

Ripples

LAKE RIPLEY
PRIORITY LAKE PROJECT

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Winter 2003

Lake Ripley Management District Board of Directors

John Molinaro
Chair
(608) 423-4743

Mike Sabella
Treasurer
(608) 423-4603

Derek Hoffman
Secretary
(608) 423-1414

Joanne Knilans
Commissioner
(608) 423-3067

Dennis McCarthy
Commissioner
(608) 655-3455

Paul Jorstad
Town of Oakland
(608) 423-4949

Pam Rogers
Jefferson County
(920) 648-6428

Paul Dearlove
Project Manager
101 E. Main St.,
Suite 2
P.O. Box 22
Cambridge, WI 53523
(608) 423-4537
E-mail: ripples@bminet.com

Web site:
www.lakeripley.org

FROM THE HELM

Preserve and protect Lake Ripley." On its face, that wouldn't seem to be a complicated goal for the Lake Ripley Management District, but it never ceases to amaze me how challenging it is to accomplish. Just when it seems we have made some significant gains, new problems can surface that delay our progress.

Last year, after a very difficult and heated debate, the Lake District submitted an ordinance revision to the Town of Oakland to change the placement of no-wake buoys on the lake. While there have been no ordinance changes yet, the Lake District will continue to work with the Town Board to find common ground. One thing I'm sure we can all agree on is that lake-use problems don't come with easy solutions.

The proposed buoy changes were an out flow of the 2001 Lake Ripley Management Plan. We have since added an updated Aquatic Plant Management Plan, and this year we intend to complete a Lake-Use Carrying Capacity analysis. Hopefully, the Carry Capacity report will give us information on how many watercraft can be supported by the lake, and make some recommendations on how to keep the lake safe for everyone to enjoy.

Also this year, we will continue to cost share shoreline restorations, with six new projects already approved. We have plans for improvements to the Lake District Preserve and have requested grant money to help make the preserve more user-friendly. We will continue to harvest "bad" lake weeds with the help of our new Aquatic Plant Management Plan. Furthermore, we plan to continue working closely with the Town of Oakland and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to insure the best use of the property being developed at the Majestic Pines Subdivision east of the marina.

In the most recent turn of events, the Town Board conditionally approved the Majestic Pines preliminary plat, allowing the development of 21 lots while designating "Vasby's Island" and adjoining wetlands as "unbuildable outlots". The Lake District will continue to meet with all parties to discuss the future of these unbuildable lands, which were previously identified as ecologically significant "sensitive" areas that warranted special protection.

I assure you the Board will continue to monitor activities on and around the lake. We encourage you to make your feelings known, attend Board meetings, and call or visit the office with questions. The entire Board appreciates your support, because, as you know, "bad things happen when good people do nothing."

John Molinaro

Chair, Lake Ripley Management District

Thank You Local Conservationists!

We sincerely thank all the individuals who volunteered or in some way supported our efforts over the past year. We especially appreciate your lake- and land-use choices that may have indirectly benefited our environment and our community. To quote Wisconsin's renowned conservationist, Aldo Leopold: "We abuse the land [and water] because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land [and water] as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

'Singing Fat Lady' Still Silent on Buoy Debate

The Lake District and Oakland Town Boards held a joint meeting on December 21, 2002, to discuss a proposed amendment to Town Ordinance #2, calling for an expansion of slow-no-wake zones on Lake Ripley. This amendment outlined a revised buoy system purported to better protect the lake bottom and shallow aquatic habitats from excessive motor boat damage, while more equitably and safely accommodating competing lake uses and watercraft. The Legislature has delegated authority to local communities to enact these types of boating ordinances where conditions on a particular lake necessitate such local regulations. The goal of local boating regulation is to ensure that all users have a fair opportunity to enjoy the kind of recreation they prefer, without unreasonably disturbing other people or the aquatic environment.

To provide some background, revamped buoy guidelines were first set forth in the 2001 Lake Ripley Management Plan in an effort to bridge diverse recreational demands with lake-protection needs. These guidelines were further refined with the help of a Lake District Board-appointed public steering committee. A variety of opposing viewpoints and recreational interests were represented on

the committee, which ended up meeting and deliberating for several months in an attempt to reach consensus on the issue. Considerations included existing surface zoning, current lake-use patterns, and a scientifically based "performance depth" at which wake-producing watercraft can churn up and scour the lake bottom.

The Lake District Board eventually approved the committee's recommendations and conceptual buoy lines, but precise buoy placement was ultimately left to the Board's discretion, especially along the western side of the lake where committee consensus could not be reached. A final no-wake buoy strategy was then taken to public hearing and eventually submitted for the Town Board's consideration.

