

On The WaterFront

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

Washburn County
LAKES AND RIVERS
ASSOCIATION



25 years protecting waters

Summer 2024 #52



WCLRA Celebrates 25 Years

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Washburn County Lakes & Rivers Association (WCLRA) as a non-profit citizen organization advocating for healthy waters for all. Driven to protect and preserve our precious waters, our mission focuses on advocacy and education, responsible use and preservation. WCLRA is indebted to our many partners making our work possible, Board members providing leadership and volunteers lightening the load.

We acknowledge dedicated partners such as Washburn County government agencies, UW-Extension, lake associations and many more. From those instrumental in forming WCLRA to those who provided ongoing leadership and to our members and volunteers, we say a huge thank-you. We hope you enjoy reading inside this newsletter about our history and a few highlights throughout the years.



WCLRA Board Canoe trip to the Shell Lake diversion outlet, 2003

Earth Day at Hunt Hill

Our Involvement Continues

On April 20, 2024 Barb Luck and Craig Walkey, WCLRA directors, spoke with attendees and shared shoreland protection information at the Hunt Hill Earth Day Celebration.

There were three presentations. First were Lee and Mary Grese, founders of Northwest Bison, who naturally regenerate land and raise and market bison to the public. The second presenter was April Hepokoski from Zero Waste Duluth who advocated reducing trash and creating new uses for the trash we throw out. Finally Mike Heim, Lac Courte Oreilles University, spoke about forest planning for climate change through researching and dispersing southern forest plants northward in order to increase ecological resilience. WCLRA held a raffle for a fishing pole and tackle box with lead free lures which was won by a 7-year-old attendee.



25 Years...The Beginning

WCLRA'S roots

John Meyer, a former executive from the Twin Cities, had moved to the Spooner area, where he shared his leadership skills by advocating for the first Lake Leaders Conference. He recognized the need for a county-wide organization to coordinate water protection and advocacy efforts. The goal was to bring together individuals from lakes that didn't have local organizations and even unnamed lakes to collaborate with existing lake associations and lake districts in Washburn County. At that time, no other county in Wisconsin had that form of county lake organization.

John attended the Wisconsin Lake Leaders Institute, and at the end of it, when the graduates were asked what they were going to do next, he stated that he was going to contact Beverly Stencel, at UW-Extension, to ask for her assistance in starting a county lake organization. She used her expertise with focus groups and surveys to identify people who wanted to preserve Washburn County water resources and be part of an organization with that goal. Out of Beverly's work came the people who ultimately became the founding directors of WCLRA.

John served as initial WCLRA president until it was formally established as a not-for-profit corporation in 1999. Chip Wood was then elected as its first Board president.

Early issues

Many of the same major issues we face today were also present in the first years of WCLRA. Examples include shoreline development, being involved at Zoning meetings/enforcement, and boating safety. We supported passage of a no wake bill. Addressing Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) was already a challenge, and using Galerucella beetles to control purple loosestrife was an innovative approach.

Washburn was one of the first counties to make it illegal to transport invasive species, which is now a state law. WCLRA has continued to work closely with Washburn County Land and Water Conservation on public education about AIS. WCLRA also was an active participant reviewing the science and social impact of the Shell Lake water diversion to the Yellow River to lower the

flood risk to lake properties. WCLRA Board members stayed involved through a 10-year monitoring effort after the diversion was operated.

Initial key players and relentless contributors



WCLRA Board members with Governor Doyle 2010

These are the founders

Fred Blake, Vice President, Bob Denison, Director
Ed Fischer, Director, Karen Kaufmann, Treasurer
John Meyer, Past President,
Eileen-Marie Moore, Secretary,
Michael Norris, Director, Chip Wood, President

Fred and Ed continue to serve.

“Working with Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association (WCLRA) has been such a great experience for me at the beginning of my career with University of Wisconsin Division of Extension. WCLRA has been a very welcoming, encouraging, cooperative, and helpful community partner. I am continuously impressed by the passion and knowledge members of WCLRA possess around protecting and enhancing Washburn County's water resources, and I am so excited to be working on projects, such as the Score My Shore workshop and a joint educational event with the local farmer-led watershed council.”

