



TWIN LAKES NEWS

• MAINTAIN • PROTECT • ENHANCE

• FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

• EDUCATION • COOPERATION

FALL, 2020

Volume 26, no 3

Sand in our Shoes

We are all aware that our land here at Twin Lakes is composed of sand. It turns out that this landscape is a uniquely interesting and important ecological zone, called the NW Sands, one of 17 ecological landscapes in Wisconsin; this stretches from the Bayfield peninsula in the north southwest to Grantsburg in the south as shown on this map. Perhaps when you and your family decided to make a vacation or permanent home here, you were attracted by the wonderful sand beaches (remember beaches?) or, like us, you just happened onto this area for other reasons. In any case, we are fortunate to be living on land that has a very deep history and contains many rare plants and animals.



It so happens that our oldest cabin owner has shared information about this area. In May, TLPA received the following letter from Jim Anderson, whose cabin is on North Lake:

Dear Stuart,

The notes by Steve Myhre were a very interesting short-term record of Twin Lakes' water level data. I have owned my property on North Twin Lake since 1948 and have seen the lake level vary quite a bit. But I'd like to share some geologic history of the lakes in NW Wisconsin.

My stepdad was chief geologist of Longyear Co. in Minneapolis and I remember some of the things he told me (I'm 93 years old). The landscape of NW Wisconsin is a direct result of the Laurentide Glacier that receded about 10,000 years ago and left about 150 square miles of NW Wisconsin as a desert. Ground water filled the low spots so the lakes of our area are ground water lakes that vary as the ground water varies. The desert sand is about 150 feet deep, so we have very much good water that is filtered through much sand as the water flows from north to south as it has for thousands of years.

To be a bit more specific, as the Laurentide Glacier receded, melt water lakes were formed along the southern edge. In our case, the lake was Glacial Lake Duluth, the predecessor of Lake Superior; from 9,900 to 9,600 years ago this lake over-spilled, sending many tons of sand, rocks, and chunks of ice south overlaying the ancient bedrock. The results were that the Brule and St. Croix River valleys were gouged out. Our Totogatic and Namekagon Rivers along with other rivers of the St. Croix watershed began to flow south to the Gulf of Mexico. The ice chunks that the meltwater carried got stuck, creating depressions; as

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President's Message

The open water season at the Twin Lakes is nearly over, and most docks and watercraft have already been pulled. Thus far it's been a year with many new surprises, some welcome and some not so welcome – 2 successful loon nestings, otters sighted on all 3 lakes, an osprey staying for the entire summer, beavers dropping trees at several properties, countless birch and other trees killed by the high water now dropping into the lakes, new neighbors buying properties that had languished on the market, social distancing behaviors of many sorts including conducting our TLPA Annual Meeting through the *Twin Lakes News*, high water and more shoreline erosion and more shoreline repair, some who have typically been “weekenders” or “snowbirds” opting to stay at the lakes permanently. As part of the year closes and many go separate ways, I'd like to here express my appreciation. In no particular order and with my apologies to those I'm forgetting, **thanks.**

- to the other members of the TLPA board for their diligence, contributions and patience,
- to Pat Shifferd for her creative work in composing these *Twin Lakes News* newsletters and her patient collaborating with me,
- to Tricia Rongitsch for her effort at maintaining and updating our TLPA web pages,
- to all of the boaters and PWC operators who showed restraint and did their part in keeping mornings and evenings as *No Wake* quiet time,
- to many of those same watercraft operators who tried to keep their wakes well back from badly eroding shorelines,
- to those who have worked to restore eroding shorelines and to increase protective vegetative barriers there,
- to those who have contacted the Chicog Town Board and the TLPA with their justifiable concern about the dramatic and dangerous increase in damage from watercraft wakes,
- to Dave Thorsen, Gary Bergh, and Darryl Rongitsch for monitoring and reporting the quality of the water in our lakes,
- to all those who have suspended plates off their docks to monitor for zebra mussels.
- to Larry Jacobson and Darryl Rongitsch for providing loons platforms as options for nesting during these times of high water and diminishing nesting sites,
- to all of those who provided updates on our 2 loon families so that I can file good reports with *LoonWatch*, and to those who duly kept a fair distance from the so alluring loon nests and loon chicks,
- to Larry Dau for sharing his captivating photographs of our resident loons,
- to all who provided timely reports to me both as our lakes froze over and as the winter ice broke up,
- to Mario Martineau, Don Shaner, Steve Myhre and Gary Bergh for making repairs to the TLPA kiosks at the 2 public landings,
- to Glenys & Dave Thorsen, Terri Corrie, Joe Larrabee, Mary & Duane Bergh, Bette & Brad Harrison and any others who participated in the *Firewise* cleanup efforts,
- to all TLPA members who took the time to vote on our budget and board of directors via email,
- and to our entire membership for your continued support of our mission to maintain, protect, and enhance the quality of the lakes and the surrounding area.

