Turtle Flambeau Flowage - Trude Lake PROPERTY OWNERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

Fall/Winter

November, 2003

Upper Chippewa River Basin - A Vision

Did you know that the Turtle Flambeau Flowage is part of the Upper Chippewa River basin? Most people might ask where the Chippewa River is, let alone where is the basin! In fact, if you asked the average resident of the flowage to describe the location of its headwaters, how many of us would know? The answer - the tributaries to the flowage begin in northern Vilas and Iron counties. The river names may be familiar: the Turtle River, the Manitowish, and the Bear. The entire Manitowish Lake Chain is upstream from the Flowage and a host of small creeks drain into its basin. Downstream, the Flambeau River flows into the Chippewa. The Upper Chippewa basin is the largest in the state and reaches from just south of Hurley to Ladysmith. In an effort to help people think more about the connections between our lakes, rivers and lands, the WDNR and University Extension developed a series of vision meetings to help people think about ways that watersheds are connected and common goals we could pursue within the basin.

In Mercer, a meeting was held this past September and thirty people attended. The presentation and discussion lasted 3½ hours and covered topics such as defining our watershed and developing a common vision for our area. The Mercer session was one of several such meetings being held throughout the Upper Chippewa Basin. The results of these meetings will be used by the WDNR to help guide long range plans. To date, many of the groups have had similar visions. Diversity of fish ranks high, with angler preferences of walleyes first and panfish second. People also expressed concerns about invasive species, and felt that with live wells and boat trailers would be the cause of most invasive species spread. ◆

President's Letter

I sure hope everyone enjoyed the week of beautiful "Indian Summer" weather in October, did a little fishing, enjoyed the great color and said good bye to summer. There certainly were lots of campers and anglers on the flowage all summer and with all the publicity given it lately, the future will be much the same. Most users have great respect for the lake and it's natural beauty, doing all they can to help keep it as it is. Our property owners' association has been involved in several projects that benefit the lake. The purple loosestrife survey, water quality testing, the walleye watch and the crib project are some of the things we coordinate.

In addition, non-property owners are joining our association as special members to support the projects we are involved in. The crib project is proving to be very successful, providing structure that can concentrate aquatic insects and other food for minnows, minnows for the larger fish to feed on and so on. The unfortunate side of the crib project is that some people chose to sit on the cribs and fish day after day. There is no law against fishing cribs and there is nothing wrong with catching a few fish off the cribs, but let's not over fish them.

The WDNR has funding for one more year of crib building, so during February 2004 we will be looking for help to build another 30 to 50 cribs. Volunteer to help if you can.

The Iron County Lakes Alliance is a reality; most Iron County lake groups are members. There are several lakes that are getting organized at present and some additional lake residents are talking about organizing.

When possible, attend our association meetings. Call one of the officers or directors to volunteer to help with a project. Also call with your suggestions and ideas, to remain successful the association needs you.

Thank you all and have a great winter. ◆

- By Arlen Wanta

"Shocking" Results!

Hot off the press – the initial figures for the 2003 fall walleye fish shocking survey are as follows!

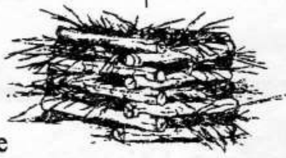
- In 2003, on average, there were 22 fish per mile shocked. This equals about 4.3 walleyes per acre.
- The fall shocking survey in 2002 was 77 fish per mile or 18.1 walleyes per acre.
- The 19-year average is 132 walleyes per mile shocked, or 36.1 walleyes per acre.
- 1992, 1996, 1998, and 2002 were years that showed a strong walleye spawn.

WDNR fish biologist, Jeff Roth, said that while the data is not complete this should give an indication of how the population is doing. You may note that this year's figures are quite a bit lower than in other years. Jeff Roth credits this to a poor spring spawn; however, this only indicates a lower population of this year's young. Larger fish would still be relatively stable. He went on to explain that the fall shocking survey is done to try to determine the previous spring's walleye spawn not the total number of walleyes per acre. ◆

Fish Crib Update

Association to start "Adopt-A-Crib" Program

As mentioned in the last newsletter, over the last two years our association has been involved in helping the WDNR with a long-term fish habitat improvement program. In winter 2002, association volunteers and the WDNR built 32 fish cribs that were placed in the Townline Lake section of the flowage. In winter 2003, another 54 cribs were built. Forty-nine were placed in the area from the Crows Nest to Grassy/Dollar Island and 5 "experimental" cribs placed in the Baraboo Lake basin. The experimental cribs were filled with different materials to evaluate effectiveness.



