



Driftwood

Spring / Summer 2020

The newsletter of the
Turtle Flambeau Flowage
and Trude Lake
Property Owners'
Association, Inc.

Announcement

On April 23, the Board of Directors of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake Property Owners' Association held a virtual meeting via Zoom to discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on scheduled activities of the association. The board made the following decisions.

First, the board voted to cancel the June 2020 Annual Membership Meeting. The next annual meeting will take place in 2021.

Second, the board voted to cancel the 2020 elections of directors and officers, a required procedure that takes place at the Annual Membership Meeting. To provide leadership continuity, the board agreed to extend for one year the term in office of those directors and officers whose terms were set to expire this year.

Third, the board voted to hold elections for all nine board positions at the 2021 Annual Membership Meeting. Prior to that election, the board will nominate individuals for one- or two-year terms in such a way as to bring the board's composition into compliance with the requirement for staggered terms as called for in the association's By-Laws.

Fourth, the board authorized the publication of an email version of the newsletter.

Fifth, the board committed to holding virtual meetings, as needed, until pandemic-related restrictions are lifted.

The Mercer Ranger Station: Who, What, and When?

By Mike Hittle

When we put the fall/winter issue of Driftwood to bed, two important matters with a direct bearing on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake had not been fully resolved: the future of the fisheries staff at the Mercer Ranger Station; and the plans and timeline for the construction of a new facility for the station. Several important developments on each of these matters took place in subsequent months, only to have some of them interrupted by the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here is where things stand as of mid May, 2020.

President's Letter p. 2

COVID-19 Visitor Impact p. 3

New Walleye Regulations p. 4

In and Out p. 7

New Volunteer Opportunities p.8

As we pointed out last fall, a plan to move the three-person fisheries staff at the Mercer Ranger Station to the WDNR's Service Center in Ashland, first put forward in May of 2019, had run into considerable local resistance. Mercer Town Chairman John Sendra, noting that Iron County had far more inland waters in need of supervision and management than did Ashland County, argued that moving fisheries personnel away from the bulk of their work made no sense whatsoever.

Continued on Page 5

President's Letter

By Randy Schubert



As I prepare this letter, a lot has changed in the world and our country since the last time we communicated. I doubt anyone would have thought several months ago that we would currently be experiencing what we are today. With “social distancing” now such a big part of our daily lives and the many unknowns of navigating through these unprecedented waters, no one really knows what the new “norm” will be and the impact it will have on our lives. One thing is for certain: there will be changes from the way we lived our lives prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and what it will be like when things get back to some type of normal, whatever that will be. Our lake association, as everything else, has been impacted by Covid-19. Restrictions put in place with the Wisconsin Safer at Home order and limitations to in-person meetings have resulted in a new way for the association to conduct board meetings. I am proud to say that thanks to Terry Daulton, we were able to conduct our April board meeting by way of a Zoom meeting. With a few minor technical glitches early on, which were quickly resolved, we were able to conduct a full board meeting and accomplish the items necessary for the continued administration of the organization. The board was faced with the difficult decision on whether to continue with the annual meeting scheduled for June 2020. After review of the current situation and pondering future unknowns, we decided to cancel our annual meeting. While we all look forward to the meeting as an opportunity to see fellow lake association members, along with conducting many of the business functions required within our bylaws,

the board felt this was the appropriate decision, based on the safety of all our members. Since the annual meeting is also where we hold our elections, the board discussed and approved by vote forgoing the election of new officers and board members for the coming year; current officers and board members agreed to serve another year. An election will be held during our annual meeting in 2021. I would like to thank all those officers and board members who agreed to stay on for another year. These decisions are outlined in another article within this publication.

We will continue to monitor the phases of the Badger Bounce Back program and its impact on our various projects and events planned for 2020. Please continue to check in and monitor our web-site, along with our Facebook page, for dates and times of scheduled events, along with any other information that develops. I encourage everyone to review our calendar of events and participate if you have the time. As with every volunteer organization, it's the members who make it work. Work days, projects, and committees are a great way to contribute in order to ensure the mission of our association is accomplished.