Town officials raised several concerns about the proposal during the joint meeting, which representatives from the Lake District Board and public advisory committee attempted to address. These concerns were generally related to perceived safety, liability and enforcement challenges. As this article goes to publication, a final decision by the Town Board on whether or not to adopt the ordinance amendment is still pending.

Fish Survey Shows Lake Ripley in Good Shape

Late one evening in October, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources worked with the Lake District to conduct an annual electrofishing survey of Lake Ripley. The survey involves safely and temporarily stunning fish using a specially equipped boat with an electric boom shocker. The fish are then easily netted for identification and measuring before being returned unharmed back to the water. Sampling is focused within shallow water depths along the entire perimeter of the lake. A very small but representative cross-section of the fishery is typically surveyed, and the findings are used to assess the health of different fish populations.

Results showed the numbers of walleye and largemouth bass sampled to be among the highest of any fall survey in the last 10 years. Average lengths of 13.8 and 10.6 inches, respectively, were within acceptable ranges for southern Wisconsin lakes. Nice sized bluegills (5.9-inch average length) were also reported, but yellow perch appear to remain stunted. One theory is that perch are the favored forage of larger gamefish and have a harder time surviving to a larger size. It is also possible that perch in Lake Ripley are being out-competed for limited habitat space and food resources. Fourteen other fish species were sampled during

the survey, including smallmouth bass that were not documented during prior surveys. It is unknown how and when smallmouth bass were first introduced, but future surveys should reveal whether their population is self-sustaining, and what impacts this recent introduction might have on the overall fishery.



'Gardening' for Lake Health

Our weed-harvesting crew was busy all summer cutting a bumper crop of Eurasian water milfoil. This non-native aquatic plant species has explosive growth characteristics that make it extremely difficult to manage once it infests a water body. Milfoil is to blame for most of Lake Ripley's "weed" problems. It stymies the growth of more beneficial plant species, offers limited value as fish habitat, and causes a number of recreational impairments when the plants canopy at the surface.

Our operators are trained to correctly identify and control milfoil within certain target areas, while avoiding native plant beds that offer important habitat and water quality benefits. They also follow guidelines set forth in an approved aquatic plant management plan for Lake Ripley. A plan was first developed more than 10 years ago, and was just recently updated to reflect the latest science and aquatic plant inventory findings. (We hope to soon have a link to this document on our web site as we had previously done for our lake management plan. Until that time, you can borrow a copy for review at the Cambridge Community Library.)

Inventory findings since 1976 indicate that the aquatic plant community in Lake Ripley has become somewhat more diverse, balanced and uniformly distributed, suggesting a shift toward a healthier lake ecosystem. However, the plant community is still largely dominated by the invasive milfoil, and remains threatened by such factors as polluted runoff, excessive shoreline development and clear-cutting, misguided plant control schemes, and



bottom scouring caused by motorized watercraft.

The Lake District requests your help and cooperation as it continues to work toward solutions to these problems. Simple yet effective actions include: 1) slow down and avoid full-throttle starts in shallow water less than several feet deep; 2) recognize that there are both good and bad lake plants; 3) rethink the use of herbicides and phosphorus-based fertilizers; 4) replace lawns and sand beaches with native trees, shrubs and perennials; 5) use erosion-control measures to help keep soil and debris from washing into the lake; and 6) encourage your friends and neighbors to do the same. In the timeless words of Mahatma Gandhi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

Discover How to Benefit From Conservation Easements

Do you own wetlands or natural areas? Would you like to protect these lands so they can never get developed or destroyed?

Call us to learn more about our tax-friendly conservation easements. An easement can allow you to retain ownership and traditional use of your land while protecting it from unwanted development. All legal, surveying and appraisal costs are covered by the Lake District, but funding and eligibility is limited so call today!



The Solution to Pollution in Lake Ripley

Significant progress was made in controlling non-point source pollution in 2002. Our biggest achievement was the plugging and re-routing of one of the watershed's most extensive agricultural drainage ditches through a partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The ditch extends more than 7,500 feet in length, comprises about 21% of the watershed's erosion-prone ditch network, and drains an estimated 142 acres of farmland north of the Lake District Preserve.

As a result of this action, about 14 acres of wetlands were restored at the preserve. These wetlands now serve to absorb floodwaters, as well as to filter and purify polluted runoff as it makes its way through this ditch system toward Lake Ripley. Soil loss and delivery models estimate that the project will prevent upwards of 557 tons of eroded soil from reaching the lake each year.

