Driftwood

Fall - Winter 2009-2010

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

President's Letter

By Terry Daulton

Imagine yourself on a fall day in 2001...Wikipedia and the Apple I-pod had just been invented, Jennifer Lopez had her first hit record in Britain, China joined the WTO, Enron declared bankruptcy, and, of course, 9/11. A lot has happened in the world since 2001, and even here in our remote corner of the world, change has been a steady force.

In 2001 the top issues on the minds of our association members were water quality, fish populations, and invasive species, in that order. This summer our 2009 member opinion survey revealed a shift, with water levels the number one member concern. Close behind came reduced fish populations and aquatic invasive species. Jet skis, water quality, and excessive boating speeds also made the top ranking of member concerns.

Our membership surveys reveal a snapshot of what people are doing, thinking about and interested in at a particular point in time. The full results of the 2009 survey are found in this newsletter, but I thought I would take a few moments to reflect on overall trends, changes in our views since the last survey, and ways our board hopes to use these results to address important issues. Perhaps most useful to the board are a few general categories of information. These include reasons why people spend time on the flowage, top concerns, your views on how the association can improve, and how to best provide communication to members.

The environmental issues highlighted by this survey suggest that while we must continue to work on fisheries, water quality, recreational use conflicts, and wildlife habitats, we need to continue and strengthen our focus on water levels. With the potential for continued drought, our discussions and work with the DNR and Xcel Energy will be on the top of the work list. We can't control the weather, but we can work hard to minimize impacts of the drought on the flowage's ecology and recreational values, while encouraging concern for the upstream and downstream rivers that affect our lake levels. We also hope to continue our work towards a full-scale water quality study for the flowage. Data from that study should not only tell us how clean our water is, but how water level fluctuations effect the ecosystem, and how our water quality and quantity relate to fisheries and wildlife.

We were pleased to note that overall, association members were happy with the newsletter, fish crib project, and other member activities. You did give us some great feedback on improvements--such as changing meeting times back to weekends and developing a better system to track member volunteer interests.

While changes are as inevitable as the current of a river, it is good to know that some things remain constant. Our members' dedication to and enthusiasm for the flowage, the need for us to work for the flowage environment, and the diverse interests and abilities of our members remain constant. Thanks so much to all of you who took the time to fill out the surveys. We will do our best to use the information and improve the flowage!

Fall 2009 - Water Level & Drought Update

As the open water recreation season on the TFF is rapidly drawing to a close, it's time to review TFF water levels and drought conditions for the past several months. We also want to share the work that our board has undertaken to improve the long-term water management of the flowage.

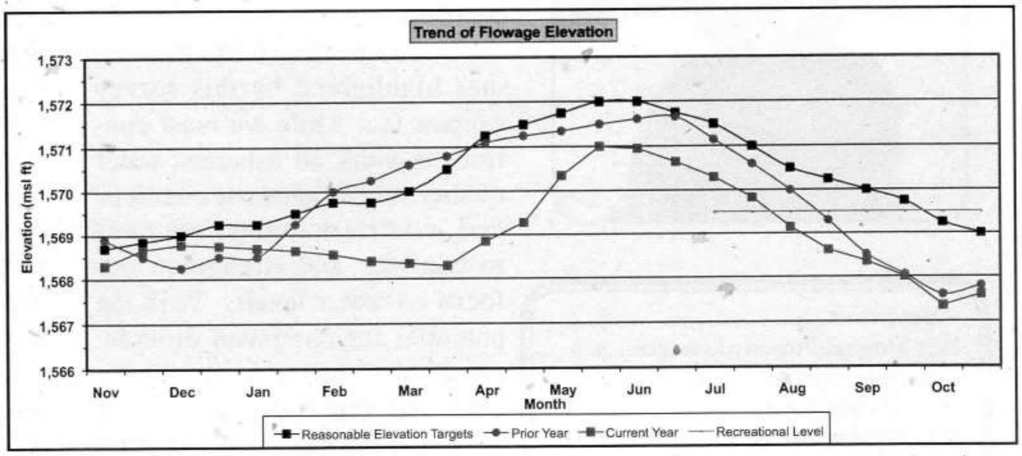
First, here is the play by play for discharge and elevations for the season. Opening weekend 2009 water levels on the TFF were 1570.35', about 20" below full-pool. By June 1st the water level had increased to 1571.0' which was the high water mark for the year. In mid-September water level exceeded the maximum summer drawdown of 1568.0' (-4') for the 3rd straight year. TFF water level bottomed out at 1567.40' (-4.60') in early October. As of this writing (October 21st), the water level had recovered almost 7", to 1567.98'.

The ongoing drought was a major factor in low water levels this year. Precipitation in most of the TFF drainage area is about 16" below normal year to date for 2009. The drought also had an impact on many smaller lakes across northern Wisconsin. Some area lakes were down 2-3 feet, indicating that the drought is impacting ground water and underground springs that re-charge our lakes.