I am pleased to report that our committees are active even in the Covid-19 era. The water level on the flowage as of early spring is great: the flowage is at full pool and the spring re-fill goal was met. As reported in my previous letter, Todd and Becky Jirous have taken over the water quality committee and the transition from Mike and Beth Myers went well. Thank you again, Todd and Becky, for taking on this project, and thanks to Mike and Beth for all their hard work and effort over the years. Randy Payne continues to charge forward with the invasive species committee. He attends and participates in various invasive species conferences and meetings with state and local organizations to identify current and future invasive species threats to the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake watershed area. Thank you, Randy, for formulating plans and strategies to address these critical issues and bringing them to the attention of the association. Our fish committee under the leadership of Jim Kohl remains strong and engaged. Furthermore, thanks to all those on our communication committee-- Terry Daulton, Mike Hittle, Chad Mcgrath, Jean Burns, Tom Mowbray and Susan Payne—for your work on the Facebook page, website, newsletter, and other communications.

While we currently have a strong group in place for our committees and board functions, I encourage and challenge more of our association members to become involved either in leadership positions (as an officer, director, or committee chair) or as a participant in one or more committees. With the association now being able to conduct meetings through Zoom and other virtual meeting sites, it's now possible to participate in various meetings without needing to be in Mercer. With over 180 members, the association has a lot of potential out there to contribute and help our organization accomplish and reach our objectives toward our mission statement.



It's unknown what impact the pandemic will have on short- and long-term travel, and on visitors to Northwoods and the Turtle-Flambeau Trude Lake areas. Be assured, however, that our organization will continue to be positive and forward thinking in relation to our responsibilities as stewards of these two special bodies of water that we truly enjoy and appreciate so much.

I hope that everyone remains safe during these very challenging times and I look forward to seeing you soon on the flowage.
Randy

Iron County Public Health and Covid-19: Current Policy Statement

On May 13, the Wisconsin State Supreme Court overturned the governor's Safer at Home Emergency Order. It appears at this moment that there will be no state-wide strategy for coping with Covid-19; decisions on local strategies have been left to the state's towns and counties. What follows are excerpts from a press release by Iron County Public Health, dated May 14, 2020.

"The order is gone, the virus is not. Continue to practice the guidance that has developed over the past eight weeks. Maintain physical distance, avoid gathering in groups, use good personal hygiene, handwashing, etc. When you feel sick, do not go to work, the store, or anywhere else. Consider wearing a cloth face covering when out in public.... It is important that businesses thoroughly review the WEDC's Reopening Guidelines before opening...We also encourage businesses to develop a Covid-19 plan that includes screening of staff for illness, disinfection and cleaning protocols, and proper distancing considerations for customers and employees. Local businesses will now play a big role in protecting customers and staff in our community."

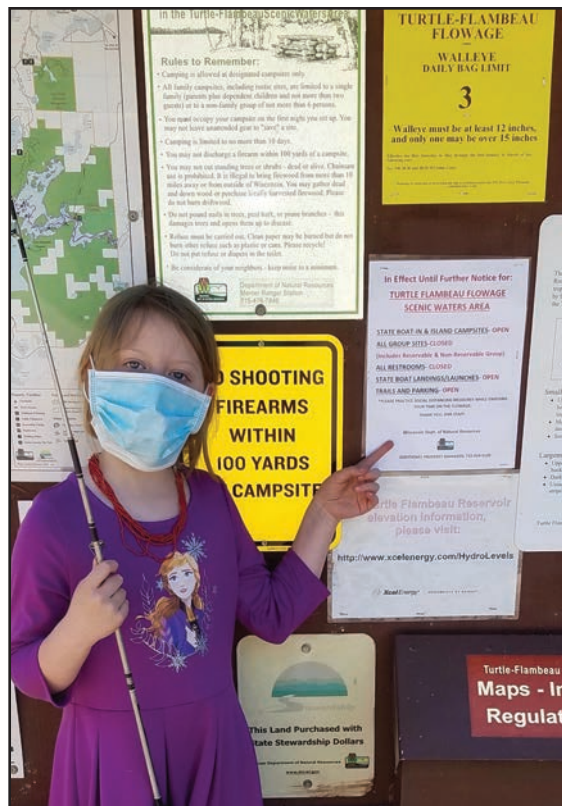
The agency also indicates that in the event of outbreaks or spikes in the virus, new orders may be necessary.

