

Driftwood

Turtle Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake Property Owners Association, Inc.

2025 Fall/Winter

The Flowage is Turning 100 Years Old!

Article below reprinted with permission of Michael Hittle.

Editor's Note: As we turn our calendars to 2026 we will be approaching the flowage's 100th birthday. In celebration, what follows is the back page summary of the book *An Accidental Jewel*, by Michael Hittle. Watch for additional articles and programming around this anniversary in 2026!



In 1926, the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company closed the gates on a newly finished dam at the confluence of the Turtle and Flambeau rivers in Iron County Wisconsin. That act created a storage reservoir of over 13,000-acres, known today as the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, whose waters were to be released for the purpose of generating hydropower for downstream industries. What served the state's industries, however, angered conservationists, for the headwaters of an iconic northwoods river, the Flambeau, had been replaced by a body of water dotted with standing dead trees and awash in driftwood and slash. But Clio, the muse of history, had a trick up her sleeve. The reservoir quickly became home to an abundant fish population; resorts sprang up to meet the needs of anglers and their families; and the flowage gained a reputation for its unique blend of excellent fishing with a wilderness setting. Statewide recognition followed in 1990, when Governor Tommy G.

Thompson hailed the flowage as "One of Wisconsin's Crown Jewels" and announced that the state would be purchasing the bulk of the flowage's shoreline from the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company. A few years later the Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters Area became a reality.



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President's Letter

by Randy Schubert

Greetings to our members of the Turtle Flambeau Flowage Trude Lake Property Owners Association. As we finish another great summer on the water and enter the fall and winter seasons, we can reflect on a busy and productive year; with challenges still ahead of us. First, our association remains strong both financially and in membership as we recently broke the 200-member mark for the first time in our history. We continue to work at renewing existing memberships along with attempting to reach out to property owners who are currently not members. The association remains focused on:

- Conducting water quality monitoring to closely watch and respond to changes.
- Coordinating the monitoring, education and management activities relating to invasive species. Partnering with natural resource agency staff in conducting prevention activities.
- Working closely with the DNR fisheries biologist to stay current on the ever-changing fisheries of the TFFTL. We communicate many of the concerns we hear from you, our members, through our close relationship with the DNR fisheries biologist.
- Water Level – This remains a very important and ongoing issue with our association. Our water level committee monitors the water level throughout the entire year and we have an open communication channel with Xcel to voice and share our concerns when necessary.

Many are aware that one of the current and ongoing issues with the flowage and inland waters of Wisconsin is the use of wake boats. Thank you to everyone who participated and shared their concerns through the survey we conducted last year. Based on the concerns of our members, we moved forward with assistance from the Last Wilderness Alliance to prepare, submit and present a wake boat ordinance at board meetings for both the Town of Sherman and the Town of Mercer. You will find additional information on the wake board issue within this edition of the *Driftwood*. While we will remain focused on the wake boat issue, we will not lose sight of the other matters our association continues to be involved with.



In closing, our association remains focused and dedicated to our mission as stewards of the TFFTL area. Once again, thank you to all our officers, board members, committee chairs, committee members, and the entire membership for being a part of this great organization. Please consider volunteering for one of our many committees, work days, or even offering to run for a board or officer position. I hope everyone has a wonderful fall and winter, whether you hunker down in the Northwoods or travel to a warm place. We will continue to update our website and email announcements on significant issues throughout the year to keep everyone informed.

Association Leads the Charge for Wake Surfing Regulation on the TFF and Trude Lake

by Terry Daulton

Based on the results of our 2024 member survey, the lake association board met with the Towns of Sherman and Mercer asking that they consider an ordinance banning the use of enhanced wakes on the TFF and Trude Lake. The ordinance does not ban the boats, but bans the operation in a bow high, stern down manner, and restricts the use of ballast tanks and other wake creating equipment.

As members will recall, our survey found that 93% of members who responded to the survey (132 respondents or around 73% of all members) were in favor of us working with the towns on this effort. Issues around wake boats include safety concerns, shoreline erosion and sedimentation as lake

bottom is disturbed, impacts on wildlife such as shoreline nesting loons and spread of invasive species in ballast waters. For example, wake boats can carry 8-25 gallons in their ballast, potentially spreading species such as spiny water flea.

