



Driftwood

Spring / Summer 2024

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

Eurasian Milfoil Plan

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

Hello everyone and happy spring. Lately, I've been doing a lot of planning in preparation for the 2024 field season. We are taking a deep look at all the work that our department does throughout the county and balancing priorities. The one thing that I do know is that our department can't do this alone. With 494 lakes and two large reservoirs, it is impossible to monitor all our lake's water quality and invasive species populations with our staff. Luckily, our amazing community rises to the occasion when asked; with a deep passion for preserving, protecting, and conserving our woods and waters. One of the goals of our Land and Water Plan is to mitigate invasive species impacts and increase public environmental knowledge and stewardship. To accomplish these goals, it is important to work with stakeholders and associations to educate, to partner up on monitoring projects, and to help develop strategies for dealing with invasive species. A good plan can accomplish a lot, but only if all the players are at the table.

As many of you already know, we have now documented the presence of the aquatic invasive Eurasian water milfoil

(EWM) on the flowage. Since this finding in August 2023, a small group made up of some of the stakeholders has been working on developing a plan. These plans are often called APM or Aquatic Plant Management plans. In thinking about how to move forward, we have taken the occurrence of the EWM as an opportunity to start collecting some important data on the overall plant community of the flowage. Zach Lawson, WDNR Fisheries Biologist, has also mentioned that he wants more data on the plant communities of the flowage to help him better understand fish habitat.

As we discussed our options, we decided to partner up with Associate Professor Peter Levi who works with the Mary Griggs Burke Center for Freshwater Innovation at Northland College. Peter has extensive knowledge of water ecosystem functions with a primary focus on inland lakes and rivers of Northwest Wisconsin. His research investigates how changes to lakes, streams, and reservoirs have cascading impacts on

other processes within these ecosystems—whether those changes are natural (e.g., seasonal) or anthropogenic (e.g., land-use change). At the Burke Center, Peter has launched a buoy-based project in Lake Namekagon, monitoring water quality continuously across all seasons. He looks forward to working on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage with Northland undergraduates and staff in partnership with Iron County Land and Water Conservation, the TFFTLPOA, Wisconsin DNR, and other local organizations.

Peter and his team have written and secured funding from the Natural Resources Foundation's Turtle Flambeau Flowage Scenic Waters grant and have also submitted a

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Northland College Professor, Peter Levi

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President's Letter

By Randy Schubert



Greetings – well another winter in the books and summer just around the corner. It was not a normal Wisconsin winter – very little snow and warm temperatures – but our lake association has been diligently working with an even higher than normal level of productivity! Here I will provide a brief recap of the efforts of our much-appreciated volunteers.

As I am sure you have noticed, the lack of snow had a significant impact not only on our winter activities in the area, but on the spring re-fill of the Turtle Flambeau Flowage. Tom Mowbray has been in contact with Xcel Energy and the WDNR monitoring refill with the goal of starting summer at full pool (see related article).

As reported in the last newsletter Eurasian milfoil was discovered in the flowage. Since then, there have been some significant developments within our association to meet the challenge of the milfoil and other aquatic invasive species. With the guidance of Randy Payne, we have identified the need to strengthen our accreditation as a lake association in order to better position ourselves in qualifying for grants. The grants will be needed to provide the funding for more research in meeting the challenge of the aquatic invasive species. With the help of Roger Nelson, we re-drafted our by-laws to comply with our organization's mission and membership. The updates along with a special meeting notice were communicated to the membership where this would be discussed. The updated by-laws were approved by the board. As a result, we are now in a better position to apply for a broader range of grants which will provide financial support to research and education projects aimed the aquatic invasive species that are threatening the flowage.

Further – we are also working closely with Zach Wilson, the Iron County Land and Conservation Commission and Northland College in applying for Wisconsin Surface Water Grants and Invasive Species Early Detection and Response Grants. Securing grants to fund studies on AIS threatening the flowage will be critical to slowing the spread and hopefully eradicating AIS. We expect that AIS will continue to be an ongoing challenge, however I am confident that our association along with the other

partners we are working with, will be able to face this early and succeed in controlling it. Thank you to everyone who has been involved.

I also encourage everyone to attend our annual meeting in June – Zach Wilson will be speaking on the Eurasian milfoil – he will provide an overview of its history, current impact on the flowage and possible efforts to control and contain it.

