

How Do Towns Take Care of Their Lakes?

A Search for Lake Management Best Practices

Delavan Lake Improvement Association
www.delavan-lake.org

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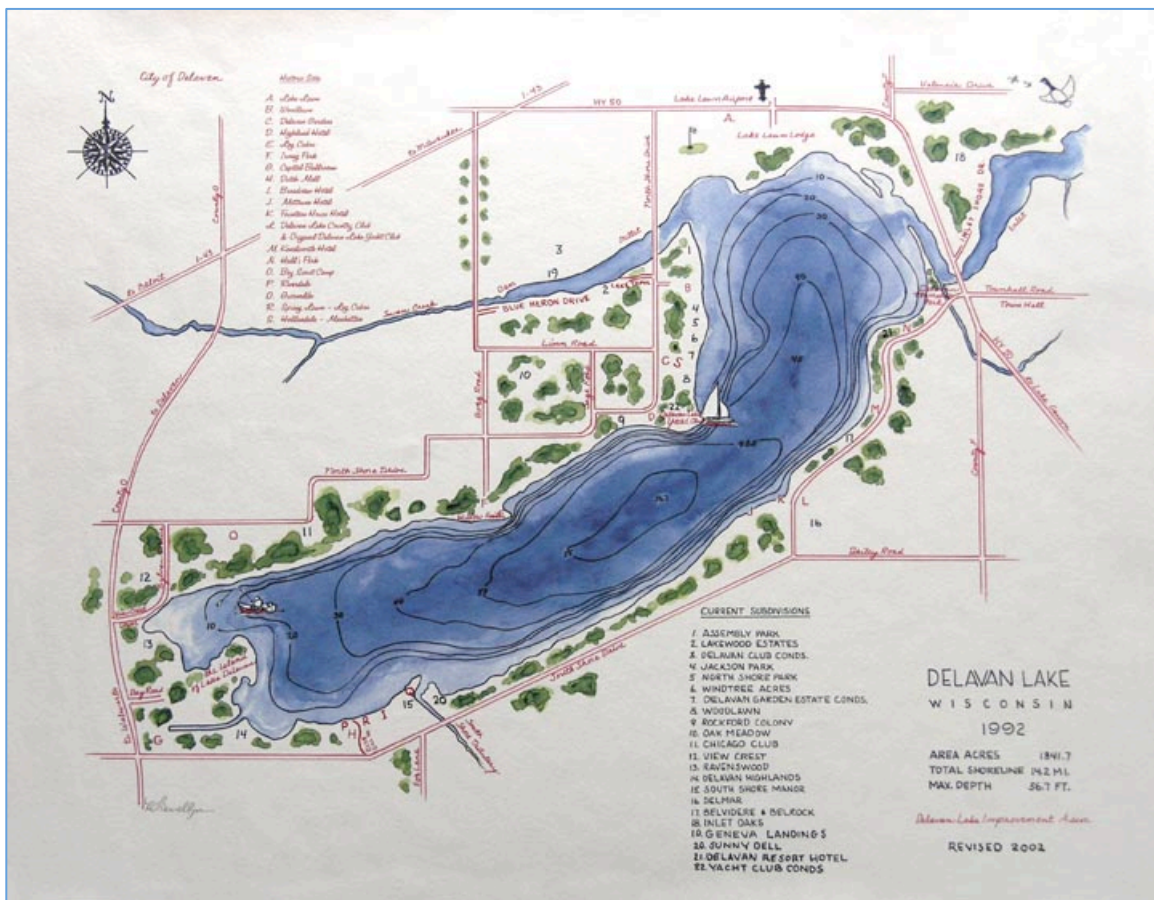


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Acknowledgements

We want to thank the Town of Delavan's Lake Committee for giving us this challenge and opportunity. It has been personally rewarding and we hope the study provides a service to the Town.

We want to thank the lake people we interviewed. We expected each interview to take about 10-15 minutes and usually spent an hour instead. Lake people are enthusiastic about their lakes, eager to share experiences and want to help others.

We hope the results of our research and the information in this report will help other lakes in the constant struggle to protect and improve Wisconsin's lakes.

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The Delavan Lake Improvement Association
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Executive Summary

The project began as an investigation on how similar lakes fund lake maintenance projects. We hoped to find other lakes that had dedicated lake funds, similar to capital expenditure funds for park acquisition.

