

YRPC Weekly News

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Our Yellow River is a Bit Under the Weather and Needs Your Help

By: Arnie DeWitt, YRPC Stream Monitoring Coordinator

Arnie, **Heat, Drought, and Duckweed: Even Wisconsin's Top Rivers Have Their Off Days**

Ask anyone planning a summer getaway to Northern Wisconsin what they picture, and the answer is usually the same: pristine, crystal-clear currents winding past pine-forested banks, perfect for a peaceful afternoon floating downstream.

What they usually do not picture is a thick, bright-green blanket of pond scum.

OUR YELLOW RIVER. OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

A healthy river supports a healthy community.

This photo of the Yellow River in Spooner, WI, taken on August 11, 2026, shows algae and duckweed (pond scum) that can harm fish, wildlife, recreation, and our local economy.

WHY IT MATTERS

Excess nutrients from our yards, streets, and stormwater feed algae blooms like this. When algae die off, they use up oxygen—harming fish and making the river unhealthy for people and pets.



WE CAN DO BETTER—TOGETHER!

Small actions in our community make a BIG difference for our river.



FERTILIZE WISELY
Use phosphorus-free fertilizer and apply only what your lawn needs.



KEEP LEAVES OUT OF STREETS
Leaves in drains wash nutrients into the river.



PICK UP AFTER YOURSELF
Properly dispose of trash and pet waste.



REDUCE RUNOFF
Use rain barrels, native plants, and permeable surfaces.



CARE FOR YOUR VEHICLE
Fix leaks and recycle fluids—don't let chemicals wash in.

**A CLEAN RIVER:
A STRONGER
SPOONER**

Learn more and get involved:

<https://yellowriverprotectionconservancy.org>

Yet, as recent summer photos of the famed Yellow River reveal, even a high-quality, ecologically sound waterway can succumb to a rough season when nature dials up the thermostat.

Driven by an unusually hot summer and prolonged stretches without significant rainfall, parts of the Yellow River have taken on a heavy coating of green surface film. The sight has caught some vacationers off guard—especially those driving hundreds of miles in search of postcard-worthy Northwoods views.

While the murky green coat can look alarming to passersby, environmental scientists note that even top-tier river systems aren't immune to extreme seasonal weather. Low water levels slow the river's current down to a crawl, while intense, uninterrupted sunlight bakes the surface. Combined with natural nutrient runoff, these conditions create an ideal environment for floating aquatic plants like duckweed and warm-weather algae to thrive.

"When you take away flow and add steady 90-degree days, even a pristine northern river acts more like a quiet pond," says the local ecological dynamic. The stagnated water column allows organic matter that would normally flush downstream to collect at the surface.

The good news for travelers and locals alike? The phenomenon is generally a temporary cosmetic setback rather than a permanent decline in water quality. Once autumn weather rolls in, bringing cooler temperatures, higher winds, and steady seasonal rains, the river's normal flow restores itself, washing away the green haze.

For now, the Yellow River offers a vivid reminder that natural ecosystems are dynamic—and that even Wisconsin's most prized waterways occasionally have a bad summer day.

All that said, you can make a difference and help the Yellow River look better in the summer months by joining the Guardians of the River Program now. Yes, things will look better this fall but then there is next summer and the summer after that. There are simple steps you can take now to get our Yellow River looking better during the summer months.

This really does not take much effort on your part. It is mostly understanding simple things you can do to help and you only need to sign up for one Best Management Practice or continue doing one or more Best Management Practices that you are doing already.

To see a list of these recommended "Best Management Practices" you can click on the links below. The lists are grouped by land type (Shoreline, Woodland and Residential). Agriculture will be available soon. To join the Guardians Program all you need to do is click on the link for your property type (Shoreline, Woodland or Residential), print the document which is the form you fill out to join Guardians. Make a copy for yourself and send it to the address on the bottom of the form or take a picture of the completed form with your smartphone and email it to contact@yrpc.ltd.

[Click here for the Shoreline Best Management Practices](#)

[Click here for the Woodland Best Management Practices](#)

[Click here for the Residential Best Management Practices](#)

[Click here for the Residential Bee Management Practices](#)

Just a last-minute heads-up, YRPC will be at the Twilight Garden Tour Thursday Aug 20th at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station. [Click here for more details](#). Our experts will be available to share the latest information on the Yellow River and current projects. Assuming our laptop battery holds out, we can also register you in the Guardians program at the event.

[Click here for information about the Burnett County Project RED Event on August 28th in Granstburg and on the St. Croix River.](#)

YRPC Website

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