I would also like to once again thank everyone who contributes and volunteers their time to this great organization. We are strong because of the passion, dedication and commitment of our membership. Thank you. I hope that everyone has a great summer and I look forward to seeing you on the water.

Wake Boat Issue Continues to Make Waves

By Terry Daulton

Perhaps the most watched public policy issue at this year's Wisconsin Lakes Conference in April was the ongoing debate on wake boat regulation. In our last issue of Driftwood, we gave an overview of the topic with the, at that time, recommendations from Wisconsin Lakes. A then proposed bill in the Wisconsin Legislature would have restricted use of wake boats within 200 feet of shore and banned them on lakes under 50 acres, while prohibiting local ordinances from enacting more strict regulations. This bill was widely opposed by local governments, lake groups, and conservation organizations and did not pass the state legislature. This gives time for interested groups to work with the legislature for more widely supported regulations.

Along with the Vilas County based Last Wilderness Alliance and statewide Wisconsin Lakes, a number of conservation organizations are tracking this issue and working to bring a consensus around effective regulatory recommendations. Until a statewide law is enacted, municipalities and lake districts are working on their own to pass ordinances. According to a recent Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article, Last Wilderness Alliance notes 17 towns have enacted ordinances relating to “wake-enhanced boating”. This term is used based on the varied activities from wake surfing to wake boarding. Recently, the Town of Newbold (Oneida County) enacted restrictions on artificially enhanced wakes on lakes under 1,500 acres. https://www.newboldwi.gov/News_Releases/Notice%20paper-%20Ordinance%20Adoption%205-9-24.pdf

One challenge in regulating this activity is the rapid evolution of the sport, with bigger boats and wakes coming out each season, and lack of adequate documentation and analysis of impacts on lakes such as increased suspension of sediments, erosion, impacts on fisheries and wildlife, not to mention safety issues for people. A literature review being prepared by Wisconsin's Green Fire, a science and public policy conservation group based in Wisconsin, outlines current peer reviewed science and policy options. Their summary suggests that wake boats only operate in areas over 20 foot deep and at least 600 foot from shorelines. The literature review also suggests that wake boat ballast tanks and bilges need to be sanitized to prevent spread of invasive species such as zebra mussels, aquatic plants, or spiny water fleas. The challenge of sanitizing tanks is

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A Trail within a Trail - New Deadhorse Walking Trail Loop

By Diane O’Krongly

When Snowmobile Trail 10 was rerouted onto the Deadhorse Hunter Walking Trail system, it prevented access to snowshoers or backwoods skiers who wanted to use the larger trail system. Beth Feind (former WDNR Flowage Manager) helped Iron County Outdoor Enthusiasts (ICORE) create a reroute for snowshoers away from the snowmobile trail. The volunteers who created the trail thought that the new trail was so beautiful it inspired them to create a second extension to create a loop back to the parking lot. This loop required town permission as it crosses Town of Mercer land. The Town has 40 acres smack dab in the middle of the State of Wisconsin Deadhorse property which is also where the new snowmobile trail was developed. In summer, hikers or hunters can utilize the snowmobile trail but in winter ICORE wanted to provide a safe option for non-motorized users, thus the creation of the new snowshoe trail.

The trail is maintained by ICORE volunteers for the Town of Mercer. If you decide to hike this trail, you’ll need to keep your eyes out for a sign a few hundred feet off the state trail since ICORE is not allowed to place signs on state property. ICORE also plans to place maps to help hikers navigate all the trails- both those on state and town land since the maps at the trailhead are no longer accurate.

We suggest getting out for a hike and exploring this remote but beautiful trail that includes views of small wetlands, some interpretive signs, ponds and varied forest types.



Eurasian Milfoil Plan

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grant proposal for an Early Detection and Response (EDR) Grant through the Wisconsin DNR -Surface Water Grant program. These funding sources will allow them to start collecting data on the flowage, looking at water levels, flow rates, nutrient loading, water quality, and aquatic plant distribution.

