

Lake Associations & Lake Districts

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There are two main types of lake organizations, lake associations and lake districts. Lake associations are voluntary groups. Lake districts are special purpose units of government. The same lake may have both a voluntary association and a public management district.

The type of organization best for your lake is determined by many factors, including; the lake community's long range goals, the number of people living on and using the lake, the size and type of lake, the urgency of threats to the lake, and the complexity of lake management activities needed to improve the lake.

Do you need a lake group?

Are you content with the condition of your lake? Or, are there too many boats, declining water quality, excessive development pressures, or an over-abundance of "weeds"? These are the issues that often prompt many folks to consider "organizing" with their lake neighbors.

Often "problems" of one kind or another are the reasons folks start lake organizations. However, lakes need protection on a pro-active basis. It is very difficult to reverse the effects of long-term pollution, shoreline destruction, or careless development practices. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

What Lake Groups Can Do

Lake organizations and agencies struggle with many issues in their continuing pursuit to safeguard lakes. Today's issues can be complex, crossing political and natural boundaries. Increasingly, complicated concerns require the involvement of those affected as well as the organizations and agencies appointed to deal with the issues. Your organization can play a vital role in defining the future of your lake.

Lake groups can serve many functions:

Promote communication between lake folks,

- Help clarify the needs of the lake,
- Assist the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in environmental conservation,
- Promote water education,
- Give the lake a strong, united voice in local government,
- Promote environmentally sound policy,
- Help all lake users understand the fragile nature of our waters,
- Give lake folks a chance to volunteer or donate to their lake,
- Make it possible to get DNR or state funding for projects
- Operate dams
- Maintain lake access
- Contract for aquatic plant removal
- Buy and operate an aquatic plant harvester
- Purchase sensitive areas such as wetlands
- Improve fish habitat (with a permit from DNR)
- Stock fish (with a permit from DNR)

- Install and operate an aerator (with a permit from DNR)

Lake groups can also serve as an important way to collectively represent lake interests to local decision makers and build community with fellow lake residents.

Communicate your lake and watershed concerns to your town and county officials. Work with your local government whenever possible to ensure that lake protection is achieved in local decision-making

- Communicate your lake's perspective by being an active participant in your countywide lake group
- Develop a lake management plan and implement it. DNR Lake Grants are available to qualified lake groups (PDF 70 KB) for a host of lake management, planning, and education projects.
- Work with towns, cities, and villages to develop local ordinances to address lake issues
- Promote lake-friendly waterfront living with lake stewardship activities
- Get involved in lake policy issues at the state level

Join the Wisconsin Association of Lakes.

- Conduct a lake monitoring program. There are many lake and watershed monitoring options to help you learn about the lake's ecology and track changes in the lake's health over time.
- Design education programs for your members and those who impact the lake.

Develop a lake newsletter to keep your members informed on local and state lake news. Survey your membership on lake concerns and potential solutions.

Lake Associations

Lake associations are voluntary groups, and include unincorporated associations, qualified lake associations (incorporated associations), and nonprofit corporations. Lake associations can form without any formal requirements, although many incorporate under Chapter 181 of the Wisconsin Statutes to be eligible for state cost sharing grants.

Associations have no powers over lake community residents; membership and dues are voluntary. A voluntary association can have genuine advantages over a lake district because they may be able to act more quickly than governmental bodies on some issues. Some folks may be more willing to support a voluntary organization rather than forming a new unit of government, particularly one with taxing power. However, if your lake management goals are ambitious, the more stable funding of a lake district may be essential. On the other hand, voluntary lake associations are sometimes frustrated by low participation and monetary support.

To be eligible for state lake planning, protection, and recreational boating facilities grants, a lake association must be "qualified," which includes being incorporated and meeting other standards.

For more information about Lake Associations, download [People of the Lake](#) (PDF 5.71 MB)

Lake Districts

Lake districts are special purpose units of government, and include; public inland lake protection and rehabilitation districts, sanitary districts, special districts, and commissions formed by local governments. The purpose of a district is to maintain, protect, and improve the quality of a lake and its watershed for the mutual good of the members and the lake environment.

Lake districts are established by town, county or village boards, or city councils, and usually based on a

formal petition of lake area owners. Lake district formation and operations must comply with Chapter 33 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The boundaries of a lake district usually include the property of all riparian owners and can include off-lake property that benefits from the lake or affects the lake's watershed. The district may include all or part of a lake or more than one lake. A city or village must give its approval to be included in a district.

Lake districts are governmental bodies with elected or appointed leaders and annual budgets funded from tax levies or special assessments. Districts also have some capabilities to regulate lake use, such as local boating ordinances and sewage management. Within a lake district, all property owners share in the cost of management activities undertaken by the district. Residents who live in the district and are eligible voters and all property owners have a vote in the affairs of the district. This is accomplished at an annual meeting which must be held between May 22 and September 8 each year.

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