

On The WaterFront

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

Washburn County
LAKES AND RIVERS
ASSOCIATION



Spring 2021 #46

Be Safe On The Water

By Pat Shifferd

One of the greatest pleasures of owning lake or river-front property is the ability to launch a boat or canoe to be out on the water. Whether used for fishing, water sports, or simply touring the waterway to see wildlife and enjoy the scenery, boating is an important part of shoreland ownership and public recreation. Indeed, use of our waters is a public good available to everyone. This right is enshrined in the Wisconsin constitution, “Wisconsin lakes and rivers are public resources, owned in common by all Wisconsin citizens under the state’s Public Trust Doctrine. Written in the state constitution in article IX, s. 1, the Public Trust Doctrine declares that all navigable waters are ‘common highways and forever free’ and held in trust by the State of Wisconsin.” (https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Waterways/about_us/doctrine.htm)

But of course, exercising this right carries with it responsibilities to operate a watercraft safely with respect for other people, for wildlife, and for the waterway itself. Reckless use of boats endangers all of these. Thus it is important to be aware of what the laws and responsibilities are regarding boating. The State has published a useful pamphlet, *Handbook of Wisconsin Boating Laws and Responsibilities*, found online at <https://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/pubs/le/le0301.pdf> and in print at DNR offices. For example, there are age requirements for boat or personal watercraft operation. Children under 12 years of age may operate a boat only if accompanied by an adult and may not operate a personal watercraft at all. Boats must be operated safely and must be licensed. Life jackets are required. Running lights are needed to assure safety if operating at night. Of course, a person cannot drive a boat or personal watercraft when under the influence of alcohol.

Further, the State of Wisconsin requires that all watercraft observe no-wake (the slowest speed



at which you can still steer your boat) within 100 feet from shore, docks, and swim rafts. For personal watercraft, the slow-no-wake distance from shore is 200 feet. Excessive speed near the shore creates erosion and can harm docks or other boats. In addition, it is illegal to harass loons or other wildlife. Loons nest close to the water’s edge and are easily disturbed by large waves. These speed requirements are especially important with the increasing use of “wake boats.” These watercraft are designed to create a high/wide wake for waterboarding. These boats, while fun to use, can create a much more dangerous situation for the shore, other boaters, and wildlife. In addition, these boats can stir up sediment on the lake bottom in shallower waters and contribute to increased phosphorus in the water, algal blooms, and destruction of wild rice. Some towns may have additional requirements for boaters, for example no-wake any time or non-motorized boating only.

Boating is central to our enjoyment of the lakes and rivers we so treasure. Being careful not to harm children at play, wildlife, and the fragile shorelands means our trusted water resources will continue to provide that enjoyment now and in the future.

Thank You Members

A heartfelt thank you to all members who renewed their WCLRA membership. It provides a strong signal that we’re focusing on important water issues. We always invite member feedback and you can share your thoughts anytime using the “email us” link at the bottom of our website home page: wclra.org.

President's Comments

By Phil Sylla

As things are shaping up, Washburn County will soon be home to the largest tar sands oil pipeline in America. The way seems clear for Enbridge to increase daily pipeline shipping to 1.2 million barrels per day (54,000,000 gallons). This amount, if it was shipped in railroad cars, would make up a train about 16.5 miles in length. Previously, Enbridge has been shipping an average of about 900,000 barrels per day. If that amount was shipped in railroad tank cars, the train would be about 14 miles in length. So, the new capacity could add about four miles to the length of the "train" flowing under the federally designated Wild and Scenic Namekagon River and the Wisconsin State designated Totagatic Wild River, a "train" stretching from Minong to Spooner.

Three events during the fall 2020 and winter 2021 make this increase possible. Enbridge has already succeeded in increasing the permitted capacity of Line 61 in Wisconsin. These upgrades provide the additional oil to bring Line 61 to full operating capacity of 1.2 million.



WCLRA promotes the environmental protection and responsible use of Washburn County surface waters and their attendant wetlands, shorelands and wildlife resources. We share ideas and information through education and active participation for the benefit of individual property owners, lake and river districts and associations, local governments, the general public, and future generations.

The current membership of Washburn County Lakes and Rivers is 388 individual/family members and 26 lake organization members. In addition, 255 individuals who are new shoreland owners receive our newsletter. An individual/family membership in WCLRA is just \$20. Go to wclra.org for information on how to become a member.



Register Now

The 2021 Northwest Wisconsin Lakes conference will again be held online this year from 9:00 am-3:45 pm on June 18, 2021.

