



Driftwood

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

Fall / Winter 2023-24

Eurasian Water Milfoil in Flowage

By Zach Wilson, Conservation Specialist,
Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department

Greetings stakeholders, association members, and lovers of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake!

As many of you know, the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department (ICLWCD) has for many years committed a large amount of its time to monitoring and managing aquatic invasives species (AIS) on the flowage. Each year a team of trained staff educate boaters at landings,

wetland invasive), Chinese and banded mystery snails, and aquatic for-get-me-not. To date, management has mostly focused on purple loosestrife populations throughout the flowage mainly because it's a species whose presence or spread can be contained by hand pulling or herbicide treatments.

On August 9th, 2023, while conducting shoreline monitoring surveys on the TFF, our department discovered a new aquatic invasive plant species: Eurasian water milfoil (EWM).

When it comes to invasive species not all are created equal in terms of conservation efforts. EWM is one that falls into the "concerned category" and often deserves more attention than other invasives. Like many invasives it can out-compete our native species by growing earlier in the season

and lasting later into the fall. In addition to having a longer growing season, EWM spreads by fragmentation. Just a small piece of EWM can float around the lake and start growing roots to form new populations.

So, what are the next steps we can take to prevent EWM from further disrupting our waters both recreationally and ecologically? My first recommendation would be to help reduce the spread by avoiding areas on the flowage with EWM. Remember it spreads through fragmentation and one pass through with a motor could potentially increase the spread. The map here shows the areas identified this summer. The main population of EWM was found near the Bonies Mound area just south of the island of that name. Follow-up surveys on 8/16/2023 with Alex Selle, our AIS Regional Coordinator, indicated roughly an area of around 90 acres containing multiple beds of EWM. Most of the



EWM locations on the flowage near Bonies Mound. Courtesy ICLWCD

search shorelines for new invasives, and manage non-native species throughout almost 14,000 acres of water. As of 2022, we have documented the presence of six aquatic invasive species, some of which are more of a concern than others based on their invasive nature and ability to drastically alter the ecosystem. These species include purple loosestrife, narrow leaf cattail, reed canary grass (which is more of a

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President's Letter

By Randy Schubert



Another summer on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage is in the books. It was a wonderful summer, but, as usual, it sped by way too fast. Our June Annual Membership Meeting was very well attended. I would, by the way, encourage everyone to attend these annual get-togethers if you possibly can. They enable attendees to meet other association members, to learn about recent and current association programs, and to take part in electing officers. Speaking of programs, one highlight of the summer was the association's first adventure tour of the flowage. Jeff Wilson and Terry Daulton, in their roles as guides and interpreters, introduced program participants to the natural wonders of the flowage. Captain Jim Kohl not only made his pontoon available for the day, but also proved his navigation skills throughout the day. Both association members and a few non-members signed on for the tour. We are hoping to continue this program in the future as it provides an opportunity to educate people about rich natural history of the flowage.

On a less positive note, we learned a few months ago that Eurasian water milfoil is present in a portion of the flowage. The arrival of this potentially damaging invasive creates a significant challenge for those of us who care about the flowage. There are additional articles in this newsletter that contain more information on its discovery and efforts to contain it. This will be an opportunity for our association to partner with the WDNR and other organizations to educate the public and also manage resources in the effort to be proactive. The invasive situation is a current challenge and will also be a significant challenge in the future. We as an organization must stay on top of this. Randy Payne and his committee continue to lead the effort on this. If anyone wants to assist, please reach out to Randy, as additional help is always appreciated.

This also leads me to another challenge our association faces: generating interest among our membership to step forward into leadership roles. I have made this plea in the past and will continue to do so. Please consider running for a position on the board or for one of the two positions as an association officer that come up for election annually. And don't forget our committees, which need

both chairs and active members. Many of our current officers, board members, and committee chairs have been serving for a number of years and are ready to step down. Turnover in leadership is vital for volunteer organizations, both to relieve those who have been long-serving, but also to bring new perspectives to the table. Right now we seem to have a shortage of individuals who are willing to take on these positions. If you have been thinking about a leadership role but are concerned about the demands of travel, keep in mind that most of our board meetings are now held by way of Zoom. Location is not the critical factor it once was. Please keep this serious need for association leadership in mind as you make future plans.

Our association has challenges ahead with the invasives. We are, however, well-positioned to take on this challenge, both organizationally and in terms of commitment. Thanks again to everyone who is currently in a leadership position and also all our great members who make this organization what it is. Have a great fall and winter.