These concerns and impacts are well documented in scientific research, most recently in a new study by the University of Minnesota, St Anthony Falls. For a full review of scientific literature, you can visit Wisconsin's Green Fire at wigreenfire.org or lastwildernessalliance.org.

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While recommendations vary, a coalition of over 80 groups in Wisconsin have come together to work on wake sport regulation. A consensus is that wake boats should not operate in depths of less than 20-25 feet and no closer than 600-700 feet from a shoreline.

In September, the association presented a draft ordinance and condition report to the Town of Sherman. These two documents are required for the Town to submit an ordinance to the DNR. The ordinance is modeled after one that has been approved in over 60 towns across Wisconsin. The Last Wilderness Alliance from Presque Isle, drafted both documents with assistance from our association. The condition report outlines physical characteristics of the waterbodies, as well as user concerns and other background information. Prior to the meeting, we sent copies of our survey, links to information on wake surfing and its impacts, and the draft ordinance and condition report to town officials.

The Sherman meeting had a large turnout of locals in support of the ordinance and no one spoke in opposition. The town board said they would bring the ordinance proposal to the town's planning commission and report back at a future meeting. Jeff Wilson, Terry Daulton, and John Richter (of Last Wilderness) presented for the meeting. Other TFFTL POA board members were also in attendance.



Sherman Town Board considers wake boat ordinance
Photo by Terry Daulton

The same group presented at the Mercer Town Board October meeting. The presentation was brief, as board members had all received the information packet. Town attorney, Fritz Schlegell, reported he also advises Springstead. He had already met with the Springstead town board chair, Tom Smiley, who is supportive of the measure. Discussion in Mercer mostly focused on the issues of enforcement, with Chairman Snow pointing out the difficulties for law enforcement staff and suggesting he was not opposed to the measure but did not see the town or county having enforcement resources. John Richter shared that in the over 60 towns with this ordinance to date, enforcement has not created any issues. Simply having the ordinance has addressed most problems with wake surfing. Additional discussion by the town board focused on support for restrictions for the TFF and Trude Lake, but potentially not for other lakes in the Town of Mercer.

It was standing room only at the Mercer meeting (around 50), with most in attendance supporting restrictions on wake surfing. No one spoke in favor of wake surfing and after the meeting several people from other Mercer area lakes expressed the hope that their lakes could also be protected.

That meeting concluded with Mr. Schlegell offering to review the ordinance in detail and come back to the board with any modifications or concerns.

The following is an excerpt from the ordinance that outlines the restrictions.

(1) Prohibited Equipment. No person may use or employ ballast tanks, ballast bags, or fins to cause a boat to operate in a bow-high manner, or which increases or enhances a boat's wake.

(2) Prohibited Operation. No person may operate a boat in an artificially bow-high manner having the effect of increasing the boat's wake. Such prohibited operation shall include wake enhancement by use of ballast tanks, or ballast bags or fins, or continuous operation at transition speed (the speed below planing speed in which a boat is operating in plowing mode). For the purpose of this provision, "continuous operation" shall mean operation that is not acceleration for the purpose of achieving a state of planing."

(3) Certain Operations Excluded. In no event shall any of the following operations be deemed a violation of this Ordinance, provided such operations do not use or employ ballast tanks, ballast bags or wake enhancing fins: i) water skiing, ii) tubing, iii) wake boarding employing a tow rope; iv) brief transition operation to empty a boat of bilge water, or v) brief transition operation of a boat accelerating into a planing condition.

On November 12, an education session on wake boats was held at the Mercer Community Center, bringing together people from several perspectives. Heather Palmquist, from Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department organized the session.

If Mercer and Sherman decide to move forward with the ordinance the first step is for each town to submit the ordinance and condition report to the DNR. The DNR will review the ordinance and must respond in writing within 20 days. The town can then move forward and schedule a vote to adopt the ordinance following proper timelines and methods. The DNR review does not enact the ordinance, that must be done by the towns and allows time for further discussion and citizen education. Because the TFF is a lake with shared jurisdiction (both towns) the ordinance in each town must be identical.

