## The Future is a Choice (cont.)



**2. Landowner Incentive Programs**

The landowner adoption rate for targeted conservation practices needs to be increased to achieve continued water quality improvements. Landowner cost-sharing grants once averaged about $25,000 per year under the DNR-funded Priority Lake Project, covering multiple projects and paying for 70% of eligible costs. This amount has substantially declined in subsequent years due to tight budgets and declining landowner interest. In recent years, the amount of available cost sharing per year has fallen below $10,000, with cost-share grants covering 50% of eligible costs for only one or two smaller projects.

**Proposal:** Consider increasing the budget for cost sharing and/or fund a new landowner-incentive pilot in an attempt to increase participation rates. This can either be accomplished through the budget using future tax dollars, or by approving a transfer of general, unrestricted funds that are currently on hand. For the proposed pilot, a minimum of $25,000 would be needed to fund a competitive grant program, with business partnerships potentially being used to offset some marketing and incentive costs.

***Pilot Summary***

The purpose of implementing a one-year pilot is to make additional progress toward goals and recommendations outlined in the 2009 Lake Ripley Improvement Plan. The pilot is meant to supplement, rather than replace, the existing landowner cost-share program as a means of inspiring action. It would do this through a one-time effort to promote and fully fund a select number of project proposals to be used as future demonstration sites.

Implementing the pilot will allow the District to assess how well new incentives and promotional activities can engage the community and motivate the adoption of best practices. Targeted practices under consideration include: rain gardens and rain barrels, lakeshore restorations, treefall habitats, redirected roof downspouts, tree plantings, removal of water-impervious surfaces, and enrollment in existing conservation-farming programs. ♦

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# Ripples

Lake Ripley Management District

Vol. 21, No. 2 Summer 2013

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**Miranda Heimstreet**

**WEED HARVEST CREW**

**Dick Langer**
**Ed Grunden**
**Bruce Crump**
**Roger Rude**

## FROM THE HELM

The Lake Ripley Management District is a unit of local government that is dedicated to the protection and preservation of our lake. The reality is that all lakes are slowly "dying." Their basins slowly fill with sediment, nutrients, and accumulated organic debris from dead plants and other lake life. Our goal is to do what we can not to accelerate this natural aging process. Sediment coring of the lake bottom clearly showed that this aging process increased with settlement and the development of the watershed that feeds the lake.

As a Lake District, we cannot accomplish our mission without the help of residents and visitors that use and love the lake. We are very thankful to those individuals and groups that rake their shorelines, restore natural habitat, and treat the lake with respect.

The reason your help is so important is because the Lake District has limited funds and resources to do all the work necessary to protect the lake. This year alone we have spent thousands of dollars repairing and maintaining the weed harvester and dump truck. This equipment is old and beyond its normal life expectancy, but has been kept operational through our maintenance program. We have increased our labor force to the limit of our current budget, and rely on interns and grants to maintain our programs.

Saturday, August 31st, is our Annual Meeting (see pages 6-7 for an agenda and proposed budget). This year we will be discussing how we can replace our aging equipment, and how we can fund more projects within the watershed that will protect the lake. We encourage you to attend and add your voice to the issues that face us in the future.

*John Molinaro, Chair*

## The Future is a Choice

Photo: Dawn Weisto

UW-Madison Environmental Economist Bill Provencher noted: "Property owners around a lake can respond in two ways when the quality of that lake begins to break down. They can take action collectively, such as by forming lake associations that govern lake use, or they can take action privately by moving off the lake."

Almost 23 years ago, Lake Ripley-area property owners chose the former response, organizing as a lake district and launching a collective effort to begin rehabilitating and managing a troubled lake. The effort continues to this day, and it plays out in an ongoing (and often under-equipped) battle against polluted runoff, invasive species, prolific weed and algae growth, and a host of other challenges that impact our use and enjoyment of Lake Ripley.

***Continued on next page >>***

# The Future is a Choice (cont.)



Imagine what Lake Ripley might look like today if the response had been different. How many more tons of phosphorus would have washed into the lake each year, and at what cost to our community? Would we have accepted more weeds and algae, dirtier water, and a permanent loss of habitat that sustains our fish and wildlife? And what of the impacts to tourism and property values?

There is a growing body of research demonstrating that lake health is positively correlated with property values and economic activity. Consider a 2005 UW-Whitewater study that evaluated the importance of Delavan Lake (Walworth County) to the local economy. The study found that the lake contributed $77 million annually to the local economy and generated 812 jobs. It also found that investments made to improve Delavan Lake's water quality raised average lakeshore property values by about $177,000. This, in turn, reduced real estate tax bills for non-lake property owners by $177 per year (for every $200,000 of property valuation). Even the improvement of Eurasian watermilfoil management was estimated to add another $6-$8.5 million in annual economic activity.