*Sarah Brown, Natural Resources Educator,
Washburn County*

25 Years...Significant Preservation Contributions

WCLRA worked with WIDNR, local partners and our legislators for the passage of a state law designating undeveloped segments of the Totogatic River as a State Wild River. WCLRA was instrumental in gaining legislative sponsorship, researching local riparian impacts, organizing informational meetings and sponsoring river trips for county officials and Wisconsin Public Television. On July 10, 2009, the group hosted Governor Doyle at Totogatic County Park to sign the bill naming the Totogatic as Wisconsin's fifth Wild River.

A related major project was raising funds to purchase and designate a parcel of land along the Totogatic as the "Totogatic Wild River Property." Key partners making this possible included The SoLar Company which offered the land for sale to us well below market value and The Conservation Fund that contributed funds, orchestrated the purchase and turned the land over to the WIDNR to manage. It remains wild and forever undeveloped and open to public non-motorized traffic. With 262 acres and over 2.5 miles of frontage on the Totogatic River preserved, this accomplishment fosters significant pride for WCLRA, locally, and also for the whole State.

WCLRA's Board has met monthly to communicate with local agencies and keep informed on proposed legislation, news and events, and oversee/manage its projects. Board members come from varied backgrounds (science, law, academia, etc.) bringing strong professional skills.

Since the early days, Board members have consistently monitored significant zoning actions related to shorelands, watching for potential lake impacts, or precedents that could weaken lake and river protection standards under the county ordinance. These members have provided years of dedicated service attending Zoning Committee and Board of Adjustment

meetings and reviewing permit and variance applications. The group has participated in special ordinance revisions for campgrounds and short-term rentals. Members have kept watch on state and local lake and river-related legislation. The Board sends legislators resolutions stating WCLRA's position, along with suggested revisions to strengthen protection under each bill. WCLRA has also sponsored several resolutions submitted to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress for consideration and voting by the public at the annual spring hearings.



WCLRA gets St. Croix Local Heroes Award 2011

For the last sixteen years, WCLRA has distributed information on water protection practices and rules.

Local lake and river organizations are also key to the protection of Washburn County waters, and their memberships are vital to WCLRA's success. WCLRA assisted with the formation of two new lake associations: Little Ripley Lake Association and Bass Lake Shore Owners Association. In 2021 we were the first partner organization of the new non-profit Yellow River Protection Conservancy.

WCLRA informs members and supports member organizations through one-on-one assistance, regular newsletters, mailings and emails. We are dedicated to youth education programs, including the Youth Environmental Stewardship (YES) Program, which WCLRA founded with Long Lake Protection Association and Hunt Hill Nature Center.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

By Lisa Burns, Washburn County Land and Water Conservation

Earlier this spring, you may have noticed a woody shrub in your yard or along your shoreline that was the first to have green leaves. If so, did you remember seeing any small black berries on it last fall? This was likely Common Buckthorn and if not taken care of early, it will become a large overgrown problem. There will be a workshop this fall to discuss identification and control techniques. Watch the newspaper and emails circulating. If you are interested in hosting the workshop, let me know!

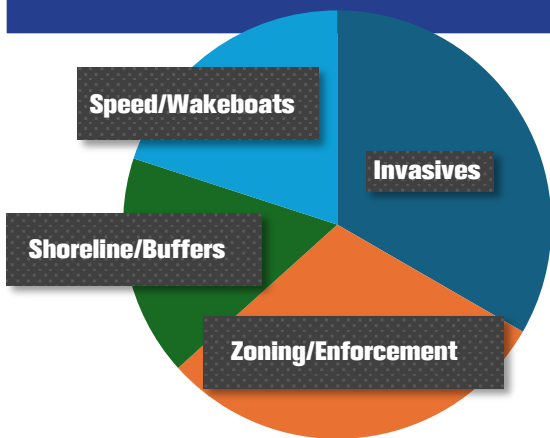
As we are all out enjoying the lakes and rivers, continue to be mindful of invasive species and how YOU can help with prevention. Watch out for Yellow Flag Iris (YFI) growing along shorelines. This plant displaces the native plants and grasses that are crucial for healthy lakes and shorelines. The easiest way to control YFI, is to cut the plant just below the water's surface and to prevent the seeds from dispersing. Do this while it is in bloom while you can easily identify it, or you may be cutting the native Blue Flag Iris.