Our association plans to attend future town board meetings to follow up as this process proceeds. Members are also encouraged to attend and express their views. Please stay tuned for more information on this process in your email or in future copies of *Driftwood*.



Building Wooden Snowshoes

by Troy Tipton

High School Physics Teacher: Mr. Tipton, would you rather your foot be stepped upon by an elephant or a lady with spiked high heels?

Me: Ah, neither I guess...um.

High School Physics Teacher: Well, the answer may be would you rather have a smashed foot or a pierced foot.

So begins my education on the concept of pressure, a concept that snowshoes take full advantage of, enabling us to enjoy our Mercer area snowfall. More surface area means more snowflakes beneath your foot, buoying you up versus sinking you deep within the snow.

Historically, Native Americans varied their snowshoe design based on the needs, conditions, and natural materials at hand. For example, if traveling over open territory—perhaps a lake, field or tundra—a longer snowshoe offers advantages.



Bearpaw Snowshoe
By Troy Tipton

Whereas traveling in a brushy, wooded area, a shorter, rounder Bearpaw type shoe is more highly prized for maneuverability. Today, snowshoeing is a popular wintertime activity with thousands of people taking to the trails wearing highly engineered snowshoes. Locally, we can get our snowshoe hearts beating on prepared trails such as the Ruffed Grouse Management Area among many others. Another option is blazing your

own trail across the flowage or through the woods.

While today's snowshoes are impressively optimized devices, for those like me who appreciate vintage designs or



are simply crafty and looking for a wintertime project, I'd like to offer you an overview of the wooden snowshoes I constructed with the help of Gil Gilpatrick's Building Wooden Snowshoes & Snowshoe Furniture.

Wood Selection: Wood is straight, snowshoes are curved. The first hurdle is to select a relatively knot-free piece of wood. I used pieces of straight-grained ash.

Bending: This was hard! After constructing a wooden form in the shape of a snowshoe, you must steam your wood, quickly wrap the steaming wood piece around the form and clamp it in place. Prepare extra pieces as you will fail! You will move too slowly, your piece will suddenly break and you will have to try again. But when you get it right, you will have a lovely piece of wood that begins to look like a snowshoe. Did I mention this was hard!

Assembling and other knickknacks: In addition to the frame, there are bindings to make, cross members to create and holes, lots of holes to drill to enable the snowshoe lacing.

Lacing: Knit one, purl two? My mother used to knit a lot and I can recall her anger when several rows down she'd identify a flaw and have to backtrack to repair it. While not knitted, a snowshoe's webbing is made up of a woven lattice and keen attention is needed to get the pattern right. Like mother like son, as I channeled her fury when I'd make a lacing mistake. Patience is a virtue: backtrack and fix your error.

Finishing: I finished my snowshoes with polyurethane and when complete, they looked so nice I was almost afraid to use them.

Hope to see you out on the trails.



Traditional Snowshoe
By Troy Tipton

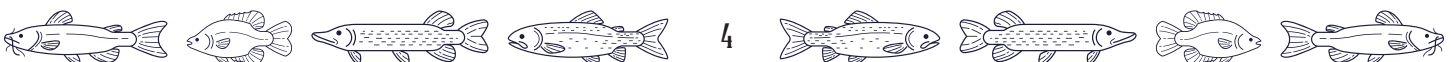
New Members in 2025

Please welcome the following new members to the TFFTL-POA

Mary Biddick
Craig Gamoke
Carl & Michelle Gustafson
Timothy Heady
Christina Kang

Randy & Holly Lathrop
Henri Miller
Eric & Darcy Mundt
Dan & Mae Paul
Ian Thomson

Bob & Pam Von Oepen
Guy & Ann Wilson
Jen Witt
Tim Tyler



Choose Your Native Plants Wisely

by Mary Nelson

In recent years, native plants have become increasingly popular, and for good reason — they are resilient, low-maintenance, support wildlife, and help conserve water and enrich soil. In response to this increase in popularity, more plant retailers offer an abundance of native plant varieties. When shopping for native plants, there are a few things to keep in mind to ensure you get the plants that you want and the ones that are best for your habitat.