Research also shows that property values decline significantly when a lake's water clarity declines. A 2001 University of Maine study looked at nearly 200 lakes where water clarity had declined below the regional average, and estimated a $256-512 million loss of property value due to those declines. The same study was used to determine potential future tax losses in one Maine township where 60% of the 211 million property tax valuation is from lakefront property. It concluded that a three-foot decline in average minimum water clarity would cause a loss of $10.5 million, or roughly 5% in total property value.

Here's an interesting fact that hits closer to home. Although the Lake Ripley Management District accounts for only 7% of the total land area in the Town of Oakland, it contains most of its population and about 70% of the Town's total assessed valuation. That speaks volumes to the lake's impact on property valuation and regional tax base.

Many people buy property and spend money here because of Lake Ripley and everything it has to offer. In fact, according to a 2005 lake district opinion survey, the most valued lake amenities affecting property-buying decisions were natural beauty, watersport opportunities, quiet recreation, and water clarity. Of those responding to the survey, about 60% owned property off the lake and at least one-quarter mile from the water's edge.

Given these facts, maybe we should instead be asking ourselves: *Are we choosing a future that invests <u>enough</u> to maintain the quality of our lake?* It's a question we plan to explore at the August 31st budget hearing and Annual Meeting, and especially with respect to our capacity to harvest weeds and fund conservation practices.

## Lake Protection Proposals

**<u>1. Aquatic Plant Management</u>**

Our current budget pays for a part-time cutting crew working 20-30-hour work weeks. The budget covers training, operator wages, insurance, fuel, parts/supplies, and expected costs for equipment maintenance and repair. Under thick weed-growth conditions (and assuming no equipment problems), a two-person operating team can collect and dispose 2-4 dump truck loads of weeds within about a six-hour timeframe. Actual cutting time on the water can vary considerably, and is dependent on weather; type, density and location of weed growth; equipment performance; and other factors.

Harvesting is guided by a DNR-approved management plan and permit that dictates where and what we can cut. It relies on four pieces of equipment remaining fully operational: a mechanical harvester, a shore conveyor for off-loading harvested plant material, a dump truck, and a pickup truck. This equipment is fast approaching or has already reached the end of its useful life, and is demanding more downtime and expense to keep running.

The purchase of a new mechanical harvester alone can cost $130,000. Grants may be available to cover up to half this cost, while restricted capital reserve funds could potentially pay for the rest. There is then a 6-month turnaround time once a new machine is ordered from the manufacturer.

**<u>Proposal</u>:** Plan and budget for the replacement of all equipment within the next 2-5 years. Consider a larger budget to increase staffing levels and cutting hours on the lake.

***Continued on Page 8 >>***

# Official Notices



**LAKE RIPLEY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT**
**<u>2014 PROPOSED BUDGET</u>**

| | 2012 ACTUAL | 2013 BUDGET | 2013 JAN-JUNE ACTUAL | 2013 JUL-DEC ESTIMATED | 2014 PROPOSED BUDGET |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue: | | | | | |
| Real Estate Tax Levy | $ 118,204 | $ 118,320 | $ 78,745 | $ 39,575 | $ 124,969 |
| Grants | 13,105 | | 6,708 | | |
| Interest Income | 829 | | 435 | 400 | |
| Carryover | 4,193 | 680 | 680 | | 2,055 |
| Restricted Funds, Net | <17,622> | | <17,185> | 26,092 | |
| Other | 721 | | 75 | | |
| Total Revenues | 119,430 | 119,000 | 69,458 | 66,067 | 127,024 |
| Projects: | | | | | |
| Inlet Monitoring | | | | | 3,000 |
| Other Special Programs | 751 | 250 | 0 | <250> | 0 |
| Operations: | | | | | |
| Landowner Cost Sharing | 7,463 | 5,000 | 0 | 5,000 | 8,500 |
| Weed Harvesting | 13,667 | 10,560 | 11,699 | 7,732 | 10,085 |
| Preserve Restoration/Management | 3,826 | 14,750 | 22,810 | 815 | 15,400 |
| Staff Payroll/Fringes/Taxes | 69,539 | 70,620 | 35,356 | 35,264 | 72,919 |
| Insurance | 5,191 | 5,220 | 5,501 | 0 | 5,600 |
| Legal Counsel | 375 | 1,500 | 1,553 | 0 | 1,500 |
| Dues & Conferences | 1,229 | 1,400 | 385 | <1,015> | 1,150 |
| Office & Community Outreach | 6,281 | 7,300 | 3,392 | 3,528 | 6,470 |
| Miscellaneous | 2,680 | 3,200 | 1,787 | 1,413 | 3,200 |
| Commissioner Stipends | 4,450 | 4,900 | 2,350 | 1,850 | 4,900 |
| Rent | 1,800 | 1,800 | 1,050 | 750 | 1,800 |
| Capital Reserve, Land/Equipment Acquisition | 10,000 | 10,000 | 0 | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| Total Disbursements | 127,252 | 136,500 | 85,883 | 65,087 | 144,524 |
| Authorized Use of Unrestricted Funds | 6,468 | 17,500 | 17,500 | 0 | 17,500 |
| Balance | $ <1,354> | $ 0 | $ 1,075 | $ 980 | $ 0 |