While this may all sound like bad news, the good news is that with leadership from the DNR, Xcel Energy has kept water outflow (discharge) at the Turtle Dam in the 225 to 250 cfs range since September 2008. This is below the MOU required minimum outflow of 300 cfs. We believe that our timely and consistent work with the DNR has encouraged this shift in outflow strategy. This said, we believe that Xcel should conservatively manage water levels so that compliance with MOU outflows and elevations is the norm rather than an exception.

What has the association been doing to address these issues? As many of you may know, our board has been involved in ongoing water level discussions with the DNR for the past two years. This season we kept in close contact with the lead DNR staff for the TFF water levels, Tom Aartilla (Park Falls). We have also been working with Mr. Aartilla to set up a meeting with Xcel on long-term strategies for responsible flowage management, with special consideration for management during drought periods. We sent two board members to training sessions on water levels, lake ecology and droughts. The board has taken the lead in developing a spreadsheet of proposed target elevations as a springboard for discussions with Xcel when we meet later this year. Our goal is to work for the establishment of water level targets that address the needs of all interested parties. Comparisons of actual water levels with these targets could provide early warnings of potential low-water problems. This information, in turn, could prompt timely reviews of the situations and lead to responses that would keep operations within the MOU. Obviously, these target levels would depend on spring refill as required by the MOU.

As confirmed by Survey results (elsewhere in this newsletter), water level management continues to be an extremely important issue for association members. Water levels impact not just recreation and fishing, but water quality, invasive species, wetland health, aquatic plants--in short the overall health of the flowage. It is vital that we continue to work with Xcel and DNR to establish both a methodology to monitor TFF elevation and discharge over the course of a year and a long-term plan to manage TFF water inventory for the benefit of all TFF stakeholders.



Membership Survey: The Short Version

By Jim Leever

The 2009 membership survey is complete, and a copy of the full report is enclosed with this newsletter. The following is a brief overview.

We asked for your opinions and concerns and we got them. Of the 148 surveys sent out, 115 were completed and returned—an excellent return rate of 78%. They come from just about every area of the flowage and appear to represent a good cross-section of property owners and flowage users. (Eight Special Members returned completed surveys.)

We also learned that fishing is the primary reason people come to the flowage. Other top reasons are: peace, tranquility, and scenic/natural environment. All told, the list contains at least twenty reasons people are attracted to the area.

Expectedly, our members' greatest concern is water level management, and we heard a lot about that. We found in our analysis that as the water level goes down, more and more members are impacted. Most members can tolerate up to a one foot drop in water level; but after that, for every one-foot drop about 20% more of our members experience major problems. After water water-level management, members' concerns focus on a decreased fish population, aquatic invasive species, jet skis, and water quality.

Other concerns include: excessive boat speeds; inconsiderate boaters; inconsiderate use of fireworks; excessive noise; inconsiderate use of jet skis; inconsiderate use of outdoor lighting; and other similar issues. Most of these concerns are not top concerns for members, but it strikes me that many could readily be remedied with a little consideration and respect for our neighbors and for fellow flowage users.

The newsletter and the association board get high marks, over 90% favorable; but there are a few critical comments. Criticisms call for more issues of and content in the newsletter and more action from the board on water-level management. Some critics think that only a few of the board members are concerned and actively working on the water-level issue. In fact, discussions about water levels have been and are discussed in detail by the entire board, while certain board members are taking the lead in pursuing board-determined policies.

The survey asks two specific questions: should the culvert between the flowage and Trude Lake be enlarged to allow access from one body of water to the other? and should we continue with the fish crib program? The culvert question receives a mixed response, with only about half of the respondents in agreement. Eight out of ten respondents favor continuing the crib program.

Finally, the part of the full report that I would encourage everyone to read is Attachment #2, "member comments." In a way, the comments mirror the statistical data in other parts of the report, but they also put flesh and bones on the numbers and percentages. The board, the members, and the DNR should all have something to chew on after reading this section

To wrap it up, the report provides both "hard data" and a general understanding of our members' opinions, concerns, and expectations for the flowage and the association. The members have spoken, and we can all benefit by their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions. By working together we can resolve many of the issues brought out in this report and make the flowage a better place for all to enjoy.

Jet Ski Ordinance for TFF in Place

The long awaited jet ski ordinance for the flowage has been passed by both the Mercer and Springstead Town Boards. The regulation sets jet ski hours of operation at 11 am-4 pm for the entire water body. Having both towns concur on this regulation allows for enforcement if jet ski operation hours are violated. MANY THANKS to both boards for the long work on this important rule.

From Aspen to Administration: Niehaus New Flowage Property Manager

As the new property manager for the Turtle Flambeau Scenic Waters Area, I would like to share with you a bit about myself. I live in Mercer and have been here since July, 1991, when I started as a forester working out of the Mercer Ranger Station. My tenure as forester included working on the Iron County Forest as well as on three different state properties here in Iron County. One of those state properties was the Turtle Flambeau Scenic Waters Area.