Become familiar with native plant nomenclature:



Cultivar *Echinacea purpurea*
'Pink Double Delight'
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Every native plant has both a common name and a scientific name. The scientific name, which is Greek or Latin, has two parts: a genus and a species. The common name is one that was given to a plant to describe a particular characteristic. A particular native plant can have numerous common names. Take for example *Prenanthes alba*, which is known commonly

as white rattlesnake root, lion's foot, and white lettuce. To ensure that you get the specific native plant that you want, it is best to use the plant's scientific name rather than the common name when shopping.

Make sure the native plants you choose are appropriate for your specific habitat:

Not all native plants are appropriate for all environments. Take, for example, cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*). Cup plant is, in many respects, a stunning and beneficial plant. In the proper environment, cup plants spread by both rhizomes and seeds to form extensive colonies. Cup plant is most at home in the tall grass ecosystem of the Midwest, where competition from other plants, such as Indian grass and big blue stem, keep it in check. When in an environment with rich soil and not much competition, it can be quite aggressive. Interestingly, cup plant is native to Wisconsin, threatened in Michigan, and highly invasive in New York, where it was introduced.

Watch for "altered" native plants:

The nomenclature of a plant will tell you if it is the "original" native plant or if it has been "altered" either naturally or by human intervention. There are three types of altered plants: varieties, hybrids and cultivars.

A variety results when the change occurs naturally as a result of a mutation or cross pollination with no human



Native *Echinacea purpurea*

intervention. The scientific name of the new plant will be followed by the abbreviation "var." followed by the variety (e.g., *Rudbeckia hirta* var. *pulcherrima*). Seeds from a specific variety will often grow true to type, meaning that the offspring will retain the parent plant's unique characteristics.

A hybrid plant results from the cross pollination of two different plant species. This can occur naturally but is more often the result of human intervention. The intent of cross pollination is to produce a new plant with enhanced traits, such as different color blooms or more disease resistance. A hybrid is indicated by an "x" in the scientific name. While some hybrid names include the full names of both parent plants separated by an "x", most hybrids are given a name of their own, such as *Quercus* × *schuettei*, a naturally occurring hybrid of *Quercus bicolor* (swamp white oak) and *Quercus macrocarpa* (bur oak) discovered in the late 1800's by a botanist named J. H. Schuette. Like all hybrid plants, this oak does not grow true to seed. In order to create a genetically identical copy of the parent tree, nurseries use asexual propagation methods like cuttings, grafting, or tissue culture.

The term cultivar means "cultivated variety" and refers to a plant that has been bred by humans for specific, desirable traits like a new flower color or disease resistance. As with most hybrids, cultivars do not grow true to seed and are maintained through asexual methods. A cultivar variety plant name lists the parent plant's scientific name in italics followed by the cultivar name in single quotation marks (e.g., *Echinacea purpurea* 'Pink Double Delight').

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The recent increased interest in native plants has prompted the horticultural industry to use the term *nativar* to describe a cultivar that is derived from a native plant. Don't be fooled by the name, these are not native plants. While human beings may find *nativars* more appealing than their native counterparts, pollinators do not feel the same way. When native plants are hybridized to create new varieties with perhaps brighter color, more petals, or shorter stature, the hybridization process frequently changes their nectar and pollen value. In addition, changes in bloom in color or structure may confuse or deter pollinators.

The best advice I can give anyone who wants to plant a native garden to attract pollinators is to do your research before buying plants. And remember, when you nurture natives, you nourish nature.

Season's End-Fisheries Update

by Jim Kohl

I pulled and winterized my boat on Sunday, November second while the wind was gusting to 35 mph. Conversely, the weather on the previous four days was perfect for late October musky and walleye fishing. Light winds, with a mix of sun, clouds and occasional drizzle and temperatures in the mid 40's.

Musky fishing was slow, with no sucker pickups and only one fish, a 35 incher, on a Squirrely Jake. The walleye fishing was typical for late October. We found them in deep basins and river channels. The fish were stacked in several areas with a bite on nearly every cast at times. We were using one-eighth ounce jigs with large fathead minnows and primarily vertical jigging right on the bottom. Most bites were subtle, with just a little extra resistance on the line and the telltale twitches on the rod tip. We missed more bites than we caught, because these fall walleyes run small. The fish we caught ranged from six to 15 inches and most were between nine and 12 inches. We released all of the fish we caught. These walleyes are primarily males, and they were from three different year classes.