Stu Braem, president

stuartbraem@gmail.com

Thanks to all for approving the budget and affirming the board of TLPA for the coming year.
If you haven't paid your dues for 2021, please send your check (\$25) to P.O. Box 410, Minong WI 54859

The Last Wildflowers of Summer

The last few weeks of summer have seen an explosion of purple and yellow along the roadsides and in yards: blazing stars/liatris, tansy, asters, goldenrods, and many wild sunflowers. All are parts of large, diverse groups of species and most are considered invasive by some because of their abundance and spread. Tansy, goldenrod and asters are part of the aster family while the liatris group and sunflowers represent the sunflower family.

Tansy is particularly interesting. Native to Europe, it has been used for many centuries for a variety of medicinal purposes. During the Middle Ages, it was sometimes served as part of Lenten meals. Washing with tansy was supposed to purify the skin, while it was also used as an insect repellent. It is unclear when it was introduced into North America, but it was certainly very early in European colonization.

The goldenrods and asters are closely related; both are represented by hundreds of separate species. They are not only pretty, but they serve an important ecological function since they provide late season food for many



butterflies, moths, and bees. Like tansy, the goldenrods also are used for medicinal purposes, especially for kidney disease. Asters have medicinal uses as well, including treating headaches. I was always taught that goldenrods cause allergies. Not true, according to several sources; the true culprit appears to be ragweed. Finally, I was surprised to learn that goldenrods produce rubber. Thomas Edison worked on increasing the output of rubber from the plant; he was given a model T by Henry Ford, the tires of which were made from goldenrod. And Ford and George Washington Carver worked together during WWII to advance research on rubber from goldenrod.



As fall begins, the goldenrods have faded or been mowed down. The wild liatris at the corner of Bald Eagle and Chicog Lake Rd. has gone to seed. The tansy is gone, and the aster will follow shortly. But for many weeks we have been treated to gorgeous displays of color as the trees and understory burst into flaming reds and yellows. Every fall my husband says: "This is the most beautiful fall ever!" While not a quantifiable statement, it does reflect our joy at the fall colors.



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Photos: Aster & Maple – Patricia Shifferd

Goldenrod & Dog – Stuart Braem

Loon Update

The loon family on North Twin and the family on Middle and South Twin lakes thrived during the summer. Many enjoyed watching the chicks grow, feed, and develop plumage. The adult male on N Twin appears to have migrated during the last week of August, with the adult male of the other 2 lakes migrating about 2 weeks later. As of October 1st, an adult female was still with each juvenile, all now in drab winter plumage. Soon only the juveniles will remain, strengthening before migrating instinctively on their own.

So Far, So Good, Twin Lakes!

The water quality in our lakes is holding its own with generally good readings this summer.

Dave Thorsen reports the following secchi disc and water temperature readings for North Lake:

Date	Secchi	Temp at surface	Temp at 21 feet
5/31	20 feet	70 degrees	59.1 degrees
6/13	11 feet	71 degrees	59.3 degrees
7/20	9.25 feet	80 degrees	70 degrees
8/17	8.25 feet	75.2 degrees	70.7 degrees

Gary Bergh keeps the data for South Lake. He reports that the secchi disc readings averaged 14.5 feet over the summer, comparable to the year 2000, which was an average year. Chlorophyll ranged from .992 to 2.81, a bit down from the comparison year. Phosphorus varied between 12 and 15.6, a bit up from 2000 but still well below the danger level of 20. Finally, Darryl Rongitsch reports that his three secchi disc readings in May-July were clear all the way to the bottom (7 feet). Perception of the aesthetic quality was placed at 2, with 1 being the most beautiful and 5 the worst.

So the conclusion is that we are holding our own with basic measurements. Our lakes remain healthy. And there is still no evidence of zebra mussels!

Zebra Mussel Update: Ok for Us, Not so for Others

The two counties of Washburn and Burnett have just finished a fourth year of a rapid response project to monitor and contain the highly invasive zebra mussel. A variety of techniques have and are being used, including plate sampling, veliger tows, early detection surveys, and environmental DNA. Decontamination stations have been installed at 12 Washburn County and 17 Burnett County lakes. Finally, a hot water presser washer was purchased, and is being used primarily at Big McKenzie Lake. Both counties passed ordinances requiring boaters to use decontamination stations when these are present. Print materials and news releases provided information for boaters, lake owners, and the general public about the threat these mussels pose to health, safety and property values.