Randy

Mark Your Calendars – 2024 Annual Meeting

You will want to mark your calendar for the next annual meeting of the TFFTL POA. It has been scheduled for 10:00 AM on June 22, 2024 at the Mercer Community Center, 2648 W Margaret St, Mercer, WI, located next to the Mercer library. This is a fun and engaging way to meet your neighbors while you find out the latest about Eurasian water milfoil, water quality, volunteer opportunities, and fisheries. You can also vote for your board leadership, sip coffee, munch on a donut, and step up for one of our many volunteer opportunities. Please join us!



Calling All Writers - Time To Step Up!

By Terry Daulton, Retiring Editor, *Driftwood*

It is often said that every cloud reveals a silver lining, and it is the hope of the association newsletter team that the dark cloud brought on by the discovery of Eurasian water milfoil in the flowage voluntary quiet area (near Bonies Mound) will have at least one small silver lining. The silver lining we are hoping for is a renewed sense of urgency for lake association members to step forward and act-- in particular, to join our newsletter team.

Volunteer organizations frequently rely on a small number of dedicated people shouldering multiple roles. This is certainly true for our association and any number of other Iron County volunteer groups where a modest local population reduces the pool of those with time to invest. For our association, geography and seasonal schedules may play an even stronger role in reducing volunteer engagement. Our members are spread out across a large shoreline and are often only here for parts of the year. When here they engage in property maintenance, host visitors, and of course take some time to enjoy fishing, boating and other area recreation. Our lives are all busy, and it's important to take some relaxation while enjoying the waters and shores of the flowage and environs.

Sometimes a call to action is required to bring people together and motivate volunteers. When this happens, the rewards for those who step up are many, from meeting new friends and deepening community relations to gaining new skills and the sense of accomplishment for a job well done. As you might know, several stalwart volunteers have been staffing the newsletter crew for many years. I began as editor in the year 2002, and with a few short breaks when Mike Hittle took on that role, I have been editing for over 21 years! If I were to calculate the averages at 6,000 words per newsletter and two issues per year, the result would show that we have edited over 250,000 words in those years. That is the size of several good detective novels!

Kudos to newsletter veterans Mike Hittle, Chad McGrath, and Jean Burns who have also given multiple years' service to writing and editing. We must also thank the many DNR and land and water conservation staff guest writers, lake association board members, and volunteers who have spent hours developing the content for the much-lauded publication. I say much-lauded without reserve based on the results of our 2022 member survey in which 92% of members thought we should continue or enhance the newsletter. In that same survey 69% of members said that the newsletter "meets their expectations" and 25% said that it "exceeds expectations".

Recently, our newsletter team has been joined by Mary Nelson and Joanna Vodicka. They are great additions to our team. Thanks to both for stepping forward! Regretfully,

we have also lost members-- McGrath, Hittle and Burns-- leading to a leaner team than is desirable. So, with this article I am reaching out to you members to ask you to consider stepping forward and taking on this key education and communication role for the association. Mike Hittle and I are acting as "guest editors" for this issue of *Driftwood*, but come spring we need a new editor as well as new team members if we are to have an issue, one that will be especially critical in advance of the boating and EWM season. I will continue for a time as a writer and will help the new editor learn the ropes, but I can no longer serve as editor.

How much work does this task involve, you ask? Well with two issues per year it requires setting up two meetings per issue, or four per year. Our current method is to hold one meeting to plan the newsletter and one final meeting for editing and setting priorities for the printer. Thanks to Zoom and other online tools these meetings can be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. We also have opportunities to streamline our process by utilizing online data sharing to edit articles together. That practice could reduce the length and/or frequency of meetings. Depending on the topics selected, the newsletter team writes as well as edits, and you can use this as an opportunity for creativity and enjoyment.] The newsletter editor convenes the meetings, compiles final articles and graphics via email for layout, and works with the printer on layout. In the past, review of the layout and final proofing of the copy has been done either by our entire crew or by one or two members who have been tasked with that responsibility. Mailings are easy and can be fun, organized as a mailing get together with lunch or simply taken on by one or two individuals.

We also have some decisions to make in the coming years. Do we want to maintain a hard-copy version of the newsletter or go to all electronic? Do we want to find a mail house to help with mailings or do we want to do our layout in-house should we find an individual with interest in design work. New programs such as In Design make this kind of work much easier and fun.

As someone who has done many jobs for our association, from president of the board to volunteer loosestrife puller (hip waders and biting insects!), to grant writer, I have to say that the newsletter offers a wonderful opportunity for camaraderie and creativity. That said, it is also a very important tool in our education and outreach – and allows us to take an active step to protect and preserve the flowage and Trude Lake. Please think about this seriously and offer up your skills! Whether for a year or longer, you will be glad you joined the team and made a difference!