Since the state's establishment of the Scenic Waters Area, I have been involved with the property--writing the forestry portion of the master plan, doing all of the original forest survey work, and establishing and administering timber sales on the property. Over the past 18 years, I have walked darned near all of the 24,000 acres of land as well as motoring around most of the water.

New Property Manager, Chris Niehaus

Although I know some of the members, I look forward to meeting many more. I would like to be an involved partner with the association and look forward to working with the board and you as members. I am open to comments and concerns and invite each of you to feel free to give me a call (476-7846) or stop by the office.

~ Chris Niehaus

Another Point of View

By Jim Leever

We distributed the 2009 membership survey to 5 local DNR field members, asking for their concerns regarding the flowage. We chose this secondary population, not to get a second opinion, but to get another point of view from a group also familiar with the flowage. The survey was not scientific, nor does it represent any official view from the WDNR.

These 5 DNR members list their "flowage concerns," in response to Question #7 on the membership survey. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) is listed on all 5 surveys. Shoreline development is mentioned on 4 surveys, and water level management and excessive piers are each mentioned twice. Other concerns are: climate change, septic system pollution, decreased fish population, inconsiderate outside lighting, lawn chemicals, and shoreline erosion. Missing on the list, with the exception of inconsiderate outside lighting, are the "user conflicts" which are so well represented on the association members' list.

Responses from the DNR personnel focus more on "resource concerns" as opposed to the broader range of issues the members list.

FISHERMAN'S SPECIAL

2009 Comprehensive Fish Survey on the TFF and Trude Lake

Conversation between Mike Hittle and, DNR Fisheries Biologist, Jeff Roth on September 23, 2009

JR - Jeff Roth
MH - Mike Hittle

MH - This year you conducted a comprehensive study of the TTF and Trude Lake fisheries. Where does this year's study fit into the history of assessments of these fisheries?

JR - This is the fifth comprehensive survey. The first comprehensive survey of this caliber completed in Wisconsin was done on the flowage in 1975-76. Others took place in 1989, 1992, and 1997. It's important to know, first off, that this is more a treaty assessment survey than a management survey. That is, the main goal is to determine the adult walleye population, which in turn dictates tribal harvest quotas. We've gone an extended period of time since the last survey. There are a couple of reasons for that. First, when we have fish population data that is less than three years old, its accuracy allows us to permit maximum tribal harvest within the 35% exploitation limit. The further we get away from survey data, the more conservative the formula for determining tribal declarations becomes. So from a treaty standpoint, it would behoove us not to do current estimates too frequently. Second, there is the cost of this survey--it's tremendous. So, this comprehensive survey takes place on a treaty assessment schedule. The next comprehensive survey will come five to ten years down the road. From my perspective as a manager of the flowage, that's fine with me. And you'll see this as we get into the results: everything's pretty static out there.

MH - Could you briefly review the various activities/components of this year's study?

JR - We started out with a spring netting to capture walleyes and then followed up with a recapture by electro-shocking. But we did something different this year to hold down costs. Ideally, out effort markings should be the same as they were in the 1997 survey. But instead of shocking the entire shoreline, on the advice of our statisticians, we randomly set up index stations (miles of shoreline) that we could cover and still come up with the same level of accuracy. So, we shocked, maybe, 60% of the shoreline. And the results were surprisingly accurate—as statistically accurate or better than the 1997 survey. So it worked out well.. We're also running a year-round creel census so that we can figure out angler harvest and exploitation on that walleye population. The census is ongoing now [until freeze-up] and will pick up again December 1. And next week we will do a walleye reproduction reassessment. We'll be shocking index stations, not the whole shoreline, and from those data we should pretty much be able to project current year reproduction, as well as last year's reproduction.

MH - Just out of curiosity, how big will this year's recruits be?

JR - On the flowage, they're probably as small as anywhere in Iron County because they are so abundant. Generally, 4 ½ inches at fall fingerling stage—sometimes a little bit smaller. In smaller waters, where there is not the tremendous reproduction as on the flowage, they could be 5 ½ to 6 inches.

In a related vein, I might note that walleyes on both the Gile and Flambeau flowages reproduce at rates that are well beyond the carrying capacities of those bodies of water. We're probably looking at a 20-30% survival rate to yearling stage. With that overabundance of young walleyes, we could—if we had

the latitude and flexibility—move those fingerlings to other lakes and thus manage them with this product. There's no reason not to biologically, because they are going to die anyway. It's a hard concept for people to understand; they think," the more fish the better," and that's true. But there's a finite over-winter carrying capacity. Anything else is going to die.
MH - What kills these fingerlings? Is there a lack of forage, or do they just get preyed upon over the course of winter?

JR - A good question. We don't know. It's probably a combination of habitat, food, and molestation that can vary from year to year depending on changes in fish communities. We just don't know.

