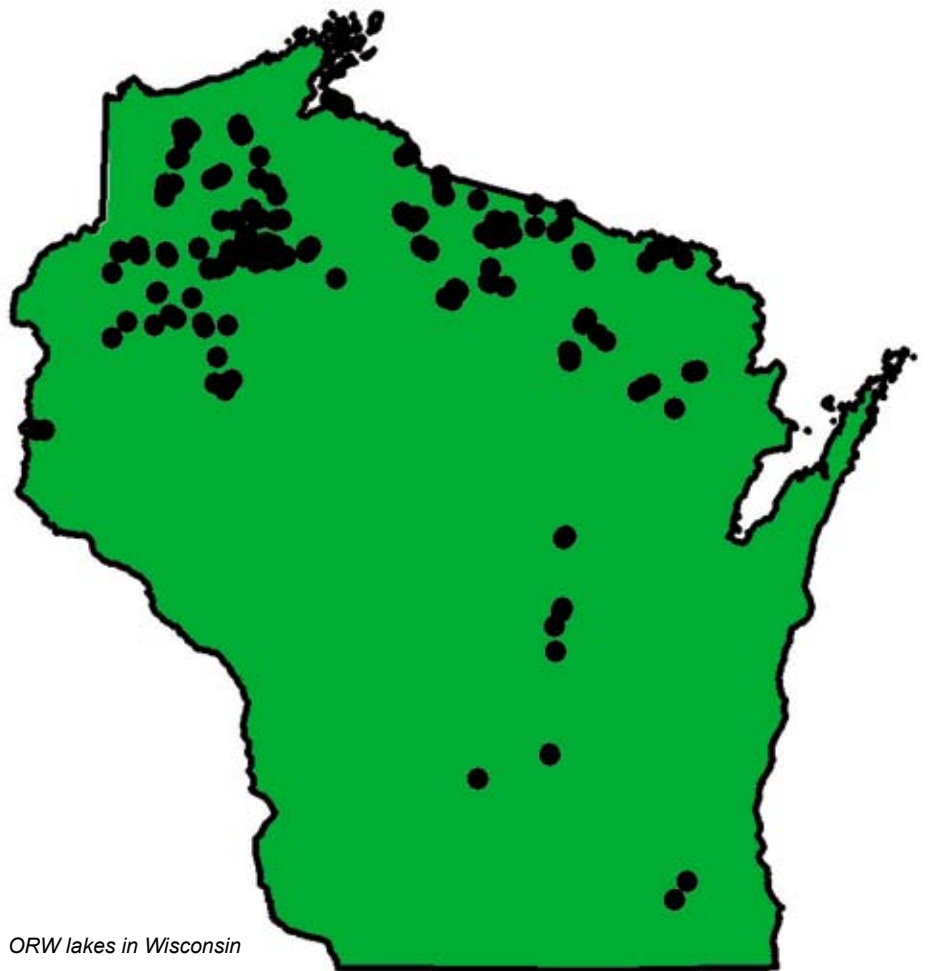
*and how do I know if my lake is one?*

by Tim Asplund, statewide limnologist, WDNR

### What are ORWs and ERWs?

Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) and Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW) are official designations for lakes, flowages, rivers, and streams that the State of Wisconsin has identified as high quality waters. In general, waters designated as ORW or ERW are surface waters which provide outstanding recreational opportunities, support valuable fisheries, have unique hydrologic features, have unique environmental settings, and are not significantly impacted by human activities. These designations are applied to meet federal Clean Water Act obligations requiring Wisconsin to adopt an "antidegradation" policy designed to prevent any lowering of water quality, particularly from point source pollution discharges, in certain high value bodies of water.

The primary difference between an ORW and an ERW is that the former typically does not have any direct point source discharges (e.g. from an industry or municipal sewage treatment plant) and any future discharge must not change background water quality.



ORW lakes in Wisconsin

The ERW designation, which is typically applied to waterbodies with existing discharges, has the capacity to allow pollutant loads to exceed background water quality in certain situations.

### Where are ORW lakes?

Currently there are 323 waterbodies with the ORW designation, including 97 lakes and 6 flowages (see map). 1532 streams are designated as ERW, but there are no lakes with this designation, primarily

because very few lakes have point source discharges. A complete list of ORW and ERW waters can be found in Chapter NR 102.10 and NR 102.11, Wis. Adm. Code.

### Can more lakes be added to the list of ORW waters?

Recently, the regulatory implications of being designated an ORW or ERW have been expanded through Act 118 (the Job Creation Act) and 2003 Act 310 (the high capacity well law). Certain activities that normally would be exempt from a Chapter 30 permit (biological shore erosion structures, boat shelters, small scale riprap repairs) now require a general or individual permit on an ORW-designated lake. In addition, high capacity wells proposed

within 1200 feet of an ORW or ERW would undergo more stringent environmental review prior to approval.

In 1993, the Department developed an evaluation process and set of criteria that resulted in the designation of 97 lakes as ORW. These procedures are currently being reviewed as part of an overall effort to refine our surface water assessment methodology for Clean Water Act purposes.

For more information about ORW and ERWs, including a recent external request to add 100 waters (all northern streams and river segments) to the list, visit DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/wqs/orwerw/>.

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**Wisconsin Lakes Partnership**

The diagram features a central map of Wisconsin with a sun and water. To the left is the 'Citizens' logo (a sailboat), to the right is the 'Science' logo (a tree and water), and below is the 'UW Extension Education' logo (a person and water). Arrows connect these three elements to each other and to the central map.

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