The bad news is that zebra mussels are now considered endemic in Big and Middle McKenzie Lakes. A recent update from Washburn County officials concludes “2020 has shown an increase in Big McKenzie. Landowners continue to report finding thousands of them covered on boats, motors, docks and along the shoreline. They cut feet, clog and overheat boat motors, eat microscopic organisms needed for fish and other species, and suffocate native clams, mussels and aquatic insects. Depending on conditions, they may survive out of water from several days to several weeks.”

The good news is that no new lakes have been found to be infected.

So while the news of no newly infected lakes, including our own, is greeted with relief, we know that everyone must continue to be vigilant to protect our precious lakes from zebra mussels and the many other invasives which can harm the waters of our lakes and rivers. Essential to this is to thoroughly clean boats when they are brought out of the water for winter storage.

ICE ON and ICE OFF Data over Time

Stuart Braem

I report **Ice On** and **Ice Off** dates to the WI Department of Natural Resources for North and South Twin Lakes. While DNR does not keep such data for Middle Twin Lake, many of us thought that information would be interesting, so the 19-20 year is the first such observation.

- **“Ice on” = date the deepest part of the lake is permanently covered in ice**
- **“Ice off” = date you could boat from any/all shores to the deepest part of the lake**

Year	Lake	Ice On	Ice Off	Duration
2019-2020	North	11/08/19	04/07/20	145 days
	South	11/12/19	04/07/20	141 days
	Middle	11/06/19	04/08/20	148 days
2018-2019	North	11/13/18	04/18/19	156 days
	South	11/21/18	04/19/19	149 days
2017-2018	North	11/10/17	5/01/18	171 days
	South	12/11/17	5/01/18	140 days
2016-2017	North	12/08/16	03/27/17	110 days
	South	12/10/16	03/29/17	110 days
2015-2016	North	12/06/15	03/21/16	106 days
	South	12/23/15	03/29/16	97 days
2014-2015	North	11/13/14	03/31/15	138 days
	South	11/15/14	04/01/15	137 days
2013-2014	North	11/24/13	04/29/14	156 days
	South	11/24/13	04/30/14	157 days
2012-2013	North	11/24/12	05/02/13	159 days
	South	11/27/12	05/04/13	158 days

- As you can see, in most years the dates for ice-on, ice-off, and duration are similar for North and South lakes. But 2017-2018 was a big exception with North being ice covered for over 30 days longer than South. This was the longest duration by far in the 8 years noted here. Any ideas about possible causes?
- Mid-November (in 2017) was the earliest “ice on” date for either lake in the past 8 years—that early ice on N Twin seemed tenuous, but held.
- Late December (in 2015) was the latest “ice on” date observed for either lake.
- “Ice-off” dates varied greatly between March (three years) and May (two years).
- What will ice-on and ice-off be this year?
- Editor’s note: with climate change we can expect the duration of ice cover to be reduced, and this appears to be happening in southern Wisconsin. But there is no such trend clearly evident in this 8 years of data. The warm years of 2015-2017 were followed by rather longer ice seasons.

Don’t forget to be Firewise as winter approaches. Rake pine needles and leaves back from structures, remove needles and leaves from roofs and gutters, and store firewood away from the house.



Sand in our Shoes (continued from page 1)

they melted, our lakes (called kettle lakes or seepage lakes) were formed. In the NW Sands as a whole, there are 546 named and 3,020 unnamed lakes and ponds. In addition, 15% of the land is wetlands.

All of those lakes, rivers, and wetlands add up to one of the highest percentages of surface water in the state. As we all know, the sand drains quickly and retains very little water. While this lowers the threat of flooding, it also increases the danger of erosion. The groundwater is easily contaminated by herbicides and fertilizers. Fortunately, land use practices have thus far allowed our water to remain quite pure, as rain water is filtered through those millions of tons of sand, refreshing the groundwater.

Two-thirds of the land is forested and agriculture represents a small proportion. An important historical feature of this sand desert were jack pine and scrub oak savannas. These so-called “pine barrens” are “fire-adapted, and to some degree, fire-dependent.” These have declined over time because of fire suppression, planting of pine plantations, and the succession of deciduous trees like oak and aspen. But the remaining patches of these barrens are considered globally significant and are the home to a large number of rare and/or endangered species, both plant and animal. For example, “as of November 2009, the Wisconsin Natural Heritage Working List documented 89 rare species, including 4 mammals, 28 birds, 7 herptiles, 6 fishes, and 44 invertebrates” here in the NW Sands. Recently, land management and logging procedures have begun to pay more attention to the remaining barrens areas in the hope of maintaining and expanding them and thus enhancing the habitat for these species. The creation of corridors, managed use of fire, and rolling sector logging are techniques being used.