The scope of the project changed as we uncovered creative ways people take care of their lakes, not only in financing projects but in other management best practices that contribute to the health of their lakes.

In asking the eight questions detailed on the following pages, what we found is that each lake has a distinctive set of characteristics and people who take care of it. However, one common characteristic is the difficulty of finding funding for lake projects. We didn't find any lakes that have dedicated lake maintenance funds, although several Towns budget annually for lake projects or dedicate room taxes to lake projects. Some lakes establish Lake Management Districts in order to ensure they have the ability to raise needed funds through taxation. Some of these have savings accounts to ease the impact of large projects.

Our conclusion is that the Town of Delavan should establish a dedicated lake management fund for the future of the lake because it is the next step in a long history of Town and citizen involvement to improve and maintain the health of the lake. This is an opportunity for Delavan to be proactive in planning for the future to ensure appropriate projects will be done in a timely manner.

There are other important lessons to be learned from this project. It is also good to consider business practices that are employed by successful lakes.

Recognize the value of viewing your lake as part of an ecosystem and watershed and plan accordingly. Many lakes use Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources lake planning grants to examine the science of the lake and create a strategic management plan. Proactive planning – with appropriate monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up – is key.

It is important to understand that communication and education are essential. Taxpayers have a right to know how their money is spent and voluntary association members will be more generous if they know their donations are used wisely. One lake had a major legal challenge and educated the public about the threat to their lake. Their Lake Management District was able to raise taxes because the taxpayers understood the threat, and the Lake Association also received generous contributions to help with the challenge.

We found that there is never too much communication. Newsletters and websites are important, but talking to your neighbor is equally important. Reaching out to people who don't read newsletters or attend meetings can change public opinion.

Appreciate the value of networking and collaboration. Lake associations do not have to "reinvent the wheel." Although each situation is unique, other people and lakes have probably seen the problem before and found a solution. Networking helps locate similar lakes, as well as scientists and experts who can help. Networking also helps locate more funding sources. Besides finding information about government grants, networking can uncover private organizations such as conservancies and wildlife groups who might contribute to projects.

Advisory Note:

We had two lake experts give us an opinion about the legality of establishing a dedicated lake maintenance fund according to Wisconsin law. They cited Wisconsin State Statutes Chapter 66.1103(5) that says, "Revenue agreements may include any provisions that the municipality considers appropriate to effect the financing of the project" and Wisconsin State Statutes Chapter 33.30(4)(d) that says funds for a specific project can be set aside in a non-lapsable fund. Town attorneys should be consulted before formalizing the dedicated funds.

Objective

Background

Delavan Lake has struggled with issues of water quality. As far back as the 1940s the Delavan Lake Improvement Association worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on an aquatic management plan that included chemical treatment for weeds and algae.

In the early 1980s, water quality in Delavan Lake had deteriorated to the point that there were severe blue-green algae blooms and excessive rough fish populations, such as carp and bigmouth buffalo.

The lake community organized the Delavan Lake Sanitary District, and sewers were constructed around the lake to stop point-source pollution, which was thought to be the cause for poor water quality. The cost of this system was nearly \$50 million.

However, just a few years after completion of the sewer system, water quality was worse; there were worse algae blooms causing restrictions on swimming and lake usage.

Again the lake community rallied and organized a 3-year study with the U.S. Geological Survey and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The Lake Committee was formed to help the Town manage the lake. The University of Wisconsin's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Institute of Environmental Studies both contributed research and engineering planning for the rehabilitation project.

By 1989, a comprehensive rehabilitation project started. Among the steps taken over the next 3 years:

- The Lake water level was drawn down by 10 feet in order to facilitate eradication of the entire fish population.
- Three ponds were constructed near Mount Road to help sediment coming from Jackson Creek before the water entered the Inlet.
- A sediment control channel was dredged in the Inlet.
- The dam at the end of the Outlet was reconstructed.
- The bottom of the lake was treated with alum to contain phosphorus sediments and prevent them from coming back into the lake.
- A peninsula near Community Park was constructed to try to divert sediment-laden water from entering the main lake; instead sending it towards the Outlet.
- Game fish were restocked as the lake refilled to its normal level.
- Costs for these projects were slightly more than \$7 million.

