

On The WaterFront

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

Washburn County
LAKES AND RIVERS
ASSOCIATION
Fall/Winter 2021-22 #46

Looking For The Next Fishing Hot Spot? It may be right out your back door

By Madeline Roberts, Natural Resources Educator, UW Extension, Washburn County

Anglers often ask about the best place to fish in the county or are looking for a great lake to catch fish. Sometimes they want to purchase a second residence on a great fishing lake to share with their kids, grandkids, and others. We are very fortunate that many of our lakes and rivers have good fishing in Washburn County. However, it's uncommon that one lake "has it all". Often some lakes are better for certain fish species than others. If you want to catch largemouth bass, northern pike, and panfish, almost every lake with public access will have them. In addition, the county has many lakes that are good for walleye, muskie, and smallmouth bass, and they are often a short drive away. With so many great fishing opportunities, it pays to think ahead to keep fishing great. "As a fisheries biologist, this is part of my job," Craig Roberts with Wisconsin DNR said. "We have three main tools to manage fisheries populations: fishing regulations, fish stocking, and fisheries habitat. We often focus on length/bag limits for fish or fish stocking, but fish habitat can be more important in the long term to have healthy fish populations."

What is considered fish habitat? One way to think about habitat is areas that provide for a fish's needs at each stage of life. Fish need areas where eggs can successfully hatch (spawning habitat), areas where young fish can find food and hide from predators (juvenile habitat), and areas where adults can get food and be protected from predators. In our area, three key habitats provide for all ages of fish: aquatic vegetation, wood, and rocks. If you are an angler, you know these habitats are good spots to catch adult fish. They also provide key spawning habitats as well as shelter and food for young fish. For example, aquatic plants are spawning habitat for yellow perch, northern pike, and musky. Aquatic plants also provide areas for panfish to feed and hide while also being feeding areas for pike, musky, and bass. While fish habitat is different on each lake, the lakes with the highest diversity of habitats often have more fish. Protecting habitat makes a lot of sense in the long term, as even stocked fish will need food and shelter to grow to a catchable size.



Minnesota DNR

Waterfront owners play a critical role in having high quality habitats in a lake. While it may seem like a waterfront lot is such a small part of the lake, even small areas of habitat add up to benefit fish which then have many areas for food and shelter. The flip side is also true: if habitat is removed from waterfront properties, it will add up to fewer fish since there will be less area for food, shelter, and spawning. As a waterfront owner, you can help in a number of ways. You can keep downed trees and branches in the water or add trees to the water through a DNR permit if you do not have any on your property. Waterfront owners can help with aquatic plants by keeping them in the water and by having a shoreline rich with native plants. The shoreline provides food and shelter for young fish when it has aquatic plants along with abundant plants, shrubs, and trees on land. You can help by keeping rocks in the water if you have them by your shoreline. These can be critical walleye spawning areas and are very difficult to replace once they are lost.

If you are interested in fish habitat and need financial help, Wisconsin DNR offers a program called Healthy Lakes, which has two great options to create fish habitat: fish sticks and shoreline native plantings. More on the program is included in this newsletter on page 6.

Campground Controversies Continue

President's Comments by Phil Sylla

At least 22 privately owned lakeside or riverside campgrounds exist in Washburn County. (www.washburncounty.org). They provide wonderful Northland get-aways for many. Understandably, they are popular and new campgrounds are opening to meet a growing demand. Recently, campgrounds opened on Bass Lake and the Yellow River. New campgrounds are proposed on Spooner Lake, Little Stone Lake, and Silver Lake. Campgrounds are places for good, healthy fun.

On the other side of the coin, too many, too big, misplaced campgrounds are not healthy for our lakes. Campgrounds can cause crowding with its detrimental effects. Zoning laws help protect the waters from crowding by limiting the number of building sites on a water body. Zoning laws do this by establishing minimum lot sizes and lakeshore frontages for houses. Therefore, the length of the shoreline limits the number of building sites. But campsites can circumvent zoning laws.