In mid October, I spoke with Zach Lawson, our Wisconsin DNR fish biologist for Iron and Ashland counties. I was interested in his observations and sampling results for the flowage.

Walleyes: Every fall the DNR and fisheries personnel from GLIFWC (Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission), work together on an annual walleye recruitment sampling survey. The crews sample selected stretches of shoreline at night with electrofishing equipment. Both agencies sample about ten miles of shoreline and record the number of walleyes that hatched this spring. Those walleyes are considered "young of the year" or YOY. Lawson was concerned about this year's spawning success because of low water levels and an early ice out. When I spoke with Zach, he had not yet received the data from GLIFWC, but his crews recorded 51 YOY per mile of shoreline. That number is inside the range of recruitment statistics from the past ten years, but near the lower end of the range. While his survey crews only sample and record YOY walleyes, this technique also reveals other fish along these shoreline sections. He said that his crews commented that

they saw a healthy mix of adult walleyes as well. Many in the mid 20 inch class. We have seen a noticeable improvement in the size structure of the flowage walleyes in recent years. I found this to be the case in May and June, with plenty of 20 inch plus fish in the boat.

Bluegills, crappies and largemouth bass: Survey crews also noticed a strong bluegill population continues to thrive and the crappie population appears healthy and stable. The biggest population shift seen is within largemouth bass. Their numbers are growing significantly as the flowage slowly transitions toward a warm water fishery. Unfortunately, bass and even bluegills are predators of walleye fry.

Invasives: Like hundreds of other bodies of water in Wisconsin the Turtle Flambeau Flowage is now home to an unwanted aquatic invasive species (AIS). Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) was found in areas between Murray's Landing and Bonies Mound. It was first confirmed in 2023. Our association has been very engaged in AIS issues for many years. A primary focus has been on locating and eradicating Purple Loosestrife, a shoreline invasive that gradually out competes native species. More recently, we have joined the challenge to prevent another AIS, Curly Leaf Pondweed, from reaching the flowage. We have participated in volunteer projects "upstream" as well as financial investments to help upstream association partners with their efforts. The DNR is closely watching and mapping areas impacted by EWM and has developed a management strategy to minimize the impacts on recreational users and navigation. Water level management is one tool the DNR is evaluating for its potential to reduce the impacts of EWM in the future as these aquatic invasive species can have a negative impact on our flowage fisheries.



John Kohl with a flowage walleye
Photo by Jim Kohl



Water Over the Dam

by Chad McGrath

Driftwood is interested in publishing other reminiscences of the early Flowage. Do you have any? If so, please see our website (tfftl.org) and then click the Contact Us link.

How do you commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of something as grand, yet subtle as the Turtle Flambeau Flowage? As Emerson said, "Nature is a muted cloud, always and never the same".



Jim and Marion Venetucci in 1955 at Popko's Resort
Photo by Venetucci Family

and ended up at Joe Popko's Club 51 (formerly the Cranberry Inn and now, once again, Club 51) in Mercer. When asked why he stopped there he said, "That's where the road ended."

Jim was traveling with his wife and baby. They were interested in renting a cabin, but were reluctant to stay because

it was chilly, and the cabin wasn't heated. Mr. Popko fixed the problem by moving a heater into their cabin. Soon thereafter, "Joe Popko took us out fishing. All I could see was logs, most of the bay was covered. People would walk out on the logs." In the early 1960's, Jim asked himself, "Why am I coming here every year and paying rent?" He discussed this with Joe Popko, who then took Jim down an old corduroy road to a fishing shack on the flowage, which Joe owned. It wasn't long before Jim owned the property, the purchase enabled according to Jim, by generous loan terms given him by Popko.