COVID-19 Impact on Visitor Use of the Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters Area

By Chad McGrath

For the TFSWA no news seems to be good news. Although the official statewide reaction to the virus curtailed many activities and businesses, not a great deal changed here around the flowage. Trails and parking lots stayed open, although signs about appropriate distancing were posted. Boat landings and parking areas, including overnight parking, stayed open. Docks remained open, including the ADA (Americans with Disability Act) compliant dock with railings, which were disinfected twice a day. To many people's chagrin toilets were closed pursuant to a Center's for Disease Control mandate. All flowage campsites for fewer than six people remained open, although group sites were closed.

Opening day of fishing season saw lots of boat landing use. According to a survey made between 9 and 10 a.m. there were: 56 vehicles, all with Wisconsin license plates at Fisherman's Landing; 23 vehicles at Murry's Landing, all with Wisconsin plates save for one from Michigan; and 95 Wisconsin vehicles, 3 Minnesota and 1 from Illinois at Springstead Landing. Indeed, according to my own unofficial survey of the Springstead Landing, there were 27 trucks with trailers parked at 7 p.m. on opening eve. Camping anyone?



A Caronavirus-savvy Lola Wilson points to a WDNR notice about social distancing, "while enjoying your time on the flowage."

Photo taken at Fisherman's Landing
by Terry Daulton

Tribal Treaty Declarations

This spring the Lake Superior Band of Chippewa, pursuant to their treaty rights, made their 2020 declarations for walleye harvests in the Ceded Territory. Citing data provided by Tom Cichosz, WDNR treaty data coordinator, the Vilas County News-Review reports that the overall harvest declaration has been set at 55,213 walleyes—a figure that is less than the number last year. Much of the reduction comes from a substantially lower declaration on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, where the Lac du Flambeau tribe has declared 2712 fish and the Bad River tribe 250 fish. The 2962 total represents 54 per cent of the safe harvest level established by the WDNR and the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission. Both in 2018 and 2019, the tribe had declared at 94 per cent. According to Jason Folstad, fisheries technician in Mercer, had the tribe declared at 60 per cent or more of the safe harvest level this year, they would have become ineligible to spear the flowage in 2021, given rules in place to prevent over-exploitation of a lake's fishery. Driftwood will report on the actual 2020 harvest when those numbers become available.



New Walleye Regulations

Though we have covered in previous issues the development of new walleye regulations for the flowage, we thought we would review them for the dedicated anglers among our readers.



Starting with the May 2, 2020 fishing opener, the minimum length for walleyes taken from the flowage will be 12 inches. Only one fish over 15 inches may be kept. The total daily bag limit is three walleyes.

These regulations apply to the following waters: Turtle-Flambeau Flowage; Trude Lake; Bear River; Flambeau River upstream of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage at Murray's Landing; Little Turtle River; and Manitowish River upstream of the Flambeau River to the Rest Lake Dam (including Benson, Sturgeon, and Vance Lakes).

According to Zach Lawson, former fisheries biologist for Iron and Ashland Counties, "This new regulation is tailored to a system with a recent decline in natural reproduction, but where harvest pressure on the entire population remains high. Combining recent survey information with a rich historical dataset on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage suggests that this regulation is a sustainable option for protecting one of Wisconsin's great walleye fisheries."



The Mercer Ranger Station: Who, What, and When?

Continued from Page 1

Retired WDNR technician Jeff Wilson contended in a lengthy memorandum to the WDNR that not only would such a move put the fisheries staff at a considerable distance from the resources they work with daily, and make citizen interaction with them much more difficult, it would also have an adverse economic impact on the agency. Travel time for staff and truck expenses could increase costs as much as \$15,000 a year—hardly a sensible move in a time of budgetary constraints. In the end, the WDNR temporized. It assigned Zach Lawson, fisheries biologist for Iron and Ashland counties, to the Mercer office for three days a week and the Ashland office for two. Fisheries technicians Jason Folstad and Jim Zarzycki remained at Mercer full time. A final decision on transferring the entire fisheries staff to Ashland was put off until the summer of 2020.



The historic Mercer Ranger Station. A popular favorite with an uncertain future.

