

# 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 2023 #50

## Hooray for Aquatic Plants!

by Kathy Bartilson

A “weed” is often defined as a plant that’s growing where it isn’t wanted. When it comes to water plants, it is doubtful any ducks, turtles, frogs, toads, fish or aquatic insects would consider the native plants in our lakes, rivers and streams to be “weeds.” We shouldn’t either! Plants are very important to the health of our waters for biological diversity, food for wildlife, oxygen from photosynthesis, and habitat for many creatures. Submerged stems and leaves provide growth substrate for algal species called periphyton. Plants also help sustain and improve water quality and keep bed and bank material in place in lakes and rivers. The flowering plants are important for our pollinators and the beauty we enjoy when we explore a local lake, river or wetland. Imagine if there were no stems rising out of the water for dragonfly nymphs to climb up when it’s time to hatch!

In fact, beds of native plants are considered to be “critical habitat areas,” as are spawning reefs and other natural aquatic features. According to the WDNR website, *“Every waterbody has critical habitat - those areas that are most important to the overall health of the aquatic plants and animals. Remarkably, 80 percent of the plants and animals on the state’s endangered and threatened species list spend all or part of their life cycle within the near shore zone. As many as 90 percent of the living things in lakes and rivers are found along the shallow margins and shores.”*

Some great examples of the food or habitat values of aquatic plants can be found in the plant’s common name: wild celery or eel grass (*Vallisneria spiralis*), favored by canvasback ducks), wild rice, duck weed, duck potato, and musky cabbage.

Our native aquatic plants serve so many important functions in our healthy water ecosystem. Keeping



Photo courtesy of Chris Hagen

our native plant beds in place helps keep invasive plants from “moving in.” Let’s protect these important features of lake and river biology by going slowly around plant beds, and not uprooting them with outboard motors and boat wakes. Take some time to enjoy the pickerelweed!

For more in-depth information on aquatic plants, see the 2020 Wisconsin Lakes Partnership publications *“Embracing the Benefits of Aquatic Plants”* (2020) and *“A Peek Beneath the Waves”* (2014), both available for download by searching for the titles on the WDNR website (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/lakes/plants/research>). A wonderful, illustrated plant guide *“Through the Looking Glass – A Field Guide to Aquatic Plants”* can be purchased through the UW-Stevens Point Extension Lakes online bookstore (<https://cnroutreached.asapconnected.com/#ProductCategory=LAKE>).

## 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](http://wclra.org).**

## The Things I Miss....

*Comments from President Craig Walkey*

Our family vacationed on Middle McKenzie Lake through the 1950s. Frogs were everywhere and we never got bored chasing and catching them. Now, on another Washburn County lake where I live full time, I rarely see any frogs. However, we do have the Spring Peepers in a wetland about 125 feet from our cabin.

As a young child of the 1950s our back yard would swarm with lightning bugs. We would get dizzy chasing and capturing them in mason jars. Now I do not see many.

As a young boy lying in bed at night crickets would seem to chant in a rhythmic cadence that would drown out all other noise. It was common to have one or two chirping in basements. We never knew how they got in our house. Now if I hear one, I stop and listen.

The last time I saw a swarm of 12-15 multi-colored butterflies dancing over a puddle was 25 years ago at the Big Devils Lake boat landing. They captivated me for some time in their silent frantic activity. Now occasionally I see a single butterfly. I understand that Wisconsin's loon population is stable, but I remember observing six or more loons on Middle McKenzie Lake when fishing at sun rise. I have read that we have lost about thirty percent of our song birds nationwide.

I may be getting older, but I don't think I am exaggerating my memories.

## Welcome New Washburn County Natural Resources Educator

Welcome to Sarah Brown, who recently signed on as Washburn County Natural Resources Educator with the University of Wisconsin Division of Extension. Sarah's educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Science in Natural Resources with emphasis in human dimensions of natural resources. Before joining Extension, Sarah was a J. Philip Keillor Fellow with Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and Wisconsin Sea Grant, where she coordinated a Lake Superior coastal resiliency project. Sarah has a passion for helping to foster a mutually beneficial connection between communities and natural resources, especially with conservation practices on private lands. She looks forward to greeting and sharing information with WCLRA members.



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# Spring at the Lake

## A Great Time to Take the “Score My Shore” Survey

by Kathy Bartilson

Shoreland owners are fortunate to have a tool to evaluate how our buildings and activities on the shore could be affecting the lake or river where we live. The Wisconsin Healthy Lakes and Rivers program developed the “Score My Shore” survey, patterned after a similar program in Michigan. As we reported in last fall’s *On the Waterfront*, the survey walks you through questions about the physical aspects of your lake or river property, as well as how you manage it. The tool is entirely voluntary and is not used for regulatory purposes. You can decide whether to register for an account or answer the survey questions anonymously.