The project was a success. By 1991, water clarity was at 26 feet deep. Projects continued to purchase and restore wetlands. This was one of the nation's largest lake rehabilitation projects and demonstrated effective partnerships among several federal, state and local governmental agencies, especially the Town of Delavan.

In 2005, the Delavan Lake Improvement commissioned a study by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to find the value of a clean and healthy lake, as compared to a lake with poor water quality. The study showed the economic benefit and importance to the region of a clean and healthy lake. It is available on the DLIA website, www.delavan-lake.org, titled "What is the Value of a Clean and Healthy Lake?"

Current Situation

In the early 2000s it was apparent again that the water quality was degrading. The ponds were filling in faster than expected and the lake's inlet was filling in rapidly, bringing in more nutrients to the main body of the lake. Three projects were outlined: Dredging the ponds, dredging the inlet, and repairing a weir, or dam, at a tributary entrance.

The projects for dredging and re-engineering the ponds and weir repair were completed. The inlet dredging project turned out to be more expensive than planned. It is currently underway and is being financed by the Town's Lake Fund, a contribution from the City of Delavan's room tax revenue, and general borrowing.

Lake Maintenance Fund

The Delavan Lake Improvement Association asked the Town's Lake Committee to start a dedicated fund so that lake projects would not cause a financial crisis. If there were such a fund, similar to a capital expenditure fund used to purchase fire equipment or park land, then the financial barrier to doing maintenance or rehabilitation projects would be less; the Town would be able to respond more quickly to lake projects as needed.

The Lake Committee asked the Association to find out what other lakes do – are there lakes with dedicated funds, and how do similar lakes finance maintenance or rehabilitation projects?

The Association accepted the challenge of researching similar lakes across the state and the result is this report.

Methodology

The project was to research how similar lakes fund projects and what are the best practices for towns taking care of lakes.

We took the list of 15,000-plus Wisconsin lakes and divided them into the five Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Watershed Management Units. The WMUs define the state into five geographic areas (South Eastern, South Central, West Central, North Central, and Northern) that for our purposes helped us prioritize the research and assign areas to team members. Delavan is in the South Central WMU, which tends to be more developed and have more agricultural pressures. The lakes' color is mostly green, indicating the presence of nutrients. (See Appendix 1.)

At the other side of the state, the Northern WMU is more rural with less agricultural pressure. The color of the lakes is mostly clear or brown, indicating fewer nutrients. Lakes in the other three WMUs tend to be somewhere in between. These are gross generalizations but helped us focus on what lakes to look at first. In order to find enough lakes for the study, however, we did work our way through all the WMUs.

We narrowed down the lists further by including lakes of 300-plus acres (Delavan is 2000 acres so much smaller lakes would have different issues.) We also included lakes in towns, not cities or villages. Town governments have a special challenge in managing and funding lakes that cities and villages, with their tax structure and independence from counties, do not have. We tried to interview lakes in Walworth County regardless of size.

We also tried to contact lakes with Associations as opposed to Lake Management Districts. The LMD is a taxing authority and has the ability to raise revenue for projects apart from Town support. We did include several lakes with LMDs because it was difficult to find comparable lakes in our area without them. There were many lessons to be learned from the LMDs and they are included in this report.

Here are the lakes we contacted, including county, size and DNR Watershed Management Unit:

Lake	County	DNR WMU	Size in Acres
Amnicon	Douglas	N	426
Archibald	Oconto	NE	460
Arrowhead	Adams	WC	350
Balsam	Barron	N	650
Beulah	Walworth	SE	812
Big Sand	Vilas	N	1408