Photo by Terry Daulton

Since that time, the situation has become still more complicated. Zach Lawson decided to move to Brule, Wisconsin, to be fisheries biologist for Bayfield and Douglas Counties; but before any steps could be taken to fill his vacated position, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Rapidly declining state revenues then forced the state to declare a hiring freeze until the end of the fiscal year (July 1) for all positions except those related to Covid-19, and it is possible that the freeze could be extended if the state's economic situation does not improve. Consequently, the process of filling the vacancy is on hold at least until July 1, and perhaps for even longer. Moreover, according to Mike Vogelsang, the WDNR fisheries supervisor for northern Wisconsin, a final decision about where to house the fisheries personnel for Iron and Ashland Counties has not yet been made and will not be made until the hiring process is set to begin.



Smokey the Bear stands guard over some of the Ranger Station's treasures.

Photo by Terry Daulton

Mercer Ranger Station has historically hosted more customers and visitors than the WDNR's Park Falls facility, and likely other WDNR facilities in the north as well. Put another way, the Mercer Ranger Station has been a service center in all but name. One cannot help but wonder whether the many people with an interest in Iron County lakes, including the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake, will take the time to drive to Ashland to share their thoughts with and ask questions of Ashland-based fisheries personnel. The ultimate decision may well turn on how the WDNR balances the abstract principles that underlie the Service Center concept against the reality of facility that has a concrete record of wide-ranging service.



As far as the Mercer Ranger Station is concerned, the WDNR remains committed to replacing the existing two structures—the vehicle and equipment storage garage, and the office building. James Yach, Secretary’s Director, Northern Wisconsin, had the following to say in a letter to Mercer Town Chairman John Sendra. “The commitment to the community includes the engineering and building of a new DNR building in Mercer. The project proposal is scheduled for submittal in June 2020 and will be part of the state’s biennial budget process.” Development of the proposal is in the hands of the Department of Administration (DOA) and WDNR staff. The projected completion date is October 2022—with the caveat that “the timeline is approximate and is subject to change given delays in approvals, unforeseen conditions, etc.”

That much is consistent, with the exception of a new timeline, with what the WDNR announced last fall; but there is much about this project that remains in the air. First and foremost, it is not clear what space will be devoted to the fisheries program in the new facility. A WDNR memorandum entitled “Mercer Ranger Station—DNR Program Representation,” which Yach sent along with his letter to John Sendra, states unequivocally that “As of June 1, 2020, all fisheries staff assigned to the Mercer Ranger Station will be re-located to the DNR Ashland Service Center.” Accordingly, no office space in the new building is scheduled for fisheries personnel, though the document does allow for storage space in the garage area for “a work boat, shocker boat and nets.” At the present time, it seems that the forestry staff in the Ranger Station is playing the major role in planning with the DOA.

The above-mentioned memorandum on “program representation” was, however, prepared in different circumstances and may not reflect current thinking within the agency. If, as Mike Vogelsang asserted, no final decision has been made about the ultimate home of the fisheries biologist for Iron and Ashland Counties, then the possibility remains that the position could end up in Mercer. Such an eventuality would entail significant changes in program needs for the new building and lead

