

Ripples

LAKE RIPLEY
PRIORITY LAKE PROJECT

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FROM THE HELM

On Sunday, November 5th, David Brower, arguably the nation's greatest environmentalist, died in California. We in the State of Wisconsin can be equally proud of our native son and environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, and his inspirational writings in his famous *Sand County Almanac*. In a very small way, the Lake Ripley Management District is trying to follow the example of these great men. I am very proud of the elected and appointed members of our Board and their honest and straightforward efforts to preserve and protect Lake Ripley.

Over the last ten years, we have worked very hard to reclaim the wetlands that filter the waters entering the lake. We have worked within our non-point source pollution grant to restore the deteriorating shoreline and ditches that contribute to the pollution entering Lake Ripley. Led by a series of exceptional lake managers, we have gotten the lake weed crisis under control, and monitored water quality and our fishery.

Now, we are close to completing a Comprehensive Lake Management Plan. The heart of the plan is the questionnaires you filled out close to a year ago. Added to the numerous studies done by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources since Lake Ripley was designated a "Priority Lake Project," we have a large data base from which to formulate the management plan. We hope to have a draft of the plan ready within the next two months. But, we should keep in mind that all plans are to some extent works in progress. Although today the best management practice may be plan A, a new technology next year may drastically change the way we approach that problem.

We firmly believe that Lake Ripley is better off today than it was ten years ago before the formation of the Lake District. We also believe that the lake will continue to improve with the completion and implementation of the Comprehensive Lake Management Plan. Therefore, I encourage you to read and respond to the plan when it is completed. As always, I believe that "bad things happen when good people do nothing."

I hope the holiday season has and will continue to bring you and your family peace.

John Molinaro

Chair, Lake Ripley Management District

Managing Lake Ripley's Aquatic Plants

Managing the aquatic plant life in Lake Ripley is one of the many important and challenging functions of the Lake Ripley Management District. Our primary goal is to protect valuable native plant communities while controlling the growth of nuisance non-native plant species like Eurasian water milfoil. The reason is because a diversity of native aquatic plants provides the foundation for a healthy and well-balanced aquatic ecosystem. Plants provide essential food and habitat for fish and other wildlife. They also protect water quality by producing dissolved oxygen, stabilizing bottom sediment, filtering pollutants, and removing the nutrients (e.g. phosphorus & nitrogen) that may otherwise cause algae blooms and poor water clarity.

Because Lake Ripley has intense lake-use and development pressure, it becomes increasingly necessary for us to take an active role in protecting and managing the lake's aquatic vegetation. Our actions on the lake and within the surrounding watershed can dramatically influence the health and quality of the Lake Ripley plant community – which in turn affects water quality. The following are just some of the factors that impact our aquatic plant community and water quality:

- Stormwater runoff pollution
- Sedimentation
- Power boating and jet skiing in shallow waters
- Irresponsible shoreline development
- Invasion and spread of non-native “weeds”

An aggressive, foreign invader called Eurasian water milfoil (commonly called milfoil) currently threatens the biological diversity and recreational use of Lake Ripley. This non-native species is a nuisance “weed” that is spreading quickly throughout Wisconsin's inland lakes. Due to an absence of natural predators and control mechanisms, milfoil is able to rapidly dominate and displace more beneficial, native plant species. If left unchecked, milfoil will grow into dense monotypic (single specie) stands of vegetation capable of reaching the water's surface and taking over the entire lake. Consequently, the habitat value and ecological stability of the entire plant community is severely diminished, while open water recreation becomes unreasonably restricted.

To control this problem, the Lake Ripley Management District attempts to implement cost-effective programs that protect native plant species while controlling non-native species. Establishing slow-no-wake zones, controlling sources of pollution, and protecting near-shore



Shown here is Lake Ripley Management District member Tim Lorden operating the weed harvester last August.

wetlands are examples of such programs. The Lake District also uses mechanical weed-harvesting equipment, which allows us to better manage the plant community by targeting specific plant types. The weed-harvesting program has been in effect on Lake Ripley for over 10 years, and was initiated in response to a milfoil-growth crisis that occurred immediately prior to the formation of the Lake District in 1990. A state grant was used to help purchase the equipment.

Since that time, nuisance weed growth has fortunately been brought under control. However, many misperceptions associated with mechanical harvesting still persist. These include:

- (1) nature can take care of itself;
- (2) harvesting removes all the plant life and fish habitat;
- (3) harvesting does not occur when and where it is most appropriate;
- (4) harvesting produces most of the floating weed fragments; and
- (5) harvesting is not a cost-effective control strategy.