To register go to:
nwwislakesconference.org

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Yellow River Protection Conservancy

By Phil Sylla



Photo by Kevin Hagen

The Yellow River Protection Conservancy (YRPC) is a new non-profit organization with the goal of protecting a natural shoreline corridor from the Yellow River's head at Spooner Lake to its confluence with the St. Croix River at Danbury. The Conservancy's plan calls upon private citizens, dedicated individuals and families, to guarantee that the shores, feeder streams, and marshlands remain wild in perpetuity. According to the plan, shoreland will remain privately owned, protected by conservation easements and other means. The Board of Directors of the YRPC asks for help from land owners, conservation organizations and everyone who wants to protect the Yellow River's unique environment and history.

Reasons for protecting the Yellow River are numerous and increasingly urgent. Its rare plants, animals and fish are vulnerable to changes in water quality. Native American wild rice sites, villages, and burial grounds need to be preserved as do 18th century fur trade sites and 19th century homesteads. Wild and secluded shorelands are vulnerable to development that could degrade the river ecosystem. Fur, fish, and game that attract sports enthusiasts need safeguarding. A 70-mile canoe route from Spooner to Danbury needs to be kept open. Pride inspires us to protect "our" river, part and parcel of Spooner and Washburn County heritage much like the railroads. Furthermore, protecting the Yellow River will enhance the economic base of Washburn County.

Particularly appropriate today, the Yellow River offers a special opportunity to respond to the urgent threat of global warming. According to The Nature Conservancy research, the Yellow River is a special,

ecologically-resilient land and nature corridor that, if protected, can mitigate against the effects of climate change. Threats to river quality are many: climate change, contaminated runoff, invasive species, and loss of habitat to name a few. Unless action is prompt, threats will increase while opportunities will diminish. Threats are numerous and need is urgent; therefore, action must be swift. Conservation-minded land owners have already pledged to protect over a mile of shoreland; the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association has generously provided start-up funds; and Landmark Land Trust is partnering with the Conservancy to provide perpetually guaranteed conservation easements.

Land owners concerned about protecting their shoreline and the full length of the river can contact Phil Sylla, philsylla@gmail.com. A fund-raising campaign will soon be underway to assist landowners obtain conservation easements and to purchase special threatened parcels. Donors can contact Wayne Sabatke, sabatke.wayne@gmail.com. Volunteers are being recruited to evaluate Spooner storm water runoff into the Yellow River, contact Kathy Bartilson, Oh2paddle@gmail.com. More volunteers are asked to participate in an August project, Snapshot Day, to control aquatic invasive species in the river. Contact Rev. Douglas Olson, dawndoug41@yahoo.com or Craig Walkey, cwalkey@centurytel.net.



Wisconsin Lakes Trivia

1. Which type of shoreland will have the most opportunity for water infiltration, which improves water quality and maintains healthier lakes?
2. What is the wingspan of adult bald eagles?
3. What fish is a cross between a musky and a northern pike?
4. What is Wisconsin's largest rodent?

1. Natural shorelines 2. 6 feet 3. Tiger musky 4. Beaver

What Can I Do On My Shoreline?

WCLRA Outreach to New Shoreland Owners and Buyers
by Kathy Bartilson

For several years, Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association has reached out to families and individuals who purchased lake and riverfront properties in the previous year. With help from UW-Extension, the new owners receive information on ways to enjoy waterfront property while providing protection to water quality, habitat and wildlife. They also receive the WCLRA newsletter “On the Waterfront” for a year. The “*New Shoreland Owner*” program is a great way for people new to the county to learn about WCLRA. Many become continuing members the following year.



In 2020, there were 157 shorefront land transactions, compared with over 300 in 2019. Out of our 964 lakes and 700 miles of streams, the property transfers took place on 58 lakes, plus one transaction each on Bean Brook, Dahlstrom Brook, and the Totogatic River for 61 waterbodies total. Long Lake had the most property transfers with 37 new property owners, which is partially explained by the fact that Long Lake has around 35 miles of shoreline.

This year, the WCLRA Blue Ribbon Shoreline committee has also prepared folders of similar information for people visiting the area in search of shoreline properties. The “*New Shoreline Buyer*” folders will be taken to local real estate offices this spring. The brochures and information provide realistic information on what to expect in purchasing property and living by the water. The “*Ready to Get on the Water?*” packets include:

- a “*Dive In*” welcome” note from UW-Extension and WCLRA
- “*Choosing the Right Waterfront Property*” brochure
- a list of local resource contacts by topic
- the Washburn County Zoning booklet
- a Washburn County Map provided by the Washburn County Tourism Office, and
- WCLRA’s “*Washburn County Waters: Let’s keep them Healthy*” publication.

The packets were a joint project with WCLRA, UW-Extension, and the Washburn County Land and Water Conservation Department.