**The Lake Ripley Management District has no indebtedness.**

| Restricted Funds: | Capital Reserve, Land/Equip. Acquisition | F.K. Elson Memorial Fund | Friends of the Preserve | Preserve Restoration & Development | Lake Planning Grant | Clean Boats-Clean Waters Grant | Lake Ripley Protection Fund |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Est. Balance (12/31/12) | $ 72,638 | $ 207 | $ 2,180 | $ 1,122 | | | |
| Additional 2012 Activity | | | | | | | |
| Increase | | | | 8,750 | $ 4,355 | | |
| Decrease | | | | | <2,082> | | |
| Final Balance (12/31/12) | 72,638 | 207 | 2,180 | 9,872 | 2,273 | | |
| 2013 *Estimated Activity* | | | | | | | |
| Interest | 363 | 1 | 10 | 49 | 11 | $ 2 | |
| Increase | | | | 5,620 | 582 | 506 | |
| Decrease | | | | | <3,000> | <55> | |
| Transfer to Restricted, Non-Lapsable *Lake Ripley Protection Fund* | <73,001> | <208> | <2,190> | <15,541> | 134 | <453> | $ 91,259 |
| Est. Balance (12/31/13) | $ 0 | $ 0 | $ 0 | $ 0 | $ 0 | $ 0 | $ 91,259 |

## Seeking Harvester Operators

Part-time crew members (from left to right): Ed Grunden, Roger Rude and Dick Langer. Not shown is Bruce Crump.

Interested in joining our harvesting team? Increased aquatic plant growth has demanded more cutting hours on the lake. This is a seasonal, part-time support position (less than 20 hours/week) that starts at $11.00/hour. We are looking for hard-working, reliable and mechanically-inclined individuals who can operate and maintain heavy machinery, and who care about the ecology of the lake. To be considered for future openings, please send us a cover letter, resume, and at least three references.

## Willerup Project Update

Sufficient funds were raised for the first phase of a major lakeshore restoration at the Willerup Bible Camp. Camp officials are especially grateful for the generous contributions received from Norma Borchhardt and the Cambridge Foundation.

## Event Highlights

Multiple workshops and volunteer events were hosted to educate and engage citizen lake stewards. They included a *Clean Boats, Clean Waters* training, a seminar on sustainable landscaping, and a volunteer cleanup day at the Lake District Preserve.

**Top right**: John Gishnock of Formecology leads a community seminar on sustainable landscaping practices at the Oakland Town Hall. **Above**: Patricia Cicero, Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Department, instructs *Clean Boats, Clean Waters* volunteers on how to work with boaters to control aquatic invasive species threats.

Volunteers clear trails, pull garlic mustard, and remove debris during a spring cleanup day at the Lake District Preserve. Special thanks go out to: Ty Rohloff, Kent Brown, Jane Jacobsen-Brown, Clare and Matt Carlson (pictured above), George Clokey, Frankie Fuller, Georgia Gomez-Ibanez, Jeanne Scherer, Dylan Kersten, Alex Bykowski, Hillary Best, Kevin Moy, Walt Christensen, Jay Settersten, Friends of the Glacial Heritage Area, and UW-Whitewater. Photos: Jeanne Scherer (left) and Rich Schoemer.