Campgrounds can circumvent zoning laws by allowing numerous, closely placed parking spaces and permanently parked trailers. Wisconsin law allows occupancy of trailers for most of the year making them, effectively, seasonal homes. Park Model Recreational Vehicles, a relatively new phenomenon, provide comfortable residences. Although called vehicles, there is a difference between Park Model RVs and traditional campers. Park Models usually have a 400 sq. ft. footprint, are often 1 ½ stories tall, and can stay in one destination permanently. In fact, after a park model is towed to a destination, the hitch and wheels are usually removed. In the case of the proposed Spooner Lake Campground, residency on this 1,132 acre lake could be increased by 200 "cabins". Campgrounds need additional regulation to take new circumstances into consideration.

Inadequately regulated campgrounds cause crowding which leads to additional problems. Side effects are heavy traffic on shoreline roads and on the water, need for more facilities like

boat launches, sewage and septic tank issues, noise and light pollution concerns, water quality degradation, shoreline degradation, and decreased property values.

Tell your lake neighbor, "A new campground is being built on _____ Lake" (insert name of your lake) and you're bound to get a strong reaction. NIMBY (not in my backyard) may be your neighbor's selfish reason for opposing a campground. But don't write off all campground concerns as simple selfishness. Lake health is not a selfish motive.

We need additional campground regulation to provide balance. All citizens have the right to enjoy Wisconsin waters. True. Likewise, State and local government have the responsibility to protect Wisconsin waters. People are asking, "What is the tipping point at which increased use leads to the decline of a waterway?" Should water use be regulated to protect citizens' rights to enjoy an unblemished resource? Campgrounds are just one factor in this big question, but because of their current popularity they are a big factor. We hope the Washburn County Board of Supervisors will follow the lead of other counties in efforts to establish campground rules that will allow access to our waters while at the same time protecting them.

Wisconsin Lake Leaders

By Cathie Erickson



WCLRA has benefited greatly from the training provided by the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership's Lake Leader Institute. A majority of our directors has participated. Each "crew" attends three training sessions between May and

October. Twenty-two individuals graduated as Crew 13 this October.

The nomination process for Crew 14 will begin in fall 2021/winter 2022. Watch wclra.org or search Wisconsin Extension Leaders.

Tommy G. Thompson Fish Hatchery 2021 Propagation Season Report

Spoooner DNR Hatchery Operations Supervisor Angelena Sikora provided this information on this summer's production:

"The spring took off like a rocket for us in terms of game fish collection (walleye and muskellunge). However, the sudden cold temperatures brought us some challenges when we were collecting white sucker eggs to hatch for forage for our muskie fry. Some mornings were 26 degrees and that slowed down the spawning run for suckers, but thankfully our hatchery across the state in Woodruff helped us out significantly in reaching our goals to have enough sucker fry to feed our muskie!

As the weather continued to warm up we saw changes in the water quality of our ponds and the flowage and did experience some fish mortality (most significantly in our muskie ponds). We performed every remedy available to us to avoid further issues and kept pushing on to raise as many fish as we could this season. When we harvested our first walleye pond in mid-September, the fish were 7.3 inches on average! They were very healthy and were stocked in Ashland and Polk counties."

By mid-October, with most of the ponds harvested, 181,198 extended growth walleye and 5,847 muskellunge have been stocked into northern Wisconsin lakes.



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.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Memberships

- 347 current paid memberships (individual, family, and groups).
- In cooperation with Washburn County Extension, we mailed information packets to 157 people who purchased waterfront real estate in Washburn County in 2020. We also provided these new owners newsletters for one year as part of our long-time New Shoreland Owner program.

