

On The WaterFront

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



Fall/Winter 2024-25 #52

Tending our Important Watersheds

By Sarah Brown

In September the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association co-hosted “What’s Happening in Your Watershed?” with the Shell Lake-Yellow River Farmer-Led Watershed Council and Sarah Brown, Washburn County Natural Resources Educator from UW-Madison’s Division of Extension. This event, hosted at Perlick Distillery in Sarona, highlighted efforts to protect water quality in local watersheds and brought together waterfront property owners, farmers, and community members.

Attendees heard a presentation by Dale Robertson, a hydrologist with United States Geological Survey, about the unique and changing hydrology of Shell Lake. Michael Geissinger from the University of Wisconsin Nutrient and Pest Management Program showed how different soil types and plant cover can impact water runoff and infiltration on both farms and lakeshores. And, there were opportunities to learn about cover crops planted at Perlick’s farm and their benefits for water quality, the distillery itself, and the farm’s pollinator planting.



Rainfall Simulator Demonstration

Did you know?

- Shell Lake is a closed-basin, terminal lake meaning it has no outlets and the water that enters it only leaves by evaporation and seepage into groundwater.
- Cover crops can reduce soil erosion significantly which reduces runoff of sediments and nutrients into nearby water bodies.

Protect our watersheds

Actions we can all take include:

1. **Plant native vegetation:** Native plants have deep root systems that help absorb rainwater and reduce runoff.
2. **Reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides:** Excess of these chemicals can wash into waterways, causing harm to aquatic life and water quality.
3. **Maintain septic systems:** Regular septic system maintenance prevents leaks that can contaminate groundwater and nearby lakes, rivers, and streams.

Washburn County
LAKES AND RIVERS
ASSOCIATION



ANNUAL REPORT

AUGUST 2023 - AUGUST 2024

Mission and Focus

The Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association (WCLRA) is a not-for-profit association of dedicated stewards of county water resources. This group of passionate people protect the 964 lakes and 700 miles of rivers and streams as well as shorelands and wetlands vital for continued preservation of wildlife habitats and enjoyment by all. In 2024 WCLRA celebrated 25 years of conservation projects in the county and advocacy for waters regionally and statewide.

Membership

- Maintained 350 paid memberships (individual, family, and groups).
- Invited 146 new shoreland property owners to join WCLRA, sent free newsletters for one year, and together with UW Extension, sent them New Shoreland Owner information.
- Maintained a mailing list with more than 1200 people, including members, local lake and river association board members, county and town officials, and resource agency partners.
- Recognized the need for new Board members, started succession planning and recruited two new committee members to contribute to varied issues and initiatives.

Legislative Priorities

- Campgrounds in the area are in a state of flux. Overnight camping is not very profitable and is run mostly by municipalities. Profitable private campgrounds have largely become locations with annual leasing for several hundred large RVs. They became very popular because of a loophole in the tax law and ease of access. But they are not always good neighbors. Therefore, the county recently limited the size of these facilities to 50 sites in residentially zoned areas (more sites are allowed in forestry and agricultural areas.) The Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners sued the

county claiming the limitation of 50 sites is unlawful. Because the case will likely make a new law, it may make it to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. That could take years and WCLRA will continue to monitor the campground situation.

- Government & Environmental Committee continued to follow-up on Conservation Congress Resolutions introduced previously, including local control of shoreline zoning, buffers on streams and ditches, campground zoning concerns, climate change, and wake boats.
- Informed legislators regarding key environmental issues, for example, enhanced wakes, lakeshore zoning, “residential” RV parks/campgrounds, laws for lake districts, and increased conservation funding.
- Continued to support the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund, which focuses on preserving natural areas, water quality, and outdoor recreation opportunities. WCLRA will monitor proposed legislation which may affect this grant program.



Ongoing Education and Advocacy

- Maintained strong relationship with the Shell Lake-Yellow River Farmer-Led Watershed Council as they advocate land management practices which focus on healthy soils and help protect watersheds.
- Blue Ribbon Shoreline Committee hosted a “Score My Shore” workshop in August with Sarah Brown from UW-Extension, Lisa Burns from the Washburn County

Land and Water Conservation Department, and Jill Sunderland and Patrick Anderson from WIDNR. Agenda included how to use the Wisconsin Healthy Lakes and Rivers “Score My Shore” tool to rate water-friendliness of landowner’s property and shorefront activities and examples. The Score My Shore tool is available online and easy to use on your own or by contacting WCLRA Board members for advice through info@wclra.org.