If you recall a few years back the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department completed a Point Intercept (PI) survey on the flowage. This survey shows the overall plant diversity and calculates plant abundance and biodiversity. Through the EDR grant, data will be collected in the initial EWM area near Bonies mound. This area will be our EWM study area. It is noteworthy that this is also the Volunteer Quiet Area zone. Within this area, a repeat of the PI surveys will be conducted along with three additional sub-PI surveys within and around the EWM core area. An additional three sub-PI plots will be established on the Turtle side of the flowage for a control site. The idea is to collect more detailed data on EWM abundance and see if EWM spreads or reduces abundance based on different changes in the ecosystem, one of which could be water level manipulation.

We also want to initiate a large-scale aquatic invasive species meandering survey. This is where you come in. Surveying the entire flowage for invasives is a major task and one that we could use some help with. We are seeking volunteers to attend training and be assigned an area of the flowage to monitor for invasive species. While the target species are purple loosestrife and Eurasian water milfoil, volunteers will also be trained to identify other invasive species as well. Please consider attending the educational workshops and workday events. Our first training will be at Fisherman’s Landing on July 2nd, at 10:00 am. I’m calling this training “AIS Shore School”. After the training session, the group will get into boats for on-the-water training and survey.

Educational Training Events

Date	Location	Activity	Time	Note
7/2/2024	Fisherman’s Landing	AIS Shore School Training	10:00 -12:00	Participants will be trained in AIS identification
7/2/2024	Fisherman’s Landing	AIS Meandering Survey	12:30-3:00	Participants will work together in boats to survey for invasives
7/24/2024	Sturgeon Bay Boat Landing	Purple Loosestrife Workday	9:30-3:00	Join a team or bring your watercraft

If you are interested in joining our workshops and training, please reach out to the Association’s AIS coordinator Randy Payne TFFInvasives@gmail.com.

Thank you for all that you do. Spread the word, not Invasive Species!!!

Tapping the Sweet Life on the Shores of Trude Lake???

By Troy Tipton

The message on an internet message board started: “I have some questions about making maple syrup and syringing equipment.”

And then the replies:

Responder: “*How long have you been at it?*”

Original poster: “*This will be my second year*”

Responder: “*There’s still time to get out before you’re hooked!!*”

Why do I find this exchange funny? Because it mimics my experience: what started out small grew into something bigger, but in a satisfying way. Five years ago, I started making syrup with a handful of taps; now I tap seventy plus trees. Seventy taps is actually quite small as some people tap hundreds and commercial producers thousands of trees! Like the original poster above I found myself asking for advice and learning more and more each year. I found myself stockpiling mountains of firewood, sourcing more tapping supplies, buying snowshoes to traverse our early spring deep snow depths so typical for Mercer, and—of course—seeking more information constantly.

Lore has it that the Native Americans in the Northeast discovered the sweet sap of the maple tree and later the practice was picked up by the Europeans. Today you’ll find hobbyists as well as small, medium, and large-scale commercial producers.

For hobbyists like me, what does the process to produce maple syrup look like?

Getting Started:

In the spring, I drill a 5/16” diameter hole at breast height approximately 1 ½” deep in a maple tree of at least 12” of diameter. A spout—or “spile” in the maple syrup vernacular—is then tapped into the hole and a vessel of some sort is hung from the spile. For me that vessel is the traditional 4-gallon aluminum pail.

Waiting:

From there, Mother Nature takes over to whip up the necessary weather conditions. Nights below freezing with a daytime warm up in the 40s cause sap to move within the tree and to drip out of the spile. You say it didn’t freeze last night? No sap for you! It didn’t warm up past freezing today? Once again, no sap for you! However, when Mother Nature gets it right, you’ll get a drip, drip, drip and possibly a gallon or two of sap a day.

Collecting:

I check my sap collection pails daily and empty them into a large food safe container. To keep the sap fresh, I bury the storage container in a snowbank and out of the sun’s reach.

Boiling:

Once I’ve accumulated 100 to 150 gallons of sap, it is time to boil. This is typically an all-day affair, with the goal of a raging hot fire beneath sap-filled stainless-steel pans. A high evaporation rate is your goal: 97 to 98% of the water contained in the sap must be boiled off to get the coveted syrup.

Finishing:

Once you’ve reduced your sap into syrup, it is time to filter and bottle it. Voilà, you finally have maple syrup.