How successful has this program been? While the goal of this program is to increase fish habitat in the flowage and not to specifically provide new fishing hotspots, the cribs have added a new dimension to fishing on those "slow" days that everyone has. Last spring, within a week of the cribs being towed to their final destinations, local guides reported walleyes being caught near the new cribs. Consistently throughout the past summer, cribs produced some good fishing, but a word of caution, they also can be a "magnet" for jigs, slip-bobber rigs and at least one anchor that was dropped in the wrong place.

In talking with Jeff Roth, Mercer area fisheries manager, state funding for winter 2004 crib building is in place, but funding for years beyond that is very doubtful.

Again this winter we will put out a call for volunteers to help build cribs. If you can help, please drop us a note or E-mail the Association at *__TFTLkAssoc@aol.com__*

In an effort to continue this project in future years, the association board recently approved an "Adopt-a-Crib" program to start next spring. While the details of this new fund raising program are not yet finalized, the materials cost (logs, rope and concrete blocks) for a single crib is about $35.00. All money raised will be earmarked specifically for the crib program, and we hope to be able to raise enough money to continue building cribs on an annual basis.

Please look for a special mailing next spring announcing details of the "Adopt-A-Crib" program and giving everyone a chance to participate in helping improve flowage fishing on a long-term basis. ◆

The Purple Plague

From July through September, the ponds and marshes dazzle and delight the eye with a vision of majestic carpets of blossoming magenta. Wherever you look, the stately stems, sporting conical crowns of blazing color, sway in the moist breeze. Unseen, countless new shoots emerge; unheard, innumerable seeds are dispersed, as the gaudy wildflower encroaches upon the marsh.

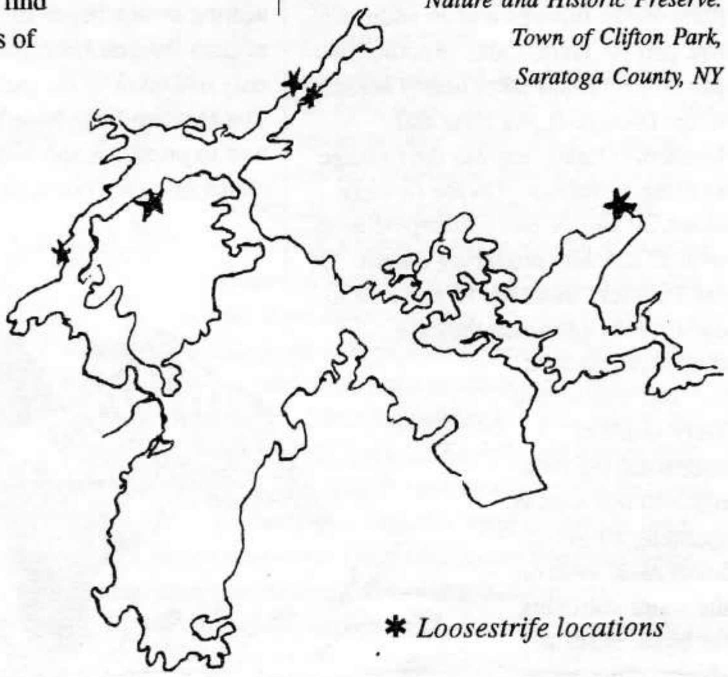
Purple loosestrife first reached America from Europe around 1860. It thrives on disturbed wetland sites. Once it takes hold, this aggressive, hardy, long-lived perennial out-competes and displaces native plants. One alarming aspect of this as yet unstoppable invasion is that the loosestrife, itself nearly valueless to wildlife (it does provide cover), destroys such crucial wildlife staples as cattails. The cattail rootstocks are an irresistible, albeit starchy, mainstay of the muskrat's diet. Muskrat also rely on cattail stalks as construction material for their houses. Ducks and other waterfowl enjoy eating cattail roots; some small birds feast on cattail seeds. When purple loosestrife displaces the cattails and its associate plants, the habitat becomes impoverished in its wildlife.

