



A healthy red fox in the early morning hours in the Preserve wetlands. Foxes are solitary hunters that feed on rodents, rabbits, birds and other small game, but will eat fruit and vegetables fish, frogs and even worms. The fox's tail provides balance and is a warm cover in cold weather.

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Ripples



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FROM THE HELM

The Lake Ripley Management District wishes Andrew Sabai, our Lake Manager for the past 16 months, best wishes in his next position with a private environmental firm. During Andrew's time as Lake Manager he provided us with a wealth of new understandings of the workings of our preserve and inlet creek. He was able to help us connect the dots of how the health of the land, wetlands and inlet creek had a direct bearing on the health of the lake. We are pleased to be able to keep him on as a project manager to see out a grant-funded project to re-meander some straight stretches of the inlet creek. With each bend of a creek, phosphorus-carrying sediment has a chance to slow in pools to sink to the bottom, or to catch on banks and get hung up. This prevents this nutrient from making its way into Lake Ripley, which is a good thing.



Andrew thanked the Board on his last full-time day for all he was able to learn and do as Lake Manager, and we thank him back for his dedication and skill reading the needs of the wetlands and lake. Good-bye full-time, hello part-time, Andrew.

In the few weeks that we had to plan for Andrew's leaving, the Board was fortunate to find an excellent candidate for a Lake Manager (and accepting a limited term employee position as the Lake Ripley Management board pilots this new idea) to step into the position and make for a smooth transition during these busy spring months. Beth Gehred, an environmental educator and program coordinator with a background in non-profit management, was able to job shadow Andrew for almost two weeks and is now flying solo.

Like every one of our Lake Managers, Beth will develop her own style of management. She already has expressed her feelings that the Lake Ripley Management District and watershed, and the creatures that depend on the habitats within, are not separate communities, but one. You will hear more from her inside this issue. Improving the health of the lake, and the people and insects, birds, fish and animals that are part of the watershed is a vision that she shares with the Board.

Stop by the office and meet Beth, or you may see her around the Lake or collecting water quality data in the Preserve. She lives in nearby Fort Atkinson. She is happy to hear from you if you are curious about volunteer opportunities, as well. Maintaining the Lake, Preserve and their biodiversity, is a job she cannot do alone.

Jimmy DeGidio, Chair

Winterkill Explained

Though it is not uncommon for lake property owners to see a dead fish or other aquatic creature as they put in their piers in springtime, it's unsettling wondering what happened. The answer could be a localized winterkill, a common type of fish kill that is the result of severe winter conditions.

Dead fish bloat and come to the surface as water warms. They may appear fuzzy because of secondary infection by fungus, but it is winterkill, not the fungus, that is the cause of death.

Winterkill is a natural process occurring when fish don't have enough oxygen. Fish and other aquatic life typically die in late winter, but may not be noticed until a month after the ice leaves the lake because they are temporarily preserved by the cold water.

Dissolved oxygen is required by fish and all other forms of aquatic life. When a lake freezes over, it is like a lid on a jar and all oxygen supplies must come from the plants in the lake. Thick ice or heavy snowcover can reduce daylight to such an extent that the plants stop producing oxygen and many die. Furthering the problem, bacteria that decompose the dead plants use the remaining oxygen in the water, reducing what is available for fish and turtles, frogs, toads and crayfish.

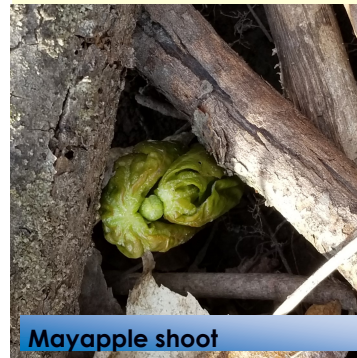
Different species of fish have different oxygen needs. Trout require the most oxygen, followed by bluegill, largemouth bass and walleye, according to DNR fisheries managers. Crappies, carp, northern pike and yellow perch can tolerate less oxygen. Bullheads and fathead minnows require the least amount of oxygen to survive.

Lake Ripley's depth – reaching 44 feet – is a relative protection. Shallow lakes with excess aquatic vegetation and mucky bottoms are more prone to the problem, and its severity is greater.



Life and death struggles are year round for Wisconsin wildlife.

Springing It Up in the Upland Woods



Mayapple shoot

Have you ever lain under the cover of a stand of mayapples in the summertime? This is a vivid outdoor memory from my childhood. The way the sun filtered through the umbrella of leaves, and the delight of being completely obscured

from view was the kind of hideaway feeling that I loved.