Eurasian Water Milfoil in Flowage

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plants were found in an average of three feet of water. Eight additional locations with single plants or one small bed of plants were also found throughout the Bonies Mound area and into the "Narrows." EWM samples were collected, pressed, photographed, and an AIS incident report was recorded with the State. The plants are well established and management for this size of a population will be difficult.

My second recommendation would be to become familiar with this plant's identification and ecology and to alert relevant authorities if you suspect you have discovered an infestation. EWM looks different from the many native species of milfoil present in the flowage.

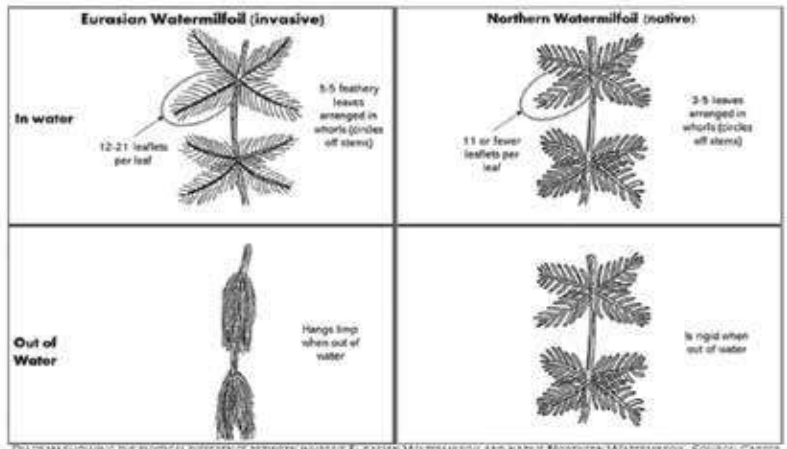


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE PHYSICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INVASIVE EURASIAN WATERMILFOIL AND NATIVE NORTHERN WATERMILFOIL. SOURCE: CARTER MARCUS AND ANGELA VANDER ECKEN

Milfoils: bad and good. Courtesy ICLWCD

When identifying EWM look for the number of leaflets on one of the plant's leaves. For example, EWM has more than 12 pairs of leaflets that grow on an individual leaf. (See photo for reference.) All the native milfoils will have fewer than 12 pairs of leaflets. Helpful information on identifying Wisconsin's aquatic plants can be found in a number of guides, including *Through the Looking Glass – A Field Guide to Aquatic Plants* by Susan Borman, Robert Korth, and Joe Temte. If you do find a suspicious plant, please contact me at the ICLWCD office.

My third recommendation is based on the fact that the TFF is now a potential source for the spread of EWM. EWM can be moved between water bodies by small fragments transported on recreational equipment. Commonly it is transported by boats, trailers, bait buckets, live wells, and fishing equipment. To help prevent the spread of EWM and other invasives, please remember to Inspect and remove any visible mud, plants, fish or animals before transporting. Drain water from equipment (boats, motor, trailer, live wells) before transporting and dispose of unwanted live bait in the trash. This will now be doubly important to ensure that plants from the flowage do not move into other nearby water bodies.

Stay tuned for more updates on management options as we meet with interested parties and stakeholders this winter to discuss future management strategies. In the meantime, I would again urge you to stay out of areas of infestation and to learn how to identify EWM in order to assist future efforts to monitor this significant invasive.

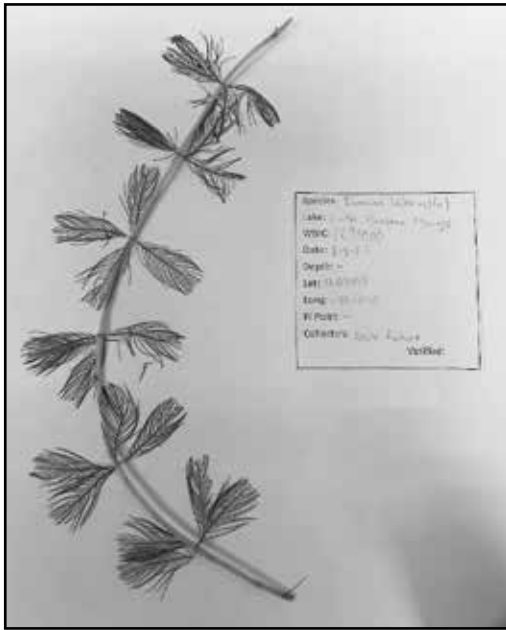


Photo of vouchered EWM from flowage.
Courtesy ICLWCD

ATTENTION !!