Lake	County	DNR WMU	Size in Acres
Birch	Washburn	N	364
Boulder	Langlade & Oconto	N	362
Camelot	Adams	WC	445
Carpenter	Douglas	N	340
Castle Rock	Adams	WC	13,900
Clam Lakes	Burnett	N	1,200
Como	Walworth	SE	955
Delavan	Walworth	SE	2,000
Dowling	Douglas	N	160
Eagle	Racine	SE	525
Fox	Dodge	SC	2,700
Hemlock	Barron	N	357
Honey	Walworth	SE	42
Ike Walton	Vilas	N	1,417
Lac Corte Oreilles	Sawyer	N	5,039
Lac Vieux Desert	Vilas	N	2,780
Lake Chetac	Sawyer	N	1,920
Lake Eau Claire	Eau Claire	WC	1,100
Lake Lucerne	Forest	N	1,000
Lake Mohawksin	Lincoln	N	1,900
Lauderdale	Walworth	SE	730
Long	Vilas	N	872
Long	Washburn	N	3,290
Lorraine	Walworth	SE	160
Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes	Vilas	N	4,440
Metonga	Forest	N	2,157
Nelson	Sawyer	N	2,503
Nokomis	Oneida & Lincoln	N	2,433
Pell	Walworth	SE	86
Petenwell	Juneau	WC	23,173
Pike	Washington	SE	522
Pine	Forest	N	1,300
Red Cedar	Barron	N	1,481
Redstone	Sauk	SC	605
Rice	Walworth	SE	137
Ripley	Jefferson	SE	420
Sherwood	Adams	WC	246
Silver	Waushara	NE	350
Sinissippi	Dodge	SC	3,000
Spider Chain of Lakes	Sawyer	N	1,600
Tomahawk	Oneida	N	3,392

Lake	County	DNR WMU	Size in Acres
Wandawega	Walworth	SE	120
White Lake	Waupaca	NE	1,100
Whitewater	Walworth	SE	640
Wind Lake	Racine	SE	940
Wood	Burnett	N	521

We used the Wisconsin Lakes list of lakes and associations to find Association contacts. We also contacted Lake Management District officials and Town officials. On many lakes, we made more than one contact in order to find more information.

Notes on LMDs: Lake Management Districts in Wisconsin are established according to Chapter 33 of Wisconsin State Statutes. They are government bodies that have the power to tax. The Board of Commissioners must include a property owner and representatives from the County and City, Village or Town. LMDs are required to hold annual meetings and present budgets that are voted on by the members. (See “A Guide to Wisconsin’s Lake Management Law,” published by the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership (Wisconsin Lakes, the University of Wisconsin Extension and the Department of Natural Resources), 1996.

Questions We Asked

- Contact information
 - Verify lake size, regulatory bodies (lake association, lake management district, sanitary district)
 - Verify Town organization (town and county)
1. What committees in your Town manage the lake and lake projects?
 2. What are current issues or concerns?
 3. Is there currently any rehabilitation or maintenance activity? If so, how is it being funded?
 4. Has there been any rehabilitation or maintenance activity in the last 20 years? If so, what were the projects and how were they funded? (Allows comparison to Delavan's major rehabilitation project in the late 1980s.)
 5. Are other agencies involved in your lake such as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources or U. S. Geological Survey?
 6. Do you have a line item in the budget or a dedicated fund for lake maintenance and or projects?
 7. Do you have a public boat launch? If so, to what fund do public launch receipts go?
 8. How do you or how did you succeed in selling these projects to a tax-weary public?

We felt that these questions would give us a good idea of lake maintenance activity and give us the best opportunity to compare other lakes to Delavan.

The Lake Committee has a follow-up list of questions that we will include with this report. Everyone we contacted was interested in receiving a copy of the report so we will be in touch with all of the people we interviewed.

Questions and Answers

Question 1: What committees in your Town manage the lake and lake projects?

Of the 34 Lake Associations that responded, 26 said there is no committee that manages the lake.

- 2 said the Town Board as a whole manages the lake and lake projects
- 2 said there is no town management, but the county helps
- 4 said there is a Lake Committee or ad hoc Lake Committee

Comments:

- The lake is in three towns with the largest town taking the lead on safety, planning and zoning ordinances for all 3; however there is no lake committee.
- The ad hoc committee works with the Protection & Rehabilitation district that manages sewer and lake projects.
- No committees, although the town recently completed its comprehensive land use plan which includes the lake.
- No committees. There is no public access to the lake, it is all private.
- No committees. The Lake Association presents plans and a budget request at the Town budget meetings (the lake is in 3 towns) but none have contributed anything for the last several years.

Of the 14 Lake Management Districts that responded, 13 said there are no Town committees. One said there is a Lake Committee that manages boat landings and signage.

Questions 2 and 3: What are your current issues or concerns? Is there currently any rehabilitation or maintenance activity? If so, how is it being funded?

(These questions and responses are combined because most often, current issues are being addressed by activity.)

