An aerial photograph of a large lake, Lac de la Queue de la Outter, with a dam in the foreground. The surrounding area is densely forested with green trees. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

The Tail of the Otter
Nigigwanowe
Lac de la Queue de la Outter

Introductions




This Photo by Unknown author is licensed under [CC BY](#).

What is our role?

- To facilitate the meeting(s) from a neutral position
- We do not have a vested interest in the outcome
- Provided background, and historical information as we know it
- Assist with the process to identify the issues you as residents have with the channel and eventually identify possible solutions.
- We are not here to provide an answer to the issues, we are here only to help you as a community to work together to define what that might be.





This is the first
of a possible
series of
meetings

Jun 9, 2023: history of channel
and discuss issues

July 6, 2023: discuss potential
solutions to the issues identified

TBD, 2023: discuss permitting
with DNR/Army Corps

TBD, 2023: select a path forward

Expectations/Ground Rules



Generate as many ideas as possible



Be respectful of others' ideas



Keep the conversation positive - no negative comments



Build off others' ideas

Why just the tail?

The name “otter tail”

In 1750 the first explores in the area met with a band of natives on the shore of “*Lac de la Queue de la Outer*”, which translates roughly to [*the Lake of the Otters Tail*](#). The name derives from the sand bar shaped like an otter’s tail where the Otter Tail River enters Otter Tail Lake (on the North East end of the lake) and now over two centuries later the otter’s tail sand bar is still there.



THE
“OTTER’S TAIL”

1884

PLAT OF
OTTER TAIL

Township 134 North, Range XXXIX West
of the Fifth Principal Meridian,
OTTER TAIL COUNTY MINN.

Scale 2 Inches to the Mile



History –
What we
know



Floating the Logs

- In the late 1800's the logging industry used the Otter Tail River to move their logs. In the spring logs were "driven" down the Otter Tail River to saw mills in Frazee and Fergus Falls. Dams were constructed to raise the rivers high enough to float the logs. Once the water was raised to proper levels, the dams were released, rushing the logs downstream. Records in 1884 claim that a log drive occurred from Becker County to Winnipeg via the Red River (Otter Tail River) The drive began on April 28 and reached its destination on July 26, floating logs an estimated 1,760 miles.

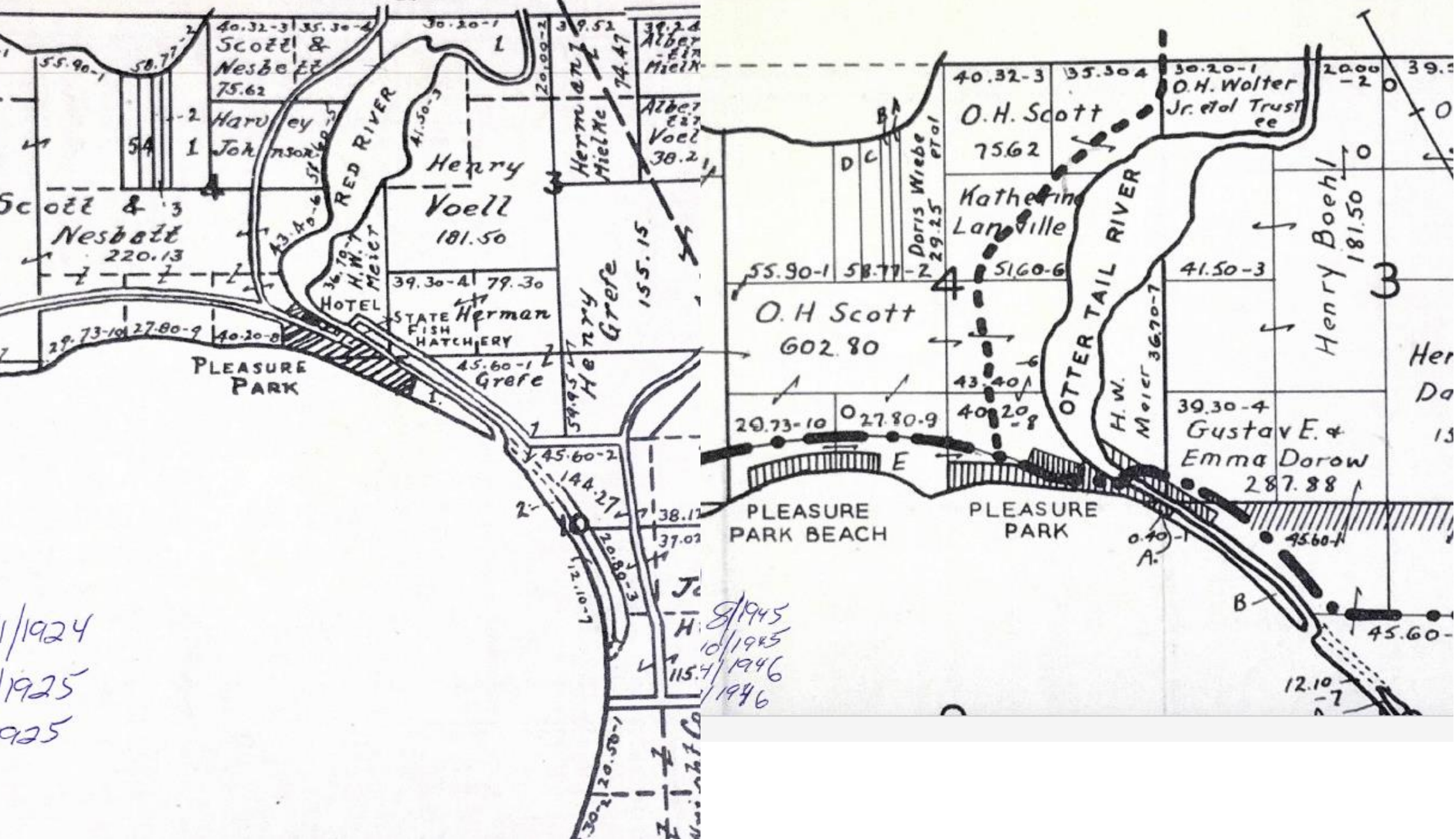
Around 1900 name changed from Red River to
Otter Tail River



USGS Map 1912



RUSH LAKE



1/1924
1925
925

1939



1953

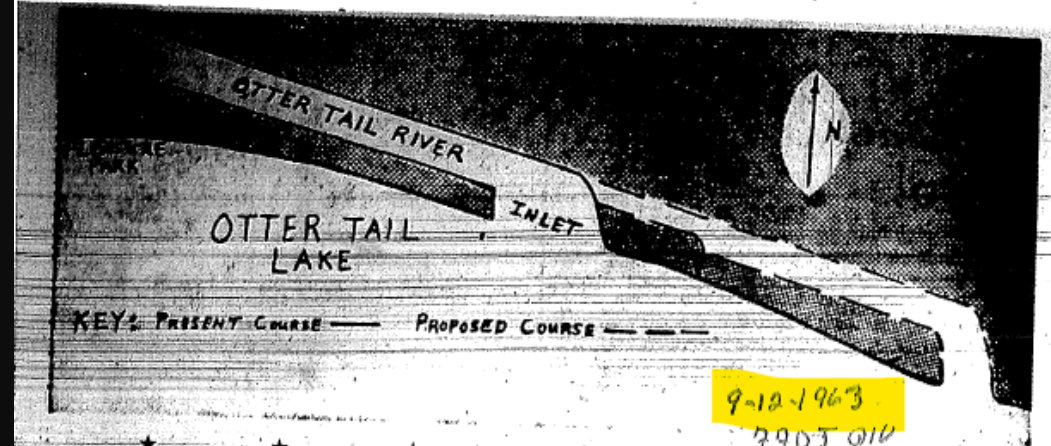




1963

September 1963

- Daily Journal Article



Where's Inlet to Otter Tail Lake Going to Be?

By JARED M. SMALLEY

Where, oh-where, shall the river flow, continues to stir lots of comment in the area of Pleasure Park on the north end of Otter Tail lake.

In question is the inlet of Otter Tail river.

At least 43 petitioners say that the river should continue to flow out of its present mouth, while at least one man thinks it should continue about another mile parallel to the lake before making an entrance.

The proposed new entrance is really not new at all, but the actual inlet at one time before the river changed its course and broke through a narrow peninsula separating the flowing current from the lake.

The trouble all seemed to start when Jim Merickel of Wadena had a portion of the old river bed, which still contained water, dredged out. He owns the surrounding lakeshore property.

Immediately some of the property owners began to accuse Merickel of planning to change the course of the river. Their fears seemed to be confirmed when Merickel had some now fence erected in the river area, which tended to build up a

deposit of sand, directing the current slightly toward the old channel.

Merickel claimed he was only trying to retard the wave action from the lake, and thereby protect his property—anyway the river was actually running over property owned by him, and he should be able to take any action he deemed fit to do.

Spokesman for the group of property owners was Elmer E. Bowers of Shawnee Mission, Kan., who said, "I was the only one who had a typewriter handy and time to do something about the situation."

One of the grievances voiced by the group was that Merickel should have had a permit to do dredge work and erect the snow fence, which actually didn't prove an obstacle to boat travel in itself.

However, as the water level dropped during the summer, it did appear that the present inlet was getting shallower.

Merickel claimed that he was not required to have a permit to improve his own land. He also pointed out again that the inlet is actually crossing land owned by himself.

In retaliation, the property group demanded that the snow fence and heavy material, includ-

ing cement blocks, be withdrawn from the river.

No action was taken.

In June Sidney A. Freilisen, director of the division of waters at the department of conservation in St. Paul was contacted, and he was asked to intervene. Freilisen directed by letter that an area game warden investigate and take the required action to correct the alleged violation, including the removal of the snow fence, concrete blocks and posts. Nothing happened. The fence remained.

Then the property owners went to work on a petition to the Department of Conservation stating:

"We, the undersigned taxpayers of Otter Tail county, State of Minnesota, respectfully request that the party, or parties who have recently installed posts, fencing, concrete blocks, wire and other impediments, interfering with the natural channel of Otter Tail river to Otter Tail lake, be officially ordered to immediately remove all such obstructions and restore the channel to its recent previous condition."

The petition was signed the 20th July.

On the night of August 2, the fence and posts disappeared.

The group claimed that Merickel had removed them because of the protests.

Merickel claimed someone else had taken down the fence and posts without his permission.

The group still felt that the "damage" was done, and that there was still some foreign material left below the surface of the river as a menace to boating, so the petition was sent in anyway on August 5.

In the meantime, Senator Cliff Ukkelberg was called into the picture to investigate. Ukkelberg requested that a state survey crew be called to check the condition of the river and determine the course the river should take.

The survey crew spent Friday morning at the site, and gathered information for a report to the conservation department, but declined to comment on their findings.

As it stands today, the property group still feels that action should be taken against Merickel, while Merickel still feels his action was right.

The present inlet provides a nearby access to the lake for the cottage owners around Pleasure Park. The proposed inlet would necessitate about a mile further travel for them to get to the lake.