Ongoing Education and Advocacy Outreach

- Created informational packets for prospective buyers of shoreline property and building sites and distributed them through local real estate agencies. These well-received folders shared ideas about how to keep our waters healthy and advice on what to consider when choosing a place on the water.
- Facilitated the sharing of The Wisconsin Historical Society's traveling display, "Great Lakes Small Streams," at Spooner Elementary School.
- Shared information about protecting our waters with our display and knowledgeable WCLRA Board members at the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Festival and Blueberries on the Barrens event at the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area.
- Initiated a new member email policy and shared timely information about Healthy Lakeshore grants, Aquatic Invasive Species control workshops, and Loon Watch opportunities. If you have not received these messages, make sure WCLRA has your email address.
- Updated WCLRA's website, wclra.org, with seasonal information and events. Published two newsletters and eight articles in local newspapers.
- Designed a print advertisement for the Spooner Advocate which declared that it takes all of us to protect our waters.

New Projects

- Worked with the City of Spooner to secure a \$22,576.32 DNR surface water grant for stormwater planning. To assess stormwater runoff to the Yellow River and other nearby waters, volunteer "Rain Rangers" inventoried and monitored stormwater outfalls throughout summer. This information will be used to help plan for cost-effective improvements in the future.
- Joined the International Dark Skies Association initiative to designate a portion of northwest Wisconsin as a "Dark Skies Park." These areas possess less artificial light for improved nighttime sky viewing.

- Together with the County Land and Water Conservation Office, promoted three aquatic invasive species workshops and recruited individual shoreline property owners to apply for Healthy Lakes grants.
- Assisted Lake Associations and Districts. For example, we supported the Minong Flowage Lake Association application for a lake draw-down to combat Eurasian milfoil and supported the Spooner Lake District with zoning questions about environmental effects of a proposed campground.

Legislative Priorities

- Met with Senator Janet Bewley and Assemblymen Nick Milroy and David Armstrong to advocate for environmental issues at the State Legislature.
- Introduced Conservation Congress Resolutions in 2020 in Washburn County (local control of shoreline zoning, high capacity well limits, buffers on streams and ditches, and climate change) were approved at the State level in 2021.
- Renewed funding for the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund, our top legislative priority in 2021, was passed in the State Budget. The Fund focuses on preserving natural areas, water quality, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- At County Zoning Board Conditional Use Permit hearings, advocated for safe shoreline development practices.
- Created the Yellow River Protection Conservancy, a new non-profit organization. Subsequently, the Board of Directors of the Yellow River Protection Conservancy named WCLRA its first Partner Organization. The goal of YRPC is to create an ecologically resilient land and water corridor of privately owned property from Spooner to Danbury.
- Funded a special DNR fly-over survey of 90 eagle nests in the County to see which nests were in use this year and track the status of local eagles. Thank you to everyone who earmarked an additional donation to WCLRA to make this possible. This year 52 nests were occupied, comparable to previous years' data. Eagles are an important species in both the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Summer Scorecard for Lakes

By Kathy Bartilson

Tyler Mesalk (Wisconsin DNR Aquatic Plant Specialist) and Lisa Burns (Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator with the Washburn County Land and Water Conservation Department) were interviewed in late summer on the aquatic invasive species (AIS) status of our County's lakes and rivers. Here's the information they had to share:

Were there any new infestations found in the county so far this summer?

The good news: no new infestations were found in Washburn County for zebra mussels, Eurasian water milfoil, spiny waterfleas, or New Zealand mudsnails.

The bad news: zebra mussels are really taking off in Big Mckenzie Lake. Based on landowner accounts, dock wheels are caked and there are lots of zebra mussels on aquatic plants as well.

Are there any new species on the horizon to worry about?

There's nothing new close to our area. A big concern comes when people are choosing ornamental plants for water features or flower gardens in their yards. Please choose native species!

In nearby counties, Eurasian water milfoil was found in Fishtrap Lake in Sawyer County, and zebra mussels are expanding in Deer Lake in Polk County. Please take extra precautions if recreating in these (or any) infested waters.

