

Lake District Primer (cont.)

A Reason to Celebrate

Your LRMD Board and staff have been honored to serve you over the years, and we pledge to continue the work that is needed to safeguard Lake Ripley. By working together, we have already made remarkable progress toward preserving and improving our quality of life as lake users and residents. In fact, our progress has been routinely recognized at both the state and federal levels through multiple lake-stewardship commendations.

While we take pride in our past accomplishments, there is much work that lies ahead. This includes keeping up with a host of lake-use and development pressures that are increasingly impacting Lake Ripley. We ask for your help as we work to overcome these challenges. We also thank the many good citizens within the district who actively support our mission, and landowners throughout the watershed who have taken action on their own properties to do what's best for the lake. The LRMD owes its success to all of you, and that alone is a reason to celebrate.

To learn more, contact the Lake District office or visit www.lakeripley.org. Our website is a great place to check meeting dates, read minutes from past meetings, learn about special events and volunteer opportunities, or download any number of informational brochures, studies and management plans that pertain to Lake Ripley.

NEWS BRIEFS

(Please call 423-4537 for details)

Earth Day Litter Cleanup

Friday, April 15th
8:00 - 3:00

Town Hall Rain Garden Planting

Thursday, June 9th
(Rain date: June 10th)
9:00 - 4:30

Town Hearing

(2nd public hearing on the joint LRMD-Town committee's proposed ordinance changes affecting Lake Ripley)

Oakland Town Hall
Tuesday, June 21st
6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

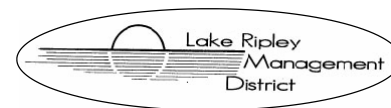
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LAKE RIPLEY PRIORITY LAKE PROJECT



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FROM THE HELM



The overriding goal of the Lake Ripley Management District is to protect the quality and condition of Lake Ripley. We believe this goal is shared by those who live on and around our beautiful lake, mainly because a safe and healthy lake is a benefit to everyone. It not only allows for recreation, but maintains the value of our homes, properties and local businesses. It also makes the area a more desirable place to live.

Although we've tried to keep you well informed over the years on matters affecting Lake Ripley, we recognize that there is an ever changing population surrounding the lake. So, to refresh those of us who have been here forever and to inform those of you who have recently joined us, we have prepared this special edition of Ripples. We hope it answers many of your questions regarding what we do as a Lake District and the many different challenges we face.

As always, we are thankful for your continued support. We also encourage you to contact us with your questions and concerns, and to attend our monthly public meetings to stay informed on what's happening around the lake. Most importantly, we promise to keep fighting and advocating for any actions and policies that promote a clean, healthy and safe Lake Ripley.

John Molinaro
Chair, Lake Ripley Management District

Safeguarding Lake Ripley: A Lake District Primer

On the 30th anniversary of the 1972 Federal Clean Water Act, then Governor Scott McCallum designated 2003 as the "Year of Water" in the State of Wisconsin. He urged citizens to act on a daily basis to become better water stewards, and to support public policy efforts that aim to improve and sustain the quality of Wisconsin's aquatic ecosystems. His decree was made in recognition that clean water is a basic human need and the basis for the health, beauty and biological diversity of our many waterways. It was further recognized that our inland surface waters constitute a limited resource that must be used wisely in the interest of future generations.

Acting Governor Jim Doyle has since expanded on this important theme by proclaiming 2005 as "The Year of Land and Water Conservation." His proclamation kicks off a year-long celebration of all the good work being done around the state to preserve and wisely manage our natural environment. What better way to celebrate than by looking back on our successes in conservation right here on Lake Ripley? It is also the ideal time to look forward as we continue working together to ensure a better future for our children and grandchildren. They more than anyone deserve a legacy of clean and unpolluted water, abundant and diverse fish and wildlife populations, and blight-free landscapes that are a part of our proud Wisconsin heritage... not to mention the foundation of a \$12 billion state tourism economy.



(Continued on next page)

Lake District Primer (cont.)

Lure of the Lake

As property owners on and around Lake Ripley, we share a common privilege to be able to access and enjoy a coveted public resource right in our own backyard. It is one of our regional landscape's most defining and prominent features, offering residents and visitors a multitude of recreational opportunities. The lake has drawn settlers to the area since the 1800s, and it continues to serve as an important environmental, recreational and economic asset for the community.



The concentration of growth and development around the lake and consistently escalating property values speak to its significance as one of the area's primary attractions. Consider that despite only accounting for about 7% of the total land area in the Town of Oakland, the Lake Ripley Management District contains the bulk of the Town's population and represents about 70% of its total assessed valuation. These facts indicate that the lake represents tremendous value and is deserving of proper stewardship.

The Threats and What's At Stake

Lake Ripley has survived the ages and weathered many changes over the course of its approximately 10,000-year history. However, it wasn't until only about 150 years ago (a blink of an eye in geologic time) when conditions took a turn for the worse. Sediment cores of the lake bottom reveal dramatic declines in water quality starting in the mid-1800s, coinciding with early settlement and the advent of large-scale land clearing. As early settlers filled marshlands and cleared oak savannahs, few measures were put in place to moderate soil erosion and polluted runoff. Fossilized sediment core evidence also points to the beginnings of intense algae blooms, prolific weed growth, and the decline of pollution-intolerant organisms.