to corresponding modifications of its layout. Planning a complex facility without knowing for sure who will be in it is kind of like putting the cart before the horse—but in this instance there isn’t even a horse, and it’s not obvious when or where it will appear.

~~~~~

The Ranger Station project will involve destruction as well as construction. The old garage will come down to make room for the new multi-purpose facility; and after the new building is finished and its offices readied for use, the current office building may be razed. Built in 1939 to house the offices and family of the first ranger to work there, the



*The Medford DNR building – the prototype for a new facility in Mercer.  
The WDNR says it will hire an architect.*

current station has captured the fancy of many locals and visitors alike. Its “cozy” atmosphere of wood paneling, fieldstone fireplace, fish and animal mounts, and fish tank has a quality lacking in many contemporary government buildings. One might even say the building’s interior reflects something of the intimate relationship between the activities of those who work there and the natural world they have responsibility for.

For those who see the Ranger Station in such a light, its destruction would be a substantial loss to the community. That sentiment led to the convening on April 29, 2020, of an ad hoc local group of stakeholders seeking to repurpose the building. The discussion at the meeting ranged from the relatively modest notion of transposing some of the rustic/outdoor-oriented features of the building into the design and construction of the new facility, to a proposal for restoring the entire building and adapting it for use as a small visitor center. Numerous area outdoor-related groups might also find uses for such a facility as a meeting center. There are, of course, issues of funding—which may be more difficult in light of current economic conditions—as well as uncertainty about reaction of the WDNR to having a locally controlled building on its property. Discussions are at an early stage; and, as noted above, it is likely to be some time before the current ranger station becomes redundant.



# In and Out: A Short History of Flowage Ice

By Lynn Schlueter

I have been keeping track of “first ice” and “ice out” since we moved to Norway Point in 1982. Our home looks out toward First Bay. One of our neighbors at the time we moved into our house, Steve Jagielski, told me that he kept track of these events on a board in his crawl space. I found a beam in our coat closet underneath the stairs and started to record first ice and opening. First ice in 1982 was November 25, and opening the following spring was on April 30. Thankfully, I bought a computer and began recording on it before I ran out of room to scratch out the ice events (I am still writing dates on the beam—but there is not much room left!).



*Ice candles decorate black ice as the flowage begins to open up in 2013.*

Photo by Mike Hittle



*Candled ice up close. Photo by Mike Hittle*

The earliest the ice formed was November 4, 1991, and the latest it set up was December 13, 1998. In 2015, the ice formed on November 28th, but completely opened on December 14th and remained open until December 19th.

The earliest opening was March 23, 2012, and the following year, 2013, was the latest opening, which was May 11th.

First ice last fall (2019) was November 8th, and the opening this spring was April 26, 2020.

The average date of first ice is November 20th, and the average opening occurs on April 17th.

| FIRST ICE |                                  | ICE OUT |          |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---------|----------|
| 1982      | November 25                      | 1983    | April 30 |
| 1983      | November 25                      | 1984    | April 19 |
| 1984      | November 17                      | 1985    | April 22 |
| 1985      | November 21                      | 1986    | April 13 |
| 1986      | November 11                      | 1987    | April 13 |
| 1987      | November 20                      | 1988    | April 15 |
| 1988      | November 18 / December 1         | 1989    | April 27 |
| 1989      | November 17                      | 1990    | April 18 |
| 1990      | November 29                      | 1991    | April 19 |
| 1991      | November 4                       | 1992    | April 30 |
| 1992      | November 7 / November 15         | 1993    | April 29 |
| 1993      | November 8 / November 27         | 1994    | April 14 |
| 1994      | November 26                      | 1995    | April 28 |
| 1995      | November 9                       | 1996    | May 8    |
| 1996      | November 12                      | 1997    | April 27 |
| 1997      | November 17                      | 1998    | April 9  |
| 1998      | December 13                      | 1999    | April 5  |
| 1999      | November 30                      | 2000    | April 15 |
| 2000      | November 20                      | 2001    | April 21 |
| 2001      | December 9                       | 2002    | April 20 |
| 2002      | November 26                      | 2003    | April 27 |
| 2003      | November 8                       | 2004    | April 19 |
| 2004      | November 25                      | 2005    | April 13 |
| 2005      | November 24                      | 2006    | April 14 |
| 2006      | December 9                       | 2007    | April 20 |
| 2007      | November 23                      | 2008    | May 2    |
| 2008      | November 18                      | 2009    | April 23 |
| 2009      | December 5                       | 2010    | March 31 |
| 2010      | November 23                      | 2011    | April 25 |
| 2011      | November 30                      | 2012    | March 23 |
| 2012      | November 26                      | 2013    | May 11   |
| 2013      | November 23                      | 2014    | May 6    |
| 2014      | November 14                      | 2015    | April 13 |
