

On The WaterFront

A newsletter promoting The Environmental Protection & Responsible Use of Washburn County Waters, Shorelands and Wildlife Resources

2020: A Challenging Year

It has been an unprecedented summer and fall this year for everyone. WCLRA continues its business (just not “as usual”) representing our 398 individual members and 24 lake associations. The WCLRA Board of Directors has not meet in person since the outbreak of the coronavirus, but it continues to meet virtually via Zoom on the third Friday of each month. In addition, the Education, Finance, Communication, Membership, and Government and Environment committees held, and continue to hold, virtual meetings. We know that many of you have also continued your work with your associations under the constraints of COVID as you meet virtually or in person with safety precautions.

All members received the WCLRA Annual Report in the mail this year. Thank you to those who returned ballots and comments. We received 74 responses re-electing the Board and approving the budget for 2021. The WCLRA Board of Directors has begun the process of setting goals for the coming year and appreciates the input from members.

One of the new projects listed in the Report this year was to update the WCLRA website. The WCLRA Communications team and our web services partner, CF Web Services, recently refreshed the design and improved display of pages when they are viewed on smart phones and tablets. The new WCLRA website is now launched. Go to www.wclra.org Watch for more photos, frequently updated content, and interesting videos as the next phase. We continue to improve our website and make it easier to find the information you need. Current and archival newsletters are available on the site in addition to other information on events and issues promoting environmental protection of the waters in northwest Wisconsin.



Photo courtesy of Barb Luck

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Meeting the Candidates

This summer, WCLRA Board members met via videoconference with current state legislators and the candidates for election. Our intent was to share information about our organization and discuss issues important to our members. The Board members felt it would be helpful to find out each candidate's viewpoints and goals if elected, as well as hearing about priorities for the upcoming year from our current legislators.

Board members spoke first with Rep. Milroy and State Senator Janet Bewley together on August 14th. Candidates for the 75th Assembly seat Dave Armstrong (R) from Rice Lake and John Ellenson (D) from Shell Lake joined WCLRA Board members on August 26 and 27, respectively. This district encompasses much of the north and west portions of Washburn County. This seat is currently held by Rep. Romaine Quinn, who is not seeking re-election.

Board members also met with Keith Kern from Superior on September 8th. Kern is a Republican candidate for the 73rd Assembly District, which includes the east and south portions of Washburn County (the county is divided almost diagonally southwest to northeast between the 73rd and 75th Assembly districts). This seat is currently held by incumbent Rep. Nick Milroy, who is running for re-election.

All 99 Wisconsin Assembly seats are up for election at once every even-numbered year. Senator Bewley is serving her second 4-year term, and is not up for re-election until 2022.

As a non-profit organization, WCLRA does not endorse political candidates, but it does its best to collaborate with candidates and legislators to focus attention and inform them on environmental issues. Climate change, tourism revenue, funding county conservation offices, local control for shoreland zoning, protecting wetlands to control flooding, clean drinking water, and agricultural and municipal run-off were among the topics of the wide-ranging discussions.

In all of the meetings, the dialogue was positive and the legislators and candidates appreciated the opportunity to learn more about water issues in northwest Wisconsin. They were all receptive to WCLRA's offer to continue to be a resource and sounding board on environmental issues after the election.

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Zebra Mussel Update--Washburn and Burnett Counties have finished a fourth year of a joint project to monitor and contain the highly invasive zebra mussel. Monitoring techniques being used include plate sampling, veliger tows, and environmental DNA. In addition to Clean Boats, Clean Waters watercraft inspections to prevent the spread, decontamination stations have been installed at 12 Washburn and 17 Burnett County lakes. A hot water pressure washer was purchased for use primarily at Big McKenzie Lake. Both counties passed ordinances requiring boaters to use decontamination stations when these are present.

The good news is that no new lakes beyond Big and Middle McKenzie have been found to be infected. The bad news is that zebra mussel populations in Big and Middle McKenzie Lakes have increased. Washburn County officials told us "Landowners [on Big McKenzie] continue to report finding thousands of them covered on boats, motors, docks and along the shoreline." Continued vigilance is imperative.