There was no measurable difference between Lake Association and Lake Management District responses regarding concerns. Of the 33 Lake Associations and 14 Lake Management Districts that responded, most have concerns about Aquatic Invasive Species. AIS are either present now and being treated, or the lake is concerned about being infested from neighboring lakes. Many have Clean Boats / Clean Waters programs using DNR grants.

There were three mentions of problems with carp or bullhead disrupting the lake bottom. In one lake, the wild rice crop is disturbed, which has an economic impact on the community.

Other concerns are blue-green algae, low water levels, fluctuating water levels, dam problems, farm runoff, sedimentation, and boat launch repair.

Invasive species mentioned:

- Curly Leaf Pondweed
- Double-Crested Cormorant
- Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM)
- Flowering Rush
- Purple Loosestrife
- Rusty Crayfish
- Smelt
- Zebra Mussels

Of the 35 Lake Associations that responded, only nine lakes are not doing any maintenance activity. The other 26 lakes' projects are funded by Towns, association dues and fund-raising as well as DNR grants.

Rehabilitation and maintenance activities:

- Chemical treatment for EWM
- Weed harvesting
- Clean Boats / Clean Waters
- Working on lake management plans with grant funding (will lead to AIS treatment)
- Dredging and boat channel maintenance
- Installing fish cribs and other fish habitat
- Aeration
- Water quality sampling and/or monitoring
- In the first phase of a 3-phase AIS planning grant funded by the DNR and the lake association

Of the 12 Lake Management District responses, activities include the above but also dam maintenance, boat launch maintenance, and river channel repair (inlet to lake.) One District is doing a \$300K alum treatment this year. The Districts' projects are funded through taxes.

Question 4: Has there been any rehabilitation or maintenance activity in the last 20 years? If so, what were the projects and how were they funded?

We asked this question to measure similarity to Delavan's major rehabilitation project in the late 1980s.

Of the 35 Lake Associations that responded, 16 said there has been none. One didn't know. 18 said there has been. Efforts range from small to large. Here is a sample:

- Used rotenone to kill rough fish; repeated later when needed
- Carp removal over several years
- Added fish cribs
- Added tree drops and walleye rock reef 3 years ago

- In an effort to be proactive started citizen lake monitoring
- Used \$90K DNR grant to develop lake management plan

- 12 years ago they replaced dam; project was funded by the town
- Building of new boat ramp was funded by DNR and federal grants
- For 15 years the county has worked with farmers on non-source point pollution

- Several large-scale dredging projects
- Major rehabilitation project utilizing funding from Town, State and Federal sources.
- \$750K dredging project paid for by special assessments, LMD, and DNR grants. (They had also accumulated a special projects fund: Fees are constant, based on the budget instead of the mil rate. Residents would rather pay a steady amount instead of low one year and high the next, so the fee is steady. Anything left over is put into a special project fund. They had about \$200K when they did the dredging project. However, they currently have nothing in the special projects fund because they needed to spend it all.)

Of the 13 Lake Management Districts that responded, 4 said no; 9 said yes. Again, the projects range from small to large:

- Implemented sanitary district and started the Protection and Rehabilitation district Created 2 ponds for sedimentation; funded by the District
- Dredged the area in front of Town's boat ramp, funded by the Town
- Have accomplished 4 different dredging projects since 2006, small enough to not require environmental assessment; projecting a 5th project this year; all funded by the Lake Management District
- Due to carp infestation, drained the lake, killed all fish and restocked.
- Completed a project to eradicate curly leaf pondweed, now facing another project because it came back.

- Re-dredged a channel, funded by the Lake Association
- Public launch rebuilt with DNR and Waterways grants
- Shoreline restoration projects, dredging, sand traps, water quality testing; financed by the Lake Management District

Question 5: Are other agencies involved in your lake such as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources or U. S. Geological Survey?

Of the 33 Lake Associations that responded to this question, the DNR works with 31 of them.

Other agencies:

- County - 7
- Federal (unspecified) - 1
- No one else besides the Association - 1
- Power companies - 2
- Town - 1
- Tribal - 2
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - 2
- U.S. Department of Agriculture - 1
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - 2
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife - 1
- U.S. Geological Survey - 3

Of the 14 Lake Management Districts that responded to this question, the DNR works with 13 of them.