- One of WCLRA’s goals is to be sure shorefront owners have good information on how their homesites

and activities can be planned to protect our waters: lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and groundwater.

- Two annual projects reach both new owners and prospective buyers. We provided information to local real estate offices, our “new buyer” project. The folders included several brochures with advice on purchasing waterfront property, along with our county zoning information and local resource staff contacts. The folders are free of charge to customers looking for homes or cabins by the water.
- For new owners, we mailed packets to everyone who purchased shorefront property in 2023. Like the “new buyer” folders, these packets provide advice tailored to new owners. Due to good response from recipients, this project has been done for 12 years. New buyers receive our newsletter for a year and many of them join our organization as members in subsequent years.
- Education Committee worked with Hunt Hill Nature Center to reactivate the Youth Environmental Stewardship program this fall. The focus is hands-on environmental education for Fifth graders from four schools, including Spooner, Shell Lake, Northwoods and Birchwood.
- Shared information about protecting our waters at community events such as Earth Day Celebration,

Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Festival, and Northwest Lakes Conference.

- Communications Committee strengthened public education during WCLRA’s 25th anniversary year about keeping our waters healthy and encouraging awareness and involvement. Activities included a video, updated key print and online materials such as overview brochure and tabletop display, fishing nonlead tackle box giveaways, thanked our partners for collaboration, posted historical accomplishments on WCLRA’s website, and published special anniversary newsletter and several timely local newspaper articles.

New Projects

- Addressed environmental and safety impacts of mounting wake-enhanced boating in the State by staying informed of developments in research, local ordinances and proposed state legislation, urging Washburn County’s legislators not to co-sponsor bills that would not adequately protect our lakes and would have eliminated local ordinances.
- Joined a coalition of environmental protection groups working around the State to regulate wake-enhanced boating with minimum requirements of 700’ from shore, 30’ depth, preventing invasive species in ballast tanks, and preserving local municipalities’ existing right to enact and enforce more restrictive local ordinances.



Washburn County
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A PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION
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Sawyer County Adopts Ordinance for Short Term Rentals

On October 17, the Sawyer County Board passed an ordinance developed by an ad hoc committee to regulate Tourist Rooming Houses (TRHs) which are also known as Short Term Rentals (STRs). The vote was 9 in favor, 3 opposed, and 3 not present. The ordinance includes a provision that requires a TRH/STR owner to have a county license as well as a state license. There are nearly 600 TRHs in Sawyer County.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is responsible for state regulation of TRHs. They define TRHs as “all lodging places and tourist cabins and cottages, other than hotels and motels, in which sleeping accommodations are offered for pay to tourists or transients. It does not include private boarding or rooming houses not accommodating tourists or transients, or bed and breakfast establishments.”

A key provision of the new Sawyer County ordinance is the occupancy limit. The maximum occupancy is set at two times the number of bedrooms plus two. In areas with septic systems, the limit is expected to keep occupancy within the capacity of the septic system.

Other key provisions are the requirements for TRH owners to provide notice to the owners of neighboring properties and to post a placard within the property’s right of way with information including name and contact information of the owner or the owner’s agent and the occupancy limit for the property.

If you want to know more or get the details of the ordinance, consult official Sawyer County resources. WCLRA will monitor the implementation, enforcement, and impacts of this ordinance in one of our neighboring counties.

Washburn 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-served 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 be available around Thanksgiving. You can print one off the Washburn County website

<http://www.co.washburn.wi.us/>. Click on “native trees, shrubs, wildflowers” on the right side of the page. You can also email lburns@co.washburn.wi.us to get one emailed or call the department at 715-468-4654 to get one mailed.

The YES Program Resumes

by Craig Walkey

The YES Program (Youth Environmental Stewardship) a partnership between WCLRA, the Long Lake Preservation Association, and Hunt Hill Nature Center, resumed this fall at Hunt Hill Nature Center. The annual program began in 2009 and was put on hold the past three years beginning in 2019 due to the pandemic. The YES Program brings students to Hunt Hill for day-long exploration of Washburn County water resources and the importance of protecting them. The program includes experimental work with water chemistry, invasive species, shoreline buffers, and stewardship.

Fifth grade students from Birchwood, Shell Lake, and Spooner attended. Northwoods (Minong) had to cancel due to an unexpected event. In total, 135 students attended. Sage Dunham, Hunt Hill Group Coordinator, said “The feedback from the schools was very positive.” We look forward to continuing the program in 2025 and beyond.