Beyond generating a walleye population estimate, I'm allowed to go beyond that and to look at the rest of the fish community and do more of a management assessment. This year we sampled the muskie population. And that's about all we did from a management perspective,since I had a panfish assessment that I had already done, and smallmouth bass we do every other year, and this was not the year.

MH - So what remains to be done in the field would be the fingerling shocking you are about to do and the creel census which will run through...

JR - The first week of March. That's right.

MH - Where are you now in the analysis of the data?

JR - I have just about everything summarized to date, except, of course, the information to be gathered this fall. The creel census information probably won't be available till this time next year. We have good, historical creel census data on which to make a comparison.. I'll be real interested to see how fishing pressure has changed, because my gut feeling is that fishing pressure has increased quite a bit out there in the last 12 years. It could be deceiving, but I will be interested to see what the fishing pressure is, and what the exploitation rate is.

WALLEYE POPULATION COMPARISON - TFF

	2009	1997
Adults marked	**11,442**	**11,573**
Total marked (adults and unknowns >15")	**17,547**	**11,896**
Males marked	**9,794**	**9,841**
Females marked	**1,615**	**1,732**
Female PE	**1.5/ac**	**1.3/ac**
Male PE	**3.3/ac**	**3.4/ac**
Unknowns >15"	**0.1/ac**	**0.05/ac**
# adults incl. Unsexable Fish > 15 in.	**54,208**	**54,758**
Total Adult PE	**4.1/ac**	**4.0/ac**
Proportion 15-20 in.	**31%**	**27%**
No. Fish 15-20 in.	**16,727**	**14,904**

MH - Let's get down to the key issues: what are the noteworthy findings to date? And are there any discernible long-term trends?
JR - Let's start with the walleyes. What we look at are adults—fish whose sex we can determine—and

unknowns, fish greater than 15 inches whose sex cannot be determined. (Many of the latter category are juvenile females, probably years away from spawning.) In making a population estimate, we include the unknowns along with identifiable adults.

MH - At what age do walleyes become sexually mature?

JR - That varies: females probably at 5 to 6 years of age; males, 3 to 5 (probably 4 in the flowage.)

What we found is that the abundance of walleyes out there remains unchanged over the last 12 years When you look at the numbers, you see that adult males and females are present in our sample in numbers almost identical to those of 1997. There were many more unknowns, however, and these are probably females coming up. The total population estimate generated from our data is 54,200 fish, about 4 adults per acre. Looking back in time to 1997 and 1992, the figures were 4 and 4 ½ fish per acre. This year's estimate is statistically valid. It is probably the best estimate in the state, and all the more remarkable for a body of water this big.

If numbers of walleyes are relatively consistent over time, the size structure of the walleye population has changed in an encouraging way. In 1997, fish between 15 and 20 inches, the size we're are looking at for angling, amounted to 27% of the estimated total population. This year, 31% fell into that category. That's 2,000 more fish in the preferred size range.

By the way, I should point out that each spring we do an index netting, where we go out and sample for walleyes, for three days, at the peak of spawning. We handle a couple of thousand fish in a few days. I look at catch rates, of course, but I'm much more concerned with size structure. I index those data to get a heads up if the size structure should start to fall apart. And I want to know that as soon as I can, because it takes so long to enact a minimum size or slot size regulation, or whatever you would do. So that's the idea behind the spring indexing. My preference is to never have a size limit on walleye out here. It hasn't been demonstrated that we need it, and I hope we don't have to go there.

So basically the walleye population has not changed much, and if it has, there's been an improvement in size structure. If I had to prognosticate with our numbers, especially given the higher number of fish that couldn't be sexed—most of them probably females—we'll see that group of fish grow larger and faster. In the next few years, these fish will be entering the preferred size structure. So it looks good.

MH - I'll attack walleyes with renewed vigor this fall and winter, but I must say I haven't put much of a dent in those 54,000 eaters this year.

JR - The flowage has NOT been good to Jeff Roth this year either. You can tell that to anybody!
Let's go on to muskies. My goal in 1997 was to do a musky population estimate for the flowage. But we were unable to complete it. We got blown off the water; the weather changed; and the catch rate went down. But we had a good sample: 217 fish. So this year we set out to duplicate that effort--same sites, same effort—to see what, if any, comparisons we could draw. And there were some interesting results. In our 1997 sample, 17% of the muskies were over 40 inches, and that's pretty good. (In 1995, 10% of the muskies in the Gile Flowage were over 40 inches.) But we had no fish in the 45-49 inch range—though one was 50 inches. This year we had 142 fish in our sample, but 31% were over 40 inches. This positive change in size structure might be the delayed effect of the 40 inch size limit—it takes muskies a long time to grow—but catch and release may be playing a part too. Nonetheless larger size limits are a good man-

agement strategy. Scientifically, the jury's out on whether size limits work on musky unless they are really high. But limits do give you some assurance that those 38 inch fish aren't going to be taken. This year's sample has even more good news about the size structure of the musky population: 8% of our sample were between 45 and 49 inches. That's quite a few fish. And they are good, healthy looking fish. I think this is all very encouraging.

