

Timeless Reflections

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." —Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." —Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." —John Muir, *founder of the Sierra Club and former Wisconsin resident*

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." —Margaret Mead

"The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard." —Gaylord Nelson, *former governor of Wisconsin and founder of Earth Day*

"When the well's dry, we know the worth of water." —Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1746

"...we can learn far more about the conditions, and values, of a society by contemplating how it chooses to play, to use its free time, to take its leisure, than by examining how it goes about its work." —A. Bartlett Gianatti

"A lake is a landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." —Henry David Thoreau, *American philosopher and naturalist*

"High quality water is more than the dream of the conservationists, more than a political slogan; high quality water, in the right quantity at the right place at the right time, is essential to health, recreation and economic growth." —Edmund S. Muske, *U.S. Senatorial speech*, 1966

"Filthy water cannot be washed." —African proverb

Ripples
Lake Ripley Management District
N4450 CTH A
Cambridge, WI 53523

Presorted Standard
U.S. Postage PAID
Cambridge, WI
Permit No. 5

Ripples

LAKE RIPLEY
PRIORITY LAKE PROJECT



Vol. 13, No. 3

Fall-Winter 2005

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Molinaro
Chair
(608) 423-4743

Mike Sabella
Treasurer
(608) 423-4603

Derek Hoffman
Secretary
(608) 423-1414

Jane Jacobsen-Brown
Commissioner
(608) 423-3319

Dennis McCarthy
Commissioner
(608) 655-3455

Gene Kapsner
Town of Oakland Rep.
(608) 423-4723

Sheri Walz
Jefferson County Rep.
(920) 648-6428

STAFF

Paul Dearlove
Project Manager
(608) 423-4537

LAKE DISTRICT OFFICE

Oakland Town Hall
N4450 CTH A
Cambridge, WI 53523

Phone:
(608) 423-4537

E-mail:
rippley@charterinternet.com

Website:
www.lakerippley.org

FROM THE HELM



The Truth and Nothing but the Truth

Recently you may have seen ads and articles on TV and in the papers suggesting that, if the proposed new pier rules are passed, the DNR will be taking your pier away. These misleading ads are particularly offensive to me, as I spent the good part of this year as a member of the stakeholders committee that helped create the new pier standards. (For details, go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/orf/water/fhp/waterway/piers.shtml>)



Whether or not these standards will be passed as proposed, here are the facts. Conservative estimates are that 94% of all pier owners will not be affected in any way. Only about 3% of existing piers which are larger in size than the rules allow and have been around for over two years will need a general permit. This is a **one time** permit that will assure pier owners that they will not be subject to future review or modification. The last 3%, or those who have extremely large piers, would need individual permits.

In my opinion, there may not be any individual permits needed for existing piers on Lake Ripley. Regardless, the Lake Ripley Management District will work with every pier owner on Lake Ripley to explain the rules and help with whatever paperwork might be necessary. So why the misleading ads? It's a matter of finances; some realtors don't want any restrictions on lake property, regardless of the negative effects on the lakes of Wisconsin. It comes down to money. The truth is: what is good for our lakes is good for property values, and good for all the people who use our lakes.

John Molinaro

Chair, Lake Ripley Management District

Survey Results

Thank you for participating in our latest opinion survey. We received a 23% return, which is an outstanding response rate. Your input helps us assess public opinions about a variety of lake-related topics, primarily for the purpose of developing future program initiatives. As you might imagine, the responses were as diverse as the property owners and recreational activities that the lake supports. Despite these varied comments, some common themes and perspectives were evident. Here is what you had to say:

Demographics

Lake Ripley's natural scenic beauty was its most appealing feature that contributed to your decision to buy property in the area. Water-sport opportunities, quiet recreation, and water clarity also received high rankings. You typically own single-family residences either on the water (40%) or within one-quarter mile of the lake (47%). Ownership timeframes were highly variable, with the greatest proportion of you (34%) owning property near the lake for over 20 years. You were fairly evenly split between permanent and seasonal homeowners (50% and 45%, respectively). Of our seasonal residents, 74% of you average at least seven days per month at your second homes, and 38% have plans to convert these homes into permanent residences.