Maple Syrup Factoids:

- Nothing is added to sap to make pure maple syrup, just water is removed to make a syrup.
- Canada produces the most syrup with the province Quebec leading the way.
- The U.S. is the number two producer, with Vermont in the top spot and Wisconsin somewhere in the #4 or #5 spot.
- Typically, 40 to 45 gallons of maple sap are needed to make a gallon of syrup.
- Maple syrup has a sugar content of approximately 66.5% whereas maple sap only has a sugar content of approximately 1% to 3%.
- A gallon of sap weighs about 8 pounds and a finished gallon of syrup weighs about 11 pounds.



Sap pails under snow.

Photo courtesy Troy Tipton

Association Annual Meeting Mark Your Calendars!

*June 22, 10 AM to Noon
Mercer Community Center*

Business meeting and special speaker, Zach Wilson, Eurasian milfoil Update



Who's on First? What's on Second? DNR Comings and Goings

For those of you who have been watching the developments at the Mercer DNR Ranger Station and wondering who and how to reach the local DNR staff when needed, we thought we would do a short update here for your edification. As you may have seen, the ongoing construction at the ranger station is not completed so many staff are working from other stations or remotely.

First, we understand that an announcement on filling the Scenic Waters Area Manager position is imminent but no official hiring decisions have been confirmed. Our local fisheries staff are still led by Zach Lawson, Jenna Melanowski is still our wildlife biologist, and Joe Fieweger continues as our lead State Park staff person from the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. The DNR has hired two seasonal staff to work on the Scenic Waters Area, Steve Greil and Dave Stremski. Our local conservation law enforcement is Tom Heisler (southern Iron County) and one position is currently vacant. The warden supervisor who can also be contacted for issues on the flowage is Tim Ebert.

In an attempt to get a live feature interview of new staff, we sent out our roving reporter, Chad McGrath who contacted the Mercer Ranger who recent took up that role when pervious ranger, Kelly Martinko, transferred to Spooner.

Adam Wysocki - Forest Ranger

An interview by Chad McGrath

I contacted Adam recently to set up a time and place to interview him. Historically, *Driftwood* has done informational pieces on DNR staff working around and

on the Flowage. Adam agreed to the interview, we picked a time and place about a week later and we were set. The morning that interview was to happen, I received a call from him. He had just found out that he was selected to start a position down in Adams-Friendship that he'd applied for a few months before, so figured I wouldn't still want to do the interview. But I ended up doing a brief interview anyway. Here's what I learned. First, "*Forest Ranger is his actual title.*" Adam described the duties for this position succinctly as, "*Putting out wildfires.*" Adam also has a degree in forestry, so he also sets up timber sales on local state and county land, most recently on the hunter walking trails off Popco Circle.

I asked him what he found most interesting/enjoyable in his 18 months on the job in Iron County. He said he loved the beauty of our forest, the extensive public land, and his recent efforts to use his forestry knowledge to create wildlife areas. Asked why he's leaving, he related that he's from the Plainfield area, and wanted to be closer to family who live there. And professionally, the area is more fire prone and may provide him with more wildfire experience, or as he, again, succinctly put it, "*more fire action.*"

Here's wishing Adam a wonderful homecoming!

In summary, we hope to share a more fulsome report in the fall/winter issue of *Driftwood*, including a new flowage manager but for now, anyone interested in using the old-fashioned telephone to speak with staff can call the DNR Mercer ranger station main line (715)476-2240 and listen for the list of ten or so numbers you can call for various specialties.

What a Difference a Year Makes!

By Jim Kohl, Chair, Fish Management Committee

Fishermen who chose to start their season on the Turtle/Flambeau Flowage were greeted with favorable conditions. The skies were overcast, with a light chop on the water. Unlike last year however, the water level was two feet below the "full pool" level, and the water temps hovered in the low 50's. Last year, the ice went off literally a day or two before opening Saturday. This year, the ice disappeared four weeks before opening day, and the walleyes were predictably at a different point in their annual spawning cycle. They were clearly several weeks ahead of what would be an average year. The two boats fishing out of our Springstead area cabin enjoyed a challenging, but successful opening Saturday.

Chippewa spearing took place around the middle of April. The tribes set a declaration of 4,534 walleyes from the TFF and ended up harvesting 2,112 walleyes, as of May 1st.

