

Officials celebrate reconstruction of century-old Sylvan Lake Dam; 'It'll be here for another 100 years'



The Sylvan Lake Dam under reconstruction, which included extensive work on the century-old dam. The project took over two decades to become a reality. (Photo courtesy of Lake County)



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UPDATED: July 28, 2025 at 11:58 AM CDT

Local and state officials celebrated a ribbon-cutting for the newly reconstructed Sylvan Lake Dam Friday, a project more than two decades in the making that officials say will secure the century-old dam's continued use for many more decades.

The \$3.5 million project also included relocating a previously exposed above-ground sanitary sewer line along North Highland Drive. The new dam can dewater the lake if need be, engineers said.

The project received funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency Pre-Disaster Mitigation Congressionally Directed spending program, as well as the Fremont Township Highway Department and Sylvan Lake Improvement Association.



The Sylvan Lake Dam post reconstruction, including a new sheet pile wall. The new dam also now has the ability to dewater the lake, officials said. (Joe States/Pioneer Press)

Sharon Osterby, the project manager for Lake County Stormwater Management, said the dam, like many in the county, was originally constructed of primarily soil and rock. Over the decades, it began to deteriorate.

Because of the location of the sewer line, work had to be done. If it were to continue to deteriorate, escaping water could have discharged sewage downstream and into the wetlands.

“It really would have been a disaster,” Osterby said.

Working on the dam was an interesting experience, she said, thinking back to how it was originally built, and how technologies have changed since.

“One hundred years ago, somebody probably had a horse and a carriage carry these massive boulders just to fill this,” Osterby said. “It’s kind of astonishing when you think about how it started, and what it is now. It’ll be here for another 100 years.”



U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood speaks during a ribbon cutting event for the Sylvan Lake Dam. The century-old dam saw extensive reconstruction work. (Joe States/Pioneer Press)

According to the event's speakers, work on the project originally began all the way back in 2004, when the Department of Natural Resources identified deficiencies. Various changes, including a change in dam ownership and funding needs, presented "obstacles and hurdles," project engineer Joy Corona said.

U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood, D-Naperville, from Illinois's 14th Congressional District — which previously contained Sylvan Lake — said she advocated for \$1.3 million from the Community Project Funding initiative to support the dam project.

"We know the real worry and fear that a dam failure would have for this gorgeous area," Underwood said. "In addition to property damage, hundreds of families here in the Sylvan Lake community would have been impacted."

It wasn't just about public safety, Underwood said, but an "investment in families and businesses, our economy and our future." She thanked the numerous local officials, from Fremont Township to Lake County, who helped make the project a reality.

"So often our government projects are theoretical. This is tangible," she said.

Originally Published: July 25, 2025 at 6:21 PM CDT