Our musky stocking rate remained pretty much unchanged through out the period. I did, however, plant them in a more scattered way, rather than dumping them all at one landing every year. It's such a big flowage.

MH - If someone were to worry that you captured fewer muskies, does that mean that there are fewer small ones coming on.

JR - No, because, again, we're looking at adult fish. We're always sampling during the spawning period, in known spawning sites. And so, hopefully, this information will allow me to conclude how the size structure has changed. I wouldn't be too concerned about the netting catch rates, because they are so variable, depending on the weather and so on. I don't think overall musky numbers are down because our catch rates are down. It's just way too small a sample to say that. And because the fish are so scattered, there might be fish in other parts of the flowage that are totally unsampled. Finally, as a musky fisherman, I'd rather have a better size structure and fewer fish than a poor size structure and a lot of fish. I'm managing the flowage for a trophy fishery, and these results are in keeping with that management philosophy.

Let me review the data on the other species that I know about. The panfish evaluation I did a couple of years ago. We did not do it as a part of this year's comprehensive survey just because we were stretched too thin. But I do have a running program to track every species out there.

New panfish regulations went into effect in 1997, and I evaluated 10 years later to see what effect the 10 fish bag/10 inch size regulations were having on crappies. As it turns out, crappies have remained unchanged, both in terms of catch rates and size structure. But you have to remember that crappies are very difficult to sample, and this is just one sample. We'll get a better handle on the effects of the crappie regulations as we sample down the road. I'm optimistic, but the data now don't support that optimism. Other than crappies, things have changed a great deal in the panfish population. Bluegills were the least abundant in our sampling before the regulations went into effect, and now they have jumped to second most abundant--from less than half a fish per lift to eight fish. The size structure has gone down a little bit, from 8.1 inches to 7.7inches, but I don't think that small difference in size structure is reflective of an overabundance. There's a good number of bluegills out there, and they are becoming

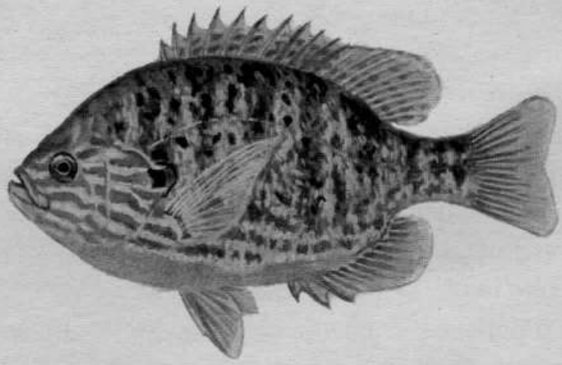
PANFISH REGULATION EVALUATION

	CATCH RATES #/LIFT		AVERAGE SIZE	
	Pre-reg	Post-reg	Pre-reg	Post-reg
Bluegill	0.4	7.5	8.1	7.7
Bl. Crappie	2.4	2.1	10.4	10.2
Pumpkinseed	1.4	10.4	6.4	6.8
Yellow Perch	0.6	1.5	9.3	8.1
Rock Bass	2.6	2.5	7.4	7.3

Conclusion: Since the onset of the 10 fish bag limit on panfish, bluegill, pumpkinseed and yellow perch have increased in abundance.

a major part of the panfish fishery. The biggest jump is in pumpkinseeds. They are the most abundant panfish in our sample, and their size structure remains the same. We captured about twice the number of perch than in the previous sample, but the numbers are still small. Finally, rock bass showed no change. All in all, the data on panfish are encouraging. The more panfish out there, the better. That's a hard result to obtain in a walleye-dominated community, but we are making good headway.

Sturgeon, I don't have the information here, but I've got reams of it. Suffice it to say, our sturgeon management program is highly successful. We are sampling fish now at a rate we have never done before, and we have been sampling for 20 years. And it's all the result of three successful stockings. We have created year classes of sturgeon, and what that tells me is that we have no or very little mortality of stocked sturgeon. They are coming on like gang busters. And we have documented for the first time ever some natural reproduction. That is, we have some fish for which we have age data, and their ages do not correspond with those of the stocked fish. Of course, most of the sturgeon out there have been stocked, but there are some natives.



Pumpkinseed – "New Panfish King".

MH - Did you get some sturgeon in your nets this year?

JR - We sample annually. I don't have the figures here, but we had several days when we sampled 30 fish a day, 80% of which had not been handled before. These are immature fish, in the 40-50 inch range. . I hope some day—perhaps this winter--to generate a sturgeon population estimate based on our sampling data. And I'm hopeful that before too long, maybe in five to ten years, we can open a hook and line season on the flowage. This program is definitely going to pay off down the road.