(Continued on next page)

Survey (cont.)

Boating

The most popular watercraft used on Lake Ripley were pontoon boats, paddle craft and speed boats.

Those of you who are boaters accessed the lake through private lake frontage (52%), followed by the Town boat landing (32%), and marina (16%). Most of you (67%) described the current availability of public access as sufficient, while 23% felt there was too much. The vast majority of you (78%) do not use your boats on other waterways. For those who do, 93% claimed to be aware of how to inspect, identify and clean your boating equipment of invasive plants and animals.

Thoroughly inspecting and cleaning your boating and fishing equipment of invasive species is extremely important. Transient boaters are the primary vectors in spreading the zebra mussel and other harmful plant and animal species from infested to non-infested waterways. Information on the simple steps you should take to prevent the spread of invasive species is posted at the public boat landing and marina. We are also looking for more volunteers to join a watercraft inspection program that we plan to pilot this summer.

Fishing

In order of importance, the fish you preferred to try to catch on Lake Ripley were largemouth bass, bluegill/sunfish, walleye, northern pike and perch. Most of you (82%) felt the fishing was fair to good in terms of fish sizes and numbers compared to other lakes. A slight majority of you (56%) always practice catch-and-release, while 39% did so on a less consistent basis.

Lake Ripley supports natural reproduction of the above fish species, with the possible exception of walleyes which are stocked every couple years. Fishery health is monitored through DNR fish-shocking and fyke-netting surveys. Long-term-trends data show what the lake continues to support fish numbers and sizes consistent with other southern WI lakes of similar characteristics. However, the loss of native aquatic and shoreline plant habitat, polluted runoff, and the over-harvesting of large game fish are ongoing concerns.

Fisheries biologists point to habitat loss as the biggest threat to a healthy, diverse and sustainable fishery. The removal or destruction of native aquatic plant beds, shoreline plant cover,



overhanging and downed trees (coarse woody structure), and emergent marshland vegetation have both a cumulative and lasting impact on fish and aquatic life. Polluted runoff that degrades water quality and leads to sedimentation of spawning beds is another contributor to habitat loss.

Water Clarity and Plant Growth

You identified clear water as the lake quality of greatest importance. Overall, you described Lake Ripley's water clarity as being clear to cloudy (93%). Aquatic plant growth was mostly described as being acceptable (68%), followed by overly abundant (25%). Those who felt current plant growth was acceptable often noted that a certain amount was needed for habitat and to maintain lake health. Conversely, those who perceived an over-abundance generally cited excessive growth in shallow-water areas around piers and close to shore.

Volunteer monitoring has been used to assess and track water quality conditions over at least the last 15 years. Looking at sediment-core evidence taken from the lake bottom, we know that water quality has stabilized in recent years after a long, slow decline beginning in the late 1800s. These long-term trends can be easily masked by annual and seasonal variability. Year-to-year water clarity changes may be attributed to many possible factors. These can include: 1) droughts and flood events that affect runoff volumes, 2) alterations in boating behaviors that can influence the re-suspension of bottom sediment, 3) changes in aquatic-plant biomass that affects phosphorus absorption and the settling of particulates, and 4) the prevalence of soil erosion and polluted runoff in any given year. Conditions will vary depending on the interplay of these different variables.