| 2015      | November 28 (opened December 14) | 2016    | April 15 |
| 2016      | December 7                       | 2017    | April 9  |
| 2017      | November 10                      | 2018    | May 6    |
| 2018      | November 13                      | 2019    | April 26 |
| 2019      | November 8                       | 2020    | April 26 |
| 2020      |                                  |         |          |
| 2021      |                                  |         |          |





# New Opportunities for Volunteers: Loons and CLP

By Randy Payne

## *Curly Leaf Pondweed*

Curly leaf pondweed (CLP) is an aquatic invasive plant that has established itself in the Turtle River watershed. This plant, which forms dense mats at the surface of the water, interferes with boating, overtakes native plants, and disturbs native fish and aquatic animals. CLP spreads naturally through seed propagation, turions (plant buds), and other plant parts; and it can also be spread through human use of water-related equipment, such as boats, trailers, and any other items that make it into the water.

CLP was discovered in Rice Lake in 2014, and last year was found in Pike Lake, the next lake downstream in the Turtle River watershed. Having clearly demonstrated its ability to colonize downstream waters, CLP, if left unchecked, has the potential to move on down the river to Lake of the Falls, and eventually to the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage.

The battle against CLP has been going on for six years, and so far has met with limited success. This year, Iron County Lakes and Rivers Alliance, the Rice Lake Association, and citizens from Pike Lake are organizing an “all-hands-on-deck” hand-pulling effort to begin as early as possible this season (June-early July). (You should have received an email previously with details of the operation and a sign-up sheet.) A scientific Point Intercept Survey of Rice Lake, the Turtle River downstream from Rice, and Pike Lake will be conducted by specialists before the hand pulling “party.” The purposes of this survey are to accurately locate the infestations and to document the native plants present in these waters. Volunteer help is needed for the actual hand removal. This will be similar to our purple loosestrife workday, but may require working in chest waders. Please consider volunteering to help our neighbors to the north, which, in turn, should help protect the long-term future of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage.

Although CLP has not been seen in the TFF yet, it’s not too early to be on the lookout. Report any sighting to Zach Wilson with the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department. CLP is identified by its lasagna shaped leaves approximately a half-inch wide and two to three inches long. There are many detailed descriptions on the internet.



## *Purple Loosestrife Survey to Become a Bit Looney*

This year we would like to add a new and fun survey task to our purple loosestrife survey: counting loon pairs and chicks! Jeff Wilson came up with a great idea to add loons to the purple loosestrife survey, which is going to be easy to implement, and a nice way to get valuable loon chick data over the entire flowage with minimal extra work on the part of the loosestrife volunteers. While surveying for purple loosestrife in late July, we will simply keep an eye out for loon pairs and chicks, and note their numbers and locations (coordinates). The data will be forwarded to Jeff who will provide a summary report to LoonWatch, the citizen science program at Northland College that tracks loon populations in Wisconsin. This summer we will send out an instruction sheet for conducting a loon survey along with the usual purple loosestrife survey documents. Thank you for your help, and stay safe.

Please contact Randy Payne if you are interested in volunteering for our association’s purple loosestrife/loon surveys at [rpayne3868@charter.net](mailto:rpayne3868@charter.net)





# Stand Up and Be Counted!

By Jean Burns



Remember to fill out and send in the 2020 Census form you received in the mail, or go to [my2020census.gov](https://my2020census.gov) and fill it out online.

*What is it?* The census survey is a set of nine questions and takes approximately ten minutes to fill out. Legally mandated by the U.S. Constitution, the census is an effort to count all people living on American soil for the primary purpose of apportioning political representation in the federal government and to help determine government funding for development, infrastructure, and health initiatives.

*Why is it important?* A complete and accurate count of the population is critical because it will determine the distribution of federal funds for education, Medicaid, fire departments, hospitals, transportation, roads, and other resources. The results of the census also determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives, and they are used for drawing political boundaries for local, state, and federal elections. The 2020 census will be vitally important for all Americans, but for those who live, work and care about rural communities and small towns, it is critical that they are accurately counted in order to get their fair share of resources and representation.



**EDITORS:** Terry Daulton/Mike Hittle  
Chad McGrath/Jean Burns

**PRESIDENT:** Randy Schubert

**VICE-PRESIDENT:** Jeff Malison

**SECRETARY:** Todd Jirous

**TREASURER:** Tom Mowbray

**DIRECTORS:** Jean Burns/Mike Hittle/  
Ed Hryciuk/Jim Kohl/Diane O'Krongly

## — Mission Statement —

The purpose of the Association is to maintain, protect and enhance the quality of the lake and its surroundings for the collective interest of members and the general public.

*Published Twice Annually*

If you would like to contact the Association electronically, please visit our website [www.tfftl.org](http://www.tfftl.org) and search under "CONTACT US"