All of these statements are incorrect. Here's why: The weed harvester is only capable of cutting weeds that grow within five feet of the water's surface or in a minimum of three-foot water depths. To prevent disturbing the lake bottom or damaging the machinery, mechanical harvesting is not performed in very shallow areas near the shore, especially in confined areas around piers and swimming rafts. The harvester also avoids cutting near areas that support desirable plant communities. Operators are trained to follow an approved Aquatic Plant Management Plan that was prepared several years ago with assistance from

the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The Plan directs operators to strictly target nuisance stands of milfoil at certain times and within specified locations. By removing the surface canopy of milfoil, harvesting can be used to benefit the underlying native plants by allowing more sunlight penetration.

Mechanical harvesting does not completely remove plants, but rather cuts them where they grow near the water's surface. Special care is taken to avoid operating during the critical fish-spawning season, or in situations where non-targeted aquatic life may be inadvertently harmed or disturbed. To avoid damaging beneficial plant communities, the harvester only operates in areas that are almost completely dominated by non-native species. Efforts are generally focused in weed-choked locations that represent heavily used navigational routes. Once the tops of the weeds are cut, the plant fragments are collected on a storage platform and later off-loaded onto a shore conveyor located near the lake's public landing. The shore conveyor then loads the harvested plant material into a waiting dump truck, which takes it to local farm fields for composting. During each cutting cycle, every effort is

made to remove any floating plant debris from the harvest area to prevent weed fragments from re-colonizing other areas of the lake bottom. Although it may not be possible to retrieve every last plant fragment, it is important to recognize that plant fragmentation is more often caused by motor boat activity, wind/wave action, and through natural plant growth processes than by mechanical harvesting.

Mechanical harvesting of aquatic plants is used strictly on an as-needed basis, which can vary considerably from year to year. Operations begin well after the spring fish-spawning season, and end in the fall following the peak boating period. The harvesting equipment is then taken off the lake and transported to a winter storage facility where it undergoes seasonal maintenance and repairs. Thanks to a handful of very dedicated volunteers, the Lake Ripley Management District is able to run its own harvesting program for a fraction of the costs generally incurred on other similar lakes. Without the help of these volunteers and the support of the local community, our aquatic plant management efforts would not be possible.

Lake Ripley Management Plan

The Lake Ripley Management Plan is nearly complete! We would like to thank all of the Lake District residents who took the time to fill out surveys and participate at public meetings/hearings for your input throughout this process.

Your feedback was used in conjunction with a wealth of existing scientific information pertaining to the lake and its watershed to develop the multi-year action plan. With any luck, actual implementation of the Plan could begin as early as late spring, 2001. Each of you will receive a summary of the key findings and final recommendations within the next few months. Copies of the Lake Ripley Management Plan will also be available for review at the Cambridge Community Library and Lake Ripley Management District Office. The following is a partial list of some of the

major issue areas covered in the Plan:

- Long-term goals and objectives
- Existing condition of the resource
- Historical overview and current status of management programs
- Assessment of public needs and priorities
- Evaluation and cost-benefit analyses of available management strategies
- Management recommendations
- Implementation guidance



Lake Ripley has sensitive shoreline that needs special handling in order to preserve habitats and water quality.

Lake Ripley Management District Meeting Schedule

As always, we strongly encourage lake residents and users to take an active role in helping us manage and protect Lake Ripley. It's up to each of us to work together and do our part in preserving the quality of life that first attracted us to the Lake Ripley area. To learn more about the lake and what you can do to help, call or stop by the Lake District office.

Regular attendance and participation at our monthly meetings is also a great way to learn more about our ongoing management efforts, and to express your opinions and concerns regarding the effectiveness of these programs. Meetings are held on Saturday mornings starting at 9:00 a.m. at the Oakland Town Hall. The upcoming meeting schedule is as follows:

December 9, 2000

February 17, 2001

March 17, 2001

April 28, 2001

Meeting agendas are posted prior to each meeting in the Cambridge News, and in the notice boxes at the Oakland Town Hall, Sami's Lake Ripley Inn, and Lake Ripley Family Restaurant. If you cannot make a meeting but wish to submit a question or comment, call us at the Town Hall (920/563-9198) between 9:00 and 9:20 a.m. during each meeting's public comment period.



Get a good overview of actions being taken to protect and restore Lake Ripley by attending the Lake Ripley Management District meetings.

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