Limnologists (lake scientists) recognize the importance of aquatic vegetation in maintaining lake quality. A diverse native plant community provides the foundation of a healthy ecosystem in terms of fish and wildlife habitat, nutrient control, water quality protection, and the stabilization of loose bottom sediment. The indiscriminate and large-scale removal of aquatic vegetation can lead to increased algae blooms, a shift to a less desirable fishery, and the deterioration of water clarity. Aquatic plant growth on Lake Ripley is primarily managed through our mechanical weed-harvesting program. Extensive aquatic plant inventories, a DNR permit, and a locally- and state-approved management plan are used to guide harvesting efforts. These efforts target the invasive Eurasian watermilfoil weed when it becomes an unreasonable impairment to navigation, or when it threatens to choke out more valuable, native plant habitat. Harvesting is not performed in physically confining areas close to shore or in less than three-foot water depths.

Survey (cont.)

Lake Use

The most popular recreational activity was swimming, followed by slow motorboat cruising and fishing. Water skiing, enjoying natural scenery, and enjoying quiet solitude also received high marks. For those who felt your ability to enjoy Lake Ripley was routinely impaired, overcrowding was the biggest concern (40%). This was followed by aquatic "weed" growth (31%), Canada geese (24%), algae (22%), noise (22%), lake levels (19%), and boating conflicts (18%). Most of you (77%) generally felt moderately to extremely crowded while using the lake on weekends, but not crowded on weekdays (72%). As for rule enforcement, 65% of you felt there was an adequate law-enforcement presence on the lake. Those who differed from this assessment were split on whether it was insufficient or overly aggressive.

Balancing the competing demands and expectations of different recreational groups while striving for safe, fair and sustainable lake use remains one of our biggest challenges. The ideal conditions sought by a swimmer are different than those of an angler, which are different than those sought by a water skier. As residents and users of a public water body, some degree of personal sacrifice must be accepted if we are to equitably share this small lake without destroying the very qualities that first drew us here. Lake Ripley is not strictly a water skiing lake, or a fishing lake, or even a swimming lake. Nor is it the private domain of lake-front or even local property owners. Rather, state law holds that the lake belong to all of us, so we all share a stewardship responsibility as its long-term caretakers.

Threats

You blamed development pressures, invasive species, and the misuse of lawn and farm chemicals as the biggest threats to Lake Ripley's future. These threats were closely followed by concerns with boating pressure, and issues related to soil erosion and polluted runoff.

Communication

The vast majority of you (89%) felt you were kept reasonably informed of important matters regarding Lake Ripley. Most of you (90%) currently receive or prefer to receive your news and information from the



Ripples newsletter. This was followed by reading local news articles (42%), talking to friends and neighbors (29%), attending or watching televised meetings (20%), and logging onto the LMRD website (18%). Lake topics you said you wanted to learn more about included lake rules, general lake ecology, invasive species, Lake Ripley trivia, shoreline erosion control, shoreline zoning rules, and lake-friendly lawn care.

Stay tuned for future articles on these topics! Also, please note that we currently have the staff and budget to distribute Ripples 3-4 times per year. Given newsletter timing and space constraints, it is not feasible for us to share all the Lake Ripley news and information that might be of interest. Aside from reading Ripples, one of the best ways to keep track of what's going on is to attend our monthly public meetings. These meetings are televised on Cambridge Cable TV 12, and the minutes are posted on our website (www.lakeripley.org). Our website also contains future meeting announcements, general lake information, and a number of downloadable lake studies, plans and reports.

The Best and Worst

When asked about Lake Ripley's single greatest attribute, you typically mentioned its water quality, natural beauty, tranquility, and ongoing management and stewardship programs. Conversely, you most often pointed to boat traffic, jet skis, overcrowding and overdevelopment when asked about the lake's most negative aspect.

Desired Actions

When asked what actions you wanted to see taken on behalf of the lake, your most common responses involved restricting either the number, size, horsepower, hours and/or speed of motorboats and jet skis. Other actions you commonly felt were warranted included tighter lake-access and development controls, and the continuation of existing management and protection efforts.

We appreciate your feedback, and promise to continue working on your behalf toward a cleaner, safer and healthier Lake Ripley. To learn more about the lake and its management, or how to volunteer or serve as a Board member, please do not hesitate to contact us.