As a side bar, we are pleased to announce that the recent wetland and upland prairie restorations are already beginning to attract a diversity and abundance of wildlife not seen in years. Visitors to the preserve are delighted to report ever increasing sightings of great blue herons, sandhill

sandhill
cranes



cranes, wood ducks, and a variety of other prairie- and wetland-dependent creatures. The Lake District Board is currently working to develop an enhanced system of

nature trails, boardwalks and interpretive signs for the property, and is looking for local donors to assist with this effort. It hopes to have the first phase of the multi-year project completed sometime this year.

2002 also saw the completion of a number of shoreline stabilization and restoration projects.

The most exciting transformations involved the use of a relatively inexpensive technique called bioengineering. This technique uses native trees, shrubs and perennials

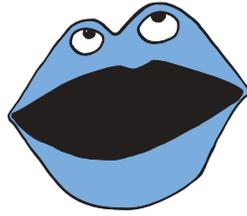
to naturally reinforce and beautify eroding, plant-barren shorelines.

As a result, high maintenance lawns of little habitat value are converted into colorfully landscaped waterfront gardens (or buffer strips) that still preserve beautiful lake views. When designed properly, bioengineered buffer strips can stop shoreline erosion, filter polluted runoff,

discourage nuisance geese, and act as magnets for more desirable wildlife. Using rock riprap to control erosion is also popular, but it has a higher price tag and offers much fewer wildlife habitat benefits. Riprap is very effective at controlling erosion and is often the only option available for highly erosive, wave-swept shorelines.

According to figures from Lake Ripley's 1995 Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Plan, eroding shorelines and ditches together were believed to account for 82% of the total sediment loading to the lake. Nearly 50% of Lake Ripley's eroding shoreline has since been repaired or is now being addressed through our state-funded Priority Lake Project. In addition, about 90% of the watershed's eroding drainage ditches are being addressed through a combination of ditch plugs and bank stabilization efforts. Thank you to all our cost-share participants for making these successes a reality!

Fact or ? Fiction?



One pound of phosphorus (a common ingredient in lawn fertilizer) can generate 500 pounds of algae.

Fact. Phosphorus is a critical nutrient needed for algae growth, but is generally less available relative to other key nutrients such as nitrogen.

The amount of phosphorus that enters a water body largely determines the abundance of algae growth. This nutrient is commonly found in fertilizers, manure, septic effluent, eroded soil, and organic debris that can wash into lakes and streams.

A well-maintained lawn is ideal for filtering and infiltrating storm runoff before it reaches the lake.

Fiction. Lawns consist mainly of Kentucky bluegrass, which is a non-native plant species with a very shallow root zone.

Soils are typically hard and compacted under this shallow root zone, preventing water from adequately soaking into the soil. The short, flexible grass blades also do little to slow the velocity of storm runoff as it races toward the lake. Furthermore, lawns frequently need extra fertilizer/herbicide applications and regular watering to flourish, contributing toward more polluted runoff.

NEWS BULLETIN • • • NEWS BULLETIN • • • NEWS BULLETIN



Lake Ripley & Cam-Rock Park Community Litter Sweep

Saturday, April 26, 2003 Time: TBD

Call (608) 423-4537 if you would like to volunteer or obtain more information

Dennis McCarthy was recently appointed as the newest member of the Lake District Board. Dennis owns a residence on Ripley Road, and manages a company called Best Built Garage Builders, Inc. "I am interested in becoming involved with the Board for I believe that we must maintain and preserve our natural resources not only for the present generation but for generations to come. I also feel strongly that this would be an excellent way to get involved in the community and feel that this would create a great opportunity to give back to the community I now call home." Welcome aboard, Dennis!

Ed Grunden, Cambridge High School aquatic biology instructor and student environmental club advisor, was honored by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources with a "Wisconsin Clean Water Achievement Award." The award was presented at a December 16th banquet celebrating the Federal Clean Water Act 30th anniversary. The event was hosted to honor select individuals who have made a positive impact on the waters of Wisconsin. Congratulations, Ed!

Students from Cambridge High School's Aquatic Environmental Club applied for and received a \$1,500 grant to help raise public awareness, conduct research, and bring together environmental groups in the community. They also obtained funding to conduct a State and National Park tour this summer promoting community involvement in protecting our nation's lakes and streams. Congratulations to tomorrow's lake stewards who are making an impact today!

MEETING SCHEDULE

- Saturday, February 15, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)
- Saturday, March 22, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)
- Saturday, April 26, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)
- Saturday, May 17, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)
- Saturday, June 21, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)
- Saturday, July 19, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)

BUDGET HEARING:

- Saturday, August 9, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)

ANNUAL MEETING:

- Saturday, August 16, 2003 (9:00 A.M. @ Oakland Town Hall)

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Lake Ripley Management District
P.O. Box 22
Cambridge, WI 53523