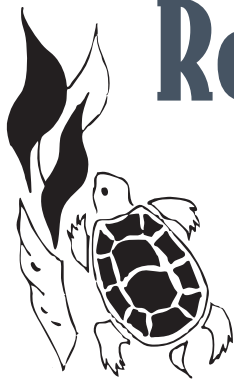


Jim Venetucci with an impressive stringer of fish circa 1956
Photo by Venetucci Family

Jim's daughter, Patti Venetucci remembers playing at the cabin on that property in the early sixties. There were still logs that would occasionally clog up the bay and she remembers walking on them and sometimes pushing them around so they could get a boat out.



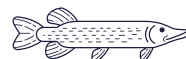
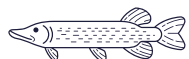
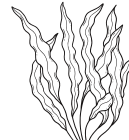
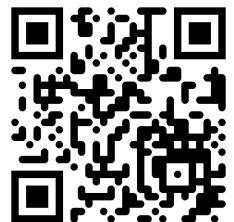
Boats and log "piers" at Popko's Resort 1956
Photo by Venetucci Family



Renew Your Membership

Annual membership dues are for the period from July 1 through June 30 of each year. You can renew your membership online or through the mail. Both options are available at the following link

<https://tfftl.org/join-renew>



Is Your Cabin Prepared for a Wildfire?

by Tom Gargrave,
Member TFFTLPOA, flowage landowner since 1965. Instructor
Big Rivers Fire Academy. Illinois Dept of Natural Resources-
Forestry 39 years Retired. DNR Fire Program Manager, DNR
Division Chief and State Forester.

Wildfires are becoming larger, more intense, and more frequent across the United States. In Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reports an average of 950 wildfires annually, with recent years seeing over 1,100 fires and more than 3,600 acres burned. Several factors contribute to the increase in wildfires. Warmer temperatures trend to longer growing seasons, creating more fine fuels. With decreasing precipitation, the risk for forest pests, tree disease, and wildfires increase. Reduced snowpack and earlier springs are also drying out the northern forests.

At the same time, a growing number of people are building or renovating cabins in and around the 17 million acres of Wisconsin's finest forests. The flowage and surrounding lands are seeing this same development. With more visitors to the woods, there is an increased potential for wildfires.

On average about 37 structures are lost each year from wildland fire in Wisconsin. Research of home destruction versus survival points to flying embers and small flames as the foremost way of ignition. Hot embers can be carried more than a mile by the wind, causing spot fires, igniting debris/landscaping and other objects near your cabin.

Most wildfires in Wisconsin are caused by human activity, with open burning as the leading factor. Burn permits are required for open burning in Iron County and can be obtained online from the DNR. Permits are not required for proper campfires.

The Pine Gulch Fire

During my career with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, I have served as the Fire Program Manager, Division Chief, and State Forester, in addition to being an instructor in the Big Rivers Fire Academy. These positions have presented me with opportunities to be involved in fighting wildfires across the country. One wildfire that is particularly memorable is the Pine Gulch Fire in Mesa County, Colorado.

It was summer of 2020 and much of the country was experiencing drought. The logging industry had been slow for years and, as a result, trees killed by pine beetles or through natural tree mortality were left standing. Fire danger signs were in place but most of the residents didn't notice.

The Pine Gulch Fire was started by a lightning strike. It grew quickly, resulting in the fire being then named the largest wildfire in Colorado history. It burned around 140,000 acres of public and private lands, homes, ranches, and businesses. It also caused the closure of highways and recreational lands, and the evacuation of residences.

On August third, our Wildland Fire Crew was dispatched to report as soon as possible for structure protection. Structure protection in the Wildland Fire world means working in the

Urban Interphase - the zone of transition where a man-made environment intermingles with the natural environment.

On arrival we went to work immediately, going from house to house, ahead of the fire, prepping cabins, and other buildings for a burn out or a potential burn over. Not all structures made the cut. A strict fire ready triage method was used to determine the probability of the structure surviving a burn over.

The first cabin we prepped was considered borderline but worth the effort. Using a small dozer, a line was

cut around the house. Firewood piles were moved away, thick landscaping and trees near the house were eliminated. Roof and gable vents were boarded up and flammable materials were dragged at least 50 feet from the structure.

We moved throughout the neighborhood just ahead of the fire for several days, assisting evacuations and preparing structures. As the fire moved closer, air support was called and fallback lines were established.

