

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 2020 #44

Ahh, the Solitude of the Lake... *or the distancing of social isolation*

WCLRA Board members are staying in touch and maintaining our regular meeting schedule, despite the current Corona virus pandemic. We are being vigilant about remaining at home and conducting meetings by videoconferencing. We are starting some new projects, so ad hoc committees are convening on-line as well. While it's not the same as meeting in person, it's good to see and hear each other and to stay informed on lake, river, wetland, and groundwater issues, and continue the important work of our organization.

Likewise, the Wisconsin Waters Convention went ahead on its scheduled dates as an on-line event. The theme of the conference was "resiliency" and that's an apt challenge for all of us as we adapt to working and communicating from the safety of our homes. You can still watch Convention sessions online by searching "UW Extension Lakes 2020 Convention."

Resiliency: the capacity to recover quickly from disruptive change or misfortune; toughness

Local lake organizations are also finding ways to continue holding meetings and protecting their lakes. Finding ways to continue combating the spread of AIS with the Clean Boats, Clean Waters (CBCW) boat inspections and decontamination stations was of particular concern to many. It looks like the CBCW program will officially re-open in June, and there are now guidelines on how to do that safely. As most would expect, this includes staying 6 feet apart, wearing masks, and not passing forms or brochures from one person to another. Up-to-date statewide CBCW guidance is on the Clean Boats, Clean Waters website at www.uwsp.edu/uwexplakes. (Just click on the CBCW logo.)

The situation with the coronavirus this spring has been very fluid and it may change again before this



WCLRA Board meetings have a new look.

newsletter is published and distributed. The Washburn County Health Department (WCHD) has cautioned us that with our county's large population of older adults and others with higher risk of COVID-19 consequences, as well as limited medical facilities, it is a priority to keep people in Washburn County healthy and safe by following the CDC's guidelines. At the same time, we also need to recognize that this is lake country, it is inevitable that people will be coming here from afar throughout the summer, and this area's economy depends on tourism. Permanent residents need to be understanding when we see our neighbors arrive back up north, as each family needs to balance concern for security and enjoyment of their property along with the risk of exposure and the availability of medical facilities (at both ends of the trip). But it is a two-way street. Non-residents also have a responsibility to use good judgment and help keep everyone safe.

As mentioned above, this is definitely a time for resiliency, tolerance, and support for one another. Let's hope the disease is contained and the risk abated soon, so our lake groups, friends and neighbors can reunite in person and enjoy the beauty of the Northwoods again this summer. Remember, we are all in this together.

2020 Wisconsin Conservation Congress

Each year every county in the State holds a public County Conservation Congress meeting on the same day in April. This year, Washburn County residents were welcomed to participate in a virtual meeting on April 13. The two-year Conservation Congress process is somewhat complicated but very democratic.

This year's county meetings, including the one scheduled in Spooner, were replaced with an online opportunity for input. At the Spooner meeting (as at all county meetings), three things happened; 1) Participants presented resolutions about conservation issues; 2) Participants voted on these new, local resolutions; and 3) Participants voted on more than 50 statewide resolutions that had been proposed in 2019 and had risen through the process to the state level.

Five new resolutions were presented in Spooner this year. All five were approved by the County. See the article on page 6. These resolutions have been sent to State Conservation Congress meetings where they will be compared to resolutions from other counties. The Conservation Congress will identify important resolutions and these resolutions will be sent to the 2021 County Conservation Congress meeting in all 72 counties to be voted on statewide.

The State Conservation Congress is now counting the statewide vote on 2019 resolutions. Popular resolutions will be sent to Wisconsin Natural Resources Board for consideration. The Natural Resources Board will send a number of the resolutions to the State Legislature for consideration during the 2021 Legislative Session. Results are now available on the DNR website.



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 individual/family membership of Washburn County Lakes & Rivers Association is 388. This includes 255 individuals who are new shoreland owners and were given free one-year membership privileges. In addition, WCLRA has 26 lake organization members. An individual/family membership in WCLRA is just \$20. Go to wclra.org for information on how to become a member.

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It's Fishing Season!!!