NOW FENCE placed near the inlet of Otter Tail Lake was taken down mysteriously the night of August 2.

1970



Office Memorandum

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

TO : Morris T. Eng, Supervisor
Hydrologic Services Unit

DATE Feb. 26, 1975

FROM : James Nye, Hydrologist
Hydrologic Services Unit

SUBJECT: SPIT - OTTERTAIL LAKE, OTTERTAIL COUNTY

The unique sand spit at the north end of Ottertail Lake was the original name sake of Ottertail Lake, River and County.

The discharge of the River at this point has formed a sand spit that averages about 100 feet wide and tapers as it extends a mile in length to the southeast.

The northwestern portion of the sand bar which is called Pleasure Park is connected to the mainland and developed with cottages. The southeastern portion near the mouth of the river is undeveloped and forms a breakwater to protect the frontage of an area know as "Paulson's Addition."

The spit in the past has been breached from time to time by high water causing a new channel on the northwest portion of the spit. This channel has been maintained for easy lake access by property owners on this end of the river.

Some times the mouth of the river becomes blocked by sand and the river is impounded behind the southern portion of the sand spit. When this occurs the flow of the river is shunted to the lake instead of traveling the entire length of the sand bar. The flow of the river tends to improve the new channel and cause the former mouth and back water area to become blocked and form a narrow enclosed lake area.

It should be noted that property owners of "Pleasure Park" take advantage of the protected waters of the river for their boat docks and so favor the channel on the northwestern end of the sand bar because it shortens the boat run to the lake. Conversely, the residences of Paulson's addition are concerned about the still water and back of lake access caused by the blocked channel in the bay behind the sand bar.

In 1969 permit P.A. 69-1203 was issued to Clarence Paulson to reopen the original channel, block the existing channel, and improve 5000 feet of the channel.

Public sentiment and a subsequent letter from Mr. Paulson requested that the northern channel continue to be kept open.

Morris T. Eng

Page 2

February 26, 1975

Compounding the situation is the fact that there is not sufficient flow of water in the river during low river stages to maintain the outlets and so the up river opening tends to become dominant.

It is reported that erosion of the sand bar is now occurring. Regional Hydrologist Jerry Paul has been contacted by local residences about a plan for stabilizing the spit with timbers (estimated cost \$3,000.00 for 500-700 feet of timbering).

Representative Joe Graba has also been reported to be willing to sponsor a bill to preserve the area as a historic site.

This raises the questions:

1. Does DNR wish to become involved in stabilizing the sand bar. Under "natural conditions" the spit has maintained it self since man has settled in the area. A deposit such as a spit is almost a living thing which under natural conditions deposits sand at one time and removes it at another.
2. What effect, if any, does the new channel have on altering the deposition patterns that formed and maintained the spit originally.

The following permits have been issued in regard to this matter:

P.A. 73-4011 - Memo dated April 17, 1973 G. Paul to L. Seymour - To construct a breakwater - permit denied - "The proposed work would transform the appearance of this natural phenomena into a vertical wall navigation channel." "It would seem to be more important to preserve this unique natural feature for the benefit of the overall public than to alter it for the convenience of a comparative few in a new development plat, ... therefore, he (Mr. Paulson) should be consigned to the fact that it was his choice to develop land in an area having inherent flow problems and should accept on that basis."....

P.A. 69-1203 - Re-open original channel and block existing opening and improve 5000 feet of channel - application submitted by Clarence Paulson - Subsequent letter by Paulson requested that northern channel also be kept open.

P.A. 69-1249 - Applicate James Merickel - To return river to its original course and open original mouth.

P.A. 61-531 - River breached sand bar in 1958, original mouth closed off. James Ahlf, Ottertail Village council asked that original outlet be restored.

August 13, 1970

69-1203

Minnesota Conservation Department
Division of Waters, Soils & Minerals
Centennial Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

Re: Permit No. 69-1249

Gentlemen:

In accordance with the Ottertail Lake Property Owners Association and the Conservation Department, we would like the original permit amended as follows:

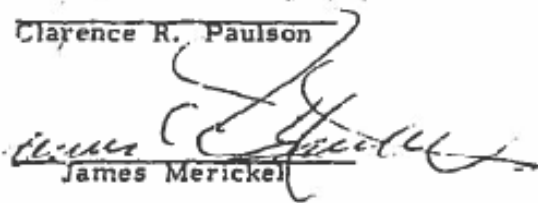
Instead of closing the channel from the river into Ottertail Lake, we will leave an opening 16 ft. in width and approximately four to five feet in depth to permit boat passage. This opening will be reinforced with rock as well as the banks on each side of this opening.

The purpose of this request for amendment is to furnish property owners lake access nearer their respective property lines.

This work will be done by a local contractor and shall be completed early this fall.

Sincerely,

Clarence R. Paulson


James Merickel

August 25, 1970

69-1203

Dept. of Conservation
Division of Lands & Minerals
Centennial Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Re: Permits No. 16-1203 and 16-1249

Gentlemen:

In accordance with the Ottertail Lake Owners Association, improvements are planned as follows:

1. This opening will be reduced to a width of 16 ft. and a depth of approximately 4' to 5'. This opening will be reinforced with rock as well as the banks on each side. The peninsula north of this opening will be reinforced with rock on the lake side to prevent further erosion.
2. This section of the river will have a uniform width of 50 ft.
3. This section of the river has an area approximately 50 ft. wide and 100 ft. long which will require removal of material from the river beds to a depth of 4 ft. The present depth is approximately 2 feet.
4. This opening will have an overall depth of 4 feet and will be reinforced on the south side by rock.