Wake Boats 2020 Update

By Cathie Erickson and Fred Blake

The summer of 2020 has been an especially busy time on Washburn County lakes as people flock to the outdoors to have fun with family and friends in a place where they feel safe from COVID. Increased traffic from various types of boats, especially wake or wave boats, coupled with high water levels on many lakes, has raised concerns. After receiving multiple complaints in the fall of 2017, WCLRA first wrote about wake boat concerns in its Spring/Summer 2018 newsletter edition (available at <https://wclra.org/wp-content/uploads/SpringID2018.pdf>) In responses to this year's WCLRA Annual Meeting mailing, wake boats were the most frequently raised concern. Mike Engleson, Executive Director of Wisconsin Lakes, has fielded a lot of questions and complaints about wake boats from around the state this summer and has been talking with lake advocates around the country who are dealing with the same issues. A definition of "wake boat" that he suggests looking at comes from Vermont and defines a wake boat as any boat with ballast tanks in the back that can be filled to create an enhanced wake by lowering the engine (*stern*) deeper into the water.

Mike summarizes the concerns about the enhanced waves from wake boats in several categories:

- Property damage
- Erosion of shoreline
- Destruction of lake bed and shoreline habitat
- Safety of other lake users
- Transport of invasive species

Is there a simple answer? Probably not! Education about safe and responsible operation of wake boats sometimes helps. State law already prohibits boating activities that create a hazardous wake or wash *and boaters are legally responsible for damage caused by their wakes*, but that can be difficult to prove and requires collecting factual documentation. Towns and villages can adopt local ordinances, but that is not an easy process and few Towns in this part

of the state would have the capacity to enforce them.

Some citizens are looking to their states for more regulation of wake boats. However, wake boat owners have a right to use and enjoy our lakes too. And, not surprisingly, the boating industry will protect its right to continue selling its products.

Convincing legislators to effectively address impacts of wake boats will require documented evidence and scientific studies of damage caused by wake boats. Mike has found that little such data currently exists. One study, currently underway at Carroll College in partnership with the Southeastern WI Regional Planning Commission and North Lake Management District, is using drone technology to measure wave height and wave frequency as well as lake bed disturbance in shallow water. We recently watched a presentation of preliminary data by Capt. Tim Tyre at a meeting hosted by the Lake Country Clean Waters group in southeast Wisconsin. This ongoing study appears to be well-designed and carefully implemented, and we're hopeful that it will provide the scientific data that has been lacking.

Does your lake association have documented evidence of damage directly caused by wake boats or ideas on measures to minimize their wave impacts? Have you contacted a warden about any boating issues this summer? WCLRA can serve as a collection point for this sort of information. Contact Fred Blake at 715-469-3228 or blakelake@centurytel.net to share your documentation and ideas for solutions.

Wisconsin Lakes Trivia



1. Wisconsin inland lakes cover what percent of the state? 3, 5, 11
2. Which aquatic invasive species was introduced by hobbyists who were using it as an aquarium plant?

1. 3. 2. curly -leaf pondweed

Navigating During High Water Conditions

by Kathy Bartilson

Again this summer, residents in Washburn County were concerned about high water on local lakes. Some lakes reached record high levels this year and high water was reported from Twin Lakes, Spider Lake, and Stone Lake, to name a few.

While we are very thankful for plentiful rain for our gardens and crops, higher water impacts our lakes and rivers, and people living and recreating on them. Water quality can change in high water, but whether it makes it better or worse can depend on each lake or river itself, and how high the water gets. Higher water can cause larger waves from wind, boat wakes and personal watercraft. When the waves hit the shore, the damage to river banks, lake shores, and lawns poses real threats to water quality through soil erosion and nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the water.

When the water rises onto natural shore areas and lawns, residue of lawn fertilizers and other chemicals can be picked up. Shoreline vegetation that prefers “dry feet” can die-off from being inundated, leaving bare soil open to erosion. Fertile lawn soils, leaves, and grass clippings washed directly into the lake or river add phosphorus, nitrogen, turbidity, and other contaminants to the water. Unchecked erosion over time can even threaten bank integrity and lead to property damage.

In extreme cases, high water levels can also threaten public health. Private wells, buried water and wastewater lines, and septic systems (especially drain fields), can become inundated, causing concern for safe drinking water and proper filtering and absorption in septic systems.

Help protect shoreline

By allowing unmowed native vegetation to grow along the shoreline, fertilizer is not needed and the shoreline can be better protected from erosion. Many native species can tolerate alternating wet and dry soil conditions. A “buffer zone” of flowers, native grasses, shrubs and trees, along with native aquatic plants along the shore, helps protect the shoreline from wave energy, provides habitat for wildlife and fish, and filters rain and runoff flowing toward the water. For great information on establishing shoreline buffers and other best practices (including funding options), check out the Wisconsin Healthy Lakes website at healthylakeswi.com.