The survey tool takes into account the answers provided, and returns a rating of **entry, restoration, enhancement, or protection** (the most lake or river-friendly level). The immediate, online feedback helps landowners understand the overall rating and recommends specific projects that could improve not only the score but help the lake or river, too.

Lake and river groups can also set up an account and see results from properties on their specific water(s) if the landowner completing the survey chooses to share this information. As of early April of this year, 10 of the landowners in our county who have completed the survey shared their results with WCLRA. Congratulations on your scores, and thanks for including us. We encourage all shoreland owners to take the survey, and implement the recommendations offered.

The survey can be found at this link (<https://survey.healthylakeswi.com/>) or by searching for the Wisconsin Healthy Lakes and Rivers site. The “Score My Shore” link is on the far right at the top of the home page menu.



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## Focus On Natives

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Pickerelweed is a native wetland plant and ranges throughout most of eastern North America. Despite the name, it is not a weed but rather native aquatic vegetation that is essential for a healthy aquatic ecosystem. It is found in freshwater along shorelines of lakes and streams, and in wetlands. Pickerelweed can tolerate water levels from ankle-deep to six feet. It can grow in a variety of sediments and will form spreading colonies in protected bays.

Pickerelweed is not only a good food source for aquatic and terrestrial animals. Its large leaves and clusters of stems provide excellent cover for fish, birds, insects, swimming mammals, amphibians and reptiles. The dense root system and stems provide a wave barrier protecting shoreline sediment from erosion.



# Update On Campground Ordinance Revisions

By Beverly Stencel

A WCLRA board member was appointed by the Washburn County (WC) Board of Supervisors, as one of three citizen members on the WC Campground Ordinance Ad Hoc Committee (Ad Hoc Committee). The Ad Hoc Committee was tasked, by the Executive Committee of the WC Board of Supervisors, with reviewing and proposing revisions to the County's campground ordinance.

WCLRA's main concerns, which were voiced by our board member at the Ad Hoc Committee meetings, are that: the current ordinance allows for congested spacing and the current density standards should be revised to address this; the definitions related to campgrounds need to be updated; campgrounds should not be allowed in the Residential-Recreational (RR1) zoning district; and consideration of impact fees to offset county services provided to campgrounds should be considered.

The Ad Hoc Committee met several times a month starting in October 2022. The Ad Hoc Committee completed their review in March 2023 and forwarded their recommended changes to the WC Zoning Committee. Not all the changes that we sought were included in the campground ordinance revisions approved. Although our representative on the Ad Hoc Committee repeatedly shared our recommendation for no campgrounds in the RRI zoning classification, this was not approved. Her motion to cap campsites to 30 in lake and river shoreline areas, 50 in RR1 and 75 in all other zoning classifications was not approved.

A majority of the Ad Hoc Committee did approve capping the size of a campground at 100 sites in all zoning districts. Previously, there was no cap at all on the number of allowable campsites. How many were allowed was just determined by the area of the campground and existing density standards.

A majority of the Ad Hoc Committee approved tightening these density standards by both allowing for only developable land (i.e. no wetlands) to be considered in the density formula, increasing the

setbacks from waterways and lot lines, and reducing the number of allowable campsites per acre. They also approved a substantial tightening of what is allowed for accessory structures (sheds, decks, porches) per campsite.

The Zoning Committee scheduled a public hearing on May 23. This article was written prior to that meeting, so we cannot report here what action the Zoning Committee took. If, at that meeting, the Zoning Committee approved the Ad Hoc Committee's recommended changes to the campground ordinance, the changes would be forwarded to the WC Executive Committee where, hopefully, they will approve forwarding the recommendations to the full WC Board. If it is forwarded on, there will be a second public hearing before the full WC board, after which a vote will be taken on the revised WC campground ordinance.

You can find out when any of the Washburn County committees and the board meet at <https://www.co.washburn.wi.us/meetings-officials/agendas-minutes>, which is where you find agendas and minutes of all county committees, as well as the county board.

## Spreading the Word

by Kathy Bartilson

WCLRA has just printed a new booklet, ***Washburn County Waters: Lets Keep Them Healthy.***

This booklet shares messages about the County's water resources, fishing, aquatic invasive species vigilance, boating safety, shoreland restoration, aquatic plants, safe drinking water and septic system maintenance. An electronic version can be downloaded from our website. Larger quantities for Lake and River groups can be ordered directly through White Birch Printing in Spooner. Printing costs need to be covered by the group making the order.



# Things to Know About Boating

By Barb Luck

Summer is here after a long snowy winter and that means Washburn County waters are alive with activity. Owners with boats that sat idle, along with other water enthusiasts and even wildlife, are anxious to enjoy more time on the water. To keep waters safe for everyone and help ensure future enjoyment of this local resource, please be a good water steward.