Yours very truly,

Clarence R. Paulson

1980



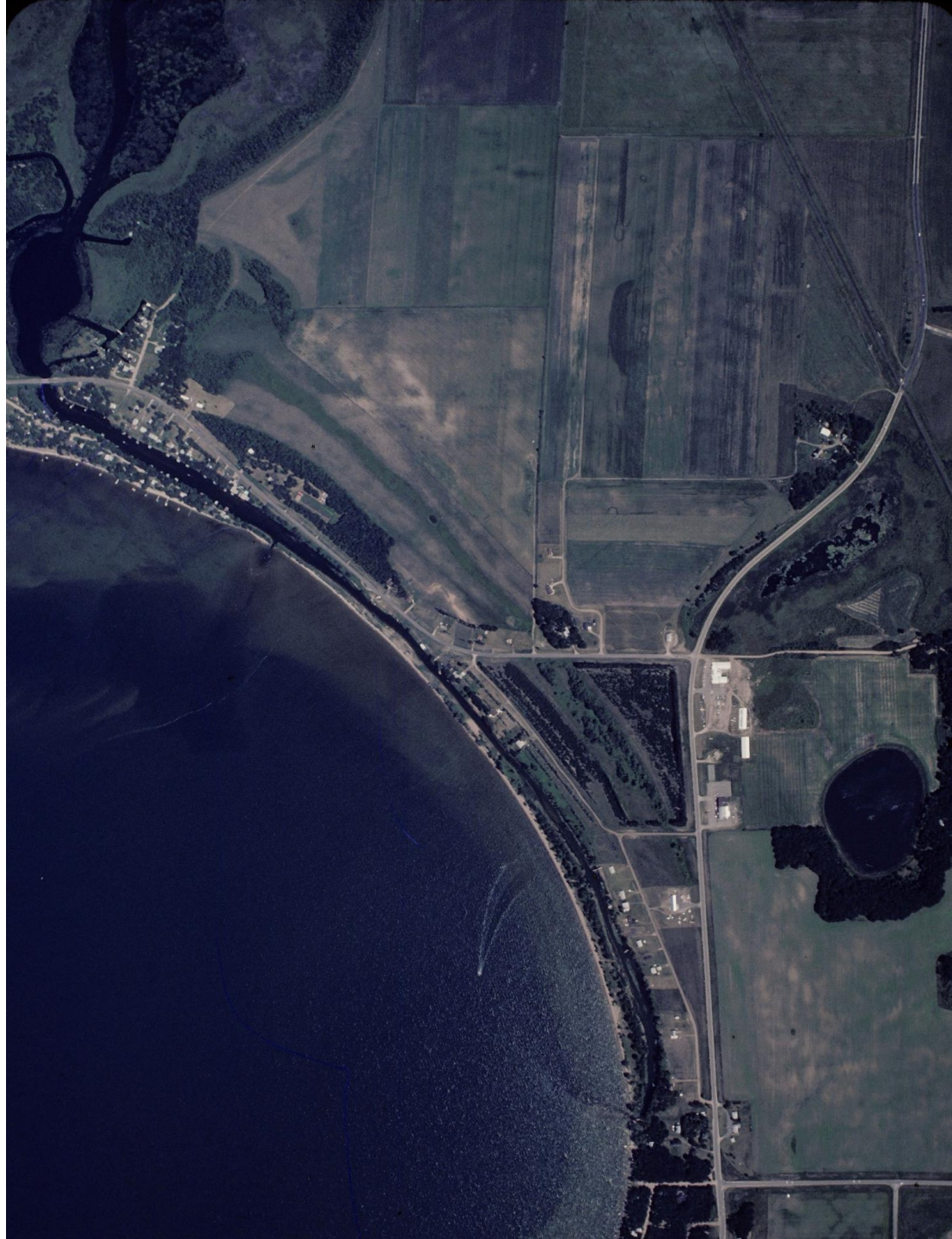
1981



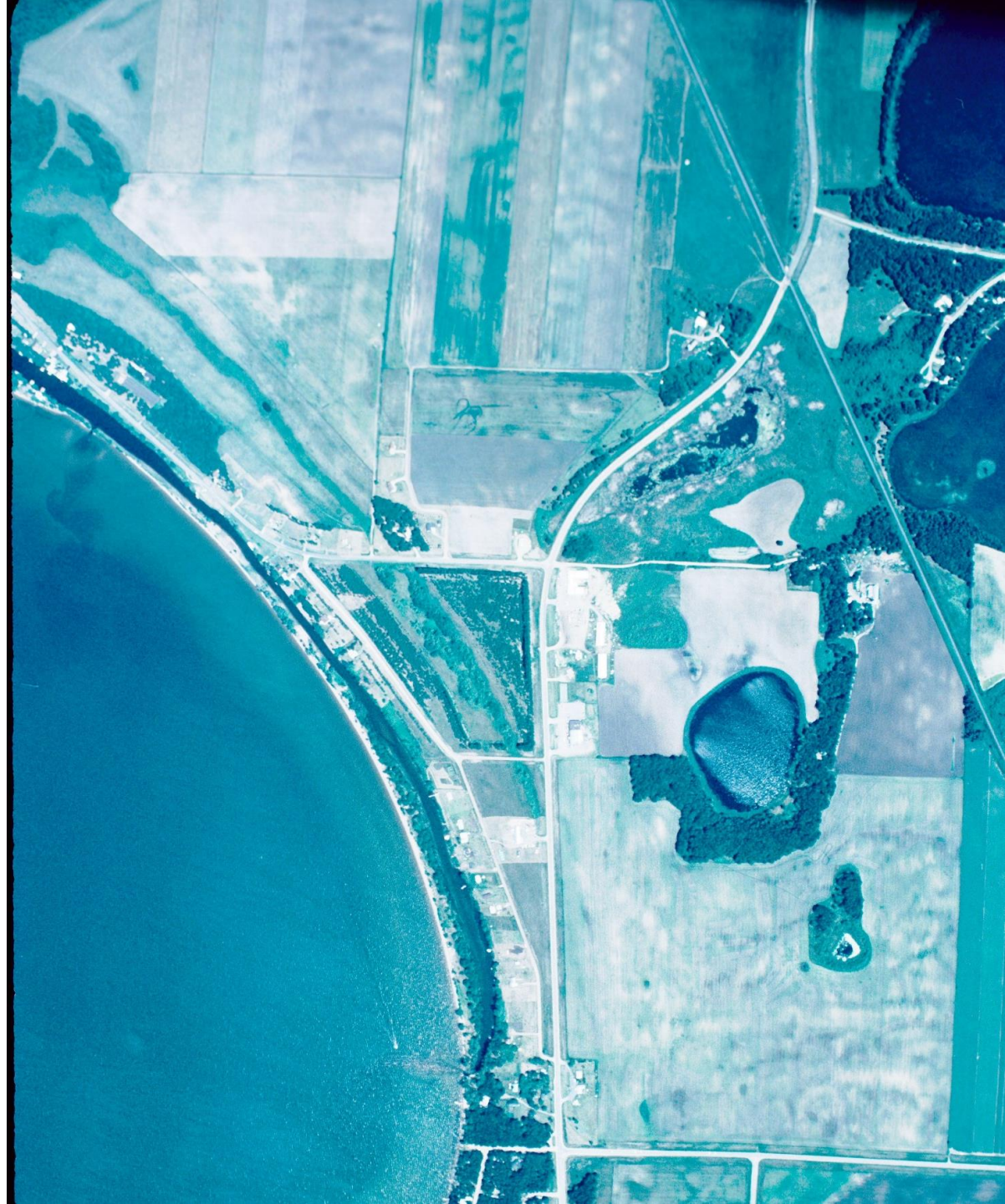
1982



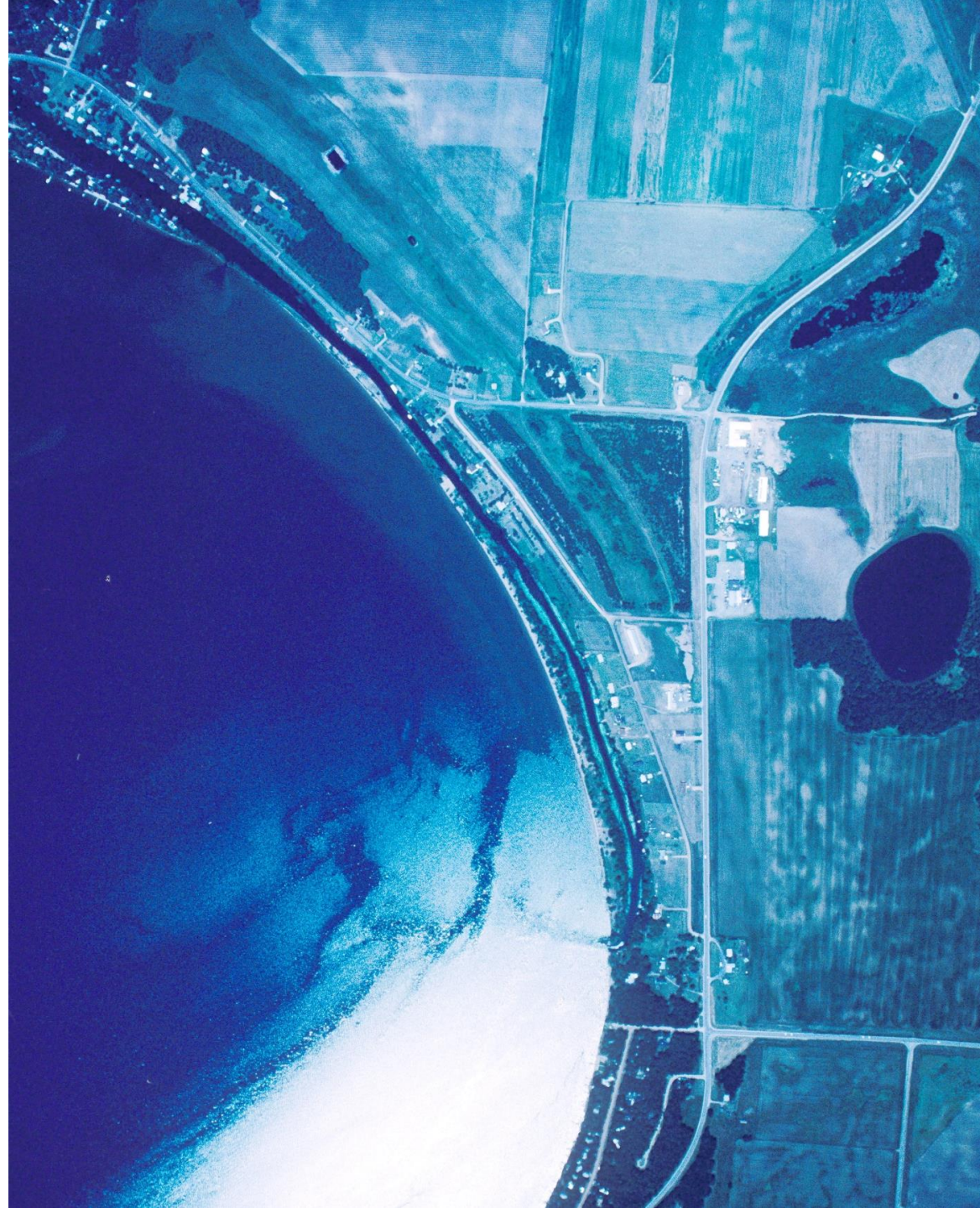
1983



1984



1985



1986



1987



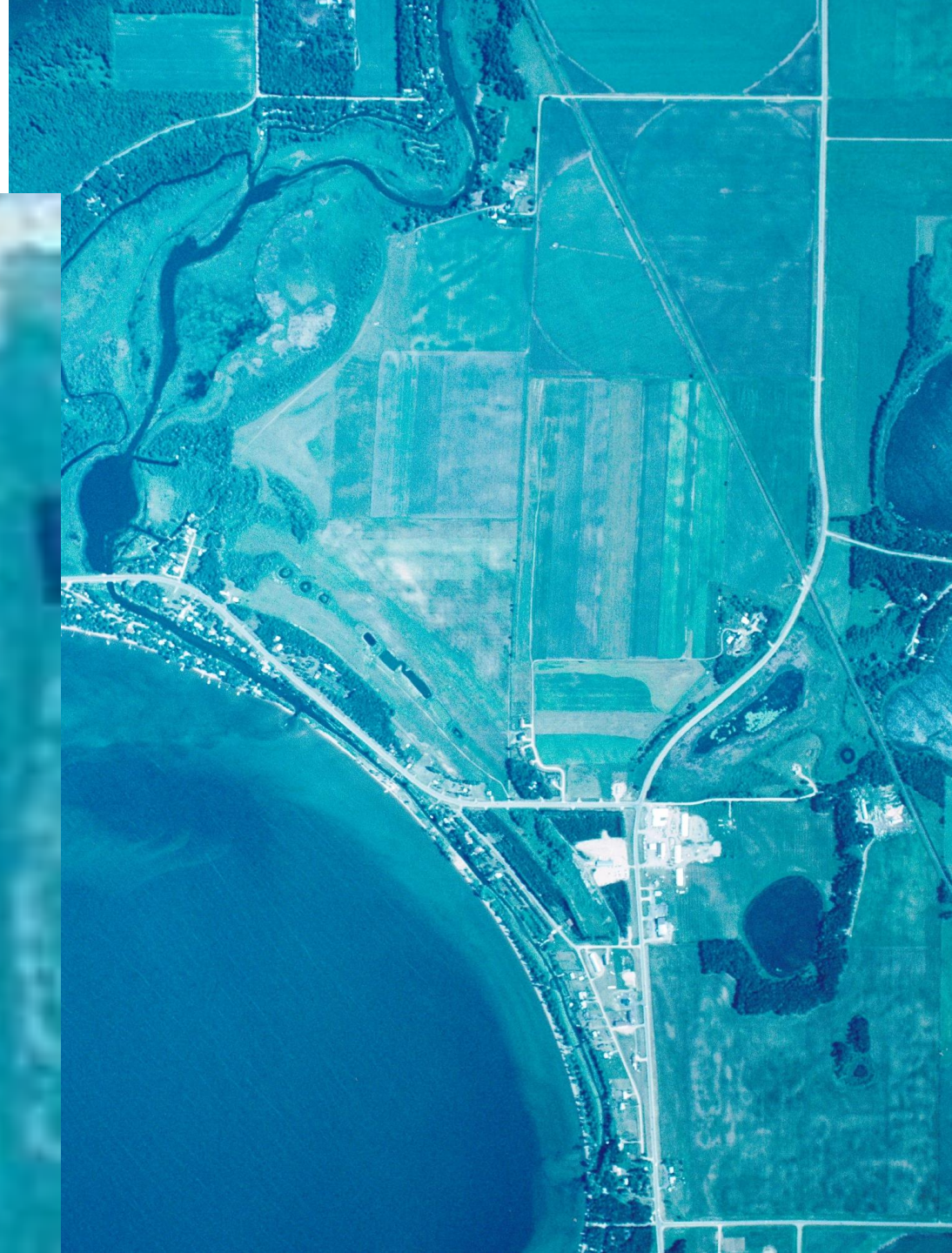
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1989