The loosestrife's reproductive powers are prodigious. If mowed or cut down, it will sprout from roots and stubble to flower again, a mature plant, in less than fifty days. It can sprout and take root from stem fragments both in and out of water. Each plant can produce up to 3,000 flowers per season, each flower containing about 100 seeds. A one-acre pure stand of purple loosestrife can contain 80,000 plants. Put these figures together with the loosestrife's ability to out-compete other plants, and the scope of the problem becomes clear.

Even more distressing is the loosestrife's effect on the entire ecosystem. Its roots are shallow and horizontal, interlacing to form a dense mat. Most loosestrife stalks are tough enough to stand throughout the winter but those that die or are blown over decompose on this dense mat or in the shallow water surrounding it. Loosestrife seedlings grow on this substrate. Thus, the purple loosestrife spreads and engulfs not only other, less hardy plants, but the water habitat as well. The constant formation of the root mat and deposition of layer upon layer of decaying plants, raises the water level, making the marshes increasingly shallow. In drought years, less than one foot of water may remain in many of the marshes that have been invaded and conquered by purple loosestrife. Some ponds dry out completely. The onslaught of purple loosestrife alter the environment in such a way as to hasten its transformation into a drier, upland habitat.

Scientists are conducting experiments to find effective means of controlling purple loosestrife. Manipulation of water-levels in wetlands, application of chemicals that will kill the plant, and controlled burning are among the methods tried so far. ◆

From the Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve. Town of Clifton Park, Saratoga County, NY



Purple Loosestrife Survey 2003

This year the purple loosestrife survey was conducted during the first ten days of August. All of the flowage, Trude Lake and Grant Lake were searched and a significant amount of loosestrife was found. Plants were found on both shores of the Turtle River north of Sturgeon Bay Landing. Some loosestrife was in the small bay about one fourth mile north of rustic campsite D-40 and some plants were seen in Donut Lake. On the Grant Creek tributary, a large area of loosestrife was found where the creek enters the flowage proper.

Thank you to Rod and Maryann Brown, Wally and Sally Dodge, Paul and Eileen Gottwald, John Kosidowski, Jim and Val Leever, Tom Mowbray, Jeff and Diane O'Krongly, Kal and Joyce Patzer, Lynn Schlueter, Jeff Wilson, George and Ann Wagner and Arlen and Grace Wanta for doing the searching this year. I apologize to those who volunteered to help but did not get called.

Our searches are worthwhile. Each year we see increasing amounts of purple loosestrife along the highways and in the marshes near the roads we drive. Our efforts, we hope, will prevent that from happening on the Flowage, Trude Lake and Grant Lake. ◆

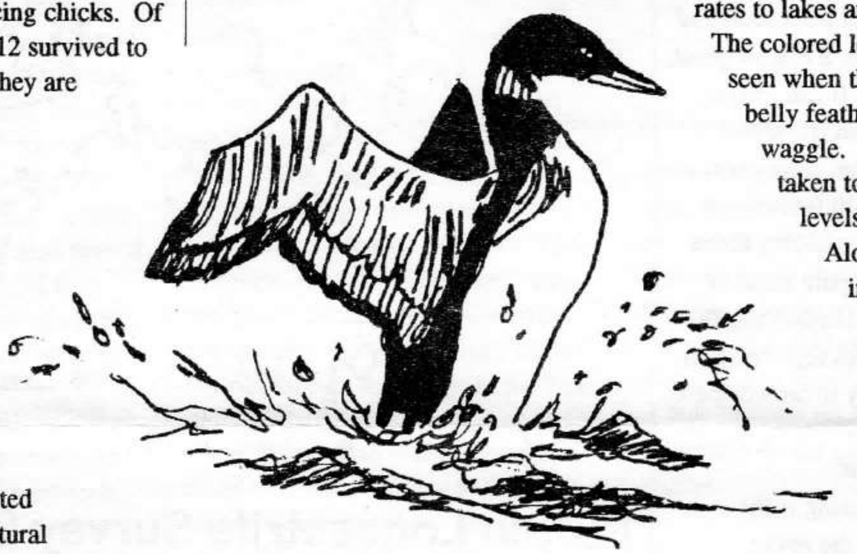
- By Liz and Frank Kilgore

Loons Break the 30-Pair Record!