Otterly Fascinating

By Mike Hittle

You never know what you are likely to come across when you poke about in the natural world, nor can you predict where a confrontation with the unexpected may lead. Such was the case when our older son, Alex, and his daughter, Gaia, took their annual paddle across the flowage to see what was going on at Donut Lake. Disembarking at the narrow opening to this little gem of a kettle lake, they came across the desiccated remains of an animal, its head firmly ensnared in a conibear trap. Uncertain what the animal was—though they thought it might just be an otter—they photographed its remains and sent the image to a trapper for identification. They soon learned, sadly, that the animal was an otter, the victim of an irresponsible trapper's neglect.

The experience was, in the lingo of the young, “a bummer,” but it did not prevent Alex and Gaia from heading off a few days later to explore the meandering course of Four Mile creek as it flows through a broad marshland. After negotiating a number of aquatic switchbacks, the two explorers hauled their kayaks over the first of two beaver dams and had scarcely taken up their paddles when they were treated to the sight of a beaver, and then another, and still another. It seems Alex and Gaia had interrupted a beaver family swim, though with all the surfacing and diving as the critters beat a hasty retreat it was impossible to tell just how many were present. “Lots,” was my granddaughter's best guess. The only missing element in this chance encounter was a loud slap from a beaver's tail. Based on my own experience, it seems the animals prefer to reserve their patented, resounding greeting for intruders who are preoccupied with some diverting task,

such as threading a 7X leader through the eye of a #20 fly, so as to maximize the element of surprise.

Observing “lots” of beavers hightailing it from their dam site makes a long paddle more than worth the time and energy required to get into a relatively remote area, and when father and daughter turned their kayaks about to head back down stream, they knew they had a good story to tell when they got back to the cabin. But the trip was not yet over, as Mother Nature had one more surprise up her sleeve. As the kayakers passed an exposed mud flat on the bank of the creek, they came upon another group of animals—this time otters. Five of these agile creatures, rather than fleeing, chose to watch, alertly and curiously as otters are wont to do, as the two kayaks silently glided past their muddy reviewing stand. Gaia, who had been understandably saddened by the sight of the trapped otter, had since been hoping to catch sight of at least one live one before the end of her visit to the Northwoods. Now, not one, but a quintet was on hand to reassure her that flowage otters were doing just fine, thank you.

This vivid, close-to-hand exposure to otters clearly captured the imagination of Gaia, who is a student of illustration and design at Maryland Institute College of Art. For not long after she returned to school this fall, we received a linoprint image of an otter that she had created in one of her classes. Lovers of the flowage often talk about the many ways in which this natural setting influences their thoughts and lives. Here is yet another example: the flowage as inspirer of the artistic creation—whiskers and all.



Original Linocut print by Gaia Hittle.



WDNR and Scenic Waters Area Update

The WDNR reports that they continue to wait for approval to hire a new Scenic Waters Area Property Manager. Joe Fieweger, Recreation Superintendent for the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest, continues in his role as acting flowage manager. He reported that seasonal park ranger, Collin Miller, ended his employment this week. Due to the construction at the Mercer Ranger Station, no heated facilities are available for him to continue through the winter. Next spring the department hopes to hire for that position again. Collin worked on maintenance and visitor services. Thanks and best wishes to Collin!

While things are on hold for staffing, not so the Mercer Ranger Station where ground has been broken for two new structures. Though some may miss the historic station, the new building promises up to date facilities. See photos.



New Ranger Station rises from site of its historic predecessor.
Photo Mike Hittle

DNR Grant Eligibility Requires that We Change Our Bylaws

By Roger Nelson

With the recent discovery of Eurasian water milfoil on the TFF as well as the ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of curly-leaf pondweed to the TFF Trude Lake waterway, it is increasingly important to step up our efforts to combat these and possibly other invasive species. These invasives have the potential to severely impact fisheries, other water-based recreational activities, and property values on the TFF and Trude Lake.

One way the TFFTLPOA is addressing this issue is to position the association to be eligible for grants from the Wisconsin DNR. The initial step in that process is to complete the DNR's Grant Eligibility Application. One of the requirements of that application, as defined in Wisconsin state statutes, is that all members of the association must be eligible to vote. Our existing bylaws state that to be a member you must own property within one mile of the TFF Trude Lake waterway. With that membership comes the right to vote. The bylaws also state that a "Special Membership" is available for anyone who is not a property owner within one mile of the TFF Trude Lake waterway. This category of membership does not include voting privileges. We do not wish to discourage support of the flowage and Trude Lake by anyone who is not a property owner, but we will need to modify the bylaws to change our terms of membership and voting privileges to comply with Wisconsin requirements for grant eligibility.

