



The Winnebago Lakes Council promotes the long-term sustainability of lakes Winnebago, Butte des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan and their connecting rivers.

The Council's mission is to protect and improve the ecological health and scenic beauty of the Winnebago lakes through citizen involvement in research, education, communication and cooperation.

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Winnebago Lakes Council

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Grant awarded for lake photography

The Winnebago Lakes Council was recently awarded a \$3000 small scale lake education grant from WDNR to develop educational products centered around photographs of shallow lake and wetland habitat. The project is intended to demonstrate how visual presentation of natural scenic beauty, accompanied by related educational efforts, can increase interest in long-term protection of our lakes.

Despite the high recreational and municipal use of the waters of the Winnebago Pool, most people visit only the deeper open water areas of the lake and a few heavily-managed urban parks. The shallow open water plant communities and adjacent wetlands and tributaries are relatively unknown. These are habitats critically important to maintaining water quality and vitally important to early life stages of most resident fish, wildlife, migratory birds and insects. Lack of personal experience with these critical habitats is exacerbated by lack of public knowledge of the existence, importance and natural beauty of these communities.

Wetland and aquatic plant communities on the Upper Pool lakes continue to lose ground to open water. From 1979 through 2009 the Upper Pool lakes have lost 696 acres of submergent vegetation just within eight study areas. Today only 6.3% of the surface area of these shallow lakes has any vegetation.

Scientific surveys and aerial photos document the acreage, but few photographs personalize the remaining habitat, or what once was. Without an emotional connection to the diversity of habitats needing protection or restoration, it is difficult to inspire and justify the necessary conservation efforts that require public support.

Andrew Sabai, an aquatic biologist who has a background in photography and worked as a limited term employee for the DNR on the Upper Lakes, has volunteered his time for this project. He intends to photograph the wide diversity of wetland habitats on the lakes, and work with the Lakes Council to incorporate related educational material into a number of products, including a blog, web page, newsletter articles, photo database and community talks.



Photo by Andrew Sabai

Healthy aquatic vegetation in Sunset Bay

Winnebago Lakes Council Annual Meeting

Tuesday, November 9, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Fin 'n' Feather, Winneconne .

Program: Aquatic Vegetation: What Was and Is - Andrew Sabai

Enjoy appetizers provided by the Lakes Council and stay for dinner on your own. Hear about our activities, elect new board members and talk about lake issues that concern you. At our 2009 Annual Meeting a top issue of concern was lake vegetation. This year our speaker will be Andrew Sabai, an aquatic biologist who has worked with various groups surveying vegetation on the Upper Lakes. He will give a short presentation on aquatic plants, followed by a question and answer period.

Reservations are not required, but a call or email would help us plan.
Please contact Dick Schallert at 582-4609 or rest@charter.net

Around the Lakes

Water level strategy meeting

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Wednesday, October 20, 2 p.m.

Radisson Paper Valley Hotel

333 W. College Avenue, Appleton

The public is invited to an interagency coordination meeting regulating outflows from Lake Winnebago and the Lower Fox River. The intent of the meeting is to allow information exchange between the Army Corps and other groups expressing interest in water resource management of the Winnebago Basin.

Open water duck hunting meeting

Lakes Butte des Morts and Poygan

Friday, October 22, 7 p.m.

Fin "n" Feather, Winneconne

WDNR will give a 20 minute PowerPoint presentation on current regulations followed by a question and answer period. The public is invited.

AIS found in Lakeside Park

Diane Schauer, Calumet County AIS Coordinator, reports two new invasive species were found this summer in Lakeside Park in Fond du Lac. Water lettuce was discovered and the WDNR removed as much as possible, although remnants remain. Chinese Mystery Snails were also discovered in a channel in September. Look for these snails in the slow water channels. More information and photos of the snails can be found on the WDNR website. If you think you have these large snails in your waterway, email Diane at schauer.diane@co.calumet.wi.us

Funding secured for 2011 AIS interns

Thanks to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, funding for 15 AIS watercraft inspectors is assured for the Winnebago system next summer. These inspectors will be coordinated out of UW Oshkosh under the supervision of Shannon Davis-Faust. The interns will cover a broader area than in past years, with additional landings along both the Fox and Wolf rivers. The Green Lake area was also allocated 12 watercraft inspectors. Our region will be well covered with youths educating boaters and anglers about invasive species laws.

Help develop a lake trivia game

John Haack, St. Croix Basin Educator, and Bret Shaw, UW Extension Environmental Communication Specialist, are developing a "Lake Trivia" game to inform players about the importance of natural shorelines and other interesting facts about Wisconsin's lakes. You are invited to submit questions in any of four categories and be entered in a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate from UWEX Lakes bookstore. For more information, please go to <http://tiny.cc/LakesTrivia> or contact John Haack at john.haack@ces.uwex.edu or 715.635.7406. Deadline to submit questions is November 1.