Have you ever wondered how many pair of loons really call the Turtle Flambeau home? This year, loon researchers found thirty-one territorial pairs on the flowage and an additional five pair on Trude Lake. Another two pair live on small lakes nearly adjacent to the flowage (Lake Nine and Deadhorse Lake) and use the flowage as foraging habitat. On the flowage alone, 30 pair of birds attempted nests with 12 actually producing chicks. Of the 15 chicks hatched, 12 survived to eight weeks age when they are considered fledged.

Jeff Wilson and Terry Daulton conducted the loon research this season, spending 40-50 hours each week on the water searching for birds, nests, and chicks. They were able to identify several new pairs and documented a number of unusual natural history notes. Perhaps most dramatic were to the two adult loon mortalities which Terry observed. The first event was the death of an adult loon on its nest near Sportsman's Landing. She had been observing the birds incubating for nearly a month and arrived one morning expecting to see hatched chicks. Instead she found a dead loon behind the nest with its head partially eaten. The nest was on a small island with dense tree cover and the dead loon was about five feet behind the nest under a balsam fir. The eggs were missing and all she found were a few shell fragments in the nest. The loon carcass also had what appeared to be puncture wounds in the chest. Attack by a bald eagle or owl was suspected but not confirmed.

A second mortality was found on Lake Nine, a small lake just west of the flowage near Rat Lake. The loon pair on this nest often feed on the flowage in the Lake Ten area. When nesting season began they spent more of their time on Lake Nine, but often only one adult of the pair was present. The birds on Lake Nine had lost a first nest to predation and had laid a second clutch of eggs. When Terry arrived to



check the birds, she found a dead loon underwater about 100 yards from the nest site. It was about a foot under the surface and was tangled in an old beaver feed bed. The loon was decomposed and mostly eaten. She suspected snapping turtle predation as she had seen several large turtles during her surveys and turtles are known to cache food underwater. In both instances, the remaining adult loon was still on territory.

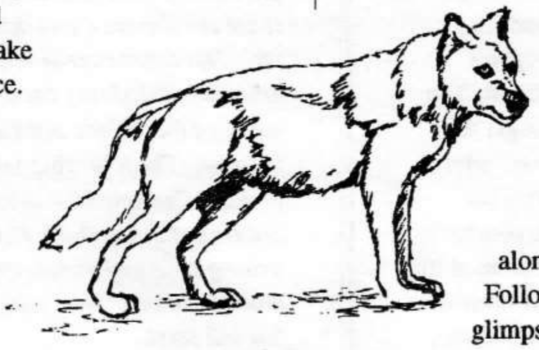
In hopes of documenting predators of adult loons and eggs, three motion detection cameras were placed near active nests on the flowage. One of the nests was washed out by waves. A second nest with camera was predated but the predator approached the nest from the water and was not documented on film. The third camera nest successfully hatched a chick. Cameras placed on other lakes did document the presence of predators at nests, including: bald eagle, raccoon, raven, domestic dog, and human.

A number of loon chicks and adults were captured and marked with colored leg bands. By marking birds, researchers hope to learn more about loon migration, adult loon return rates to lakes and chick survival. The colored leg bands are easily seen when the birds preen their belly feathers or do a foot waggle. Blood samples were taken to assess mercury levels in chicks and adult.

Along with documenting the loon nesting success, Terry and Jeff mapped the flowage for potential loon habitat and documented nest site characteristics. They counted boats seen each day and did observations of disturbances to loons by humans and other natural causes. This work is part of a larger three-year study being conducted by the WDNR under the leadership of Dr. Mike Meyer. The study's goals are to establish a population model for loons in our region and test the impacts of recreational boating, shoreline development and mercury on the loon model. The flowage was selected as a study lake this year through a random sampling method. The inclusion of the flowage in this year's work has given the opportunity to again take a look at the remarkable population of loons on this large water body. ◆

Wolf Tracks on the Flowage

Imagine the soft crunch, crunch of hard packed flowage snow on a below zero morning in January. The wan light of the winter sun sets the shoreline aglow and in the depressions behind drifts and windrows, deep blue shadows make distinct patterns on the icy surface. A large squared off track stands out in the snow; four distinct pads and the hint of claws identify it as sign of Wisconsin's largest wild canid – the grey wolf.



In the past few years, tracks and even sightings of this elusive mammal have become more frequent on the flowage. During the past two deer seasons I saw tracks and signs of wolves traveling on the new formed ice. This past year, my husband found the bed of a wolf on the shores of our bay on Horseshoe. It had spent the night curled up not more than 200 meters from our cabin door.