The Board of Directors is proposing a change in the bylaws to eliminate the "Special Membership" category and replace it with a "Friend of the Flowage" subscription category. This subscription would be available to anyone who does not qualify for membership. The Friend of the Flowage subscriber would not have voting privileges but would receive Driftwood and any other communications offered by the Association. They would also be eligible to participate in any educational opportunities we offer and would be able to participate in our conservation activities.

As per our bylaws, we will be holding a "special meeting" virtually via Zoom in December to discuss the changes to the bylaws and conduct a vote to approve these changes. In advance of the meeting, you will be able to review the proposed bylaw changes on the TFFTL website (<https://tfftl.org>). A notice will be sent out via email in November to the membership with details of the meeting along with instructions on how to participate in the meeting via Zoom. The notice will also instruct you how to vote by proxy if you are unable to attend the meeting.

The Board of Directors strongly encourages you to review the proposed bylaws and support the changes with an affirmative vote.



Scenic Waters Area Plan Update

Driftwood contacted Erin Rieser, WDNR Property Planner, to inquire about the status of the Regional Master Plan that includes the Turtle Flambeau Scenic Waters Area. She said that the department is still in the drafting stage, which should be coming to an end soon. On completion of the draft, the WDNR will invite additional public input within three to six months.

As in the initial public input period, a press release and notification will be sent out to everyone on the North Central Forest mailing list directing people to the document and providing information on in-person public meetings and other opportunities to provide comment.

Please sign up for the mailing list to remain informed of our next steps.

https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WIDNR/subscriber/new?topic_id=WIDNR_1152



Auxiliary building under construction at Mercer Ranger Station. Photo Mike Hittle

Fishing Futures

By Jim Kohl, TFFTLPOA Fish Management Chair

The Turtle-Flambeau Flowage is changing. Visitors to this area may not have noticed, as most of the changes are subtle. That's no surprise! Water bodies change as they age--especially man-made impoundments. But to those of us who fish, the evidence of change is unmistakable.

In 1968, when I first ventured onto this flowage, bumping stumps with a 14-foot aluminum boat and a 10 hp Johnson outboard, there were no bluegills, no sunfish, and very few smallmouth bass. There were lots of walleyes and some big muskies. Perch and crappies were here as well as rock bass, suckers, and some ciscoes in the deep basins. The sturgeon were also here. I remember camping in August on an island in the Baraboo Lake basin and listening to the sturgeon jumping all night long, and wondering why they jump? So, more than 50 years later, here we are, wishing walleye fishing was still like it used to be.

Our lake association has an active relationship with the WDNR, and specifically now with Zach Lawson, the Fisheries Biologist for Iron County. Lawson is responsible for monitoring and managing sustainable fish populations, primarily by using netting or shocking techniques to gather data on fish populations.

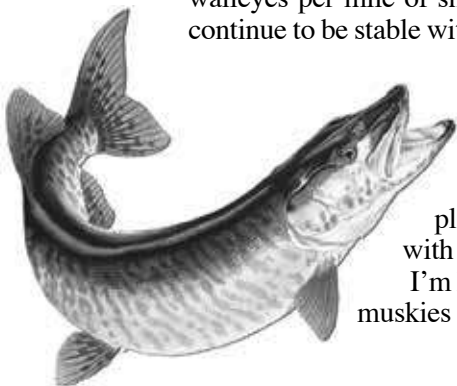
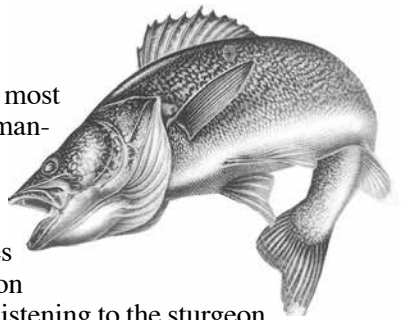
This year, he used these tools, along with data analytics, to determine if the revised smallmouth bass regulations introduced in 2016 have had the desired results. He learned that the smallmouth population has continued to thrive. Although there has been a slight increase in trophy-sized fish, there has been no desired reduction in the population of juvenile/small adult fish.

He also did a panfish study and learned that the bluegill population has continued to grow to record levels, but there are fewer fish in recent year classes so we should see the population level or decrease in coming years. There is an abundance of 3-6" bluegills in the flowage.

This fall, the WDNR did their annual fall electro-fishing survey and determined there were 67 young of the year (YOY), walleyes per mile of shoreline. This is a reasonably good number, indicating the walleye population should continue to be stable with no noticeable missing year classes. The years with poor recruitment were 2013-2014.