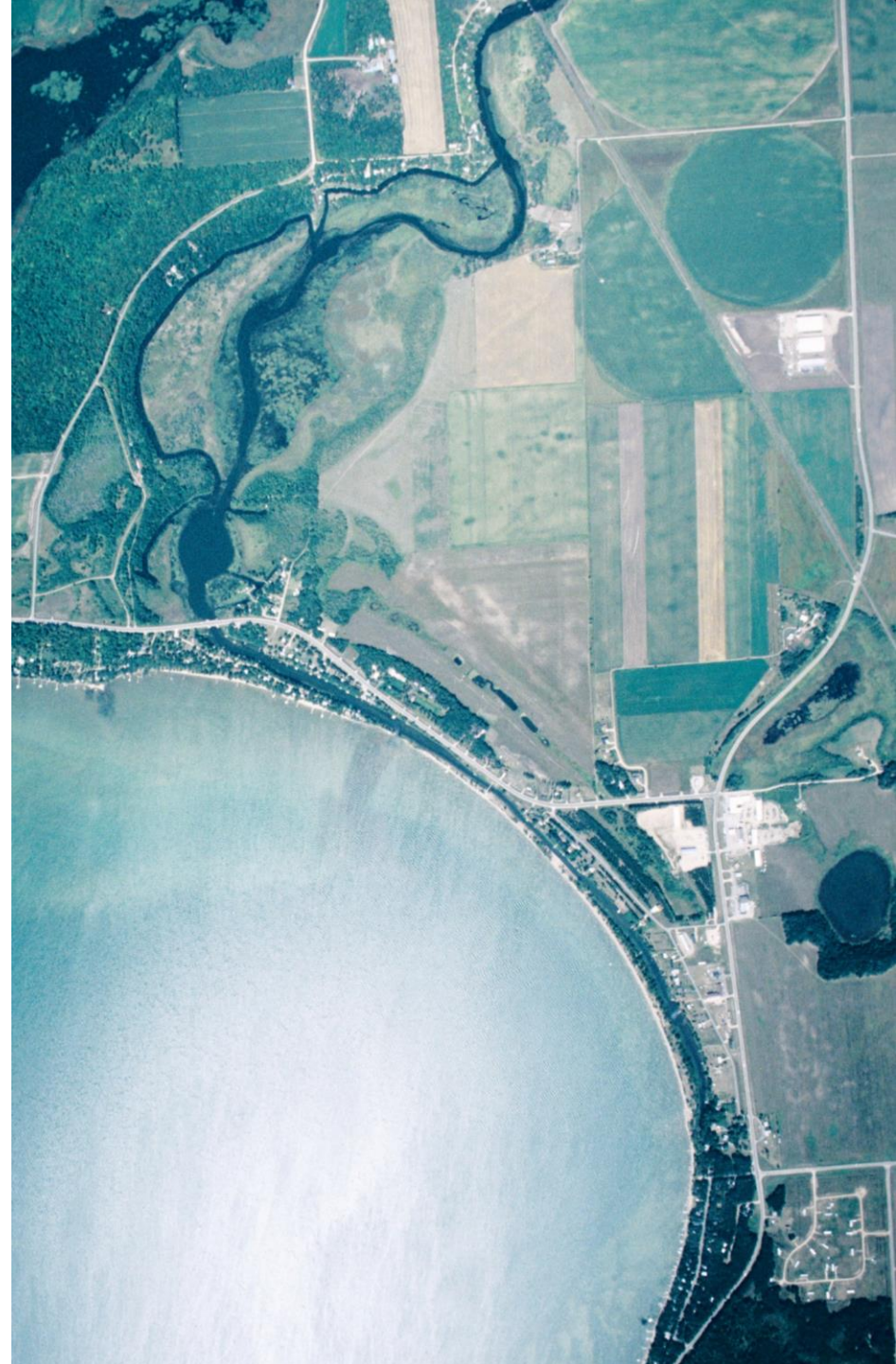
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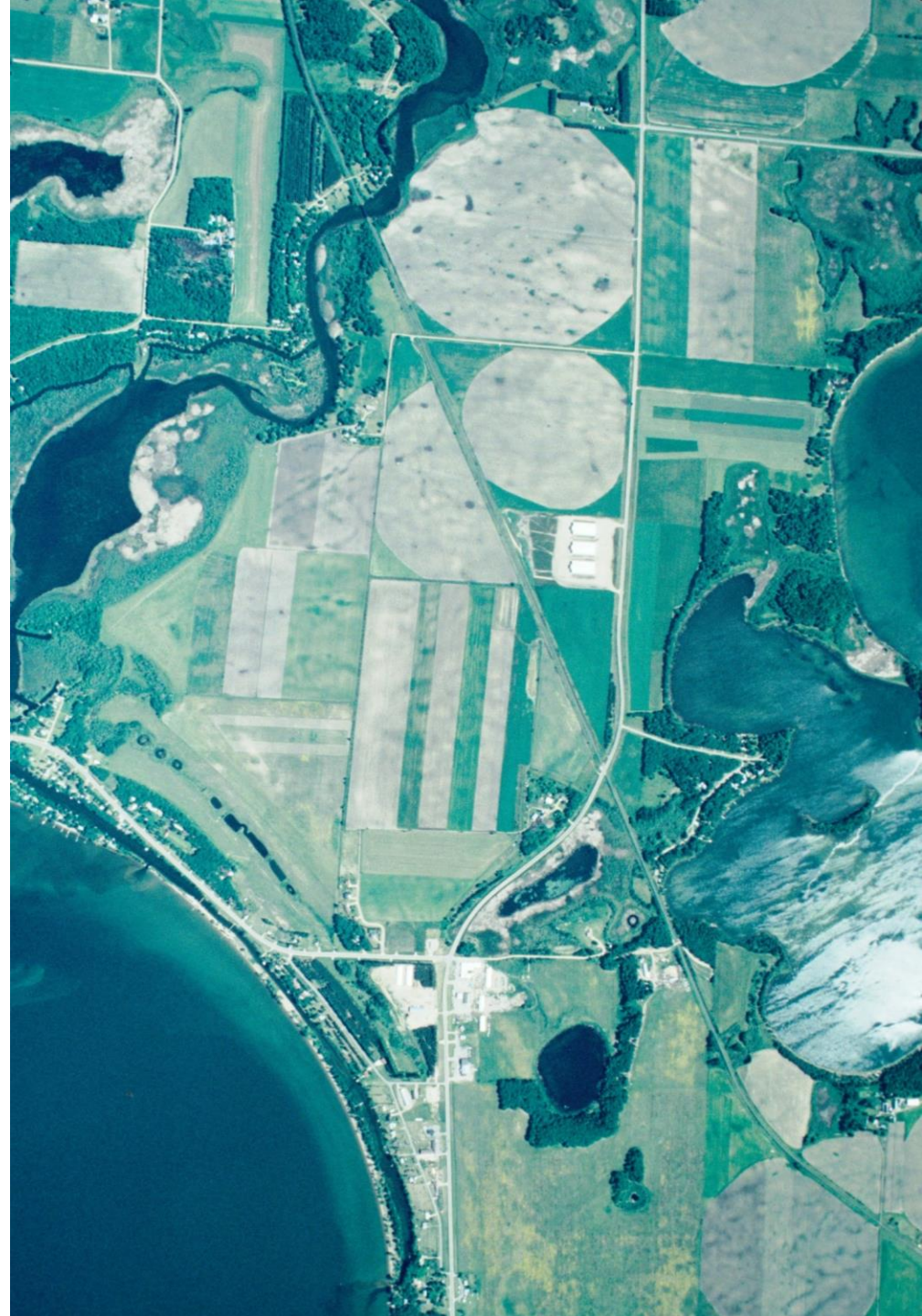
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1992



1993



1994



1995



1996



1997



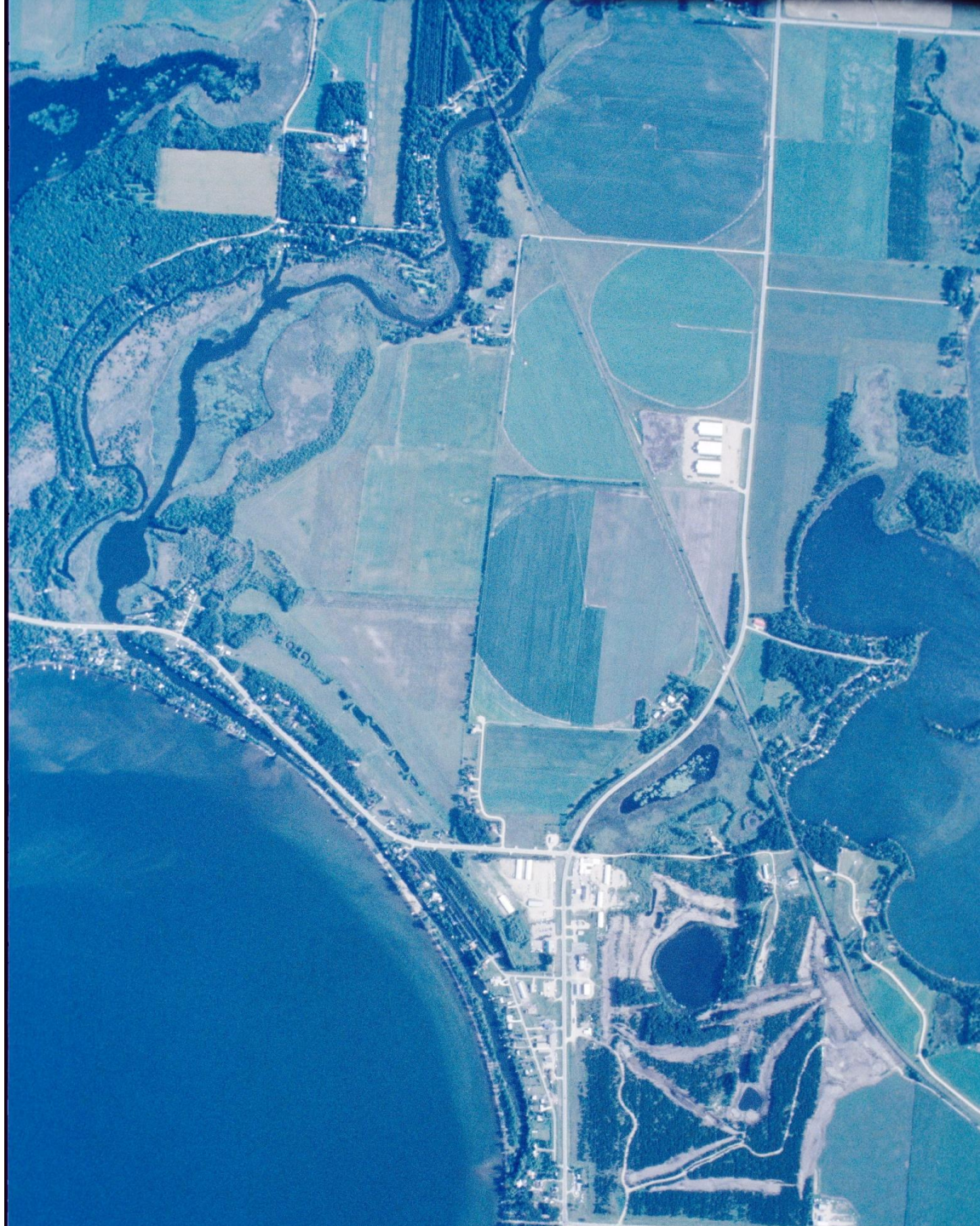
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1999