Other agencies:

- County - 2
- FEMA - 1
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - 3
- U.S. Department of Agriculture - 1
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife - 1
- U.S. Geological Survey - 3

The DNR provides boat launch grants, Clean Boats / Clean Waters grants, and Waterways grants for navigational channels. They approve permits for dams and dredging. They provide fish and fish stocking services. On some lakes, the Associations purchase the fish and the DNR puts them in the water. They advise on fish habitat enhancements such as fish cribs and tree drops. At some Associations, the DNR warden or other staff attends the meetings.

Question 6: Do you have a line item in the budget or a dedicated fund for lake maintenance and or projects?

Of the 33 Lake Associations that responded to this question, 23 said there is no line item in the budget or dedicated fund.

Other responses:

The Town budgets for the lake –

- Town budgets \$10K annually; no dedicated fund.
- Town budgets for boat and water patrol.
- There is a line item in the budget but if it isn't spent, it goes back to general funds.
- The city gives \$3000 per year (the lake is in a city and a town).
- There is a budgeted amount for dam maintenance but no dedicated fund.
- The Town budgets \$10,000 annually for AIS.

No budget or dedicated Town fund but -

- Lake receives some funds each year.
- Town's room tax is partially dedicated to the lake.
- It's a constant battle for funds.
- The Lake Association does fund raisers and has dues.
- The Town trying to move funds from a Parks account to fund a new launch.
- The Lake Association focuses on preventative measures using grants.
- County, not town, budgets money for the lake; there is no dedicated fund.
- No funding comes from the town; they rely on DNR grants and association membership.
- Interested citizens in the town established a 501(c)(3) called Fun Fest. They raise money for lakes and parks.
- The Town provided site preparation for Association kiosks installed at the public launches.

Of the 14 Lake Management Districts who responded, 12 said there is no budget or dedicated funding from the Town. This is to be expected since the LMDs are a separate taxing body whose responsibility is the lake.

Other responses:

- The town has a small contingency fund for lake maintenance and projects.
- The town gives \$2000 per lake.
- Nothing from the town. The Lake Management District has a Long-Term Capital Expenditures fund they add \$20K to per year.
- Nothing from the town. The Lake Management District has a "tax freedom account" where they put away \$5K per year in order to reduce future taxes.

Question 7: Do you have a public boat launch? Do you charge fees? If so, to what fund do public launch receipts go?

Of the 33 Lake Associations that responded to this question, 19 have free launches. 2 have no public launches and 10 charge fees. For 2 of the lakes, the counties own the launches and collect fees.

Many towns have more than one launch and some towns have public launches that are part of a county or state park.

Although we didn't ask specifically about parking, many people in Associations and Lake Management Districts reported that they don't charge fees at the launch because there is little or no parking. One Association used to charge fees, but stopped when the parking lot was flooded due to higher water levels.

Additional information:

- Town collects fees, fees go to Town's general fund - 3
- Town collects fees, the town uses for lake projects per DNR requirements from the launch building grant - 2
- The lake is in both a city and town. The city would not allow launch fees though that's how the Association planned to pay for aquatic plant treatment so they ask for voluntary donations but have not been successful
- Town has 7 public launches; fees were collected to pay back launch ramp costs, then the fees were discontinued when the costs were repaid
- The Town has 2 public launches; at one there is a donation box; donations go to the Town's general fund

Of the 14 Lake Management Districts that responded, 6 have free public launches, 2 respondents didn't know if fees were charged, one has a county public launch with fees, and 5 charge fees:

- Fees go to Town's general fund - 2
- Fees go to Town for parking lot maintenance - 1
- Fees go back to Town for launch projects and maintenance - 2
- County charges and gives 25% of fees to the District

Question 8: How do you or how did you succeed in selling these projects to a tax-weary public?

The 27 Lake Associations that responded to this question had a variety of ways to sell their projects to members and towns. They appeal to property values and the importance of tourism revenue. They spend time educating the public and advocating with government agencies. They partner with other organizations and rely on agencies for scientific data. Some have attempted to form a Lake Management District that would raise revenue for projects. Some feel they have failed.