The Blue Ribbon Shoreline committee is looking forward to other projects this year, including trying out some new shoreland protection programs being developed by Wisconsin DNR and UW-Extension. When available, one of these projects will allow shorefront owners to do an on-line assessment of how water-friendly their properties are, along with receiving recommendations on improvements to be more protective. The other is an updated and on-line lakeshore habitat restoration course.

WCLRA Helps Out

The Wisconsin State Historical Society traveling display, Great Lakes Small Streams/How Water Shaped Wisconsin, was on display at Spooner Elementary School during April. The display tells the story of Wisconsin’s historic and present relationship with the Great Lakes, inland lakes, rivers, and streams. WCLRA paid the rental and shipping costs from Madison to make the display available locally.

Stormwater Management In Spooner

by Kathy Bartilson

The City of Spooner recently received a DNR Surface Water grant to study the sources and impacts of runoff from city streets to local waters. The money will be used to hire a consultant to evaluate the stormwater sources and discharge points and prepare a plan for improvements.

WCLRA is pleased to be a partner in this project, writing articles to inform the public about the project and steps homeowners, organizations and businesses can take to capture rainwater and keep runoff clean. WCLRA volunteers will also do informal runoff surveys this summer to check different areas of the city for the volume generated and possible contamination sources. Volunteers will also survey the Yellow River Flowage and Yellow River to look for signs of stormwater impacts and problem areas (evidenced by litter, turbid water, sediment deltas, etc.).

Why is stormwater of concern? Runoff from developed areas is known to contain these pollutants:

- nitrogen and phosphorus from yard waste (leaves, grass clippings) and bacteria from pet waste
- fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides from residential and commercial lawns and yards
- oil, grease and toxic chemicals from vehicles, commercial areas, streets, and parking lots
- plastic, metal, paper and other objects from litter, and
- sediment from streets, parking lots and construction sites.

The project will be done in phases, starting with this



Spooner stormwater outlet Photo by Kathy Bartilson

planning effort. The next step would be to implement the plan recommendations and make improvements to stormwater management practices in the City. The goals of the project are to protect and enhance water quality, habitat, and aquatic life in our local waters.

The Yellow River system is home to a healthy fish community, diverse and rich mussel beds, and a self-sustaining sturgeon population. Spooner is the “headwaters” community on the length of Yellow River, which starts at the outlet of Spooner Lake and flows nearly 70 miles to its confluence with the St. Croix River (a National Wild and Scenic River). Congratulations to the City for taking on this important project.

Spooner Campground

By Ed Fischer

On February 23 of this year, the Washburn County Zoning Committee approved a conditional use permit (CUP) for a 200-site RV campground on a 300-acre parcel near Spooner Lake, despite significant citizen concerns. Spooner Lake District and WCLRA are concerned about environmental impacts to the significant wetland area in which the facility would be located. Also, this campground would double the population near the lake, which could promote overuse of the lake, decrease property values, and reduce water quality due to more boats stirring up more phosphorus from the lake bottom. The Washburn County Board of Adjustment met on May 4 to decide procedures going forward. A final hearing date on this issue will be set soon.



Photo by Kathy Bartilson

Shell Lake-Yellow River Farmer-led Council Offers Soil Education, Research, and Incentives

by Madeline Roberts

Local farmers are continuing their work to protect water quality and improve soil through the Shell Lake-Yellow River Farmer-led Watershed Council. The Council was formally started in 2019 and includes a diverse group of producers whose goal is to improve soil health and water quality through outreach, education and conservation practices that improve sustainable agriculture. The Council received a 2020 Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant for \$17,500 through the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. While some plans have changed with COVID-19, the council and partnering agencies will still provide educational opportunities and an incentive program to help farmers try conservation practices. This year the Council will be creating short educational videos on farming practices that protect water quality, as well as exploring other distance learning opportunities. Be on the lookout for the Council's conservation practice signs when you are driving around the watershed. These signs will be marking fields that have a conservation practice in place, including cover crops, rotational grazing, no-till, and nutrient management.

One education area the Council is passionate about is research. Two Council members are hosting research on their farm. Dave Fogerty is partnering with UW-River Falls Extension forage specialist Dr. Yoana Newman in conducting research on the economics and nutritional value of cover crops as food for livestock. Todd Schrankel is partnering with Extension soil fertility specialist Dr. Carrie Laboski from UW-Madison to study how to efficiently use nitrogen fertilizer for corn.

The Council is also continuing its partnership with UW-Madison's Spooner Agricultural Research Station to conduct research on which conservation practices work best in northwest Wisconsin. This year the research plot has corn being inter-seeded with several types of cover crops. Inter-seeding is a technique of planting cover crops while a cash crop is growing. This gives the cover crop more time to grow and get established, increasing its benefit to the soil and water quality protection. It also gives farmers a more flexible window to get cover crops planted. A self-guided tour is available for the



research plot, which is located on Orchard Lane, just east of Spooner. A Farmer-Led Council sign marks the entrance to the plot.