One landowner (Dave) pleaded with us to try to save his cabin. He tearfully told us it was all he had and he couldn't bear to lose it. I let him know our crew would stay as long as we could, but drastic measures were needed to hold back the fire. We worked swiftly, clearing trees, digging a dozer line, leaf blowing debris, boarding barn doors, and setting up water pumps and sprinklers.



Fire getting too big, air support called in
Photo by Tom Gargrave

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Association Annual Meeting Mark Your Calendars!

June 20, 2026
10 AM to Noon
Mercer Community Center



Honoring the Service of Our Retired Volunteer Board of Directors

The association owes much of its success to the dedication and leadership of its volunteer board of directors. Over this past year, Jean Burns, Jim Kohl, Jeff Malison and Joanna Vodicka have retired from the board. We want to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for the contributions they have made while serving on the board. Thank you for your commitment to the TFFTL-POA.

Dave worked alongside, refusing to evacuate with the other landowners. As nightfall came, we ignited a stable backfire around his house and pulled out ahead of the fire front.

Early the next day we returned to see all the buildings standing! Dave had spent the night chasing embers through the choking smoke. The backfire had slowly burned around his buildings just prior to the head of the fire. Since most all the burnable materials were cleared, the flame front jumped over. With tears Dave said, "it worked"! He bear hugged me and we gave thanks.

Protect Your Cabin

Here are key steps you should take to protect your cabin from wildfires.

- ✦ Clear combustible materials at least 25-50 feet from buildings in early spring or fall.
- ✦ Build or renovate with fire-resistant materials such as fiber cement or aluminum siding, metal roofs, and blockable vents.
- ✦ Maintain accessibility for emergency responders by keeping driveways and entrances clear.
- ✦ Prepare water sources for quick use in case of emergency.
- ✦ Obtain necessary burn permits before any open burning.

Safety First

Firefighter and public safety are paramount. During wildfire events, evacuation is strongly recommended and may be legally required. Staying behind can endanger lives and complicate emergency response.

Call to Action

As the current weather patterns and development trends continue, landowners near the flowage can expect to see a continuation of wildfires. With a little knowledge and planning there are many steps you can take to protect your cabin and ensure your family's safety. The Firewise USA® Program is a great way to get started (<https://www.nfpa.org/Education-and-Research/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>).



Meet New Board Member Tony Utrie

by Tony Utrie

In 1959 my parents purchased property on Wilson Lake after spending many summer vacations in the 50's with their parents and siblings at what was once Trude Lake Resort. The 60's brought rise to my folks building an ever-expanding cabin, dubbed "Utrie's Utopia." My six siblings and I spent summers and winters enjoying fishing, boating, skiing and hunting. Wilson Lake was home base, but the flowage was always calling. Many fishing trips and adventures were had on the flowage. I recall earlier navigation on the flowage was more challenging than today as we weaved through standing timber, submerged stumps and watched the waves for "alligator's" (floating logs) that we pushed aside as we motored carefully across the bigger water. My father dreamed of owning flowage property



Tony with a flowage Walleye
Photo by Tony Utrie

for ready access to the jewel. In 1999 my parents made their "Flambeau Fantasy" dream come true and purchased a cabin located on Norway Point. Fast forward to 2020, my wife, Elaine and I acquired this property, to maintain the legacy and enjoy all the flowage has to offer.

I am a graduate of UW-Stevens Point who has spent over 30 years working with small cheese manufacturers to pioneer and build the specialty cheese business. I am married with two grown children who share the same outdoor passion and love of the flowage. In fact, this past summer my daughter married on our property along the shores of the TFF. As a new board member, I look forward to making contributions to ensure this vast flowage remains protected and can be enjoyed for generations to come.

Meet New Board Member Troy Tipton

by Troy Tipton

My parents grew up in Forest County, a northern Wisconsin area generally east and a bit south of Mercer. As such, I got to spend a good deal of time in the Northwoods when we visited my grandparents and later when my father built a small cabin on 17 acres of forested land. These experiences exposed me to hunting and fishing and in particular, trout fishing with my Grandpa Fritz. Trout fishing is easily my favorite type of fishing and an activity I still enjoy sharing with my son, be that in the "dunking a worm" style or the more sophisticated fly-fishing approach. Other activities include all things mechanical: building a garage, fixing a car or motorcycle or making homemade snowshoes (see article in this issue of the *Driftwood*). Using both my brain and hands to create or improve something is always something I am interested in.