It should come as no surprise that wolves frequent our area. In the winter of 2002-2003, the WDNR detected at least 94 wolf packs in Wisconsin in 29 counties. The over-winter wolf population for the state that year was approximately 335-354 animals. Recent reports from the WDNR cite three active wolf packs whose territories include sections of the flowage. The Murray's Landing Pack is most likely the pack that travels in the vicinity of our cabin. There are four to six wolves in that pack and it is suspected that they bred and raised pups in 2002-2003. Two other packs, the Hoffman Lake Pack and Chippewa River Pack occupy territories in the western and southern sections of the flowage. The Hoffman Lake Pack had five wolves last winter and occupied a 51 square mile area. The Chippewa River Pack had six wolves with a 49 square mile territory. It is thought that they produced one to three pups in 2002. While wolf territory size varies, the average winter home range is about 45 square miles.

The largest recorded pack territory for Wisconsin last year was the Boot Jack Pack (Price and Oneida Counties) with 148 square miles.

Winter gives us a window into the lives of our animal neighbors. The tracks of otter, mink, fisher, squirrel, fox and snowshoe hare are common along the shores and forested lakeshore. Following a fisher or fox track can give you a glimpse of their daily life. You can follow the chase of predator and prey, see where they napped in the afternoon sun, or follow them to their winter burrows. For me, wolves are one of the most impressive of our winter mammals. Their big strides and paw prints (the size of a fist) are dead giveaways. Their tracks can be told from large dogs by their gait (how they place their feet) and habits. For example, wolves usually walk in straight lines towards their destination. Dogs tend to run back and forth between their human companions and their course.

If you are looking for a true winter adventure on the Flambeau, take your skis or snowshoes and hike the shoreline. You might want to pick up a brochure on animal tracks at the local WDNR office or purchase one of the many track field guides. Thus armed, you will undoubtedly see and identify the tracks of a mink or squirrel and perhaps you will see signs of more rare species such as the elusive timber wolf. No matter what you find, the experience of tracking and experiencing the winter landscape will clear your mind of the doldrums and refresh your spirit. ◆

- By Terry Daulton

Artist Paints the Flowage

This summer, Butternut artist Kelly Meredith presented an art exhibition featuring the Turtle Flambeau. The show was hung at the Pine Tree Gallery in Ironwood, Michigan, and a number of her pieces are still on display there. The paintings are realistic and portray the Flowage in all seasons. Meredith takes on the rough beauty of the flowage including its stump fields, wetlands, and expansive skies.

Meredith paints in acrylic and is perhaps most well known for her work as a muralist. She has created a number of fine large works on public buildings in Ashland and Butternut. She is also a schoolteacher and outdoor enthusiast.

If you are interested in seeing her work, the Pine Tree Gallery is located on Highway 2 in Ironwood. Other artwork interpreting our region can be seen at Odonata Gallery in Mercer and the Artist's Pallet in Manitowish Waters, to name a few. ◆

Tales of the Old Flambeau

Editors Note: Although in a geologic sense, the Flambeau Flowage is a young waterbody, in human terms its history stretches beyond most of our recollections. As the "pioneers" of its shores grow older, their stories of life on the flowage share the romance and adventure of a more rustic life. Our newsletter is hoping to print periodic articles highlighting the stories and accomplishments of our elders and sharing the history of the flowage. The following letter was written by Richard Czeszewski – a long time summer resident of Schenebeck Point. Richard's folksy writing style makes you feel as if you are sitting around the table with a cup of coffee sharing a few tall tales.

As I recall, it all started in April of 1957 when I received a letter from my friend "Casey." He wrote saying he just bought "Joe Popko's" Resort. There also was an invitation to come up and visit with him and his wife "Lu." Joe's place, as I recall, is on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage, just west of Mercer. Yep, you're right, that's in the northwoods of Wisconsin.

After two months of "should we, or shouldn't we," me and the two boys decided to go for it. When my wife handed me a compass, walkie talkie and a note with an emergency phone number to call when needed, I took that as a "no way charlie" for her. You have to remember, I was a city boy born and bred, and I was not too sure as to what the hell I had gotten myself into. I couldn't help but think how Lewis and Clark must have felt just before they took off in their boat. Well, at least I had a car.