By Barb Luck



Photo by Kathy Cordes

It is fishing season once again and anglers are back on the lakes enjoying one of summer's favorite recreational activities. As the sport is enjoyed, it is also important to be aware of the potential negative impacts on the wildlife that are part of our lake habitat. Think lead and fishing line.

The Problems

Most people are aware of the dangers of lead as a toxic metal to people. However, you may not be aware of the dangers of lead tackle to wildlife including loons, bald eagles, swans, great blue herons and snapping turtles. Wildlife can ingest tackle, especially sinkers and jigs, and become ill or die from lead poisoning. Loons can mistake the tackle for pebbles, which they eat to grind their food, and just that one mistake can kill them. Eagles become poisoned by eating fish who have swallowed sinkers. While it is understandably difficult to accurately measure the cause of death in wildlife, several studies from various parts of the U.S. indicate that it is a serious problem. One of these studies was conducted by the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota over nearly 20 years. They found lead poisoning in 138 of 650 eagles or 21 percent of eagles treated. A 15-year Michigan study of 186 dead loons showed that lead jig poisoning was the number one cause of death at 24 percent. Fishing line is also a potential problem.

There are four types of fishing line – monofilament, copolymer, braid, and fluorocarbon. According to Wisconsin DNR, these fishing lines can remain in the

environment for 600 years and more. Any of these lines that are discarded in the water or on land or snagged in the water can entangle turtles, fish, birds and other wildlife. If they swallow the line, they starve to death.

Solutions

The good news is that there are several non-poisonous, economical alternatives to lead tackle including tungsten, glass, copper, steel, tin, bismuth, or plastic sinkers. If you take your children or grandchildren fishing, you can all avoid contact with lead if you use safer tackle. Lead tackle can be safely disposed of at Spooner area hazardous waste collection (check www.nwrpc.com for the summer schedule) or at one of these locations: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/fishhealth/gettheleadout.html>. We encourage you to share information about non-lead options with other anglers.

There is also biodegradable fishing line that is strong and while it is stiffer than other fishing lines, it is still flexible. It begins to degrade in the second year outdoors and is completely degraded by the fifth year in the environment. Ask your fishing tackle shop to order it for you. Fishing lines can be recycled at the Spooner DNR Service Center.

Sources: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/nontoxic-tackle-lets-get-lead-out>

<https://wetlandsinstitute.org/conservation/monofilament->



Wisconsin Lakes Trivia

1. Based on the Wisconsin Constitution and subsequent laws, what doctrine declares that the state's rivers and lakes are *common highways and forever free*?
2. Wisconsin selected this as its state rock in 1971.
3. What shoreline animal builds a chimney out of mud on the shoreline?
4. What is Wisconsin's largest turtle?

1. Public Trust Doctrine 2. Red Granite 3. Crayfish 4. Snapping turtle

A Blue Ribbon Program to Support Your Lake

by Phil Sylla

A voluntary program to protect and restore Washburn County shorelines is being designed. The program, still in the planning stage, will offer shoreland builders and waterfront homeowners incentives to voluntarily follow shoreline protection practices once required by law. Before 2015, Wisconsin county ordinances could enact *more stringent* standards than the *minimum* standards required by the state. Washburn County chose to develop highly protective shoreline zoning rules. However, in 2015 Wisconsin Act 55 dictated that counties “may not regulate a matter more restrictively than the matter is regulated by [state] shoreland zoning standard.” As a result, Washburn County’s more stringent standards were no longer valid. Our lakes became more vulnerable to development.

With incentives we hope to persuade property developers to create parcels wider than 100 feet and plan for greater than the minimum (75 feet) building setback from the shore. These incentives encourage less dense development along shorelines allowing space for wider shoreline buffers, enhanced wildlife habitat, better water quality, and higher property values.

The “Blue Ribbon” program will offer incentives to owners of already developed lakeshore properties too. Although the setbacks and lot widths on these properties are already determined, there are other things property owners can do to allow space for wildlife, prevent run-off, and encourage high water quality. Three tiers of commitment may be offered similar to Michigan’s Shoreland Stewards program that gives “Bronze,” “Silver,” and “Gold” awards. We lean toward “Blue Ribbon” as our highest standard because it is the lake color we aim to maintain! Directing stormwater away from the water, decreasing the amount of mowed shoreline, increasing the width of the buffer, decreasing the amount of impermeable surfaces, eliminating lawn fertilizer, painting buildings with neutral colors to encourage a “wild” view from the water: these are examples of things owners of developed properties will do to win awards.