Lawson also stated that the WDNR, partner in partnership with the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department, will start to monitor plant communities on the flowage. Unfortunately, an ICLWCD team discovered Eurasian water milfoil in significant areas of the flowage. In response to this presence of a very prolific invasive species, the ICLWCD and WDNR will be developing a plan to mitigate its impact. This plan will call for partnerships with our association, Xcel Energy and potentially others with an interest or expertise.

I'm hoping to get out on the water for a few more weeks, looking for a few heavy November muskies and some active fall walleyes.



Eurasian Watermilfoil - Another Invasive Species to Control

By Randy Payne

Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM)

The biggest news so far this year has been the detection of EWM in the Bonies Mound area. Please see the article written by Zach Wilson in this issue for the details. His article states, "The best course of action at this moment in time is to again stay out of areas of infestation and learn how to identify EWM for future monitoring." He also states "Stay tuned for more updates on management options as we meet with interested parties and stakeholders this winter." Our organization is preparing for possible future WDNR grant proposals by renewing our qualified lake association status with the DNR. A grant requires a plan, and this will be determined by all interested parties in the coming months.

Purple Loosestrife (PL)

In general, we had a good year, with very few new PL sites, and existing sites seemed to have fewer plants. Our containment efforts are paying off! Thank you, volunteers. Starting upstream at the Manitowish River by the intersection of Hwy. 182 and 51, the Iron County team found and pulled many plants. The river downstream to the flowage was not totally pulled this year. In the flowage, TFFTL-POA volunteers worked the most infected areas, and saw fewer plants this year. The PL Workday crew also saw and pulled fewer plants. The PL south from the Pink Rock area was pulled twice, and sporadic spots down to the dam were pulled.

Curly Leaf Pondweed (CLP)

CLP has not been detected in the TFF, but is upstream in the Turtle River chain. Rice Lake is continuing the Great Pondweed Pull event, yet the total mass of CLP removed does not seem to be decreasing. There is concern about the amount of CLP debris escaping downstream between the nets placed across the Turtle River right below Rice Lake. Pike Lake Assoc. and the TFFTL-POA are proposing a new net configuration that will catch more CLP debris, but it must be approved by the WDNR. There is an increase of CLP in the river this year, with some very large patches starting to appear. The CLP sites in Pike Lake were proving to be very resistant to pulling this year, and required many outings (20+) of volunteers for complete removal. The plants are pulled first in mid-summer, but continue to exhibit new growth into the fall. Some volunteers snorkel, which is the most effective way to get rid of small CLP patches. Even a small CLP plant will have a large, spread-out root system that cannot be removed completely with raking. With a snorkel and goggles, you can get right up close to the plants, and by working gently with your hands, pull the root system up almost completely. Patches that were snorkel-pulled did not regrow as much as raked plants. TFFTL-POA hired the North Lakeland Discovery Center to pull CLP on the river and Pike Lake, and they snorkelpull! There are still small CLP patches between Pike Lake and Lake of the Falls that are pulled by Pike Lake Neighbors. The WDNR conducted a point intercept study on Lake of the Falls this summer. This involves sampling the aquatic plants in a grid pattern across the lake. They did not detect any CLP.



Randy Payne with a forkful of invasive pondweed. Photo courtesy Randy Payne

How you can help:

- *) Your donations to our special projects fund (on the membership renewal form) supports the CLP control effort, and in the future, will help with EWM control.
- *) Pike Lake Neighbors has a group of very motivated individuals working on this and is to be commended for their work, as it benefits the TFF as well as their own lake. Please consider volunteering. They need our help.
See: <https://pikelakeneighbors.org/volunteer>.
- *) Learn how to identify CLP and EWM and if seen, report to Zach Wilson (Iron County) or TFFTL-POA.
- *) Spread the word to look out for invasives. Remind and encourage visitors or anybody that moves boats into and out of the flowage, to clean their boats, and avoid the Bonies Mound EWM areas.
- *) Volunteer to survey/pull PL from a section of the TFF.



‘The Water Column’ – An Excerpt

By Diane Daulton

This time of year, you never know what to expect, except that winter is on its way as we march toward the solstice and beyond. Just last week clouds of synchronized snow buntings accompanied me along a dirt road, harbingers of the colors of our landscape yet to come. As fox sparrows, juncos, and other late migrants make their way south, *Gavia immer*, our beloved common loon, is on the move.

Volunteer “loon rangers” help to monitor loon presence and chick production on Northwoods lakes during the breeding season, but what happens as loons head south for the winter? To answer that question, Research Wildlife Biologist Kevin Kenow, with U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and partner agencies have been studying both migration pathways and wintering grounds of upper Midwest common loons. Loons from Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, outfitted with leg band geotags and satellite transmitter technology have literally mapped their own story. It turns out, Midwest loons prepare for their long journey in stages, often beginning migration in earnest with a move from breeding lakes to the Great Lakes, principally Lake Michigan, as they prepare for longer overland flights. From there, most adult study birds flew directly to lakes and reservoirs mid-way south (the heart of loon “rest stops” were in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama) before making the final push, mostly to Florida’s Gulf coast. Juveniles, unlike their parents, do not stage on Lake Michigan, but migrate straight down to the Gulf with a few stopovers.