It is impossible to discuss all of these important fauna of the NW Sands ecosystem. So here is a bit of information about three: the Sharp-tailed Grouse, the Karner Blue butterfly, and Blanding’s turtle.

Of these many species, probably the most well-known is the sharp-tailed grouse. Our area has one of the few remaining populations of this bird, and they are right at home in the pine barrens. The nearby



Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (NBWA) and Douglas County Bird Sanctuary are home to important populations of sharp tails. People come from all over to see and hear their mating ritual in the spring; male birds put on a dramatic display and drum on the ground in order to attract a female. If you want to see this amazing ritual, you need to reserve a blind ahead of time; reservations are available on-line in mid-January and are quickly spoken for. There are three blinds at NBWA and one at the Bird Sanctuary. To register for a blind, go to the websites of the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (www.fncwa.org) or Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (www.fotbs.org). More about the life of this fascinating bird will be in the spring edition of this newsletter.

The beautiful little Karner blue butterfly is usually found in open barrens, savannas and prairies that contain wild lupine. This is so since the caterpillar of the Karner blue feeds exclusively on the leaves of this plant. Since wild lupine is widespread in the northwest sands, we can, as noted by the DNR “be proud of the abundance of savanna and barrens habitats that support the world’s largest populations of the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly.” But maintaining those open barrens and providing corridors between patches is essential for this rare and beautiful butterfly to survive. Accordingly the DNR has developed a Habitat Conservation



Plan to aid in this goal. If you are interested in learning how you might help with this, use this link: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/endangeredresources/karner>.

Blanding's turtle is remarkably long-lived, with a life span of 80-90 years; given this, it is perhaps not surprising that individuals do not become capable of reproduction for almost 20 years. It is a timid turtle and will withdraw into its shell when even slightly disturbed. Though they are about the same average size as our common painted turtles, the upper shell (carapace) of the Blanding's is more domed and the lower shell is blotchy grey-brown and yellow. The upper shell has yellow or light spots on a dark background, but this turtle's most notable feature is a bright yellow chin and throat. The turtle pictured here was photographed on the edge of Bald Eagle Drive near Pash. Its range is the NE U.S. and S.E. Canada. It is endangered in many places; Wisconsin considers it a species of special concern. Blanding's turtle prefers sandy soil, shallow wetlands, with access to deeper water for overwintering. This describes our land to a T, so we can expect to see this turtle around here. Another interesting characteristic is that they are great travelers; the males especially will wander several miles, often far from water, in search of food or mates. They are omnivorous, eating earthworms, crayfish, and minnows as well as a variety of plants.



Photos: Sharp-tail: Larry Dau; Blanding's turtle: Stuart Braem; Karner blue: Gregor Schuurman, WI DNR
 Much of the information and quotes come from the detailed, if rather technical DNR publication: *Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin*, Chapter 17, *Northwest Sands*. The map was created by Andy Stoltman, WI DNR.
 The full document is available at: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/landscapes/documents/1805Ch17-low.pdf>

Calling for Love Letters to the Twin Lakes

This summer has been one unlike any we have experienced, as the Covid-19 pandemic has required drastic alterations in our summertime activities. TLPA had to cancel the social, annual meeting, and ice cream gathering. Neighbors have had to greet each other from a distance and the many usual parties and picnics have been few and far between.



But if you are like me, you have found solace and support from the natural world this summer. The lakes have been there for us to enjoy. The loons and owls have called at night. We saw loon chicks hatch and grow. The eagles and other birds have flown overhead. Deer, bears, turtles, foxes, and other wildlife have shared the land with us.

Next spring's newsletter will, with your help, be a celebration of this land and its waters. Please send me stories, poetry, reminiscences, photos, drawings, anecdotes, etc. which capture for you what being here means to you and your family. I'm calling these Love Letters to the Twin Lakes.

My e-mail is patriciashifferd@gmail.com. If you can't send electronic copies of stories, photos, and drawings, you could send them to me through snail mail (N12036 Pash Drive, Trego) and I will scan them and return them to you.

**TWIN LAKES PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 410
MINONG, WI 54859**

TO:



Join the Lake Association? Why on Earth Not? We monitor lake water quality, provide important information via three newsletters a year, publish a free Handbook of Best Practices for lake property owners, and have fun together at the Summer Social and Annual Fall Meeting. Dues are only \$25.00 a year. To join, fill out the form below and mail with a check to TLPA, Box 410, Minong WI 54859. And thanks!

Name _____

Your Lake _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Lake Address _____

Phone _____ Lake Phone _____