Are there any new control technologies, insights, or advice to stop the spread?

Tyler reported there is a new fast-acting herbicide, ProcellaCOR for chemical treatment of infestations that requires a shorter exposure time than other herbicides currently in use. The side effects have to be evaluated however. Use of granular 2-4 D is no longer grant-funded for AIS control, based on doubts about its effectiveness for long-term management.

Lisa added that use of decontamination stations are one of our best tools, and are required to be



Photo courtesy of Ann Sheldon, Shell Lake

used (County ordinance) when entering and leaving lakes equipped with stations. There are currently around 18 stations in Washburn County and 25 in Burnett County.

Lisa and other County staff developed an excellent "story map" on the County website. It can be found by searching online for "Washburn County AIS story map" or following links on the Land and Water Conservation Department's site. This site has maps of known AIS infestations on waterbodies in the county, along with photos for species identification and links to more information.



Wisconsin Lakes Trivia

1. What is known as the fish of a thousand casts?
2. What adaptation makes the common loon heavier so that it can ride low in the water and sink quickly when it dives?
3. A bald eagle can see a rabbit from how far away?

1. Muskie 2. It has nearly solid bones 3. 1 mile

Grants for Lakes and Rivers

By Linda Anderson



Lakes and rivers with their scenic beauty are the heart of Northwest Wisconsin. Property owners and visitors enjoy fishing, swimming, and boating on the beautiful lakes and rivers that abound. Key to protecting waterfront investment and recreation is having clean waters that keep users safe and promote fish populations. A program developed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) called **Healthy Lakes & Rivers**, includes 5 simple and inexpensive Best Practices that will improve habitat on your shoreland property and help maintain water quality.

1. 350 ft² Native Plantings. Native plantings in the transitional zone improve wildlife habitat, slow runoff water, and promote natural beauty. Template planting plans are designed for a contiguous area of at least 350 ft² with a corresponding list of native plants suited to the given soil conditions and function of the plan, including lakeshore, bird/butterfly habitat, woodland, low-growing, deer resistant, and bare soil area plantings.

<https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthylakesgrants/files/2020/09/NativePlantings-HealthyLakeFactSheetSeries2020.pdf>

2. Fish Sticks. This fish and wildlife habitat best practice creates food, shelter, and breeding areas for all sorts of creatures from small aquatic insects, to fish, turtles, ducks, and song birds. Fish Sticks can also help prevent bank erosion – protecting lakeshore properties and your lake.

<https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthylakesgrants/files/2020/06/FishSticks-HealthyLakeFactSheetSeries2020.pdf>

3. Diversion. A diversion best practice redirects runoff that would otherwise move downhill into the lake or river to a dispersion area where it can soak into the ground. It may be used in connection with a rock infiltration or rain garden practice. By increasing the frequency of diversion practices, runoff volume can be kept low, decreasing erosion. <https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthylakesgrants/files/2016/03/diversion-icons.png>

4. Rock infiltration. This infiltration best practice captures, cleans, and infiltrates runoff that would otherwise move downhill into the lake or river. It is appropriate for sandy to loamy soils only (not clay!) and may require a catch basin or diversion practice to redirect runoff water to it. <https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthylakesgrants/files/2020/06/RockInfiltration-HealthyLakeFactSheetSeries2020.pdf>

5. Rain Gardens. Rain gardens capture and infiltrate runoff allowing about 30% more water to soak into the ground than conventional lawns and can be used with any soil type. Rain gardens collectively protect lakes and rivers by diverting and cleaning polluted runoff; much of the runoff soaks into the ground and the rest is filtered through native plants that help clean the runoff before it drains to the lake or river. They also simultaneously provide habitat for birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects and promote natural beauty. Rain gardens are designed to drain within 1-2 days, which means they won't pond water long enough to grow more mosquitoes who need 7-12 days for a successful hatch. <https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthylakesgrants/files/2019/02/RainGarden-HealthyLakesFactSheetSeries-1.pdf>