Comments:

- Everyone understands that tourism is the basis of the economy and is willing to fund lakes.
- The lake economy is so important to the town that taxpayers understand and are willing to fund lake projects.
- People see the benefits and results and like what they see. Homeowners benefit from the clean lake whether they're on the lake or nearby. Their dues are \$50 per year. People directly on the lake give \$250 more for lake management and they have nearly 90% participation.
- The Association presents the facts and lets homeowners decide. They feel they provide property value protection. 75% of the eligible families participate by giving money or hours. They also have a memorial fund that accepts contributions and uses them for Association projects.
- The Town works with the Association to garner public support by having open meetings, listening sessions, plan discussions and press coverage.
- There was no public opposition to 2011 Town budget; the town had been saving for a weed cutter and launch projects for a few years.
- The Association used to do general fundraising and found that only 4% of the lake property population was participating. This year they launched a "Fair Share Program" which requests \$270/year from each property owner. Their target was 75% of properties and they have already reached 55%. This has primarily been accomplished by emails to everyone on the lake and presentations in neighborhoods or through homeowners' associations. They have made it clear that this is an alternative to a Lake Management District.
- They work hard at communications using a newsletter 3 times per year, at least 2 letters, and a website. If people complain, they tell them to come to the meetings and make suggestions in person; people who don't participate and complain later aren't listened to. They have 150 members out of a total 175 lake homeowners.
- When their constituents see how much volunteer effort is going on, they are willing to participate.
- The Association does a lot of work using volunteers. When their members see how much money they're saving by relying on volunteers, they donate more money. They have a place on their membership renewal to donate extra funds

(they are NOT a 501(c)(3)) and they raise lots of money. The President also does a lot of one-to-one work with local politicians to convince them of the worth of projects.

- With support of a DNR grant, the Association worked with an intern for 8 months to complete a State of the Watershed document. They partner with other organizations for programs and fund-raising, “banding together to be the voice of the water”.
- The Association focuses on educating the public regarding AIS and issues “calls to action” as necessary for sampling, as well as monitoring oxygen levels, secchi disc readings, etc. The Association maintains visibility by having a booth at parades and other public events to distribute handouts regarding membership, accomplishments, lakes issues, etc. They also sell popular coupon books containing 40-50 coupons offering deals from local vendors. They are conducting their first Lake Fair this year (co-sponsored by a local resort) and will have 20+ vendors all related to lake/environmental issues: DNR, County, environmental engineering companies, alternative tackle, environmentally friendly detergent, etc. Theme is “Curly” (curly leaf pondweed) and association members will wear curly wigs to highlight the theme.
- Advocate to governing bodies. Combine forces with a group of lakes for stronger voice at County. The Association has important role in educating and involving the community with the shoreline monitoring program and disseminating information.
- Continually seeking assistance from other organizations to help gather data and determine course of action
- Word of mouth, keep educating
- Most projects are beyond local fundraising capabilities. The Association solicits donations for particular projects from property owners.
- Difficult, lots of education needed to convince people the lake is "not a private swimming pool"
- The Association attempted to create a Lake Management District last year and it almost succeeded. They will try again this year and recommend the same to Delavan. They made case based on property value support.
- Because of all the difficulties the Association was experiencing with lack of funds and volunteers the Association proceeded to work with the County to implement a Lake District. They met all 4 requirements to form a lake district and it was approved in committee; however, the Board voted it down. The future of the Association is uncertain.
- Currently the biggest and most controversial issue is the possible establishment of a Lake Management District. Focus on educating the public about the economic benefit and necessity of ongoing maintenance.
- They don't succeed. They have minimal funding and have trouble convincing even lake residents to support the Association and projects
- Very difficult; it is hard to get people to help

- The Association wanted to charge launch fees and tried to convince the city and village that property values will go down unless the Association had funds to combat AIS, to no avail. The city and village will not charge fees because they fear boaters will go to another lake to avoid fees.

The 13 Lake Management Districts that responded to this question use a combination of appeal to property values, communication and fiscal management to sell their projects. The Districts are required to have annual meetings where commissioners are elected and budgets are presented. Every customer of the District has a vote and it's important to have public support in order to further the needed programs.