Be more aware when boating

Recreation during high water calls for special caution and courtesy. Boat wakes can reach farther up onto the shoreline causing erosion and property damage in areas not normally reached by the water. The U.S. Boat Owners Association advises allowing extra time for your fishing trip and driving watercraft slowly and farther from shore. In addition, avoid repetitive routes, which can send wakes slamming into the same sections of shore. Avoid close passes to other boats and allow extra space when following other watercraft. High water can also hide obstacles like rocks and logs that are normally visible. Using care to watch for these hazards can prevent serious mishaps on both lakes and rivers, making water sports safer for the participants and for the shoreline.

Wisconsin law requires that boats operate at slow-no wake speeds within 100 feet of shore, as well as within 100 feet of a dock, raft, pier, or buoyed restricted area. *This law protecting lakeshore was signed right here in Washburn County at Totogatic Park in July of 2009, when the Totogatic River was also designated a State Wild River by former Governor Jim Doyle.*

Healthy Lakes Planning on Matthews Lake

by Dick Howard, Matthews Lake Association

Matthews Lake is a moderately sized, mesotrophic (“middle aged” as lakes go), seepage-fed body of water beloved by its Matthew Lake Community. Its clarity is remarkable – Secchi Disk readings above the average for NW Wisconsin and clarity so good that plants have been found growing in the deep hole at 25 feet. More importantly, it is home to much wildlife, rather good “catching” (as opposed to “fishing”), and a wide variety of lake activities including pontoon happy hours, water skiing, and paddle boarding. It currently has no invasive species other than an abundance of mystery snails. It is the intent of the Matthews Lake Association (MLA) to protect this lake and improve its health through its comprehensive planning begun in 2019.

Water quality monitoring has shown evidence of increased phosphorus in our lake, the cause of which is unknown. This is a concern to us. As the reader may know, phosphorus (P) is the “accelerant” to plant and algae growth in a lake and can accelerate the “aging” of a lake. Its sources are many. This trend stimulated the MLA board to act in a positive manner to understand the lake better through baseline data and take steps to reduce phosphorus loading.

MLA received a planning grant through the Surface Waters Grants program of the Wisconsin DNR to embark upon a comprehensive plan for Matthews Lake. We already have a very proactive process to inspect boats at our landing to prevent the introduction of invasive species from being launched into the lake. Our current planning process includes a comprehensive inventory of the aquatic plant life, research on the potential of phosphorus loading through septic systems, and proactive steps to reduce runoff through shoreland restoration and enhancement best practices like native



Courtesy of Matthews Lake Association

plantings, rock infiltration, and diversion projects. Our comprehensive aquatic plants survey is now complete, and we are “in process” to engage landowners around the lake to understand how to adopt best practices for their shoreland.

Thanks in no small part to Lisa Burns, Washburn County Land and Water Conservation, and Linda Anderson, Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association (WCLRA), we have been able to educate landowners around the lake on best practices to reduce runoff. 18 of our landowners expressed positive, active interest in native plantings to reduce runoff. As of the date of this article, we anticipate nearly half of the interested parties will be applying for Healthy Lakes and Rivers Grants for shoreland improvements. The other half are going the DIY approach to install plantings to reduce runoff and enhance the beauty of our shorelines. As Linda Anderson puts it, they will have some beautiful plantings that will enhance the bees, wildlife and add some “eye candy” to our shorelines. We know this will be an ongoing process to protect our lake and add value to our properties.

We owe a special thanks to Linda Anderson’s tireless efforts to teach, advise and guide us at MLA in our lakeshore enhancements. Thank you WCLRA!

Blue Ribbon Shoreland Incentive

by Kathy Bartilson

Can we each do more at our shorefront homes to protect our waters? This spring, the WCLRA Board approved a project to develop incentives and rewards for “water-friendly” properties. A “Blue Ribbon Shoreline” committee was formed including Board members, local realtors, and some of our state and county resource managers.

The committee has explored a wide range of ideas and target audiences, from the stage where shorefront property is divided and offered for sale, to building a new home, to work that can improve conditions at existing homes and properties. Rewards for owners that have (or install) effective shoreline buffers are also being considered. Other ideas include organizing tours of shorefront properties, financial and technical assistance and training for buffer restoration, special decals to place on docks, and “water-friendly property” signs for yards or mailboxes.

The first project the committee will undertake is producing a packet of information to share with people hoping to buy shoreland property. Some of the participants also hope to take further training in shoreland buffer design and installation.

Do you have ideas on meaningful rewards or incentives for restoring a protective shoreland buffer, implementing stormwater capture and treatment, aquatic habitat improvement or other measure? We’d love to hear from you!