Smallmouth bass –we didn't do anything on them this year—are on an alternate year sampling schedule. We have sample index stations that we shock. Here I'm looking more at catch rates than size structure. Are the smallmouth coming on at a level that might warrant a change in regulations? I would forecast that we will, probably, propose something down the line if numbers get out of proportion. We might look at relaxing the 15 inch minimum 2 fish bag limit.

MH - Is there anything in your data to suggest that the smallmouth population has adversely impacted walleye numbers or size structure.

JR - Not at all. And we've looked at recent research which shows that there is no competition between smallmouth and walleyes at any life stage. The jury is out whether largemouth can compete with walleye. But we don't have that concern on the flowage—there are so few largemouth out there that I don't see that ever becoming a problem.

MH - I know the association members who labor mightily, along with the DNR staff, to build cribs will want to know whether the cribs have played a significant role in the fishery.

JR - I think cribs have definitely played a role in the fishery. As you might suspect, any time you concentrate fish, they are more easily harvested. So anglers have benefited from them. Has the fish population benefited from cribs? I just can't say. I'd love to say I have even a gut feeling, but I can't see any impact of crib building on the biology of the fishery. But it definitely enables people to go out and harvest fish, and our regulations are in place to prevent over-harvest, and the data suggest the regs are working. If cribs allow people to go out and harvest more fish, that's what I'm here for.

MH - Low water is hard on lower units and tempers. Does it have any effect on fish biology, on the fishery?

JR - I'm not concerned at the level we are at now. I would be concerned if we dropped down 10-12 feet below normal, getting down to river channels. If that happened, I would expect to see some loss of recruitment, probably of all species. Down the road we might have a missing year class here and there. I wouldn't be concerned about over-exploitation through the ice, but I'd be concerned about winterkill on Horseshoe Lake, which is already prone to winterkill. Where we are now, however, is not a concern.

MH - Is there anything we haven't covered that is on your mind?

JR - Your membership will certainly be interested in the current state of Trude Lake. It has changed dramatically. The number of walleyes is up and the size structure is down. I haven't picked through those data yet, but a cursory look at the raw data tells me there have been some major changes--and they don't look to be for the better. This situation has no bearing on the flowage, however. There is virtually no movement of fish between the two bodies of water. Biologically speaking, they can be managed as two separate lakes.

MH - By way of summary, how would you assess the overall health of the fish population in the flowage?

JR - It's probably improved over what I've seen and observed both as a biologist and a fisherman since the 1970s. As a biologist I believe we have improved the fishery because it is more diverse. Back in the 1970s, walleyes were absolutely, totally, dominant. As a fisherman, I think you could go out and catch more walleye in the 70s than you can now. And if our estimates were right back then, there were twice as many walleyes. But it was such a walleye-dominated system. Muskies were there; panfish were almost non existent. I believe a more diversified fishery is a better one.

MH - Certainly my children grew up fishing here, and it was walleyes or nothing. That was an awful way to get them started--jigging among the snags and stumps. Now my grandkids tie up to a stump, throw out a bobber, and haul in pumpkinseeds.

JR - Right. To start out kids in hunting or fishing, they have to be successful.

MH - The prospect youngsters catching fish—from panfish to muskies-- in the flowage for years to come seems a good place to stop. Thanks Jeff.

Aquatic Plant Survey Conducted on the TFF and Trude Lake

By Heather Palmquqist - Iron County LCD

Aquatic plants, known to many as "weeds," are commonly regarded as a nuisance or as being "gross" when you swim through a clump. One man's junk is another's treasure. Aquatic plants are vital to the aquatic ecosystem. If you find a bulrush bed, you will likely find small fish, invertebrates, and waterfowl. A bed of fern pondweed offers great foraging opportunity and cover for northern pike. Understanding the aquatic plant community can tell you a lot about your favorite waters.

Aquatic plant surveys are conducted to inventory the species diversity in a particular body of water to aid in management. Surveys are done according to a grid system of GPS points from which a sample of plants is taken, along with data about the substrate, depth, and plant density. Samples of each plant are taken and the supporting data compiled to complete a picture of the plant comunity.

Part of the Aquatic Plant Survey crew: Left to Right Diane O'Krongly, Heather Palmquist, Nick Jongebloed, and Terry Daulton

At the beginning of August, association members Diane O'Krongly, Nick Jongebloed, Terry Daulton, along with Iron Country staffer Heather Palmquist and DNR aquatic plant specialist Sandy Wickman, conducted an aquatic plant survey on the TFF and Trude Lake. Due to its size, the whole body of water was not inventoried. Instead, transects of ten points were inventoried at each of the USGS testing stations. An additional five points were surveyed at each boat landing to monitor for any invasive species that may have come in from the boats of visiting anglers. The survey found over 30 different plant species in the flowage and Trude Lake. No invasive species were found.