Researchers also collected information on dive behavior to learn about loon foraging patterns in order to better understand threats to their survival year-round. For example, while on Lake Michigan, loons often fed in deep waters, where they consumed Round Goby, an invasive fish that eats another invasive species, the quagga mussel. Quagga mussels can consume botulism toxin on the lake bed produced under conditions such as those created by rotting mats of *Cladophora* algae. As toxin is passed up the food chain via the gobies, they have been linked to avian botulism outbreaks in loons and other waterbirds which have resulted in massive die-offs. On Gulf or Atlantic waters, where loons winter, nutrient loading from human activities can cause outbreaks of red tide – a toxic algae that can affect loons directly and cause fish die-offs. Oil spill contamination can also impact loons, especially after migration, when they undergo a complete molt and are flightless.

Back at home, some loons may linger on northern lakes into November, especially if they have been injured or are not

in peak condition for other reasons. Loons are heavy birds, which is a great adaptation for diving, but not so good when it’s time to take off. They need a large stretch of open water and a great deal of exertion to gain flight. Depending upon the wind, current, and lake shape, loons may need a quarter of a mile “runway” as they taxi in an effort to become airborne.

Northland College’s LoonWatch Coordinator, Erica LeMoine often receives calls from worried loon enthusiasts. She notes, “Juvenile loons are the last to migrate. They’re hard-wired for migration, so they don’t need parental guidance. If weather is warm, juveniles may stay later into November and even December, powering up for their lengthy (1,200 to 1,500 mile) migration.”

Years ago, I lived on a lovely little lake. One year, as ice was forming, I noticed a bird swimming around a small opening near the center of the lake. Upon closer examination, I could see it was a juvenile loon. We watched and worried, knowing there was almost certainly no ¼ mile taxi-way left open on the lake. We set about trying to determine how safe



Common loons on the wintering grounds lack their iconic checkerboard plumage. Photo by Linda Grenzer

the ice was, and eventually began to ice-break our way slowly towards the hole using our canoe, an ice chisel, and a crummy old wooden paddle. We chopped and labored, attempting to enlarge the open water area, as the loon skirted the far side of the hole diving out of sight periodically. As memory serves, it was quite a production getting out there and back and my aging paddle was in shards when we returned to shore; I would not recommend it, as it was neither smart nor safe.

The next morning, wind and weather turned around, and the loon had disappeared – we hoped on its way south.

If you observe an iced in loon you can contact the Raptor Education Group, Inc (REGI), a wildlife rehabilitation facility in Antigo, or Kevin and Linda Grenzer at “Loon Rescue” who have specialized equipment for loon ice rescues and rehabilitation.

To learn more about the USGS loon migration study, check out USGS’s Midwest Science podcast “Unraveling mysteries of the Common Loon” on YouTube or visit https://umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/loons/migrations.html.

To see more Water Column articles visit the Bottom Line News and Views, Ashland WI <http://www.bottomlinenewsandviews.com/>.

Wake Boat Controversy and Bill Introduced

Introduction by Terry Daulton,
commentary by Wisconsin Lakes

Over the past several years, discussions about a new type of recreational watercraft have been making waves for lake users and lakeshore property owners, sometimes pitting neighbor against neighbor. Wake boats, also known as wake surf boats, use their hull and engine design together with water ballast tanks to increase displacement weight and thus create exciting new recreation for surfing. However, concerns about impacts of wakes include shoreline erosion and increased sediment suspension in waters, safety concerns for small boats, anglers, and boats attached to shoreline docks, as well as issues relating to invasive species. Additionally, these boats create forceful propwash currents down to a depth of almost 20', causing significant damage to plant life and ecosystems on the lake bottom. A new bill is being proposed in the Wisconsin Legislature (LRB 3518). Readers of Wisconsin newspapers, including Wisconsin Outdoor News may have noticed articles on this topic. The Wisconsin Lakes Conference and regional lakes meetings have held sessions on the issue. Closer to home, the Vilas and Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Associations as well as the Presque Isle based Last Wilderness Alliance, are leading efforts to help local communities learn more and consider local ordinances. You can visit their websites and look for additional information at <https://vclra.org/news-and-articles/>, <https://www.oclra.org/2023/10/25/lwas-six-minute-video-on-enhanced-wakes/> or <https://lastwildernessalliance.org/>



The below article is an Action Alert published by Wisconsin Lakes, the umbrella group of lake organizations across Wisconsin, suggesting citizens and lake groups get engaged with the issue and provide comments on LRB 3518.