Photo courtesy of Barb Luck



4" 5-7" 8-12" 12-15"
MINIMUM GUIDELINES FOR NEW, CLEAR ICE

Ice is never 100% safe!

Guidelines for new ice only:

- Under 4" -Stay Off
- 4" -Ice fishing or other activities on foot
- 5-7" -Snowmobile or ATV
- 8-12" -Car or small pickup
- 12-15" -Medium truck

Many factors other than thickness can cause ice to be unsafe. White ice or “snow ice” is only about half as strong as new, clear ice. Double the above guidelines when traveling on white ice.



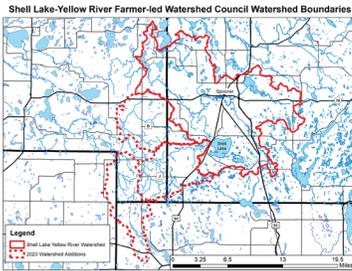
**SAVE
THE
DATE**

March 8-12 The Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention will again be virtual next year and part of a larger (the first ever) **Wisconsin Water Week**
<https://wisconsinlakes.org/wisconsin-water-week/>

June 18 Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference
Format and location still to be determined.

Farmer-led Watershed Council Update

by Madeline Roberts



Local farmers are continuing to help protect and improve water quality in the Shell Lake and Yellow River watershed

through their Farmer-led Watershed Council. The current focus of the Council has been on education and an incentive program. On the education side, the Council has been putting up signs around the watershed highlighting practices that protect water quality so keep an eye out as you drive around the area. The Council is also working on creating educational videos on the research and practices Council members are doing. Stay tuned for the finished product. If you want an up-close look at how cover crops have been inter-seeded into standing corn, there is a self-guided tour at the Spooner Agricultural Research Station. Take Hwy 70 east from Spooner and turn left on Orchard lane.

A second significant part of the Council's work is an incentive program. This program includes:

- \$20/acre for cover crops and \$25/acre for first-time users of cover crops
- \$4/acre for soil testing. \$5/acre for tests that include micronutrients
- FREE mentorship on no-till, cover crops, and rotational grazing

This program is open to any fields within the watersheds. Three new watersheds were added this year to allow more local farmers to participate in the program. If you have questions about the program or a field's eligibility, contact Brent Edlin: 715-468-4654 Bedlin@co.washburn.wi.us

Falling Leaves

by Barb Luck



Fall time with leaves turning to fire-y reds, glowing yellows and oranges, and bold maroons is a favorite time of year for many people. It's a time to enjoy some of nature's finest color displays. Before we know it, the leaves lose their luster and begin to fall off. We know it's going to happen but do we know how to help leaves stay where they can replenish soil with nutrients? When leaves decompose, they give off large amounts of phosphorus which is great for lawns and gardens. But, it's not great when large quantities of leaves end up in bodies of water, as the phosphorus creates troublesome algae and depletes oxygen needed by fish and native plants. Even after the leaves have finished their colorful display, you can get more benefits from them with these actions:

Rake leaves out of the street to keep street gutters and storm drains clear and out of nearby water to protect water quality. Similarly, if you have waterfront property, rake leaves away from your shoreline buffer and water.

Mulch your leaves with your mower for your lawn, or instead, use them around shrubs, both of which provide nutrients to the soil

Consider starting a compost pile with leaves, which provides nutrient-rich material which you can use to replenish garden soil. For more information, see [Composting in Wisconsin Overview](#) (DNR).

Source: CleanLakesAlliance.org



Photo courtesy of Barb Luck

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Photo courtesy of Matthews Lake Association

Contacts to Protect Lakes and Rivers

“We need more than ever to provide what help we can to protect our lakes and rivers from environmentally damaging activities. Keep your eyes open! We are the last line of defense! But **do not trespass** to obtain further information. Let those in authority check it out.”

DNR Water Regulation Violation and Information:

Dan Harrington (Water Management Specialist, Spooner Office)..... 715-733-0019
 Jon Hagen (Conservation Warden for Southern Washburn County).....715-635-4099
 Dave Swanson (Conservation Warden for Northern Washburn County).....715-466-5428

If wardens are in the field, messages can be relayed to them through the Washburn County Sheriff’s Department at 715-468-4720 or at the DNR’s toll-free tip line.....1-800-TIP-WDNR (847-9367)

County Shoreland Zoning Questions or Violations:

Michelle Boutwell (Zoning Administrator).....715-468-4690

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