**Budget Hearing**
August 31, 2013
9:00 a.m. at Oakland Town Hall
(See proposed budget on page 7)

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**Annual Meeting**
August 31, 2013
Immediately following budget hearing

I. Call to order
II. Approval of 2012 Annual Meeting minutes
III. Nomination of board candidates (Names on Ballot: Mike Sabella and Jane Jacobsen-Brown, incumbents)
IV. Chairman's report
V. Treasurer's report
VI. Adoption of Resolution 2013-01 creating a restricted, non-lapsable Lake Ripley Protection Fund
VII. Authorization to use unrestricted funds, capital reserves or other financing strategies to replace weed-harvesting equipment
VIII. Authorization to use unrestricted funds to implement a landowner incentive pilot to encourage adoption of conservation practices
IX. Approval of budget and tax levy
X. Tabulation of vote and election of board members
XI. Adjournment



The Lake District Board of Commissioners serves the interests of area property owners in protecting and managing the lake. Five board members are elected to three-year terms (at least one must own land within the District), while two are appointed as representatives from the Town of Oakland and Jefferson County Boards.

You were introduced to four of our seven commissioners in recent editions of *Ripples*. Two additional members are profiled below. All are volunteers who generously contribute their time, expertise and leadership as Lake Ripley's trusted stewards.


John Molinaro (left) and Mike Sabella at the entrance to the Lake District Preserve.

**John Molinaro** and his wife, Ann, have owned property at Lake Ripley for the last 37 years, and lived here permanently for the last 10 years. John was one of the original members of LRMD Board, serving as secretary for a number of years before being elected chairman. John participated and graduated from the Wisconsin Lake Leaders Institute, and then later graduated from the Advanced Lake Leaders program. He also served on the Board of Directors of Wisconsin Association of Lakes for four years, with two and a half of those years as chairman. In 2006, he received the Wisconsin Lakes Stewardship Award for his lake-protection accomplishments. In 2011, he received the Protector's Award from the Rock River Coalition. For the last 10 years, John has served on the Jefferson County Board representing the Cambridge/Oakland area.

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Along with their two daughters and five grandchildren, **Mike Sabella** and his wife, Marilyn, have enjoyed Lake Ripley for twenty-eight years. After his military service, Mike held positions in the corporate tax department of the Burlington Railroad, and later as an auditor with PricewaterhouseCoopers. He is a Certified Public Accountant and founding partner of Sabella & Graham, P.C. in Park Ridge, Illinois—a company he started in 1974. Mike joined the Lake District Board in 1997 and has served as its Treasurer ever since. He also serves as a member of the Weed Harvesting Oversight Committee. He was elected and served 12 years as a Village Trustee in LaGrange Park, Illinois , and currently serves as Vice President of the LaGrange Park Police Pension Board. Mike lives on the southeast side of Lake Ripley and enjoys its peaceful, reflective nature. ♦

## Questions & Answers

**Do nonresident property owners have a say in Lake District affairs?**

Answer: Unlike other governmental units like towns and sanitary districts, nonresident property owners have the right to vote in lake districts. This occurs at the Annual Meeting through the election of board representatives and the adoption of operating budgets.

**How are changes in the weather affecting phosphorus runoff?**

Answer: Phosphorus runoff—which fuels plant and algae growth—-has become a greater problem in recent decades as the number of large rainfalls has increased. Rainfalls of three or more inches, called extreme rainfall events, have been on the rise. Our region saw no extreme rainfall events in the 1980s, two or three in the 1990s, and nine between 2000 and 2010. During drought years, data show that our lakes can clear up quickly when there is little stormwater runoff to deliver phosphorus.

**Who do I contact to get approvals for projects occurring near the lakeshore?**

Answer: Activities taking place at or below the water's edge (piers, dredging, adding shoreline rocks, etc.) are the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin DNR and may require permits. Building and land-disturbance activities within 1000 feet of a lake, 300 feet of a navigable stream, or in floodplains are regulated by county shoreland zoning.

## CLEAN BOATS, CLEAN WATERS

Hello, my name is Miranda Heimstreet. I am the program coordinator of the "Clean Boats-Clean Waters" initiative at the Lake Ripley Management District this summer. I am a senior at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, majoring in political science and pursuing a minor in public administration. I spent the first year of my life living on Lake Ripley, then grew up in Lake Mills, so I have spent a lot of time enjoying our local lakes.


Miranda and Jeanne Scherer (not pictured) staff an educational booth at Lake Ripley Park during Umbrella Daze. Photo: Jeanne Scherer.

*Clean Boats, Clean Waters* is a boater-education effort funded by a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources grant. It aims to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species by raising public awareness of the problem and through the teaching of preventive measures.