Purple martins populate Lake Winnebago

The purple martin is a declining Neotropical migrant bird species nesting throughout Wisconsin. On July 13 Noel and Seth Cutright, Carl Schwartz and boat captain Tom Schaefer surveyed purple martin nesting structures for almost 12 hours from the water along the entire Lake Winnebago shoreline. They found 228 poles at 131 locations. Of these, 67 were active and 64 inactive. Among their most interesting findings were a few active colonies on public property: Fond du Lac's Columbia Park located west of the Village of Pipe, High Cliff State Park, the Stockbridge Harbor and Oshkosh water treatment plant. At the treatment plant the Oshkosh Bird Club has worked to establish and increase a martin colony. Three pairs nested there in 1990. More nesting sites have been added, and according to the surveyors, about 45-50 are now in use.



Noel Cutright says it's important to increase the size of colonies by adding more martin houses at existing sites. He also suggested adding housing on other public property: Roosevelt Park and Lakeside Park in Fond du Lac. City and county staff take note. *Read the full survey results in the winter issue of The Passenger Pigeon arriving mid-November. The surveyors are well-known birders.*

New book identifies lake plants

Paul Skawinski's new book *Aquatic Plants of Wisconsin* is a comprehensive, photographic field guide for users of Wisconsin lakes and streams. With 280 color photographs, it covers 120 species of submerged aquatic plants, including rare species. Paul spent two years photographing, researching, writing and designing the book. To order send a check for \$30.00 + \$4.00 S&H to Paul Skawinski, PO Box 1021, Stevens Point, WI 54481 or order from UW-Extension. To read its first review from Dr. Emmet Judziewicz, Curator of the UW-Stevens Point Herbarium, please go to <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/>



Sheepshead Tournament. Kids show off fishing gear provided by the East Shore Sauger Chapter of Walleyes for Tomorrow and Quinney Fishing Club at the club's 3rd annual Sheepshead Fishing Tournament on Lake Winnebago. By weigh in time 53 boats had hauled in 2,744 pounds of sheepshead, all to be delivered to a nearby mink farm.

Thanks to Diane Schauer, Calumet County Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, for this article, the AIS articles, and purple martin photos.

Winnebago Lakes Council 2010 Annual Report

The Winnebago Lakes Council, like other non-profits, has felt the impact of difficult economic times. Nevertheless, while membership numbers have declined, participation in our programs continues to increase. This year we successfully held our first annual conference, and plans are underway for a second conference in spring 2011. With assistance from UW Extension we conducted an internal planning process and have set goals for the future. Our board remains strong. As the Winnebago Lakes Council begins its sixth year, the issues confronting our lakes continue to be challenging.

Community Education

Speakers Series. "Mysteries of the Great Lakes," a film probing critical lake issues and featuring Winnebago lake sturgeon and local biologist Ron Bruch, was shown five times in various venues around the lake as part of the speaker series, and an additional eight times by individual board members. We reached more than 500 people.

Tours and workshops. Two programs were aimed to help residents develop shoreland buffers: a workshop with Melissa Netzer on enhancing shorelines within the new NR115 rules, and a tour of three sites on Lakes Winneconne in cooperation with Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department, Fox Valley area Chapter -Wild Ones and the Winnebago League of Women Voters.

2010 Winnebago Lakes Conference. The first annual lakes conference on March 13 attracted more than 70 residents and resulted in more than 100 recommendations for improvements to our lakes. Theme for the conference was celebrating the accomplishments of the 1989 Winnebago Comprehensive Management Plan, and planning for the system's next 20 years. Eight speakers shared information.

Community Talks. Talks of various lengths about the Winnebago Pool lakes were given to eight community groups. These presentations were tailored to address interests of the groups.

Web site and Newsletter. The Lakes Council and quarterly newsletter *WaterWays* continued to keep residents informed of lake projects and activities. In 2010 we contracted for a redesign of our Web site and expect it to be on line by the end of the year.

Programs and Projects

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Regional Plan.

Work continued on Phase 2 of the Regional AIS plan with funds from a \$63,000 state grant. In April we held a conference in collaboration with the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance for local decisionmakers that included a full day educational session on aquatic invasive species. In fall we contracted with the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to complete inventories and rework the regional AIS plan for future presentations to city councils and county and town boards. East Central will assume a greater share of responsibility for AIS work in 2011 with state funds recently awarded to support a West Winnebago AIS coordinator. Diane Schauer works on the east side of the lake as Calumet County's Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator. She serves on the Lakes Council's board.