Troy in the Canadian Rockies
Photo by Troy Tipton

On a personal note, I graduated with a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I am now retired after spending 34 years working for Kimberly-Clark in both Wisconsin and in Connecticut. My wife Mary and I have three children. Our daughter Jill resides in France, while our twins, Alex and Claire live in Iowa and Wisconsin respectively.

In addition to being a new board member, I am a member of the small group of people who organize and publish the twice-yearly *Driftwood* newsletter.



Water Level Committee Fall-Winter Update

by Millard Johnson

Well, we are now into the Fall and Winter is around the corner. We started the summer with achieving a full-pool level (1,571.5 feet) and of course then experienced a long dry summer and fall. After the recent Rest Lake Dam fall drawdown, we were sitting with a water pool elevation of 1,570.51 feet on November 4, 2025. The TFF dam discharge rate on that date was 330 cfs with a water temperature of 42.3 degrees at the dam. Rest Lake Dam was discharging on November 4th at a rate of 126 cfs.

For those of you that would like to follow this yourself, you can go to Xcel Energy's dam data website located at <https://corporate.my.xcelenergy.com/s/energy/sources/hydro>. Once you are onto this website, you will want to scroll all the way down to get to the link to the area named "Reservoir Levels and Discharge Rates". In that section you click on "Turtle-Flambeau Flowage" and up will pop the latest data on elevation, discharge, and water temperature. Unfortunately, Xcel Energy does not put up data every day and it does not provide any historical data on their website.

We communicated with the DNR during the late summer as to our concerns regarding the low water level and dock access issues. Xcel eventually lowered its discharge rate. Our DNR contact has been good to work with and responsive when we have reached out and does get feedback from Xcel Energy that he shares with us. As we know, we have not had much rain this year. According to the "World Weather" website for Mercer, 2025 so far has had the lowest amount of rainfall since before 2009. This does create a challenge for maintaining adequate water levels.

It has been reported that we are having high natural plant growth in some of the dock and navigation areas of the flowage. While these are not exotic invasives, they still present problems, especially when the water levels are lower. This is a problem that is getting worse than the historical past and is something that we will be paying more attention to in the future. Invasive weeds are a major concern. Our committee recognizes there is a need to better understand the relationship between water levels, drawdowns, and the spread of invasive weeds. The focus of your association so far has been to battle the invasive weeds in the lakes and rivers upstream of the TFF and TL and keep them out of our waters.

The Turtle Flambeau Flowage Dam Memorandum of Understanding governing the operation of the dam has two Major Principles that are to be followed except in extreme conditions or an emergency.

1. Winter drawdown will occur annually and not exceed 8 feet in depth (1,564.0 ft). Winter stream flows will not drop below 300 cfs (November 20 - June 1).
2. Summer drawdown of the reservoir will occur and not exceed 1,568.0 ft. Summer stream flows (June 1 - November 19) will not drop below 300 cfs.

In addition to the major principles, there are four "modifications" that provide additional guidance. When there is a conflict meeting the major principles or modifications, the DNR and Xcel should hold a consultation to determine appropriate actions.

Although it can be frustrating when you are having trouble accessing your dock, we are fortunate that the MOU does not allow for even more water level drops than it does. Some other flowages have much higher fluctuations than we do. The DNR is tasked with balancing the needs of the river flow downstream and our flowage along with the dam operator's.

If you have concerns or some ideas regarding how to better manage water levels on our flowage, please contact me at MWJ3CPA@GMAIL.COM and I will bring those thoughts to our Water Level Committee.

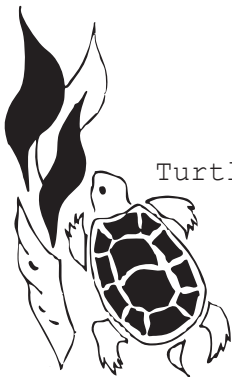


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Driftwood

Turtle Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake Property Owners Association, Inc.

2025 Fall/Winter

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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"