The most common way invasive species such as zebra mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil are spread from lake to lake is by hitching a ride on boats and trailers. Non-native, invasive organisms can also be introduced through the improper disposal of bait or the draining of contaminated bilge water. Once these organisms are transferred to a new lake or stream, they can cause irreparable harm to the native ecosystem, and may inflict detrimental impacts on tourism and the local economy.

*Clean Boats, Clean Waters* includes groups of volunteers that check boating equipment for hitchhiking plants and animals when the boats are about to be launched or removed from the water. Boaters are educated about the importance of draining all of the boat's water, properly disposing of bait, and making

Miranda (left) and volunteer Dylan Kersten (far right) educate boaters and conduct watercraft inspections at the public boat landing. Photo: Ed Grunden.

sure there are no plants or animals stuck to their boats or trailers. This is not only the right thing to do to protect our lakes, but it's also the law. In 2009, Wisconsin passed laws that impose heavy fines for transporting plants, animals, or even water from one water body to another.

### Zebra Mussels

Zebra Mussels are mollusks that have a soft, slug-like body protected by two razor sharp shells held together by a very strong ligament. They multiply at extremely high rates as female zebra mussels release anywhere from 30,000 to 1,000,000 eggs per year. The fertilized eggs turn into tiny larvae that spread great distances before they mature and attach to hard surfaces.

Zebra mussels are pests because they clog water intake systems and the cooling systems of boat engines. They also invade beaches and swimming areas and are painful to step on. As filter feeders, they are able to consume large amounts of plankton that many small or developing fish rely on for food. This disrupts the ecosystem as competition increases for a limited resource, causing impacts that cascade up the food chain. Bottom-feeding fish also flourish following an infestation be-

**Did You Know?**

*Adult zebra mussels can survive a week out of the water. They have no natural predators in our lakes so once they invade, they are here to stay.*



cause they feed on the waste of the zebra mussels.

### Eurasian watermilfoil

Eurasian Watermilfoil is a rooted, submersed aquatic plant that has a spaghetti-like stem and feathery leaves. It typically grows to a height of three to ten feet long. This weed has the propensity to form dense mats on the water surface, effectively blocking out sunlight. Thick stands of milfoil can impede boat traffic, as well as the ability of larger fish to travel though the water and find prey.


Zebra mussels attached to the stem of Eurasian watermilfoil. Photo: Paul Skawinski.

According to the Wisconsin DNR, Eurasian watermilfoil can be found in over 400 Wisconsin lakes. Once an infestation occurs, it is usually there to stay as it is very difficult to eradicate without also destroying the native plants that maintain lake health. On Lake Ripley, weed harvesting is used to try to keep these weeds in check, and particularly in locations where they tend to form dense mats that can obstruct navigation.

In order to prevent more unwanted species, we as boaters must do our part to protect the lakes we enjoy so much. Checking your boats and trailers for plants and animals when you leave the water can protect our lakes as well as save yourself from hefty fines. If we all take part in prevention techniques, we can keep the lakes beautiful for many years to come.

If you are interested in volunteering for *Clean Boats, Clean Waters*, please contact the Lake District office. I look forward to seeing you at the lake this summer.

**Did you know?**

*The **non-native** Eurasian watermilfoil, once the dominant species in Lake Ripley, has declined precipitously over the last 20 years. The largest colonies are now mostly found in East Bay.*

*Recently, it's the **native** Sago pondweed that seems to be doing especially well. The finely-leafed and wiry Sago has reached its highest densities in both bays and along portions of the north shore.*

## INLET STREAM MONITORING

Dylan Kersten (left), Miranda Heimstreet (right) and Jeanne Scherer (photographer) take water quality measurements at the inlet and outlet to Lake Ripley. Here they're seen timing the stream's flow rate.

With funding through UW-Extension's Water Action Volunteer program, work is now underway to re-evaluate the quality of Lake Ripley's inlet stream. The stream drains much of the eastern portion of the lake's agriculturally-dominated watershed, and supplies most of the lake's surface water.

In 1993, a water resources appraisal found the stream to be in very poor condition due to the impacts of sedimentation and fertilizer runoff. This set the stage for a 13-year, Wisconsin DNR-funded "Priority Watershed Project" to help landowners control soil erosion, storm runoff and pollution through the cost sharing of various conservation practices.

A re-assessment of the stream—which is proposed to continue through 2014—should yield useful comparative information on how watershed improvements are impacting stream (and lake) conditions. Twenty years of improvements include the purchase and ongoing restoration of the Lake District Preserve, multiple ditch closures, area wetland enhancements, and the adoption of sustainable farming methods that protect soils and downstream water quality. ♦