So I was happy to see a colony of mayapples (*podophyllum P. peltatum*) just beginning to emerge in the upland woods in the Lake Ripley Preserve. The mayapples are one of a number of plants whose successful adaptation strategy is to get to work earlier in the spring than other plants. These short-lived, beautiful woodland plants are sometimes called the spring ephemerals.



The ephemerals are one reason the ground comes alive beneath your feet in the spring.

Spring ephemerals bloom on the forest floor among the leaf litter. The slips of green are welcome sights, but wildflowers should never be picked or dug from the wild. Instead get down there and take a selfie and then continue a little happier along your way.

Back to our mayapples.
(continued on page 3)

Board members serve in many ways

Consider running for the Lake Ripley Management Board. Two seats will become vacant when the terms end of long-time treasure of a treasurer Mike Sabella, and Mike Doman. Thanks to both for great service. If you are interested in having your name on the ballot, let us know soon by sending a written request by email or US Post to ripley@oaklandtown.com or N4455 Cty Road A, Cambridge. Voting will take place at the Annual meeting, scheduled for Aug 17.

Lake Ripley Planning Matters

The LRMD has received a Lake Management Planning Grant of \$5,568 and technical assistance from the Wisconsin DNR to help with large scale planning.

The Lake Ripley Management Plan, officially titled the *Lake Ripley Improvement Plan – A Condition Assessment and Strategy for Protection and Rehabilitation* was written in large part in 2009 by Lake Manager Paul Dearlove, updated by Lake Manager Lisa Griffin in 2015, and now, at age ten, will benefit from the knowledge gained from completed projects and incorporation of emerging areas of concern.

Lake Ripley faces many challenges: algae blooms, sedimentation, development pressures, and conflicting lake uses. The lake also faces some management uncertainties: a changing climate, landscape, and lake uses. The Lake Ripley Improvement Plan is being updated to meet those challenges.

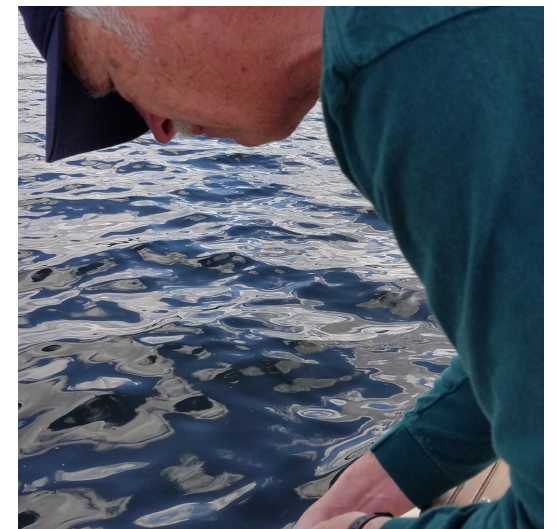
The LRMD can best effect change through education and direct action in the watershed. This project provides the needed update and additional data in order to drive management decisions for the long-term and inform the public during the project period.

A strong document, it is by design flexible enough to rise to new challenges. The LRMD staff and Board members have been very active in collecting data and devising and implement-

ing plans since 1991.

This new planning process will continue these efforts while taking District projects to the next level. Recent runoff events and data collection on the inlet creek show that while some improvements have been made in the watershed, the greatest current threat to water quality and lake habitat enters through the inlet stream.

Gathering more data will help us assess the situation, design watershed improvements that will protect water quality, and improve fish and wildlife habitat. We will also develop a plan for how to evaluate the efficacy of these improvements. Future monitoring will be outlined in the new management plan and allow the use of adaptive management to further improve future projects.



Board member and volunteer monitor Craig Kempel conducting a Secchi test in the lake.

Look for a public opinion survey that addresses a wide variety of ecological and human use issues some time in the fall/winter of 2019. Your input will help us prioritize management decisions.

In addition to the guidance that a flexible, structured plan document provides, increased grant opportunities are available to lake organizations that produce them. This will improve our financial ability to preserve and enhance Lake Ripley's water quality, its fish and wildlife communities and its overall ecological health.

Mayapples (continued)

Pollinated flowers are followed in early summer by fleshy fruits containing several tan seeds. These green "apples" ripen to a golden color, sometimes tinged with pink or purple, later in the summer. The 1½-2 inch long fruits (but not the seeds) are edible, but bland, when ripe and can be used in jellies or preserves. They may also be eaten by box turtles and other wildlife that disperse the seeds.