As part of this initial survey, the association received from the DNR a full-scale grid, which can be used as the basis for future studies

We're Weaving a Website

By Diane O'Krongly

Want to know more about the TFF-TL POA and the flowage? All you need is a computer and the Internet. For those of you who do not have a computer, think about your public library, your kids, or grandkids. The site is: http://www.easysite.com/Turtleflambeau.

This site contains information about the association: a copy of the By-Laws; names of board members and contact information for them; annual meeting minutes and agendas; a PDF version of the Newsletter; and much more. A calendar lists association activities and other events relevant to members. Topics of specific interest have their own dedicated areas: lake-level information, crib-building, efforts to eliminate aquatic invasives, and the progress of our Lake Management Grant Program. We also provide contact information for the DNR and other lake partner organizations.

We need your favorite photos of the flowage and Trude Lake, which can be added to the website. Please give us a caption for your photos and let us know which albums they should be put in. And don't forget to check out the audio section and listen to the great songs that teach about lake health issues.

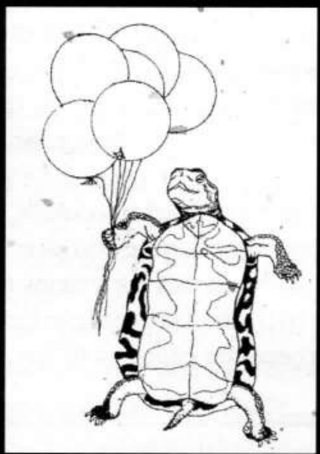
Our website is a work in progress. Please let us know how we can improve it.

New Landing Signs Highlight Invasives

The Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department, through a Citizen-Based Monitoring Grant, has developed new aquatic invasive species signs for boat landings. The signs will be placed at 16 different landings throughout Iron County, with four to be posted on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage. Each sign includes pictures of invasives, a brief explanation of their effect on an ecosystem, and ways to prevent their spread . The signs will be posted at Fisherman's, Sportsman's, Sturgeon Bay, and Springstead landings next spring.

Cabin Fever Party Set for Jan 16th

The ever popular association Cabin Fever Party has been set for January 16th at the Mercer Community Center. It will again start at 5 pm, and people are asked to bring a dish to pass. The association will provide a main course, coffee, and juice. Look for further information on the party as the date approaches!



Initial Results From Water Quality Grant

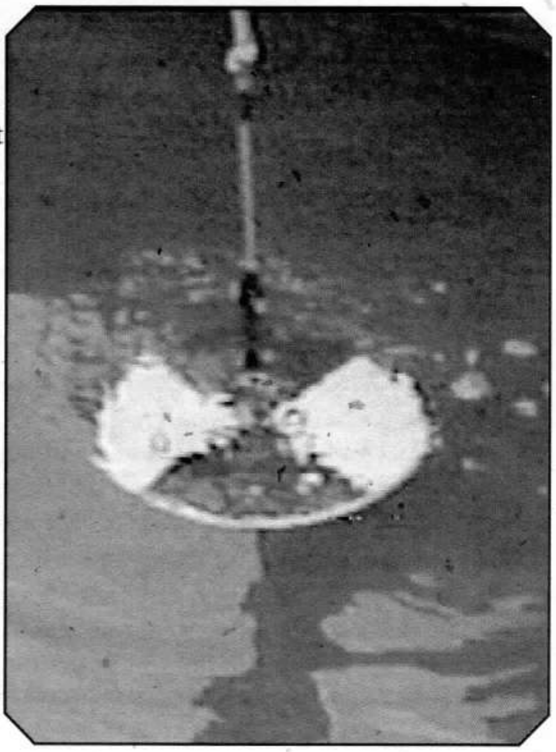
By Dale Robertson - USGS

In order to develop a more extensive water-quality database for the Turtle Flambeau Flowage and connected lakes, the U.S. Geological Survey began an extensive monitoring program in May of 2009 that will continue through March of 2010. This program consists of monitoring various physical and chemical properties in five locations in the system—once in the spring, three times throughout the summer, and once in late winter. Monitoring is being conducted in Trude Lake, Lake Bastine, Baraboo Lake, Townline Lake, and in the main basin (Big Water) of the lake. This monitoring is being supplemented by ongoing citizen monitoring of the lake.

Initial results have shown that deeper regions of the lake remain stratified throughout summer, whereas shallower regions frequently mix. This stratification results in anoxia (lack of oxygen) below the thermocline in the deeper parts of the lake. Most of the lake is classified as eutrophic with respect to total phosphorus concentrations and water clarity throughout most of the year, except Trude Lake, which generally has slightly better water quality and is classified as mesotrophic. The amount of algae in the flowage is less than would be expected given the amount of nutrients in the water. Although the water quality in the main part of the flowage may have been slightly worse in 2009 than in earlier years, no long-term trends in water quality are apparent.

Late winter sampling will examine the extent of anoxia under the ice and the potential for winterkills, as well as examine the amount of nutrients being released under the ice.