I am always willing to come and educate your lake group about invasive species. If you think you have found any suspicious plant or animal, take a picture and/or put it in a Ziploc bag with the location and contact me.

If you are interested in getting an order form for our 2025 tree, shrub and wildflower sale, please email lburns@co.washburn.wi.us or call 715-468-4654. Order forms go out around Thanksgiving.



Member Feedback



Helpful member feedback

Last fall as part of our Annual Report, we asked members about their top water-related priorities. A big thank you to everyone who responded and provided comments. Eighty-seven members responded about their main areas of concern. These included invasive plants, water quality/zoning, shoreline protection, speed and wake boats, and campground regulations. Suggestions for educational topics to be addressed in our newsletter or website ranged from DNR responsibilities to fish and wildlife changes to combating pollution and many more.

“For over two decades, the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association has proven to be invaluable to the City of Shell Lake and its residents. Shell Lake prides itself on being a steward of its lakes. Whether talking about water clarity, shoreline buffers, sanitary systems, or a myriad of other critical topics, the amount of effort and expertise needed can be daunting. Having Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association always at the ready to support our community both with their expertise and volunteer time is critical to our success.”

Andy Eiche,
Shell Lake City Administrator

“The Yellow River Protection Conservancy was founded through support and leadership from WCLRA. We appreciate the WCLRA mission and the organization's long-term commitment to the health of our waters throughout the county and the state.”

Kathy Bartilson, YRPC

What's Happening in Your Watershed?

Event Hosted by Farmer-Led Council and WCLRA
by Sarah Brown, University of Wisconsin Extension Educator

We are excited to announce a joint educational event hosted by the Shell Lake-Yellow River Farmer-Led Watershed Council and the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association. This event, also planned in collaboration with Yellow River Protection Conservancy, Long Lake Preservation Association, Brent Edlin (Washburn County Land and Water Department), and Sarah Brown (Extension – Washburn County, Natural Resources Educator), is born out of our shared commitment to enhancing and safeguarding the water resources within local watersheds.

Scheduled for September 29 from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m., we invite community members, shoreland property owners, farmers, (and anyone keen on understanding the measures being taken to preserve the health of our waters), to join us for a day of learning at the Perlick Distillery near Sarona.

Participants will have the opportunity to listen to a hydrology expert discuss the unique characteristics of Shell Lake within its watershed. Additionally, a rainfall simulator demonstration by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will illustrate how different types of vegetation, such as cover crops, lawns, and native plantings, can significantly affect runoff.

After a meal at the venue, attendees will be welcome to join an optional farm tour. This tour will showcase the conservation agricultural strategies implemented at Perlick Distillery, including a pollinator planting, solar panels, wetland restoration, cover crops, and more.

We look forward to seeing you at this event and bringing the community together to learn about and understand how we are protecting our crucial water resources. More details as well as registration will be shared soon.