## Basic safety reminders

Operating a watercraft of any kind is both a right and a responsibility to operate it safely with respect for other people, for wildlife, and for the waterway itself. Reckless use of boats endangers all of these, and therefore, it is important to know boating laws and responsibilities. The State has a useful pamphlet, *Handbook of Wisconsin Boating Laws and Responsibilities*, found online at <https://widnr.widen.net/s/0vw8hwrae3> and in print at WDNR offices. Here are a few examples:

- Children under 10 years of age may not operate a motorboat at all.
- Children ages 10-12 can operate a boat if accompanied by an adult.
- Children 12-15 must be accompanied by an adult or have completed a boat safety course accepted by the WDNR.
- Boats must be operated safely and must be licensed.
- No one can operate a boat or ski when under the influence of alcohol.
- Life jackets are required.
- Running lights are needed to assure safety if operating at night.
- An anchored boat at night must have a white light.

## No-wake preserves fragile shore

The State of Wisconsin requires that all watercraft observe slow-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 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 in shallow waters and are easily disturbed. See the related article about

wake boats on page 7.

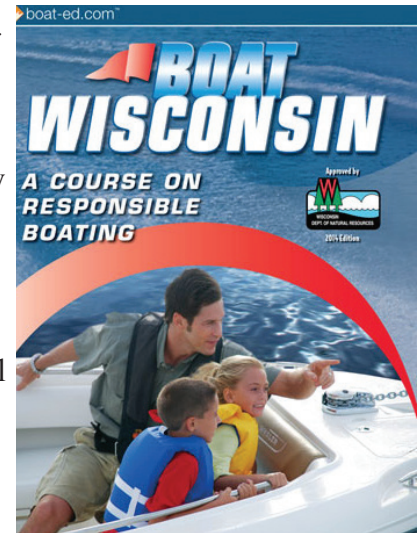
## Important to know: Learn about AIS

It's important to know your role to help control the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) such as Eurasian water milfoil and zebra mussels. Before any boat launching and before leaving the water, boaters must:

- INSPECT boats, trailers and equipment.
- REMOVE all attached aquatic plants and animals.
- DRAIN all water from boats, vehicles and equipment.
- NEVER MOVE plants or live fish away from a waterbody.

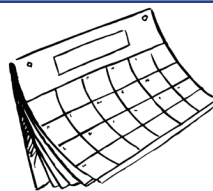
Boating is central to enjoying lakes and rivers. Being careful not to harm children at play, wildlife, and the fragile shorelands means water resources will continue to provide that enjoyment now and in the future.

(WDNR)



## Another Grant Opportunity

The Washburn County Land and Water Department is applying for another Healthy Lakes Grant for 2024 and is getting site visits and plans ready for the November application. This grant covers up to 75% of costs per practice, up to \$1000 per project. Landowners contribute a 25% match. Check out <https://healthylakeswi.com/best-practices/> for more info on Healthy Lakes grants. If interested contact Lisa Burns at [lburns@co.washburn.wi.us](mailto:lburns@co.washburn.wi.us) or 715-468-



**The 2023 Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference will be held at Spooner High School from 9:00 am to 3:45 pm on June 23, 2023.**

To register go to: [nwwislakesconference.org](https://nwwislakesconference.org)

# Climate Impact to Wisconsin Lakes and Waters

By Dea Larsen Converse, Communications Director, WICCI

A focus on climate impacts to water resources in Wisconsin from the [Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts](#) (WICCI) shows that warming temperatures and changing precipitation patterns are impacting Wisconsin's lakes and rivers. The last two decades have been the warmest on record in Wisconsin and the past decade has been the wettest.

*"We need to increase the magnitude and urgency of actions to protect and restore habitat and enhance water quality to make Wisconsin's waters more resilient to climate change."* – Katie Hein, WICCI Water Resources Working Group Co-Chair

Hear more about this topic from Katie Hein who will be speaking at this year's [Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference](#) on June 23.

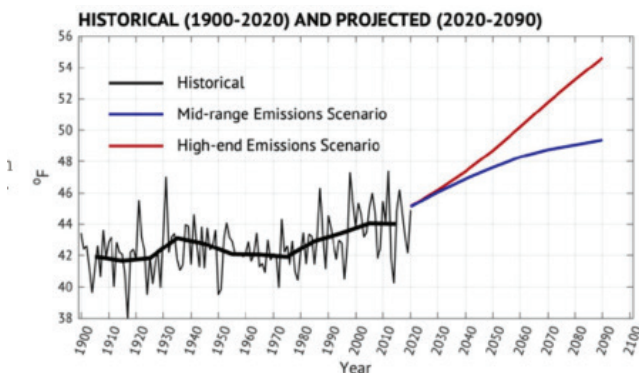
What does this mean for lakes in northern Wisconsin? One example is a decline in ice cover and increasing variability in ice-on and ice-off dates which are having significant impacts. From the duration of ice thick enough to be safe for ice fishing to the increasingly unpredictable timing in annual freezing and thawing dates (that set up lake and tributary environments for fish spawning), climate change is impacting fish and anglers alike. These changes are reducing the survival of iconic fish like walleye and perch.