Building contractors, realtors, DNR, UW Extension, and county staff are being consulted for advice on what incentives will be meaningful, ways to administer the program, and how to fund the program. Neighboring Burnett County has had a shoreline restoration property tax incentive program for almost 20 years. Maybe we can do something similar. We hope that the 26 Washburn County Lake Associations will adopt and assist the “Blue Ribbon” program.

Maintaining a healthy shore is often the best way you can help your lake. Undeveloped shore is most healthy and, fortunately, Washburn County still has wild lakes. But most of the lakes we live on are developed and becoming more developed. To keep our lakes healthy but also “friendly” to residences, the standard is: maintain shorelines in as close to an “undeveloped” state as possible. WCLRA welcomes your ideas as we design this program to reward property owners who voluntarily go beyond the current State minimum standards to protect our lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands.



The First Spring Salad

by Phil Sylla

The watercress is there all winter but you can't collect it until the snow recedes enough to get to the springs. Back in the 1960s when she judged that spring had progressed enough, my mother would send me to the springs at the head of Sand Creek for a nice bunch of watercress for a Spring salad. Watercress collecting was a reminder of springtime's in the 1920's when fresh vegetables had not been available all winter and people were yearning for a fresh, green salad.

You too can be a watercress collector. For a novel spicy salad, a nice respite from Covid-19 cabin fever, and a pleasant walk in the woods. This is a great way to spend an early Spring afternoon. First, think of a spring that trickles into your river or lake. Trout stream headwaters are a good bet because watercress grows in the cleanest, clearest seeps where you can see water welling up out of the sand. You can ask, but watercress connoisseurs hide favorite spots as jealously as morel and wild asparagus hunters. Get out and look. Enjoy spring. Trust me.

There are lots of good spots in NW Wisconsin. Wear rubber boots; a bit of shallow wading will be necessary. Put a sieve in your backpack (so you can drain the cress as you pick it), a big bandana to dry icy water off of your hands and a plastic bag or a reuseable container. Look for bright green trailing, floating or erect stems and smooth, 1-inch-wide, oval-shaped leaflets arranged opposite one another with one larger leaf at the end of the stem. Taste it. Is it peppery and delicious? That's the right stuff.

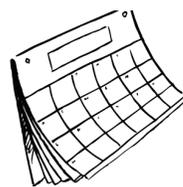
My mother's watercress salad recipe was simple: clean and rinse the watercress and serve it in a bowl dressed with hot bacon drippings and a little vinegar. If that does not appeal to your modern sensibilities, try a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich substituting watercress for the



Photo by Phil Sylla

lettuce. Search on-line and you'll be amazed at the watercress recipes you'll find (I like the watercress – pear salad recipes). Since you'll be eating your watercress raw, soak it for one hour in clean water to which you have added a few drops of iodine. Then rinse.

People love watercress because of its distinctive, peppery taste. It's best as an addition to a salad rather than the main ingredient. Exclusive restaurants serve watercress salads! High-end supermarkets stock it! Here, it's available for free. Try it! You'll like it!



Register Now

The 2020 Northwest Wisconsin Lakes conference will be held online this year from 9:00 am-3:45 pm on June 19, 2020.

To register go to:
stcroixriverassociation.org/events

WCLRA Government and Environment Committee Activity

by Dave Vold

Three items, Conservation Congress Resolutions, Conservation Lobby day, and meeting with Washburn County committees and staff dominated the G&E Committee agenda in recent months. The G&E Committee is comprised of both WCLRA board members and community members.