Although it took two days, we finally got to Mercer, Wisconsin. As I recall, Casey said Mercer was small, but come on, where I come from we have a dozen or more public parks bigger than Mercer. However, I was very thankful to get there because they had a gas station and we were driving on gas fumes for the last five miles. Also "Mother Nature" was hitting me over the head with a pine cone and saying "I can't hold it much longer, Charlie." Yep I said two days, which I thought wasn't too bad considering we spent a lot of time on two-lane roads following trucks with hay, pigs, chickens, cattle, logs, and gas, plus, you name it.

We finally got to Wausau the first night and camped up there by the tower. Be kind to me and let me skip that whole fiasco, you see, the walkie talkie didn't work and the emergency phone number had been cancelled.

Let's get back to Mercer. I stopped at the ranger station just outside of town to get first-hand information on how to find Joe Popko's Resort. The ranger was very helpful with his directions, and it seemed like his favorite phrase was, "you can't miss it," which he used four times. Well, with a full tank of gas, the compass and a rejuvenated desire to blaze a trail, I took off down "FF", and then "F", then the big dead pine tree on the driver's side, under the transmission wires, past Dead Horse Lake, then over the bridge to the fork in the road. Keep to the right or else you will end up in Wilson Lake. As I recall we finally made it to "Popko's place." You know what? The ranger was right, you can't miss it.

Our visit with Casey and Lu was very enjoyable, so much so, we did it again for eleven years. That week on the flowage is unforgettable. When you think about, that was 46 years ago and not too much has changed since then, except the size of the motors. I've heard people use the phrase "Crown Jewel of Wisconsin" when they describe the Turtle Flambeau Flowage, I agree, and I'm sure you do too.

P.S. My first motor was a 2.5 horse Johnson with the gas tank on top of the engine.

- Ton-e Mara "North Wind" (Richard Czeszewski) Richard Czeszewski owns the cottage with the totem pole on Schenebeck Point.

What's Happening at Lake of the Falls?

Flowage residents who travel Iron County Highway FF during spring may recall the high waters, which threaten travel during spring melt. In some stretches, such as along the Black Lakes, entire sections of FF may be underwater for days at a time. Upstream from the Lake of the Falls Dam, property owners have been flooded, and their lawns and basements filled with water. In an attempt to address the severe flooding issues, Iron County has begun a reconstruction of the dam and spillways between Lake of the Falls and the flowage. The project is under the supervision of the Iron County Forestry Department and Iron County Land Conservation Department.

- Continued on next page

This season, the first phase was completed with the construction of a new tailrace. County Forest Supervisor, Charlie Zinsmaster, stated that Phase 1 (the tailrace) was completed on time and under budget. The tailrace is the drainage channel that excess waters flow through in the event of high water. The new tailrace was lined with local rock riprap to prevent erosion. Zinsmaster was pleased that native rocks were readily available this summer due to highway construction on FF. He also stated that they were able to make use of local topography in designing the spillway. The bedrock that creates the falls also makes an excellent base for the new upstream channel. This reduced the amount of rock riprap and lowered costs.

Next summer they will reconstruct the current weir (or dam). While Zinsmaster has not seen the final hydraulic calculations for the weir, it will be designed to shunt water to the tailrace when the Lake of the Falls level rises above 2.5 feet from the dam top. He stated that it would actually take about 2.7 foot rise to provide the head to push water into the tailrace. During normal water levels, the tailrace will be dry and will support emergent vegetation between the rock armor.

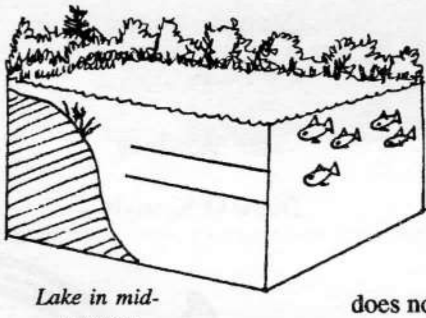
The cost of this project to date is about $31,000. The project is a partnership between the County Land Conservation Department (LCD) and Forestry Department. The LCD has provided 70% cost sharing for construction through its land and water plan. The cost sharing dollars are from the state and are bonding dollars, not general revenue. The goal of the LCD is to improve soil and water conservation in the County. Their offices are located in Ashland.

If you haven't stopped at the County FF Bridge at Lake of the Falls, you might want to take a drive over and see the progress. The large boulders and tailrace structure are impressive and unusual. Next summer we can look for a new and improved dam to match. ◆

More Than Leaves are Turning . . .