I chose to start fishing in three different river channel spots that have been productive post spawn areas in the past. In previous years, dating back as far as 1972 for me, these areas always held walleyes. Usually, the fish were primarily post-spawn males between nine and 14 inches, but the action was non-stop in some years. That was not the case this year, so we headed south to the big water and started fishing secluded bays in four to eight feet



Mary Kohl with ther Northern Pike.



of water. I was fishing with my son Jeff, and my brother, John. I was fishing with a Rapala #12 Husky Jerk. Jeff was fishing a 1/8th oz. jig with a four inch soft plastic shad tail in chartreuse. John was pitching a jig with a large fathead minnow. We all started catching fish. The “sweet spot” depth was four feet, with wood and rocks with new weed growth nearby. The fish we caught were between 12 and 16 inches. We also found a few smallmouth bass. It was a productive morning! We released all but one of the walleyes. Fishermen are reminded that the current regulations on the TFF are limit of three walleyes per angler. The minimum size is 12 inches and only one can be over 15 inches.

After lunch we fished in the Horseshoe basin, drifting in five to seven feet of water with slip bobbers and fatheads. It was a productive afternoon, with a dozen walleyes between 12 and 21 inches. We also caught some nice perch and a few small northern.

My wife, Mary, and I fished Sunday evening. The skies were sunny and the wind was light. We were both casting the Rapala Husky Jerks and covering a lot of water. We struggled to find a few walleyes, but Mary caught and released a 35-inch northern pike, which is unusual for the TFF and I caught a fat 20 inch smallmouth.

I am concerned about the walleye spawning success because of the unusually low water levels this spring. We will learn more this fall when the DNR does their walleye recruitment surveys.

Wishing you all great fishing and a good summer on the water!

Water Over the Dam? An Update on Spring Refill

By Tom Mowbray and Jim Moore, Water Level Committee

(This article is being written on 5/3/24, the day before the spring fishing opener. Current TFF water level is 1569.91, which is just over 2 feet below full pool of 1572. Discharge from the TFF dam is 320 cubic feet per second (cfs), just over the MOU minimum discharge of 300 cfs.)

As most Association members know, water levels on the TFF are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Xcel Energy and the Wisconsin DNR (WDNR). The MOU has been in place since 1990 when the State purchased most of the land around the TFF. Major principles of the MOU allow for TFF drawdowns from full-pool, (which is 1572 feet above sea level) of up to four feet in the summer and eight feet in the winter. To protect the downstream health of the Flambeau River, the MOU requires a minimum discharge of 300 cubic feet per second (cfs).

To protect fish spawning activity on the TFF, including fry survival and nesting of migratory waterfowl, the original authors of the MOU included a provision for a spring refill goal of 1571.5 by April 20th or one week after ice out, whichever is later. Such refill “will normally be accomplished without lowering flow below 300 cfs”. (A copy of the full MOU is on the TFF-TL POA web site under the LINKS tab.)

Per the US Drought Monitor website, the TFF area has been in a drought since July 2023. For the most part, we have been in a Severe drought, but last month or so the drought has been downgraded to Moderate. The drought, coupled with a significant lack of snowpack this winter, has partially led to the current low water condition. Further impacting current water levels, consistent with recent years, is a very minimal discharge from the Manitowish Waters (MW) chain. At the time of this writing, in order to refill the MW chain, the Rest Lake dam is only discharging 50 cfs, and there are about 12 inches left to refill the MW chain. Once they refill, more water should start flowing downstream to help refill the TFF.

Obviously, the spring refill goal was missed by over two feet this year. Spring refill has been missed several times and by varying amounts over the last 15 years. We understand that Xcel has a profit incentive to use stored water to produce power at downstream plants. However,

we are concerned that low spring water levels are impacting our local businesses, home owners and recreational users of the TFF.

Since early February 2024, ongoing communications have taken place with Xcel and WDNR about water level issues and our concerns. In mid-April 2024, WDNR communicated to us that because the TFF water level was within the normal summer operating range, they were monitoring the situation and no further action was required.

We believe that because of the ongoing water level issues, as noted above, and the new threat to the TFF due to the recent discovery of Eurasian Water Milfoil, that all stakeholders, Xcel Energy, WDNR and the TFF-TL POA Board, need to take a proactive approach to ensure water levels are managed to maximize the ecological benefits to the Turtle Flambeau Scenic Waters Area watershed.



4/30/24, and Donners Bay Resort





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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"