Conservation Congress Resolutions

Each year, every county in the state holds a public Conservation Congress meeting on the same date to vote on a large number of resolutions. This year, WCLRA presented five resolutions:

1. Resolution urging restoration of local county control over shoreline zoning.
2. Resolution urging increased DNR regulation of agricultural high capacity wells.
3. Resolution urging increasing the number of scientists in the DNR
4. Resolution to establish perennial vegetative buffer zones along rivers and streams
5. Resolution urging restoration of full funding of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund

Conservation Lobby Day

Phil Sylla and Dave Vold represented WCLRA at Conservation Lobby day in Madison on January 30, 2020. Lobby Day, sponsored by Wisconsin Conservation Voters, is an annual event. This year's emphasis on Clean Water was a result of Governor Ever's declaration of 2019 as "The Year of Clean Water" and Assembly Speaker Voss's "Clean Water Task Force" that was active throughout the state during the spring and summer of 2019. The Clean Water Task force introduced 13 new legislative proposals to the Wisconsin Assembly.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters urged lobbyists from throughout the State to speak to their Senators about four legislative proposals: Support the CLEAR Act, SB302/AB321 dealing with ground water pollution from PFAs; Support the SCHOOLS Acts SB423 and SB424 dealing with lead pollution in water in schools, daycares, and summer camps; Support AB790 and SB723, additional funding for county conservationists;



Oppose AB794 and SB708, weakening the Groundwater Standards, which will undermine the scientific processes that protect our water.

After learning about each proposal, Phil and Dave visited with our legislators or their staff members.

Meeting with County Committees and Staff

The Government and Environment Committee wants to focus more on this role in the future. Presently Director Fred Blake meets regularly with the Land and Water Conservation Committee (LWCC) and hears their concerns while sharing our activities. Also, LWCC Staff Members Brent Edlin and Lisa Burns serve as liaisons to WCLRA and often attend our monthly meetings. At the March meeting of the Board of Directors, WCLRA received a report on the Washburn County Resource Management Plan for 2017-2027.

The Wisconsin Legislature created the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program in 1989 to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The conservation and recreation goals of the Stewardship Program are achieved through the acquisition of land and easements, development of recreational facilities, and restoration of wildlife habitat.

Respecting Our Waters

By Kathy Bartilson



Beaver Brook Photo courtesy of Kathy Bartilson

In Northwest Wisconsin, we are blessed by so many lakes and streams. They provide us recreation, an abundance of wildlife, and a sense of peace and tranquility that only nature can provide. In these days of Covid-19, we are especially fortunate to be able to social-distance and de-stress by walking in the woods, boating on a lake, or fishing a stream. But it is not an environment that we can ever take for granted. We need to protect the quality of our waters to ensure that they will continue to provide the enjoyment we have come to expect.

Property owners living on a body of water are often expected to take responsibility for protecting the water quality of our lakes and streams. While these owners do have a significant impact, everyone living in Wisconsin, whether on lakes or off, can do things that protect the waters that the state holds in public trust for all citizens. Here are a few things *everyone* can do to help in and around our homes and yards.

- Use non-toxic phosphorus-free detergents, household cleaners, and try out some home-made and water-friendly fabric softeners.
- Buy household products that are free of the potentially toxic antibacterial compound triclosan.
- Compost food wastes and lawn clippings.
- Avoid letting lawn clippings and leaves get into storm sewers or ditches known to fill with water.

- Sweep any lawn fertilizer that lands on the street or driveway back onto the lawn.
- Pick up dog waste so it doesn't wash into storm sewers.
- Direct roof and driveway runoff into rain gardens or areas where water can soak into the ground and be filtered.
- Use phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer or...
- Convert lawns to prairie or rain gardens with native plants to host native insects, butterflies, and birds.
- Properly maintain septic systems.

Remember

We're in this together – we all contribute to the problems and can be part of the solutions. What we do on the land affects the water and when it comes to runoff, we all live on waterfront property.

Go Native!

You may have heard the buzz lately about planting native plants in your landscape or lakescape. Our bees and butterflies, many who face declining numbers, love them. While most know about the relationship between monarch butterflies and milkweed, many other butterflies and bees also rely on a specific native host to reproduce. But did you know that native plants can better survive in our climate and better withstand competition from non-native invasive species? Native plants require less watering and herbicides and have deeper root systems that can prevent erosion on steeper slopes. There are natives for sun, shade, wet, and dry conditions. Go Native!



Cardinal flower Photo by Steven Sevreringhaus

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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

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