*"We know that as water warms, it becomes less favorable for walleye, which are a cool-water species. In a lot of cases the lakes are becoming clearer as the climate changes. That is generally not good for walleye."* – Max Wolter, WDNR Fisheries Biologist

Max explains further that as the climate warms, a very complex interplay of temperature, clarity, competitive species, and even invasive species like zebra mussels and rusty crayfish are linked to temperature and clarity.

The [WICCI Water Resources Working Group](#) recommends helpful actions individuals can take. These include planting native plants in shoreland areas along rivers and lakes, building rain gardens, and supporting efforts to protect and restore floodplains and wetlands. Boaters can help reduce stress on aquatic systems by reducing the spread of aquatic invasive species by keeping boats clean, and protecting near-shore areas through responsible recreational use, including no-wake boat operation.

There is hope for the future, but it is up to us.



*WICCI is a nationally recognized collaboration of scientists and stakeholders working together to help foster solutions to climate change in Wisconsin. WICCI formed as a partnership between UW–Madison's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 2007.*

Wisconsin's historical warming (black line) is expected to continue into the coming century under both a high end emissions (red curve) and mid-range emissions (blue curve) scenario. Source: Nelson Institute Center for Climatic Research

# Wave Impacts--A Growing Concern

*By Cathie Erickson and Linda Anderson*

With the bountiful number of lakes in Washburn County, swimmers, boaters, and fisherfolk alike share the recreational space of the waters. In recent years, there has been growing concern throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota, that the impacts of waves produced by powerboats, and especially those produced by specialized wakesurf boats, were having a detrimental effect on shorelines and lake recreation. Wakesurf boats are designed to create large wakes that allow for surfing on those wakes created behind the boat. For many this is wonderful fun. But property owners report shoreline erosion, other boaters fear for their safety, and many perceive disturbances to sediment and aquatic plants of the lakes. Other types of large wake-producing boats are raising similar concerns. When the concerns were first raised a few years ago, they were based on individual experiences and observations but there had been no scientific studies to back up anecdotal reports. Scientific evidence is now emerging from studies around the country.

Phase I of a study by researchers in the University of Minnesota (UMN) College of Science and Engineering's St. Anthony Falls Laboratory looked at the magnitude of wakes created by four recreational boats. The findings reveal wake waves from wake boats are higher and require greater distance to decrease from more typical recreational boats. The study indicates if a wake boat is 500 to 600 feet from shore, the wave levels will be similar to a ski boat or cruiser 200 feet from the shoreline. "The energy of these boats, of wake surf boats, is three to six times larger than traditional boats, and six to twelve times larger in terms of power," said Jeff Marr, a member of the UMN research team.

Phase II of the study which began last year is looking at the depth and breadth of propeller wash under the water. It hopes to answer the following questions: How deep does propeller wash penetrate into the water column for different boat sizes and usage scenarios? At what depth does propeller wash begin to interact with the lake bottom, and what happens when it does? This study is privately funded, and last fall WCLRA made a substantial contribution toward the funding of Phase II. For more information about this study Google UMN Wake boat study or go to <https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/healthywatersinitiative/welcome>.

What are the solutions? First and foremost is information and communication. Keep up with the emerging data and talk with your neighbors, guests and visitors at your boat landing about the importance of operating watercraft safely and in ways that don't damage the shoreline or lakebed. Local ordinances are being adopted or considered in some areas that require wakeboats to operate farther from shore and in deeper waters. One of the biggest issues with local ordinances lack of enforcement authority for DNR wardens. Although there has been talk of passing state laws governing wakesurf boats, the current legislature would have to agree to do so. The real solution rests largely with knowledgeable wakesurf boat owners who understand the powerful nature of their boats and operate to minimize potential destructive impacts.



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*Photo courtesy of Linda Anderson*

**Contacts to Protect Lakes and Rivers**

If you have a question or suspect a violation of a law that protects our lakes & rivers or the people who use them, carefully note the Who, What, Where, and When of the situation. Take a picture if possible and try to get the registration number of any watercraft that are involved.

**DNR Water Regulation and Violation Information:**

The fastest way to report a suspected violation and create an official record is to call WDNR’s tip line:  
1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367)

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

**County Shoreland Zoning Questions or Violations:**

- Dale (Butch) Beers (Zoning Administrator).....715-468-4695

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