The Wisconsin DNR encourages do-it-yourselfers to use these practices and have also created a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Healthy Lakes and Rivers grant (<https://healthylakeswi.com/grants/>) for funding assistance. Any eligible applicant can apply for these grants. Eligible applicants include cities, county entities, and lake associations that can assist individual shoreland property owners who wish to participate. The grants provide up to \$1,000 per Best Practice and up to \$25,000 for an eligible applicant applying on behalf of multiple property owners. A requirement of grant-funded projects is a signed contract stating the shoreland property owner will maintain the project for at least 10 years.

(Wisconsin DNR)

Fish Sticks in Action

By Sandy Swanson, Mackenzie Lake Association



The McKenzie Lakes Association (MLA) has obtained all the required permits for a Healthy Lakes surface water grant for “fish sticks” (fish/wildlife shoreline habitat) for the three McKenzie Lakes. To start the project, we have six landowner volunteers

and seven sites that meet the DNR criteria and an experienced contractor has been selected for the work. Placement was scheduled for March 2021 but, unfortunately, the ice was too thin for the equipment so the plan is for January 2022. Later this fall 24” X 36” MLA/Healthy Lakes signs will be installed to mark the designated fish sticks shoreline areas at the seven sites. Mike Pederson, avid fisherman and active MLA member, is project coordinator and doing all the groundwork. Sandy Swanson, MLA president, as project administrator, is filing appropriate reports.

“Fish sticks” are groups of whole trees placed along the shoreline and anchored in place. These structures provide habitat for aquatic insects, fish, turtles, and songbirds and also help protect the shoreline from bank erosion.

<https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/>

[healthyakesgrants/files/2020/06/FishSticks-HealthyLakeFactSheetSeries2020.pdf](https://erc.cals.wisc.edu/healthyakesgrants/files/2020/06/FishSticks-HealthyLakeFactSheetSeries2020.pdf)

County Tree, Shrub, and Wildflower Sale

The Washburn County Land & Water Conservation Department is getting ready for their annual conifer, shrub and wildflower sale. All sales are on a first-come, first-serve basis so be sure to order early. You do not have to have property in Washburn County to order.

***Pine and Spruce Trees** are sold in bundles of 25.

***Shrubs** are sold in bundles of 10.

***Native Perennial Wildflowers and Grasses** are 2 inch pots and sold in flats of 32 plants.

Order forms will go out around Thanksgiving. To get on the mailing list, email Lisa Burns lburns@co.washburn.wi.us or call 715-468-4654.

Washburn County Healthy Lakes Grants In Action

By Lisa Burns



The Washburn County Land and Water Conservation Department received a Wisconsin DNR Healthy Lakes grant in 2021. The goal of the grant is to protect

and restore the health of lakes and rivers by increasing property owner participation in habitat restoration and runoff and erosion control.

Upon request, staff did site visits with numerous landowners and offered advice on what practices would be best. A variety of sites were visited. Some landowners decided to opt out of the grant and do projects on their own (which is highly encouraged) while others were already doing a great job of lake protection on their property. Eight shoreline owners took advantage of the grant, which included raingardens and native plantings. A similar grant is in the works for 2022.

The Shell Lake Inland Lakes Protection District has applied for a Wisconsin DNR Healthy Lakes Grant for 2022. The focus of the grant is on shoreline native plantings. Eight property owners are participating with room remaining for others to join the grant next year.



SAVE THE DATE

April 6-8 *The Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention: “Protecting What We Love for The Future”* Format to be determined. Check the WCLRA website in the coming months for updates. www.wclra.org

June 17 *Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference* Format and location still to be determined. Keep up to date at www.wclra.org

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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 Violation and Information:

Dan Harrington (Water Management Specialist, Spooner Office)..... 715-733-0019
 Jon Hagen (Conservation Warden for 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).....715-468-4695

Washburn County Land and Water Conservation

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