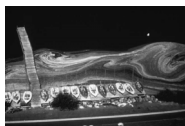


Sediment plume on a Wisconsin lake

While we've managed to slow and even reverse these trends in recent years, they clearly highlight the fact that Lake Ripley has a natural carrying capacity that makes it vulnerable to overuse and overdevelopment. They also help demonstrate that the lake is part of a

larger ecosystem which can be significantly altered—for better or worse—as a consequence of human activities. Therefore, it is our responsibility to care for the lake and not mistakenly dismiss it as a timeless and static feature in the landscape.

Ongoing threats to Lake Ripley include overdevelopment, soil erosion, contaminated runoff, habitat loss, non-native species infestations, and growing lake-use pressures. Many involve impacts that may be difficult to recognize or measure on an individual and site-specific basis, but that may have tremendous cumulative impacts. If inappropriately addressed or left unmanaged, they can lead to a gradual deterioration of the resource, lost recreational opportunities, increased lake-rehabilitation costs, and even lowered property values. In fact, several studies—including one recently conducted on Delavan Lake in Southeast Wisconsin—demonstrate a direct correlation between a lake's water-clarity conditions and both *regional* property values and economic activity.



Algae scum on a Wisconsin lake

A Call to Action

It was not until the late 1980s when these abuses culminated into an actual crisis, finally calling attention to the issues and motivating real action. By that time, Lake Ripley had turned into a fertile breeding ground for nuisance algae and excessive weed growth. Eurasian water milfoil, a non-native lake weed that chokes out natural habitat, thrived in such conditions. The aggressive weed eventually claimed 40% of the lake surface with a nearly impenetrable tangle of vegetation. Consequently, the ability to access and navigate the lake became severely impeded, fishing suffered, and the lake's aesthetic condition rapidly degenerated.

In 1990, the community finally banded together and petitioned the county to form the Lake Ripley Management District (LRMD) under Chapter 33 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The LRMD currently serves close to 1,500 landowners around the lake. While prolific weed growth was among many motivating factors behind the district's formation, it was merely a symptom of other larger concerns. Such concerns have since become the focus of scientific study and ongoing management attention.

Lake District Primer (cont.)

Lake District Mandates

Since its inception 15 years ago, the LRMD has served as an organized, local voice for area property owners concerned with maintaining the quality of Lake Ripley. It operates under the guiding principle that every citizen is entitled to enjoy a clean and safe lake, along with all its unique flora and fauna. This principle is reflected in the LRMD's mission to conduct programs and advance policies that: (1) preserve or enhance the lake's condition; and (2) ensure equitable and sustainable use of the resource.

The Wisconsin Constitution, through the public trust doctrine, authorizes the state to hold all natural navigable waters in trust for the public. This constitutional grant of authority is intended to protect the public interest as it relates to commercial and recreational navigation, water quality, fishing and hunting, swimming, and the enjoyment of natural scenic beauty. Regulations that serve the public interest may entail obtaining permit review, or may limit or prohibit certain activities. While all lakes are governed by a set of minimum state regulations, counties and towns have the authority to enact more restrictive standards if necessary to protect local water bodies.

The LRMD operates, in part, to advocate on behalf of its members for actions and policies that benefit the lake and its users as a whole. This is not an easy task. Managing a public resource that must be shared by competing user groups is a balancing act that is wrought with controversy. It underscores how important it is that we embrace our common goals of fairness, equity and resource sustainability. By not accepting reasonable limits on how we individually use and impact the lake, we invite conflict and problems that may otherwise be avoided.

A True Democracy

A lake district is the only form of government that allows non-resident property owners to have a seat at the table. It is a true example of participatory democ-

racy, with all eligible residents and property owners having a vote in the affairs of the district. This is accomplished at an annual meeting where budgets and tax levies are approved by the general membership. Opinion surveys and public hearings may also be conducted to help identify citizen concerns and guide management decisions. However, while the LRMD is able to conduct a number of lake-improvement programs, only towns and counties can dictate land use, adopt ordinances or enforce rules and regulations.

A seven-member board of commissioners and its staff direct the day-to-day operations of the LRMD. The board is comprised of five elected property owners from the district (serving three-year terms), and appointed representatives from both Jefferson County and the Town of Oakland. A grant-funded project manager is employed by the Board to administer the programs and activities carried out by the district. These activities are guided by one or more management plans developed and approved by both the district and Wisconsin DNR. They include a lake management plan, weed harvesting plan, and a pollution abatement plan administered through the Priority Lake Project grant program.

Investing in the Future

All members of the LRMD share in the cost of management activities undertaken by the district. However, by remaining fiscal prudent and aggressively pursuing outside sources of funding, we have consistently kept the tax levy down around only 0.4 mill (\$40 per every \$100,000 of assessed valuation). The average property owner invests what amounts to less than 25 cents a day to finance important lake management and rehabilitation efforts.

This investment is already returning dividends in the form of improved lake conditions and access to additional funding sources. Local tax dollars have been used to leverage well over \$1 million in grants. Many of these grants are only available to lake districts, including \$72,000 in annual funding for the Priority Lake Project (until 2007). For every \$1 collected in taxes, approximately \$2 is obtained in outside funding which gets reinvested right back into the lake and local community.

LRMD Activities

- Conduct surveys and studies
- Develop management plans
- Assist landowners in controlling erosion and polluted runoff
- Manage aquatic plants
- Monitor water quality
- Restore degraded wildlife habitat
- Identify and protect threatened fish-spawning refuges
- Obtain and administer project grants
- Acquire conservation easements
- Act as information clearinghouse
- Conduct educational programs
- Investigate and report citizen concerns
- Serve as local regulatory watchdog
- Advocate for policies that benefit Lake Ripley at the town, county and state levels