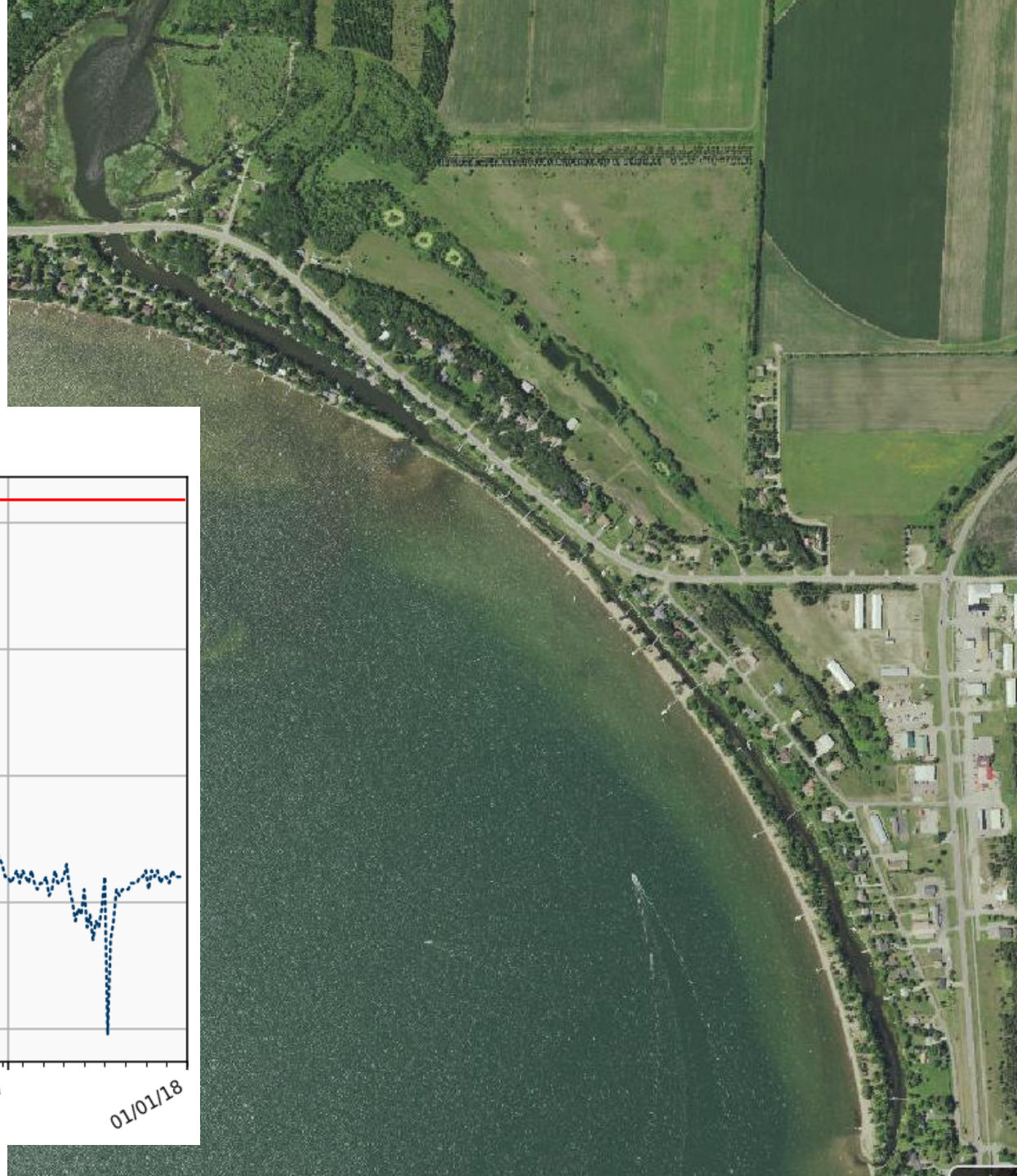
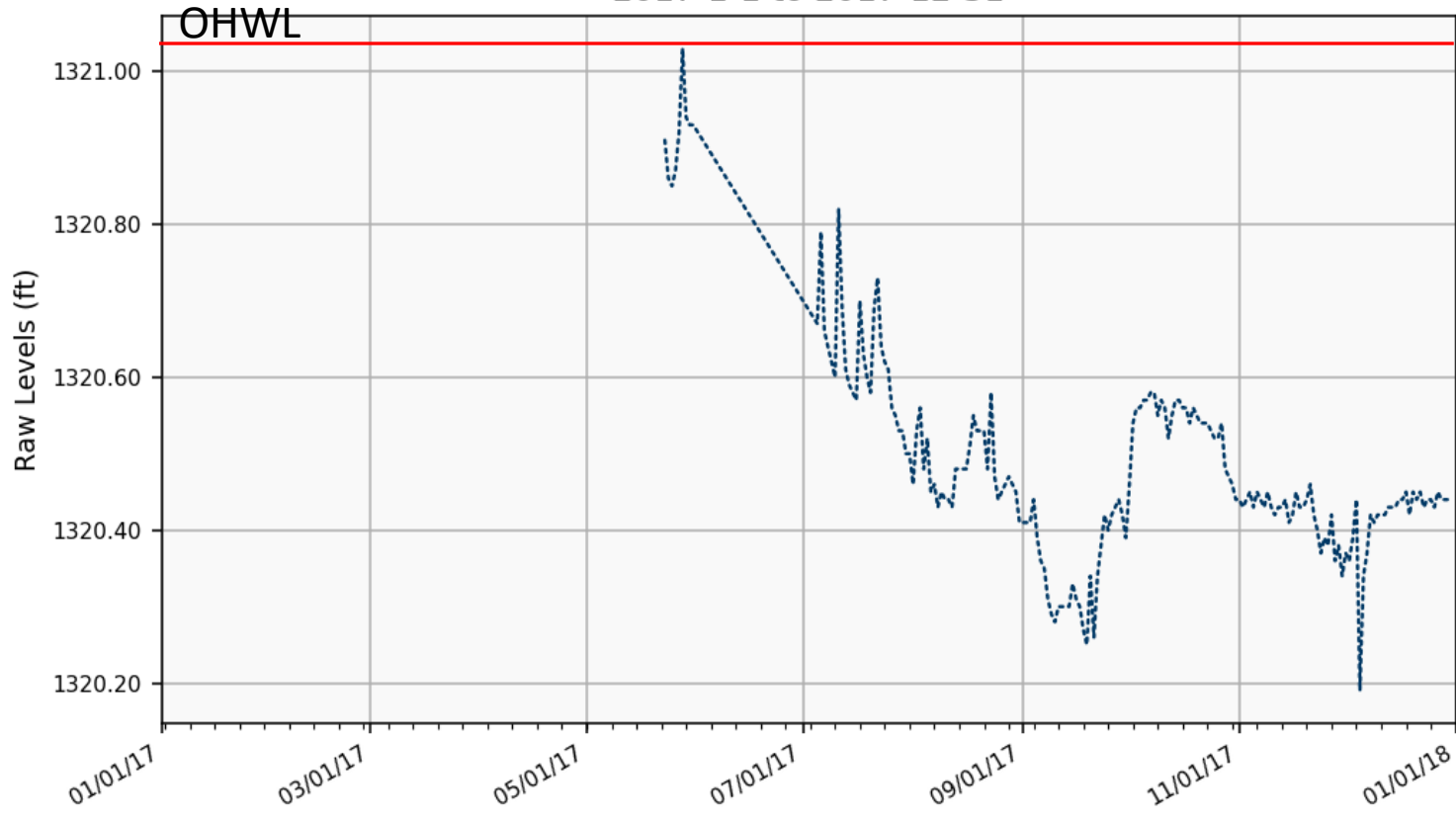