Clean Boats, Clean Waters. For the *fifth* year in a row, the Lakes Council cooperated with UW Oshkosh on an AIS boat inspection and education project funded by a state grant to the Lakes Council with local matching dollars. This year we funded the program's supervisor, while other state grants supported five summer interns to check boats and distribute AIS literature at boat landings on the Winnebago system. Information gathered from boaters and anglers through this process helps evaluate the success of the program.



Photo by Diane Schauer

Lake Butte des Morts Shoreland Management

In 2007 more than 400 lake residents responded to a survey about shoreland management on Lake Butte des Morts. This year we followed up with an informational mailing to all 600 property owners on the lake. Contained in the mailing were explanations of new state laws and regulations about shoreland management and phosphorus reduction. We also included material about programs and funding to help install shoreland buffers, and invitations to several shoreland management educational events. Thanks to UW Extension and the Citizens Natural Resources Association of Wisconsin for assistance with the mailing.

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Financial Report

The Winnebago Lakes Council is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization funded by dues, donations and grants. Funding support this year came from the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, UW Extension, UW Oshkosh, Citizens Natural Resources Association, and Oshkosh Southwest Rotary. During this period the Lakes Council successfully closed-out three grants amounting to \$22,500, two for educational work and one for the Clean Boats Clean Waters program. The Oshkosh Area Community Foundation and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources partially funded these projects. Thanks to our contributors and volunteers for providing the local matching share.

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Membership renewals for 2011 are now due. WLC membership extends from January through December. Please respond to this notice to help save additional mailing costs. Thank you for supporting our lakes.

Fall 2010

WaterWays

Winnebago Lakes Council

Shoreline buffers beautify and benefit lakes

We stepped from a pretty, neatly manicured residential street on the shore of Lake Winneconne into the suddenly pristine-seeming world of Gene and Anna Kuhns' backyard. There coneflowers and other exuberant native plants were blooming, birds were singing, overhanging branches provided a feeling of shelter – and little lawn was in sight.

It was a dramatic example of what some local shoreline property owners are doing to provide a lawn-free buffer zone next to the lake to help protect wildlife and improve water quality by filtering polluted runoff. And it was a remarkable example of how aesthetically pleasing the return-to-nature transformation can be in a world where lawns are often viewed as a crucial part of effective residential landscaping.

Three sites visited

The July 26 tour of this and two other Winneconne properties was led by Winnebago County Land & Water Conservation Department staff Chad Casper and Keith Marquardt. Sponsored by the Winnebago Lakes Council, Winnebago League of Women Voters and Fox Valley Area Chapter of the Wild Ones, the tour followed up on a previous WLC program by landscape designer Melissa Netzer.

Peggy Davidson arranged the tour and wrote this story

At the Kuhns' property on 6869 Sunset Trail we learned from Gene Kuhns, a former forester, about how much work goes into a restoration project. To kill the grass in the buffer zone cardboard and wet newspapers were layered on top. It took a year before it was ready for planting. Marquardt helped with design advice and physical labor. He also arranged county funding for 70 percent of costs for plants and \$8 an hour for labor.

County funding available

Next we visited two other restoration sites: one next door at Diane Hanson's residence at 6861 Sunset Trail and a second at Tom and Karyn Schmitz's home at 6465 Paulson Road. Both also received county funding assistance. That aid pays for 70 percent of expenses, up to \$2,100. It is generally available to county property owners for shoreline vegetative buffers on property within 35 feet of water bodies. Qualifying projects must be approved by the Land & Water Conservation Department before work is started. Interested shoreline owners should contact county staff at 232-1950 or 727-8642. Marquardt says he greatly enjoys "meeting and working with landowners and hearing about their dreams."

Even small steps can help restore the functions of natural buffers. Experts recommend property owners leave logs and



Photo by Tom Mengeling

Coneflowers are popular buffer plants.

beneficial vegetation in the water and be selective in removing tree branches and shrubs as they try to carve out a view of the lake. One of the easiest and least expensive approaches is simply not mowing lawn next to the water. Turf grass will grow 1 to 2 feet before it goes to seed, and over time shrubs and trees will naturally create a more diverse vegetation.

UW Extension suggests that planting native flowers throughout unmown buffer zones can provide a constantly changing foreground to the lakeside view – and as the years go by, native plantings will spread, creating drifts of color. The Extension's publication, "Shoreline Plants and Landscaping," offers many specific suggestions and descriptions of trees, shrubs, groundcovers and grasses that might be effectively incorporated into landscaping.