All the parts of the plant, except the fruit, contain podophyllotoxin which is highly toxic if consumed.

Other favorite ephemerals to look for in the Preserve are rue anemones, wood anemones, and starry solomon's plume. What are your memories of spring in the woods? Make some new ones with the help of these delicate beauties.



Morel hunters are often tipped off that the morels are in season when the mayapples are in bloom.



Wood anemone (*anemone quinquefolia*). Just call it pretty.

Lake Managing



Beth Gehred

The learning curve is steep and the rubber boots to fill are large, but so far so good from the District Office.

The variety of work I get to do as Lake Manager is one of the most appealing parts of this position. From monitoring lake and inlet levels, to making sure the weed harvesting crew has what it needs to be ready to go, to ordering Zero Waste dog-poo bag refills (!!) for the Preserve's dog waste station, my days have been full and productive.

When you add in that I've met one kind person after another you'll understand that my first weeks on the job have been a real pleasure. I cannot thank each Board, staff, and District member enough for their support and helpfulness during this transition.

Here are some projects going forward that will impact Ripples readers —

- After a successful managed burn on two sections of the Preserve prairie, we've contracted to have the vegetative matter remaining cut away to better allow the prairie grasses to get their foothold. A healthy prairie and wetland preserve is the first line of defense for protecting our lake.
- Beginning the process for a property owner opinion survey for the updated management plan.
- A new member's been added to this year's weed harvesting crew. Welcome Bill Zibell!
- We are working on having an educator at the boat landing to remind boaters & fishers to drain livewells and buckets to stop aquatic hitchhikers.
- Preparing for the annual meeting August 17. Hope to meet you there or sooner!

As the World Terns

Forster's Terns are a medium-sized tern with pointed wings, long, forked tail, and black-tipped orange bill.



In the last issue of Ripples, you may remember reading about a plan to strategically outfit an 8x12' raft to mimic the natural nesting habitat of the Forster's Tern, and locate it in the Preserve wetlands. We can think of no better way to celebrate May as American Wetlands Month than inviting you to see the completed project.

The raft is clearly visible from the observation deck located along the path through the prairie of the Preserve on County Rd A. The hike there will take about fifteen minutes from the Preserve parking lot.

Let us know if you spot one of the small, gull-like colony nesting birds, should we be lucky enough to have success in our first year trying to attract them!

Currently, the Forster's Tern nests only in a handful of locations in the state.

Thank you to Roger Rude for providing the substrate we used to mimic the bird's favored nesting material, and to Board member Craig Kempel for his help in constructing the raft. A field cam is also trained on the site, so potential predators won't bother the site without our knowing.

Look to Facebook for updates. You can't turn your head for a minute around here or you might miss something.

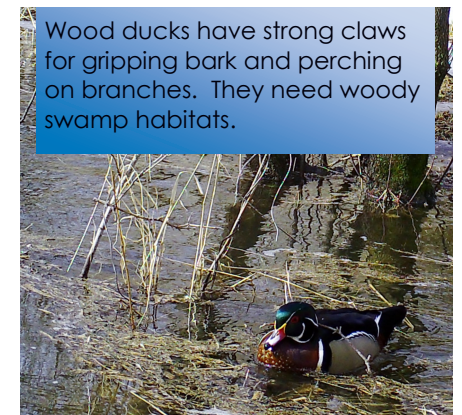
Of Wetlands and Watersheds

Of the 1500 acres of wetlands that used to surround Lake Ripley, approximately 500 remain. The rest have been converted, through a process of tiling, filling, rerouting and draining, to the farms and built environments that we humans call home today.

Protecting the wetlands that remain is a year-round goal here at LRMD so that the services they provide can continue. We invite property owners and lake users within the watershed to pledge the same because more than any other strategy for keeping our lake healthy, keeping our surrounding wetlands healthy has the most impact.

This is why the Lake Ripley Management District has a wetlands management plan as well as a lake management plan. Helping natural processes of the wetlands continue to act as a line of defense against nutrient-overloaded runoff from farm fields, has required that we first develop a deep understanding of how these processes work and interact.

Owning acres of some of the remaining wetlands on the Preserve allows us to observe and manage them. The aim is to maximize their ability to catch, slow, and filter the influx of water into Lake Ripley as effectively as they were intended to. The beauty of the creatures attracted to the wetlands, such as this wood duck that was caught on our trail cam in late March, help make the efforts we all make feel worthwhile and urgent. What we call wetlands, they call home. Sometimes, humans are the guests.



Wood ducks have strong claws for gripping bark and perching on branches. They need woody swamp habitats.