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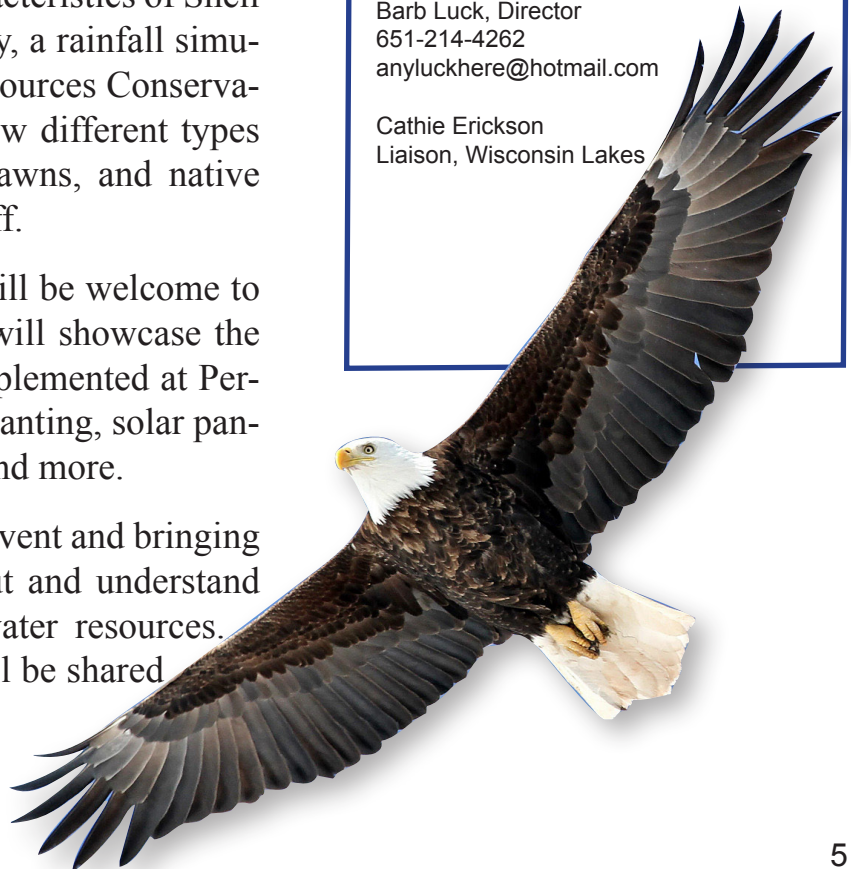
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Cathie Erickson
Liaison, Wisconsin Lakes



Protect Wild Rice for Water Quality, Wildlife, and People

By Kathy Bartilson

Last summer, a lakeshore owner in our county removed aquatic plants in the riparian zone near his dock. What he didn't realize (according to DNR enforcement documents) was that he was illegally uprooting wild rice, resulting in a citation for removing plants from a natural bed of this important aquatic species.

Why is wild rice so important? First, it's important unto itself as a species that has graced and guarded our waters for generations, and is currently threatened by development, climate change and genetic alteration. Next, it serves many functions for water quality, helping take up nutrients from surface water and sediment, and minimizing wave impact on the banks and beds of lakes, streams, and rivers. It provides food and habitat for insects, songbirds, waterfowl, and furbearers, as well as cover for invertebrates, fish, reptiles and amphibians. It's a sacred food to our tribal neighbors, and a delicacy on the dinner table.



Wild rice is an annual grass that has to grow from seed every year; the plant dies in the fall and does not grow back from roots the next spring. To be sure wild rice isn't disturbed by boat wakes and propellers, or deliberately or inadvertently removed, it's important to be able to identify wild rice in each of its growth stages in the summer. It starts with a seed sprouting in shallow water with a little bit of current flowing through. The light-green, very flexible sprouts grow upward and soon float on the surface of the water. This is called the "floating-leaf stage," that occurs in mid-May to mid-June, when the short roots and narrow leaves are very easily uprooted by waves, boat wakes, or rapid changes in water level.

As the summer progresses, tall, strong stalks called "tillers" emerge, and by August flowers and grains appear. By Labor Day, harvest is underway by red-winged blackbirds and humans. Sora rails are often seen hopping from stalk to stalk eating insects. Ripe rice grains that fall in the water each fall help assure that the rice beds will return in following seasons. Losing rice plants due to human recreation or carelessness during the summer threatens the extent and productivity of the beds for years to come.

Regardless of the time of the season, please travel slowly and carefully near rice beds whether swimming, wading, paddling, or using any size or shape of human-powered or motorized watercraft. Remember that boat wakes can damage shoreline, wild rice and other important beds of aquatic vegetation.