Last year the Council spent over \$11,000 to help farmers try cover crops and the incentive program is offered again this year. To allow more local farmers to participate in this program, the council is expanding its boundaries to include three smaller watersheds to the west. These watersheds are part of the upper Clam River watershed. The upper Clam River watershed has high quality trout streams which are some of the best in the area. Through the incentive program, the Council will help protect these streams and other valuable lakes and rivers in the area.

WCLRA Annual Meeting

Again this year, our Annual Meeting will be conducted virtually. Given concerns about large groups of people meeting in person during the COVID pandemic, the Board believes this is the best approach. That means that late this summer, you can expect to receive a mailed summary of major activities, the proposed budget for the year 2022, a member feedback request, and a ballot for you to indicate your votes for the Board and budget. We all look forward to meeting in person in another year.

WCLRA Sponsors Eagle Nest Survey

By Kathy Bartilson

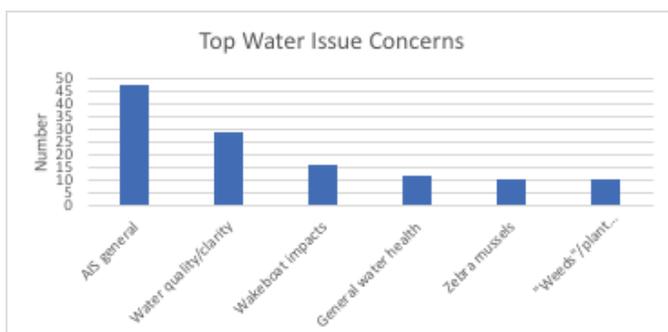
Early this spring, Department of Natural Resources pilot, Joe Sprenger, flew over our county to check each known eagle nest for activity. This special survey was sponsored by member donations to WCLRA's Conservation and Preservation Fund. Thank-you to everyone who earmarked an additional donation.

Washburn County has 90 known nest sites, and this year 52 of them were recorded as active and occupied. This compares with 56 active nests in 2019, when our county had the 8th highest number of nests in the state (Vilas and Oneida had the most, and they also have the most lakes!). Our remaining 38 sites had empty nests at 27 locations, and the nest was gone at 11 sites.

The Department of Natural Resources has statewide eagle nest survey data dating back to 1973, when there were only 108 active nests observed in the state. In 2019 (the last statewide survey date) there were 1684! This is an impressive come-back for our national bird, which is also an important species in both the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

With this steady and full recovery of bald eagles, some of the funding for the statewide surveys will be used by WDNR to support recovery and habitat work for other non-game wildlife species. WCLRA was pleased to fund this additional survey to have more trend information and assure that our nesting population remains strong. If you are interested in seeing the 2019 report of the last statewide survey, it can be found at this link: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/WildlifeHabitat/2019EagleOspreySurveys.pdf>, or search the DNR site for "2019 Eagle Nest Report." This report also had similar data on ospreys.

Thank you for renewing your membership with WCLRA and answering the survey questions. One of the questions we asked was your greatest areas of concern related to water bodies. Issues with ten or more mentions are below.



Snapshot Day

By Craig Walkey

The River Alliance of Wisconsin coordinates "Snapshot day." This year's event will be held in August (date to be scheduled) and will occur throughout Wisconsin. It is a field event to search for and identify aquatic invasive plants. There will be a one-day training session ahead of the event. Washburn County's site of action will be the Yellow River just west of Spooner. If you are interested in joining this project, please watch our website or wisconsinrivers.org/

Focus On Natives

By Linda Anderson



While most people know about the relationship between monarch butterflies and milkweed, the Karner Blue butterfly has the same kind of relationship with the wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*). The Karner Blue was Federally listed as endangered in 1992. Habitat

throughout the range of the Karner Blue butterfly has been lost as a result of land development and lack of natural disturbance, such as wildfire and grazing by large mammals. Such disturbance helps maintain the butterfly's habitat by setting back encroaching forests, encouraging lupine and flowering plant growth.

This butterfly is most widespread in Wisconsin and the state has implemented a Wisconsin Habitat Conservation Plan. How can you help? Increase the habitat for the butterfly by including wild lupine in upland areas of your shoreline restoration plan and gardens on your property.

More information: <https://wiatri.net/inventory/kbb/#training>



Photo by WI DNR

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Photo courtesy of Linda Anderson

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 and Violation Information:

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

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:

Dale (Butch) Beers (Zoning Administrator).....715-468-4690

Washburn County Land and Water Conservation

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