Wisconsin Lakes Policy Recommendations Regarding Regulation of Enhanced Wakes

October 21, 2023

In the last decade, the ability for watercraft to create “enhanced wakes” rose in capability and popularity. Wakeboats, boats with a construction and mechanics dedicated to the creation of enhanced wakes, especially through the use of ballast tanks to weigh down the boat’s stern, are a more and more common sight on lakes of all sizes in Wisconsin. Enhanced wakes are also created by aftermarket add-ons to existing boats, and are used for sports like wakeboarding and wakesurfing.

Under the public trust doctrine of the Wisconsin Constitution, our state’s waters are held in trust for all and are “forever free.” The doctrine has quite rightly been interpreted over the years to include a right of the public to recreate on our waters, which makes decisions about how and when to regulate an individual’s right to use certain watercraft or partake in certain types of activities complicated and as such should only be undertaken with great restraint.

But wakeboats introduced watercraft with a size, power, and function not ever seen on our inland waters. Waves often vastly greater in intensity than any other wave, including those generated by periodic storms or general winds, crash into the shoreline. The downward thrust of the stern-heavy boats’ propellers scour the bottom in a way no other craft does to date. And the current design of the ballast tanks used to weigh down the stern of the boats do not sufficiently drain to prevent aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels, starry stonewort, or other plants and animals to be removed before the watercraft moves to another lake.

Wisconsin Lakes advocates sound, science-based solutions to protect our lake environments and the rights of all of Wisconsin’s lake users. As such, **we make the following recommendations towards building a statewide policy around enhanced wakes in Wisconsin:**

- 1) ***Minimum state standards while maintaining local control:*** More than most states, Wisconsin features thousands of lakes, all with their own unique characteristics. While it is in the state’s interest to set minimum standards for enhanced wakes statewide for reasons of public safety, the protection of private property, and protection of the lake environment, Wisconsin Lakes believes the best solutions for each lake come from the communities that call it



waters home. The ability through the local boating ordinance process to enact enhanced wake ordinances stronger than any state standard for a particular lake should continue to be allowed.

- 2) **No enhanced wakes within at least 500 feet of the shore:** Based on the best available science, enhanced wakes should be prohibited within at least 500' from the shore.
- 3) **No enhanced wakes in water shallower than at least 30 feet:** Current studies are still in progress that will likely indicate impacts in waters deeper than 20 feet. We are currently recommending a prohibition of enhanced wake creation in depths of less than 30 feet to prevent bottom scouring or the stirring up of lakebed.

In addition to advocating for these basic, minimum state standards, we also call for the following:

- 4) **Prevention of aquatic invasive species transport:** As currently designed, many of these boats do not allow for the complete draining of their ballast tanks. Wisconsin law currently prohibits a boater from transporting AIS from lake to lake, and these tanks make it almost a given that boaters are unwittingly violating that law and could contribute to the spread of species such as zebra mussels or starry stonewort. Steps should be taken - whether voluntarily by the boat manufacturers or by mandate in state law - to fix the drainage system of the tanks to fully allow complete drainage both for new models and by a retrofit of existing boats. Additionally, the state should put in place meaningful decontamination regulations for all watercraft backed by sufficient funding to ensure enforcement of those laws and regulations.
- 5) **Best practices for wakes to be included in boater certification courses:** All boaters taking certification courses in Wisconsin should be taught best practices if creating an enhanced wake to limit environmental damage, maintain the safest lake environment for other users, and cause the least infringement of the enjoyment of the lake by all lake users.

Wisconsin Lakes is a statewide non-profit conservation organization of waterfront property owners, lake users, lake associations, and lake districts who in turn represent over 80,000 citizens and property owners. For over 30 years, Wisconsin Lakes has been a powerful bipartisan advocate for the conservation, protection, and restoration of Wisconsin's lake resources.

Association Sponsors Pontoon Tours

Based on results from our recent member survey, the association decided to pilot an educational pontoon boat tour this past summer. Thanks to generous offers of boat and gas from Jim Kohl and naturalist narration from Jeff Wilson, the tour was a big success and even garnered new members for the association. Here are a few photos from the day's events. If these appeal to you as a fun way to spend a sunny morning on the water, look for more such offerings next season!



Jeff Wilson holds forth. Photo Terry Daulton



Driftwood

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

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— 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.

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If you would like to contact the association electronically, please visit our website
www.tfftl.org and search under "CONTACT US"