“The Deep Lake Association has benefited from our membership with WCLRA in a number of ways, including acting as a resource for shoreland restorations. WCLRA encourages communication by offering to visit association meetings and WCLRA Board meetings are open. WCLRA maintains and develops dialogue with local and state elected officials. WCLRA sponsors and/or participates in community events including Earth Day at Hunt Hill, Canoe Heritage Day and the Northwest Lakes Conference. Such collaboration between stakeholders is essential to meeting our mutual goals.”

Bruce Keyzer

Get The Lead Out!!!

Help Protect Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat

To promote use of lead-free tackle, WCLRA is holding drawings for a tackle box of lead-free gear and a fishing rod at community events this summer.* Why use lead-free tackle? Lost lures and sinkers containing lead end up on the lake or stream bed, and can be ingested by waterfowl, loons, eagles, swans and even turtles. WCLRA wants to protect wildlife from lead poisoning that occurs when lost lures and sinkers are ingested. According to WIDNR information, it only takes one sinker to kill a loon. To learn more about it, search for "Get the Lead Out" on the DNR website the DNR website, which includes information on the relatively low cost of replacing lead gear.

Dr. Kim Amman, veterinarian and founder of Winged Freedom Raptor Hospital in Spooner, treats many birds for lead poisoning each year, some of which do not survive. To learn about Winged Freedom's work or to donate, look for this organization on Facebook. Here is a first-hand, compelling account from Dr. Amman on how devastating lead poisoning can be.



Eagle photo by Kevin Hagen

“We treat about 50 bald eagles every year. They come in for a variety of reasons, including trauma like being hit by a moving vehicle, fighting wounds, starvation, lead poisoning, and many other causes. Every eagle, as part of its initial workup, has blood drawn and we are able to check the level of lead in that blood sample. We also check lead levels on other raptors that are known to feed on dead animals and gut piles.

It is extremely unusual for the blood lead level to be read out at “too low to read.” It almost never happens. Most Bald Eagles have a measurable amount of lead in their bloodstream, which tells us they have been exposed and have the toxin stored in their tissues and circulating throughout their bodies.

Many birds come in with levels our analyzer calls “too high to read.” This means that the level of lead in the blood sample is higher than the highest value the analyzer is designed to read. These birds are extremely ill and in most cases must be euthanized to save further suffering because we know that no amount of treatment will save them.

*Birds with lead levels between “too low” and “too high” are evaluated with other tests to determine whether they can be saved. If so, we start injections of medication to bind up the lead in the blood and allow the bird's system to eliminate it. This treatment can require weeks of injections and supportive care. During this time the eagles are often nauseated, weak, regurgitating food, and they are suffering from various symptoms as the lead attacks their nerves. They can have seizures, hallucinations, and they are generally miserable. Choosing an alternative fishing tackle and ammunition can **eliminate the problem.***

One of the saddest things we see are the juvenile eaglets who are in trouble and come in for treatment. Often these are babies with attentive parents, but right after leaving the nest the babies end up on the ground, not flying very well, certainly unable to hunt or fish for themselves, and a disconnect seems to happen where the parents just don't feed them in their new location. Most of these babies are starving, sometimes critically ill with other infections plus starvation. We check lead levels on these babies and their levels are almost never “too low.” They have measurable lead within their bodies and they are only 10 weeks old! So we know lead is in our environment, likely within the fish the eagles are feeding to their offspring. We know how lead can negatively affect developing human children, and I fear that the same is true for these young eaglets. It should be a wakeup call to anyone who cares about our planet and the health of our wild animals and humans alike.”

“The frustrating part of treating this disorder over and over is that we as humans are the sole cause of the birds' suffering and it is completely in our power to stop it. Choosing an alternative fishing tackle or ammunition can eliminate the problem.”

* Many thanks to Spooner Outlet for donations of fishing gear for our drawings.

On The Waterfront is published by:
 WASHBURN COUNTY LAKES AND RIVERS ASSN, INC.
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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
 Evan Fox (Conservation Warden for Washburn County).....715-559-8081

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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