2000

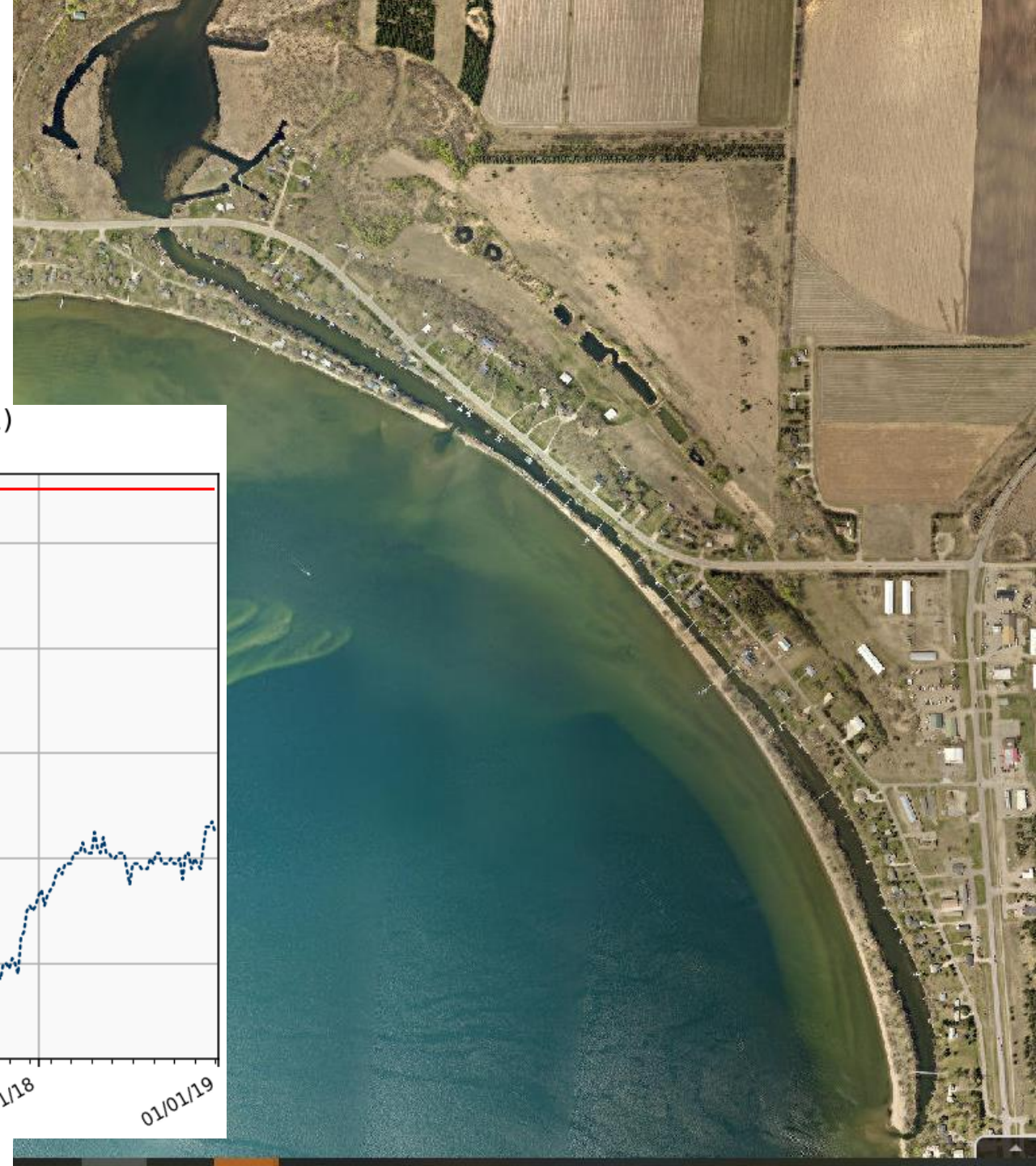


2017

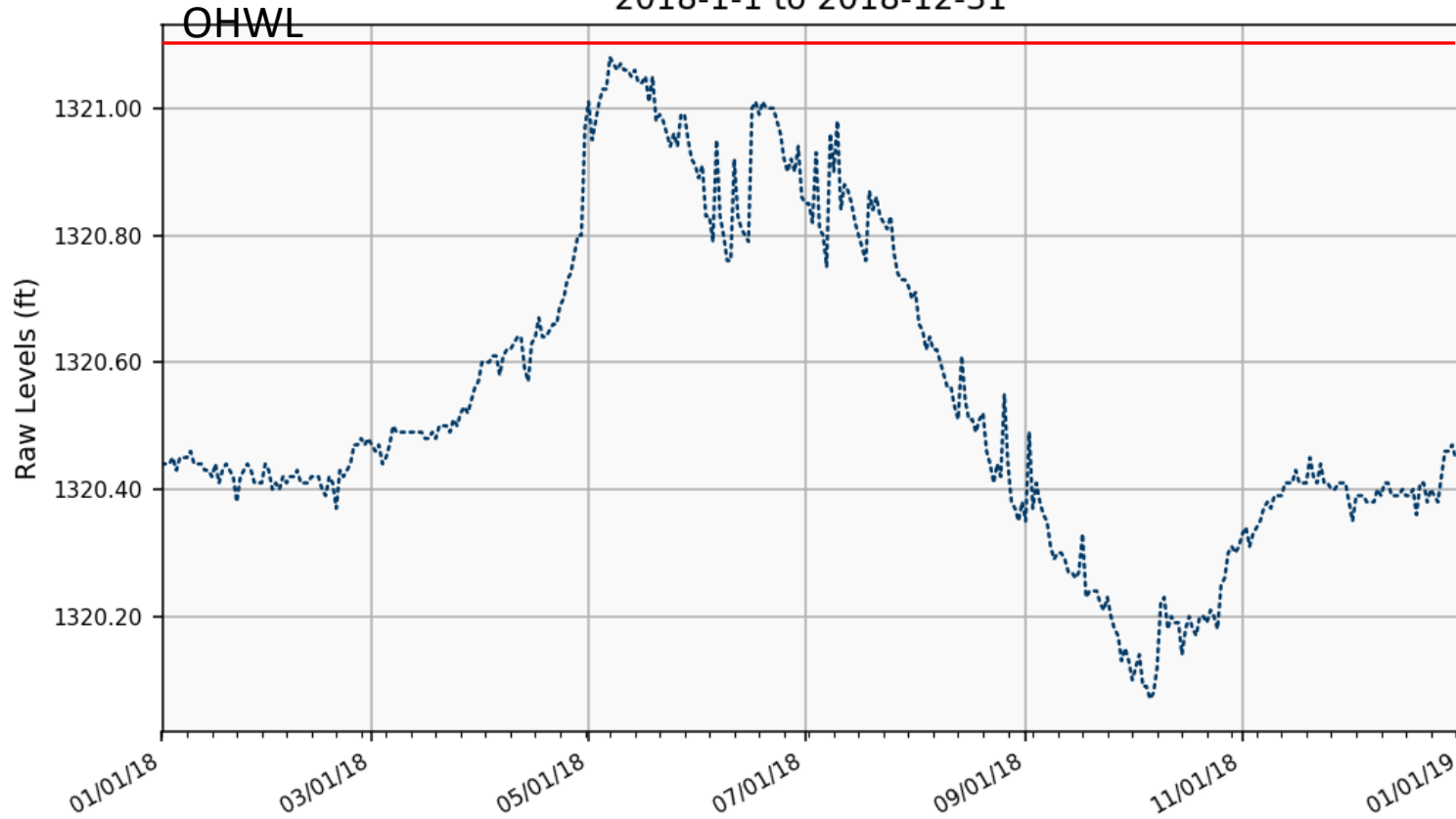
Otter Tail River nr Battle Lake, CR72 (56052001)
2017-1-1 to 2017-12-31



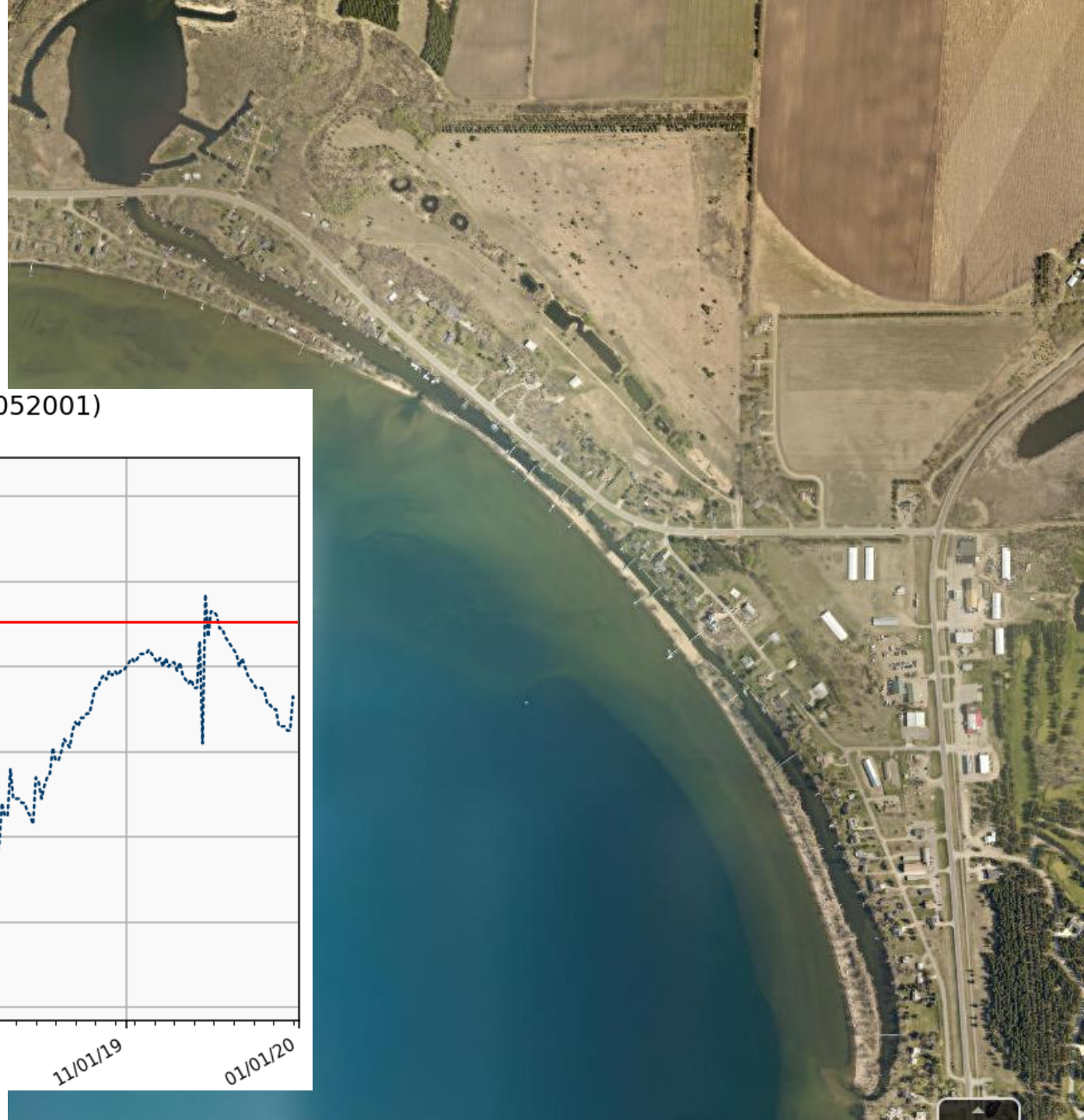
2018



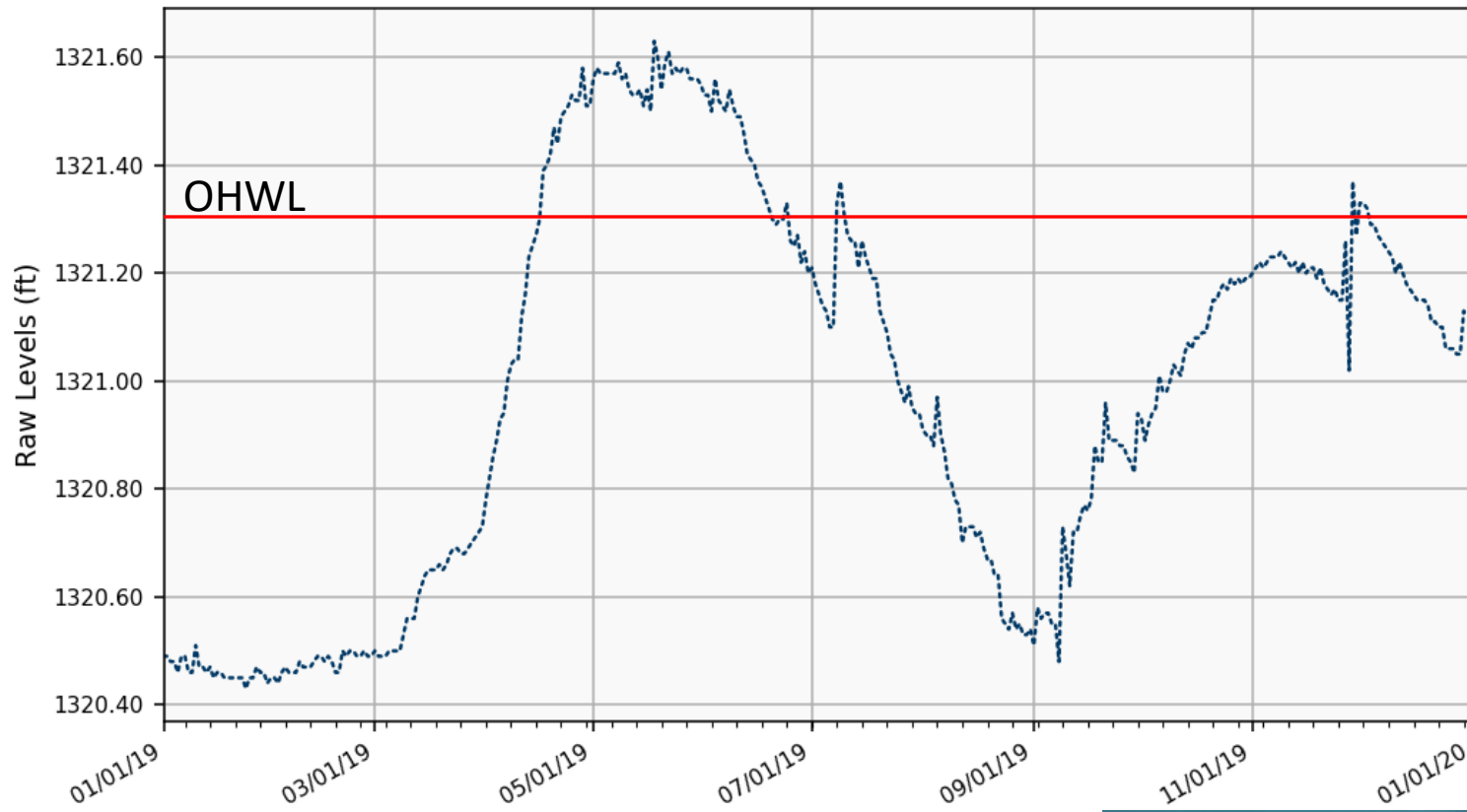
Otter Tail River nr Battle Lake, CR72 (56052001)
2018-1-1 to 2018-12-31