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Cathie Erickson
Liaison, Wisconsin Lakes

SAVE ^{THE} DATE

March 26-28 The 46th Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention, Stevens Point, WI
<https://wisconsinwaterweek.org/home/lakes-and-rivers-convention/>

June 20 Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference, 2025 Hayward High School.
Keep up-to-date at wclra.org

Regulation Of Enhanced Wakes

By Cathie Erickson

There has been considerable recent activity across Wisconsin with the goal of getting appropriate regulation to reduce environmental and safety impacts of enhanced wakes. Meanwhile, wake boats are becoming more powerful and more common.

A new, rapidly growing coalition focused on protecting Wisconsin's lakes was announced in August by five statewide organizations. The founding members of the coalition are the Wisconsin Lakes Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Lakes At Stake Wisconsin, Last Wilderness Alliance, and Wisconsin's Green Fire. WCLRA has joined the coalition along with numerous other water-protection organizations, anglers, advocates for local control, and lake property landowners.

The coalition's principles include:

700 ft. from shore -- Wake-enhanced boating activities should occur at least 700' from any shoreline.

30-ft. depth -- Wake-enhanced boating activities should occur in water depths of no less than 30'.

Prevent the transfer of invasive species in ballast tanks -- Boats moving from lake-to-lake must have proof of decontaminated ballast tanks before entering lakes.

Local control – Local municipalities' existing right to enact and maintain local ordinances that are more restrictive than these state minimums shall be preserved.

One coalition member, the Last Wilderness Alliance (LWA), is assisting Wisconsin towns and their lake organizations with the process of developing local ordinances to regulate enhanced wakes. LWA has developed a standard template that local governments can use to reduce the work involved. Having uniform ordinances around the state avoids the confusion that could be caused by implementation of ordinances with vastly different language. Several towns and lake organizations in Washburn County have received assistance from LWA volunteers.

State legislators are also discussing the impacts of enhanced wakes and considering what type of regulations would be most appropriate and effective. It would not be surprising to see new legislation proposed in 2025. But at this time nobody knows what will be proposed or the likelihood of passage.

WCLRA will continue to monitor these developments. If you have questions or comments on this topic, contact Cathie Erickson at CathieErickson@gmail.com.



Thank You Mr. Page!



WCLRA extends sincere thanks and condolences to the friends and family of Tracy “Chip” Page for the generous memorial gifts to our organization after Mr. Page’s death. We greatly appreciate your support for the work of our group.

Tracy was called “Chip” for being a “chip off the old block,” and the third person in his family tree to be named Tracy Shepard Page. With the memorial gifts we received, there were notes sharing how much he loved the lakes and streams in our area. Some referred to him as “The Fish Whisperer” because of how successful he was at catching fish! He was also an avid reader. Early in his career he served in the Peace Corps in Kabala, Sierra Leone and worked in information technology after returning to the U.S.

Tracy and his wife Cathy, daughter Karla, and son Damon have had a lake home in Washburn County since 1993, first on North Twin Lake and later on Dunn Lake. They have been long-term members of WCLRA.

Karla shared things she learned from her dad in his eulogy. Here’s a particularly poignant one: “Always pinch your barbs. When teaching us to fish, the first thing I remember being drilled into my head was that you always pinch down the fishing hook barbs to keep from mangling a fish you didn’t plan to eat anyway. I’m sure there’s some deeper lesson here about leveling the playing field so others have a chance, or not being unnecessarily cruel to anyone, but he left that part up to us to figure out for ourselves.”

A new fishing pier is currently under construction and will be placed on the south bank of the Yellow River Flowage in Spooner (just east of the hatchery along the walking trail). Several partner groups are contributing to the cost of construction. To honor Tracy, WCLRA plans to use some of the memorial funds for our group’s contribution to the project. How better to honor “The Fish Whisperer” and show our appreciation for the generous memorial.



Celebrating WCLRA’s 25 Years

Ron Brown, past Director
Kathy Bartilson, current Vice-President
Linda Anderson, current President
Craig Walkey, Director
Dave Vold, Director
Charlotte Shover, past Director
Beverly Stencil, past Director
Kevin Campbell, current Treasurer
Pat and Kent Shifferd (not pictured)

On The Waterfront is published by:
 WASHBURN COUNTY LAKES AND RIVERS ASSN, INC.
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 Spooner, WI 54801
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 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).....715-468-4690

Washburn County Land and Water Conservation

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