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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Area Reservoir Levels Expected to Decline Further as Drought Conditions Continue – September 3, 2026

WAUSAU, Wis. —

Water levels in area natural lakes and engineered reservoirs are expected to continue declining as ongoing drought conditions persist. As of September 3, 2026, the U.S. Drought Monitor classifies Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas counties as experiencing widespread severe drought, with areas of extreme drought along the northwestern edge of the Wisconsin River Basin. **Riparian property owners, businesses, and other water users are encouraged to prepare for continued lower water levels, including making any necessary adjustments to piers, boat lifts, and watercraft.**

Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company (WVIC) continues to coordinate with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to help preserve reservoir storage capacity and water levels heading into the fall and winter months. Since early August, required flows in the Wisconsin River have been reduced twice in coordination with these agencies. Wisconsin River flows at Merrill are currently operating at the lowest allowable level for this time of year to protect water quality and other natural resources. WVIC reservoirs have supplied more than 50% of the Wisconsin River flow at Merrill since mid-July and continue to provide a significant share of the flow.

During late summer and early fall, area lakes and reservoirs can lose up to 1 inch of water per week due to evaporation. Current inflows from area streams and groundwater are below the required minimum dam releases. Without several inches of sustained rainfall in each of the coming weeks, water levels are expected to continue to drop.

WVIC manages several natural lake reservoirs and engineered reservoirs in the region. Daily water level updates are available on WVIC's website at <https://www.wvic.com/Content/Data--Reports.cfm>.

The U.S. Drought Monitor is updated weekly on Thursdays. Current drought conditions are available at <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?Midwest>.

The National Weather Service provides 1- to 7-day precipitation forecasts at <https://www.wpc.ncep.noaa.gov/qpf/day1-7.shtml> and detailed short-term forecasts at <https://www.weather.gov/>.

WVIC owns and operates 21 storage reservoirs as part of the Wisconsin River Headwaters Reservoir System. The system is holistically managed to maintain as uniform a flow as practicable in the Wisconsin and Tomahawk rivers and a reasonable balance among the benefits the water resource provides including water conservation, flood control, low flow augmentation, hydroelectric generation, water quality, wildlife, and recreation.

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