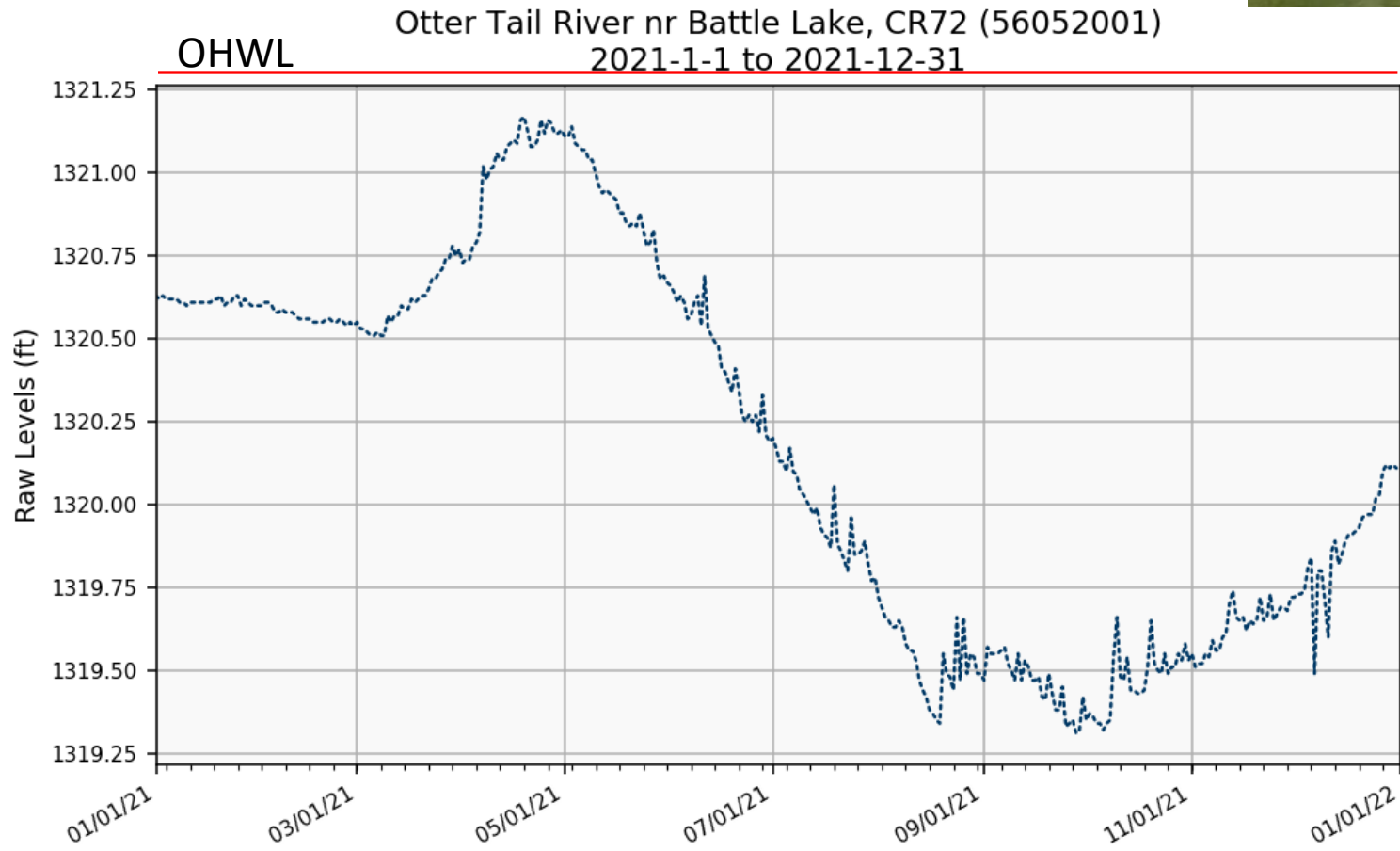
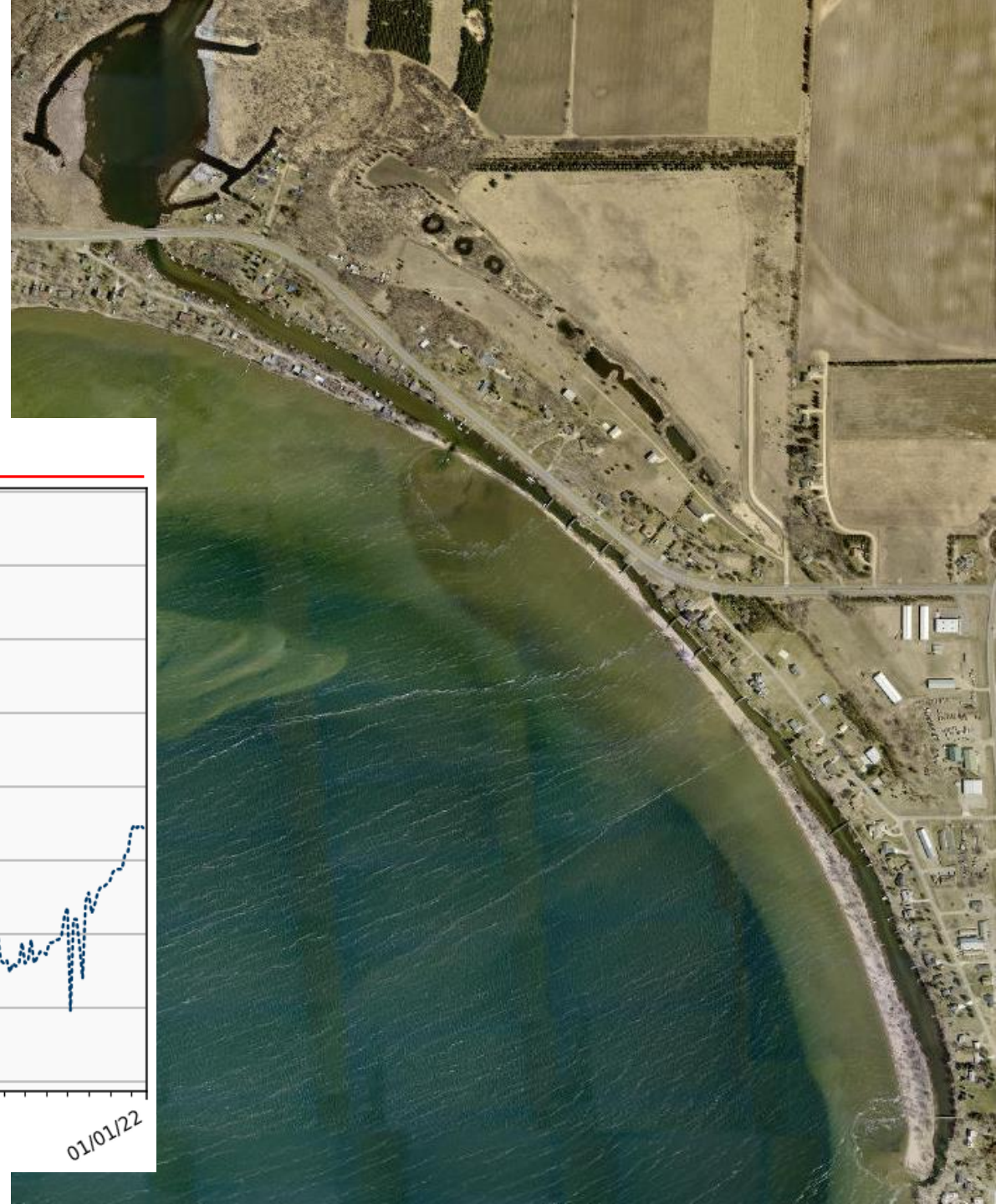
2019



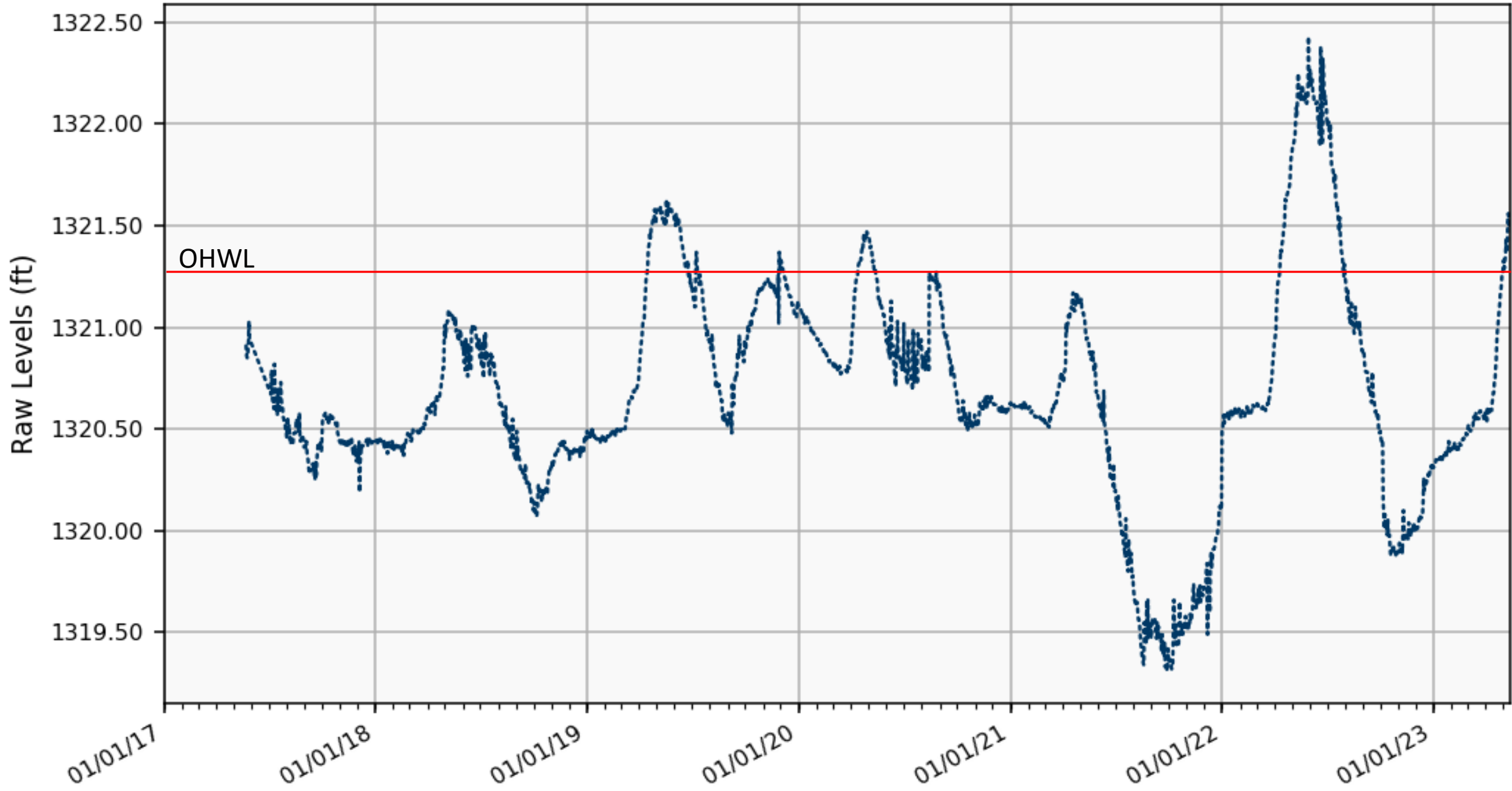
Otter Tail River nr Battle Lake, CR72 (56052001)
2019-1-1 to 2019-12-31