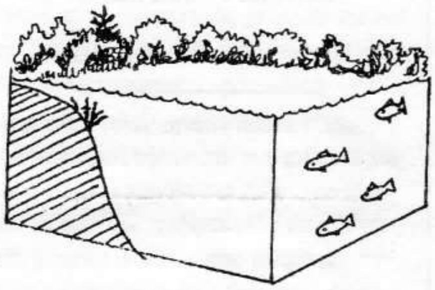
We typically associate fall with the changes that occur outdoors such as the variety of leaf color, first frost, migration of birds, harvest of fall fruit and vegetables, and more.

Lakes experience seasonal changes as well. Unlike a shallow pond, which usually has a relatively uniform temperature throughout, a deep lake has a warm surface layer in the summer and a colder layer below. As the surface temperature increases above 4° Celsius, it becomes lighter than the cold water below it. This layer of warmer water floats on the surface and is called the epilimnion. The surface layer does not mix with the cold bottom layer called the hypolimnion. The thermocline separates the two. Wind circulates and aerates the surface water but does not thoroughly mix it. Surface water is full of oxygen but the nutrients stay on the lake bottom. The water near the bottom is deficient in oxygen at this time.



Lake in mid-summer with thermal layers

By fall, conditions begin to change and the tables turn. Air temperature and sunlight decrease causing the water to cool. As the surface water cools to below 4° C, it becomes heavier and displaces the water beneath it. This disrupts the stable stratification (layers) formed during summer. Fall winds mix the lake throughout recharging nutrients and oxygen. This is referred to as fall turnover (also called overturn).

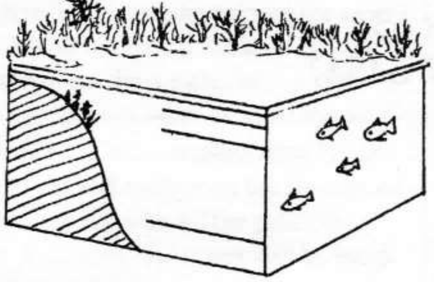


Spring and fall overturn

During winter, the surface water begins to cool. It becomes lighter and stays on top. Now, the warmest water in the lake is on the bottom!

You may wonder how warm summer surface water and cool winter surface water can both be lighter than water underneath it. Water above 4° C and below it are less dense than water at exactly 4° C. As it warms and cools its density changes, thus causing turnover.

In spring, when surface waters warm, a spring turnover occurs. Oxygen and nutrients are recharged. As air and water temperature increase the lake stratifies, and the cycle continues. ◆



Lake in winter with layers

- MaryJo Gingras
Conservation Educator
Iron County Land Conservation

Turtle Flambeau-Trude Lake Property Owner's Association

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A special thank you to Terry Daulton for the line art drawings included in this newsletter.

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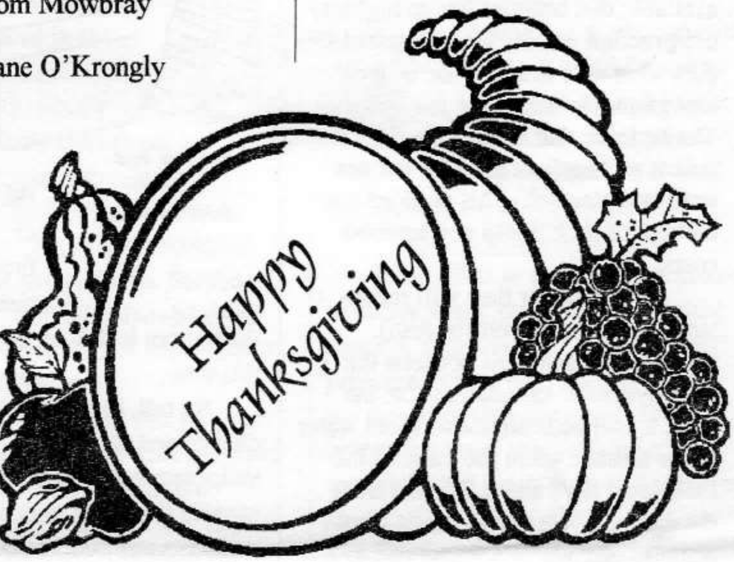
Mission Statement

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



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