Ripples

Lake Ripley Management District

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From the Helm

The Common Carp

Common carp (Cyprinus carpio) are regarded as a nuisance fish in some countries and a delicacy in others. During the middle ages in Europe, carp were exclusively reserved for royalty and even today they are prepared by chefs in the some of the finest restaurants in the world! Carp were brought to the U.S. during the 1830s from Europe and kept in ponds near Washington D.C. in hopes of farming them for a food source for immigrants. They were intentionally released into the Hudson River with hopes of creating a commercial fishing market. By the late 1800s, the U.S. Fish Commission was stocking carp directly into lakes and rivers.

During this time, the timber industry started to boom. Workers were logging hillsides at such a fast rate that the topsoil began eroding into lakes and streams, causing mass destruction of the native fishes' spawning areas. Not only was this practice contributing to the rate of sedimentation at an alarming rate, the government was also draining wetlands, leveeing river bottoms, and

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The Common Carp continued

commercially harvesting millions of tons of native fish in the Midwest to supply food for the east coast. This led to fish populations being at an all-time low; northern pike, white suckers, and walleye populations were all significantly impacted.

Government leaders soon became alarmed by the mass depletion of the native fishery in the country, which led to President Grant appointing a fish commission to oversee the fisheries. Due to the political climate during this time it would have been politically incorrect to say that logging, development around shorelines, draining of wetlands, or the damming of rivers were the cause of our declining native fishery. The quick answer was to import the common carp from Europe to make up for the loss of our native species.

The government thought carp would be the perfect solution for the massive destruction of the water ways, because they could survive in the silty water that had been polluted by runoff and sewage caused by the rapid development of our rural areas. The common carp never became popular for fine dining in the U.S. because of its poor taste which was a direct result of the environment it lived in. In Europe, the fresh water within their lakes and streams produced a much different taste of carp. By the 1890s carp were only selling for 3-4¢/pound and that caused a lot of fish farmers to move on to other types of farming. By now, most lakes and rivers were inundated with carp and the numbers of game fish were low.

In 1880, the Midwest received its first carp at the Nevin Hatchery in Madison, Wisconsin. 75 carp were shipped to the hatchery and by the next year they had produced 163 fingerlings that were given to others for stocking in ponds. At that time, carp could sell for $1/pound and they were hard to come by.

Unfortunately, carp contribute to poor water quality. They are notorious for altering natural ecosystems. They uproot aquatic vegetation, which releases sediment into the water column and therefore increases the turbidity of the water. This behavior can also contribute to algae blooms; the sediment that is stirred up often contains phosphorus, which is one of the most common nutrients associated with algae blooms. Carp prey on native fish eggs, reducing the native fish population. Carp are extremely hard to remove from lakes and rivers; it is expensive and causes lots of excess damage from practices such as poisoning and netting.

As more dams are removed and the restoration of wetlands continue, there seems to be a balance created by nature which will hopefully allow the native fish to thrive once again. Last year the Board approved a motion to prevent carp from entering the lake at the outlet from Koshkonong Creek. With help from our lake manager, the DNR, Jefferson County Zoning Department, the Town of Oakland Board, and residents that live along the creek, we will be installing a carp barrier at the culvert on Park Road. This will prevent the spawning carp from swimming further up the creek and entering Lake Ripley.

We encourage fisherman to harvest the carp while in the outlet and properly dispose of them. Have a safe boating season and I hope to see you on Lake Ripley on those beautiful sunny days! For more information on the common carp, visit: *www.americancarpsociety.com* and *www.usgs.gov*.

Jimmy DeGidio, Chair

Burn, Prairie, Burn!

On April 2nd, the District was able to burn 23 acres of prairie and 9.5 acres of wetland! There is a lot of planning that goes into burning a prairie. For safety reasons, a burn is only prescribed and conducted under precise weather conditions; temperature, wind and humidity are all closely monitored before any burn to ensure ideal burn conditions. This practice also helps the animals living within the prairie to survive. Burning the prairie and wetland provides many benefits to the entire ecosystem! Fire helps cycle nutrients and restore them to the soil by removing them from dead organic matter, to prevent the invasion of less desirable fire-sensitive species, such as the non-native buckthorn. Fire is beneficial as it acts as nature's "gardener" by trimming back these trees and over-mature shrubs that shade out our sun-dependent plants, such as grasses and prairie flowers. A grassy environment would naturally transition into a wooded forest over time. Burning helps maintain the grasslands so that creatures living there will still have a home. Most of the mammals living in prairies are burrowers. They live in self-dug tunnel systems under the ground, and they will retreat into their homes for safety during the burn. After a burn, the blackened soil quickly absorbs sunlight. The warmed earth encourages seed germination. Charred plant remains turn into a rich fertilizer, encouraging new grass growth to sprout from the network of root systems deep below ground.

Prairie Mound Ants

Burning the prairie allowed me to see some of the best kept secrets the prairie ecosystem has to offer! As I was walking along the freshly burned prairie, I noticed mounds of dirt still standing. I learned that these mounds are ant hills! Prairie mound ants are incredible animals that build mounds that can reach two feet high and three to four feet wide! The mounds are formed when the ants tunnel into the soil and bring particles up to the surface to dispose of. The average mound takes about six years to build and lasts for about twelve years. Some mounds are as old as 30 years! These ants can tunnel up to five feet into the earth; they move more dirt than earthworms and are valuable soil mixers and turners! One mound can have up to 6,000 ants inside, with fifty or more entrances. The mounds consist of a honeycomb of tunnels and chambers for food and young workers to rest in, and the tunnels also affect oxygen exchange. These ants eat insect larvae, pillbugs, and they harvest honeydew from aphids and treehoppers. These insects are fascinating, and it is always fun to learn more about the prairie ecosystem!