2021



Otter Tail River nr Battle Lake, CR72 (56052001)
2017-1-1 to 2023-5-11



Otter Tail River Ordinary High Water Level: 1321.30 (MSL 1912)

Period of record- 1919-2022

Recorded Water Level Elevations

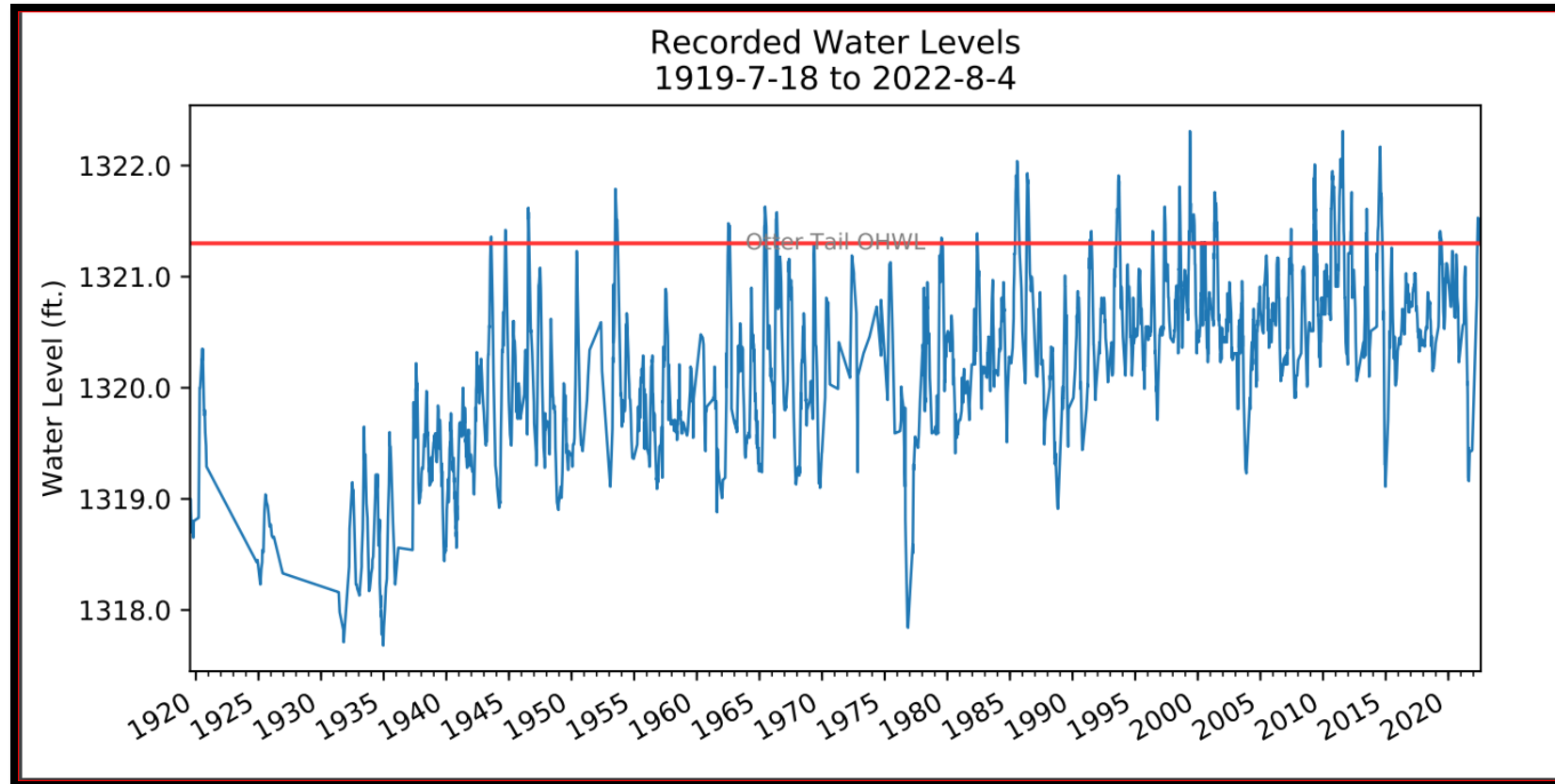
Beginning Elevation: 1318.95 (07-18-1919)

Ending Elevation: 1320.63 (08-04-2022)

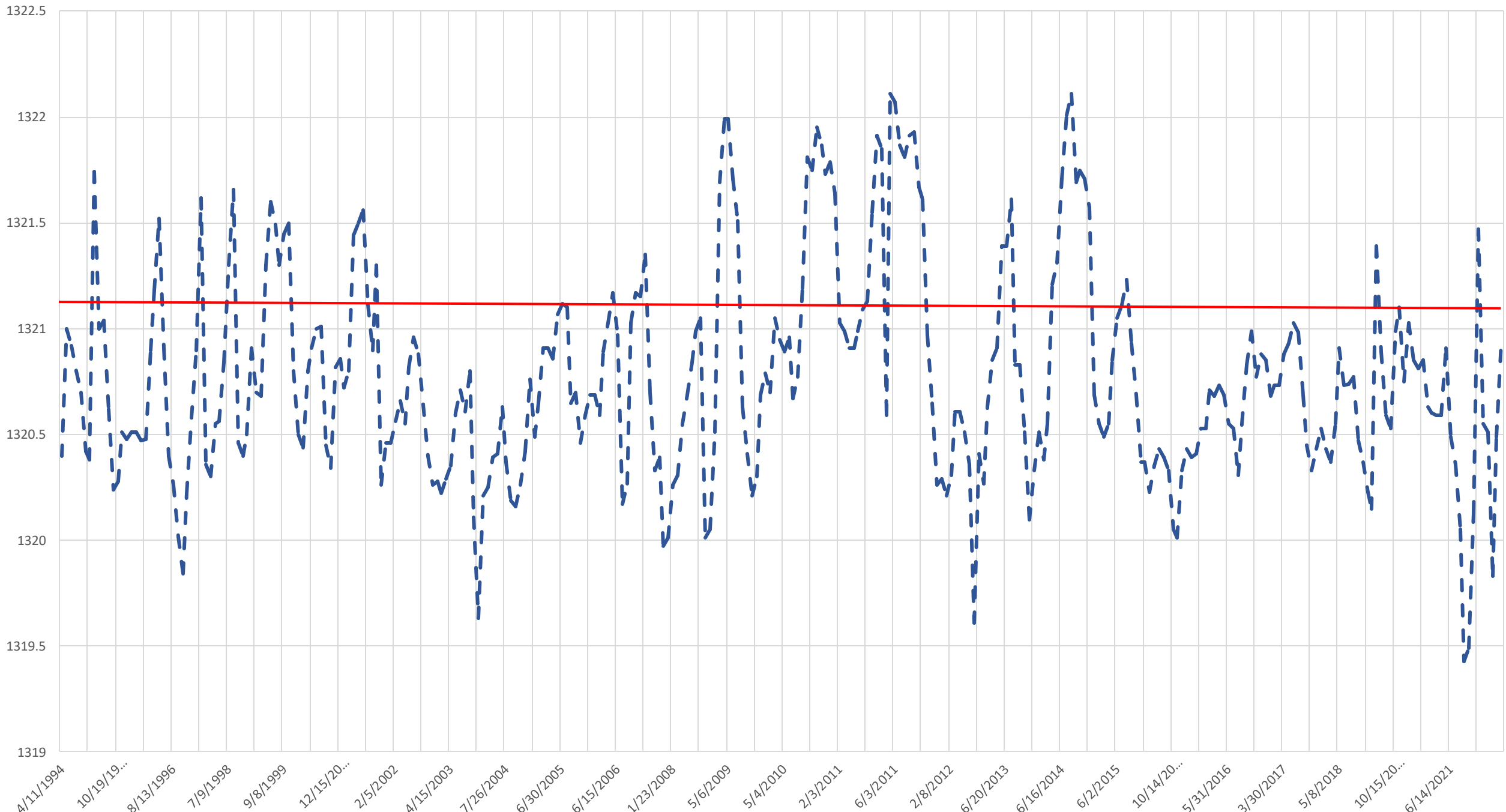
Highest Recorded: 1322.31 (08-01-2011)

Lowest Recorded: 1317.68 (12-18-1934)

Number of Readings: 3,691



Otter Tail Lake Water Level 1994-2023



Breakout Groups

- Answer the following question:
 - What are the issues with the channel?



Issues Identified by Citizens

- No flow after mid-June to July at south end
- Water gets stagnant, sandbar grows
- The original mouth is three times shorter distance than north mouth to deeper water
- Water fluctuates up and down
- Water stagnate in the wintertime
- Weeds from ag runoff
- Who controls the levels from the dams upstream?

- The weeds in the river, slows the flow of water, silt builds up
- If the first mouth is closed, would another break occur elsewhere
- Access and navigation
- Water quality on south section is poor late in the season
- Riparian rights
- Weeds, muck, low levels, access
- Shallow spots, water quality, navigation
- Weeds in river, trash in river

- Lack of flow, unnavigable
- Wild rice infestation, zebra mussels, excessive watercrafts
- Rush lake dam-maintain as is
- Flow, navigation, vegetation, can't get out
- Wild rice, water level fluctuations, sand and muck, rush lake
- Weeds between both openings are a concern later in the season
- Wild rice is out of control
- South end is a nightmare later in the summer

- Channels clogged with muck and wild rice
- Flow, weed growth makes channel unnavigable
- Sediment in channel
- Ease of navigation
- Water fluctuation
- Floating bogs
- Lack of flow, too much vegetation
- Invasive vegetation?



Schedule Next Meeting