For more information on the U.S. Geological Survey monitoring program, please contact Dr. Dale Robertson: dzobert@usgs.gov or (608) 821-3867.



Winter Aerobics Offered (AKA Fish Crib Construction)

The association will again be teaming up with the DNR fisheries staff to put together fish cribs for placement in the flowage. The tentative work location for the cribs will be between Norway Point and Fisherman's Landing. We hope to get to work soon after freeze up. Some of you who helped with this project last year expressed the view that the logs were every-so-slightly large. In light of this feedback we are hoping to reduce the exercise regime from the level of kick boxing aerobics to a more reasonable winter activity level. Arnie Popp is working on getting logs to Fisherman's Landing in late October or early November and he is promising only small logs (or he will drill extra holes to make them lighter). By the time you receive this newsletter, drilling will have taken place on the weekend of November 7-8. Construction of the cribs will occur on Thursday and Friday, January 14 and 15, just prior to the Cabin Fever Party on the 16th. January 18 and 19 will be held in reserve in case Mother Nature lays a trip on us on Thursday and Friday. Food will be served. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Arnie at (715) 476- 0424.

Big Island Campsites
Hail, Hail, the gang's all here...

By Chris Niehaus - DNR

The new group camping sites on Big Island should be complete by the end of October and ready to receive campers next spring. Two "cluster" group sites located on the east side of Big Island and north of the existing group site will accommodate up to 45 people at each site. Each of the two group sites is divided into a cluster of three camping areas with a 15 person maximum at each area. The new camping areas will be labeled as B3 – B8. Each group site has a pitted vault toilet for men and women, both handicapped accessible. Each camping area has its own boat docking area and a crushed granite, low grade approach to the camping area so that it is wheelchair friendly. The middle camping area on each site also has geo-tech fabric extending into the water so that it allows easier access for a wheelchair.

Each of the camping areas will be available by reservation only through the existing reservation system for state parks. Camping without a reservation on these sites will not be allowed. The fee for each camping area will be $40.00 per night at the normal rate and $10.00 per night for Wisconsin non-profit youth groups. These will be the only sites with a reservation system. All remaining campsites will stay first-come, first-served and free. The two existing group sites will remain unchanged. Other than the toilet buildings and fee for these new sites, everything else about the camping remains the same: boat in access only and garbage must be packed out.

These new sites were developed to resolve problems of overcrowding at our group sites. Our goal is to provide the means for groups to plan their visits and to insure that the number of campers does not exceed the capacity of the facilities.

Purple Loosestrife Benefits from the Drought!

By Bruce Bacon - DNR

Each year is a battle, with the flowage association volunteers being the forward scouts. Locating our targets, the loosestrife plants, is the first step. Some volunteers also help by pulling or treating plants with herbicide, the first skirmishes. Then a more organized battle is fought with DNR personnel and volunteers, starting at the Sturgeon Bay Landing. Recognizing that any army marches on its stomach, the association feeds the troops (quite well!) after a hard day in the field. The DNR along with a few volunteers then tackle the Manitowish River from the Hwy 47 bridge to Murray's Landing. This is where the war will be won or lost! The moving water in the narrow channel is more efficient at distributing tiny loosestrife seeds. And now the drought of several years has prepared suitable seed beds at MANY sites along the river and TFF shores.

We are using the herbicide "Habitat." It does a better job of eradicating loosestrife than pulling plants, which we have tried for 5 plus years. Loosestrife beetles show promise in slowing the dominance of loosestrife plants in an area but they allow the plants to remain present. The bottom line is we will use all the weapons at our disposal: pulling isolated plants, using herbicides each summer, and hopefully releasing beetles in the future. The key to having an impact is surveillance. We must locate new plants ANYWHERE on the Flowage! That is where your help is so important.

Left to Right Thad Krause, Bruce Bacon (with potted loosestrife), Dave Pierce, Heather Palmquist, and Diane O'Krongly

In 2009 we (you) found loosestrife plants along the Turtle River, both up and downstream from the Sturgeon Bay Landing, and at the NW side of Big Island, Bonies Mound and adjacent islands, the bays leading to Grant Creek, Horseshoe Lake, the south end of the big water, Murray's Landing, and 3 to 4 miles of the Manitowish River. That is a lot of area to monitor. Making this year even more difficult was the delayed maturing of loosestrife plants, possibly due to the cool summer. So we have gone a second time to many of the sites that were treated and found additional loosestrife plants to treat. Some are still not blossoming as I write this (August 18). We will have had people out treating loosestrife for 8 days or more this year, a significant increase from past years. The good news is there are far fewer large mature plants out there. What we are finding and treating are the thousands of young plants allowed to sprout by the drought conditions. Hope for high water next year! And THANKS to all who helped with the loosestrife surveillance and treatment!!!

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

Published Twice Annually

If you would like to contact the association by email, please note the new address!

TFTLkAssoc@hotmail.com

--- 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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