Spring Paddle on Lake Ripley

As I push away from shore the silence of the morning is broken by the rush of wings and the distinctive primitive shriek of a pair of sandhill cranes that, until that moment, had been hidden by the shoreline vegetation. When the cranes had cleared the air space of a flat calm Lake Ripley, I resumed my morning paddle with a goal of a shoreline trip around the lake. After a few strokes, the muscles in my arms and back remembered the familiar rhythm of the J-stroke and the gentle wake of my canoe leaves a trail that I like to think is the day's problems being left behind during my time of exercise and reflection.

The paddle around Milwaukee Bay goes by quickly as I start the familiar bend around the boy scout camp. On this early spring morning the camp is still vacant of activity except for the bald eagle that has taken up a position high in one of the numerous oak trees, that by their size most certainly outdates the camp.

Further down the lake approaching the marina I take a moment at what I know to be a productive fishing spot. I place the paddle across my knees and drift in perfect stillness while searching the bottom below for signs of pre-spawn activity. The early spring timeframe has the lake water in optically crystal-clear condition, and I can easily scan the bottom. A few small bass and bluegills can be seen here and there, but the tell-tale images of the males guarding the eggs in the bed have not yet developed. With warmer weather predicted in the coming weeks I make a mental note to check this area again and maybe next time bring my fishing equipment.

While I am still a hundred or so yards from the park beach area, I notice a brightly colored buoy further out towards the deeper water. Strange thing because I do not remember buoys in this area of the lake. I am paddling close to shore but decide to paddle further out to investigate the AWOL floating

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Spring Paddle on Lake Ripley continued

marker. That is when the marker starts to move in a straight line towards the shoreline of the beach. It is a calm day on the lake and the buoy is making steady headway from right to left. This certainly requires additional investigation as I increase my stroke cadence.

Now within 50 yards I can see that the buoy is moving fast enough to make a wake. Suddenly ahead of the buoy water splashes and a wet-suited diver clears his snorkel with a hard breath. Mystery solved as I make my way towards shore to intercept the visitor from the deep.

The diver, Zach, is a free diving spearfisherman from Madison who got a tip that Lake Ripley was a great place for early season carp. Attached to his belt were 3 nice sized carp which were destined for his friend's smoker.

He found the carp in 8 to 10 feet of water and was able to spot and identify the fish from ten feet in the perfectly clear water conditions. He remarked that the water clarity was exceptional, and he planned to return to the lake before boating activity made the free diving undoable.

Curious about spearfishing I began asking questions and Zach advised that there is a continuous open season for spearing rough fish in all Wisconsin counties except Ashland, Bayfield, Forest, Iron, Menominee, Oneida, Price, Sawyer and Vilas, and for all Lake Winnebago System waters. While some people shun the palatability of carp, Zach was quick to point out that carp have been embraced by parts of the world for centuries as a sustainable food source and with the proper cooking techniques the fish is considered exceptional eating.

Throughout the conversation it became apparent to me that spearfishing for rough fish was a win-win situation for everyone. Since carp are considered an unwelcome species by most lake communities, the taking of the fish by the spearfishing recreational activity of some provides a positive outcome for everyone. I thanked Zach for his time educating me on spearfishing and congratulated him on his catch.

As I finished my paddle around Lake Ripley I could not stop thinking about the activity of spearfishing and my chance encounter with an active participant. The reoccurring theme was the water clarity of the lake! The work of the LRMD current members and those that have served previously are responsible for these ideal conditions that I was experiencing on this early spring day and I made a mental note to somehow recognize them for their hard work.

If you are on the lake and you see a paddler in a black canoe with a smile on his face, please give me a wave.

Paddle on My Friends - Jon Tilp

Mosquitos, anyone?

Mosquitos are no joke, for sure! But how we deal with them can either help or harm the very creatures we do enjoy seeing in our yards. Like all living things, mosquitos play their role in the food web. If we "fog" a yard to reduce mosquitos, we are also (unintentionally) killing many beneficial insects like bees and butterflies as well as mosquitos. Poisons, like traps, kill more than the intended target. Thus, we are also unintentionally harming the songbirds, frogs, dragonflies, and bats who eat mosquitos and other insects. A single bat eats several thousand mosquitos every night! A well-placed bat-house would create an on-site, night-shift crew of efficient mosquito eaters! Plant a shoreline buffer garden as habitat for frogs and dragonflies, for the day-shift mosquito crew. Sometimes the best solution is to help nature take care of the problem!

DO NOT Compost Invasive Plants!

After weeding invasive plants like garlic mustard, dames rocket, and yellow rocket, burn the debris! DO NOT compost them! They can still set seed, contaminate the compost, and continue spreading through seeding.

Public input session for Lake Management Plan

A public input session will be held during late summer/early fall of 2021. This session will be to discuss the 10-year lake management plan that the District is currently updating. A draft will be available online and the public comments will be incorporated into the plan.

Fundraiser Fun! - Thank you to everyone who bought pizzas from Watertown's Pizza Ranch and helped the District raise some money! This money will be used to help us achieve our ongoing restoration goals in the Preserve! We appreciate you!!

Be sure to visit, to LIKE and FOLLOW our Facebook page at: **www.facebook.com/LRMDLS2020**

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