

Chicog-Then and Now for May, 2026
JoAnn Malek

The sun was shining at noon on Easter Sunday, 2026, and I was overjoyed to be back in my kayak. Actually, my corner of the shoreline was iced in, but the brilliant blue MOVING water covering most of the lake was calling to me. I found a shallow moat along my shore and with muck boots, my icebreaker kayak and a sturdy paddle I was able to get to the beautiful open water

I love Wisconsin! The gently rolling hills that make up our topography. The many and varied lakes. These are products of glaciers that covered our land for fifteen thousand years. Eskers, which are long ridges of gravel. Drumlins, which are hills made up of sediment. Kettle-holes. All reflect the action of glaciers.

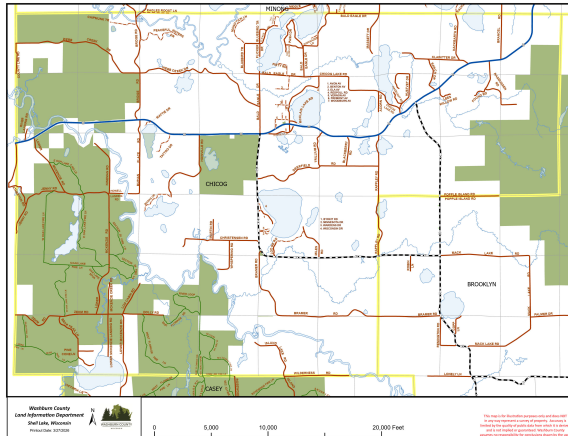
Some ten thousand years ago, as the glaciers receded, winds carried seeds from other parts of the world. Grasses, plants and some small trees grew, though soil was poor and temperatures were low. Thousands of years later temperatures were rising, soils were improved, and larger seeds were able to take root. Eventually northern Wisconsin became a never-ending forest.

Natural disturbances to these forests through the centuries included fire and windthrow. What a glorious word! Windthrow is defined as the uprooting or overturning of trees by strong winds. I picture huge trees pulled from the ground, roots and all, then tossed aloft by the wind.

Manmade disturbances may have been even more drastic. From the late 1800s into the early 1900s, massive clear cutting took place in our woodlands. Wisconsin led the nation in timber production. By 1915 forests were gone. Intense slash fires followed logging devastation, killing seedlings, saplings and crucial soil organic matter.

Eventually, federal and state governments lured settlers to convert lost forestland to farmland. That effort failed in the northern half of state, but

Wisconsin State Legislature introduced two new laws. The Forest Crop Law was a forestry incentive program to encourage sustainable land



management through reduced property taxes. The County Forest Reserve Law allowed counties to acquire tax delinquent lands and establish county forest reserves. Langlade County Forest was the first, established in 1928. Today county forests comprise 42% of the public land in Wisconsin, some 2.41 million acres in thirty counties. In Chicog, 9,180 acres are designated Washburn County Forests.

In 1963 a new County Forest Law provided the basis for a permanent program of county forests. This law recognizes the concept of multiple use to assure maximum public benefits, protect public rights, interests, investments and to compensate counties for public uses, benefits, privileges. Counties are to provide for optimum production of forest products, recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed production, stabilization of stream flow.

The county pays \$0.63/acre annually for lands enrolled in the county forest program. Timber sale is a primary objective. The county is required to pay a minimum 10% of gross timber sale revenue to the township annually. These monies have benefited the town of Chicog, allowing the move of our town hall from an old school building into a modern meeting/fire/road maintenance facility without heavy reliance on property tax increases,

Forests change constantly. Precipitation and temperatures continue to vary as they have for thousands of years, though recent trends clearly indicate warmer conditions. What is causing these changes? Fire suppression may favor invasions of moisture-loving forest plants into drier sites. Overabundant deer are limiting regeneration. Trees that once were allowed to grow to majestic proportions are now felled after 40-100 years.

UW-Madison botany researchers state that iconic forests have changed in substantial and surprising ways over the past half century. Pines, hemlocks, birches and red oaks have declined substantially. Maples, aspens, ashes and cherry trees are more abundant. Plants in the understory are less diverse.

I do love our woods, and I love having pileated woodpeckers for my neighbors. Naturalist Emily Stone notes: Unlike many birds, populations of pileated

woodpeckers have been increasing since 1966 due to the regrowth of large trees and the conversion of some large trees into food-rich snags.

I love Wisconsin!

Do you have stories to tell about Chicog-Then and Now? I'd like to listen. Call or text me at (612) 250-0301.

From librarian Katy Larson: the bookmobile is still off the road. We don't have information on when the manufacturer will determine the necessary recall repair.

Thank you for reading Chicog-Then and Now

Town Website:

www.townofchicog.com



IMPORTANT MAY DATES

Wednesday 5/13, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesdays 5/13&27, Namekagen Transit Service

Wednesday 5/27, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook

Thursdays, 5/7&14, 10:30-2:30, Walkabout pot lucks, town hall

Saturday, 5/23, 9-3, Craft fair, town hall