Comments:

- Appeal to peoples' interest in property values. The citizens understand that if the lake quality is degraded, so are their property values.
- Direct contact, education.
- Educate the public about their property values being greater if the lake is healthy.
- Fiscal management: The assessment has been the same for 5 years. They carry over the surplus and use it as needed, that's why they haven't needed to raise the assessment.
- The LMD has an annual meeting where commissioners present a budget and those present vote on it. The past few years, the voters have not agreed with the LMD recommendations and insisted on *more* action to maintain the lake, specifically an alum treatment. Last year the voters insisted on adding weed harvesting equipment to the budget.
- They talk to people at meetings, have newsletters and a website for communication and education. Their District is successful because taxes are low and they do projects the residents want.
- Plan the presentations carefully; compare their low rates to what the homeowner would spend on lawn care, snow removal or other home maintenance.
- Since only 20% of the people in the district live on the lake, it is really important for them to come to the annual meeting where they can vote for actions by the district.
- It's difficult to get people involved. Very few people are interested in the lakes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Delavan Lake is one of the most-studied lakes in Wisconsin. The Delavan Lake Improvement Association's 2005 economic impact study continues to be used as an example of the value in investing in lakes. We are fortunate to have experts engaged in managing our water quality, fisheries, and surrounding watershed. And the Town has a strong history of addressing problems.

The Town wanted to find best practices in financing lake projects. What our project found is that every lake has a distinctive set of characteristics - geography, size, flora and fauna - as well as the people who take care of it - that make its management highly individualized. What works for one lake would not necessarily work for another lake.

However, one common characteristic is the difficulty of finding funding for lake projects. We saw many creative ways to raise money, from fund-raisers requiring intensive volunteer support, to partnerships that open doors to new sources. Some lakes establish Lake Management Districts in order to ensure the ability to raise the funds they need through taxation.

The Delavan Lake Improvement Association has encouraged the Town of Delavan to establish a dedicated lake fund, where an amount would be contributed - and held - each year to spend on the projects that keep our economy vital. The fund would smooth the impact of a large project, such as the \$1.4 million dredging project undertaken in the summer of 2011. The annual budget process affords the opportunity to educate the public on a wide range of issues including the necessity of long-term planning for care of the lake. A dedicated lake fund will also help keep politics out of science; we cannot allow lake management to be driven by politics.

Our conclusion is that the Town of Delavan should establish a dedicated lake management fund for the future of the lake.

In the course of working on this project, our scope increased from financing to overall best practices in lake management, because lakes that follow best practices find that funding comes easier than lakes that don't. For example, networking really helps: One of our scientists used a report about success on one lake to lobby for a grant on another.

Here are best practices we garnered from our interviews. There were many success stories and here are a few of them.

Best practices we have observed

Successful lakes stay ahead of the problem. One lake that currently doesn't have AIS wrote a Rapid Response plan in order to get the various governmental agencies to sign off; they felt if they waited until they had AIS, it would take too long to get approval. Having the plan in place will save months. Another town established a Lake Committee in 2005 because of the threat of invasive species. They have an all-volunteer Clean Boats / Clean Waters program. They don't have any invasive species yet, but they have an educated public.

The Delavan Lake dedicated maintenance fund is another good example. Proactively setting aside funds helps taxpayers understand the need for maintenance, like it would for a planned park acquisition in 5 years, for example. Projects become planned instead of urgent: Anticipate the problem, plan the solution.

Successful lakes see the “big picture.” Some lakes are involved with watershed-wide projects to control non-source point pollution. Some lakes are doing watershed studies in order to plan future projects. We spoke to several Associations and Lake Management Districts that covered more than one lake because the homeowners recognized the lakes were interconnected and it made sense to work together.

Successful lakes educate the public. Some Associations sponsor workshops with county AIS specialists and DNR wardens. One Association provided free lunch to everyone who attended and they had a full house. Some towns in the Northern Watershed Management Unit that have more than one lake formed town AIS response committees, complete with newsletters and websites. Some lakes have lake fairs or State of the Lake meetings and advertise to attract non-members.

Successful lakes communicate. Whether it is Town officials, Association officers or LMD commissioners, they all find a way to communicate to their constituents. Websites, newsletters and meetings are popular but one-on-one discussions with other officials or taxpayers are equally important.

Successful lakes network and collaborate. Associations and LMD officials attend the Wisconsin Lakes convention in April; some Town officials also attend. Some Associations participate in countywide lakes associations such as the Walworth County Lakes Association. They do not work alone; they seek information and experience from other lakes. It helps to find out what other similar lakes are doing.

Networking helps locate scientists and experts. Successful lakes take advantage of experts and expertise in available government and private agencies.

Networking also helps locate more funding sources. Besides finding information about government grants, networking can uncover private organizations such as conservancies and wildlife groups who might contribute to projects.

Successful lakes use good planning. When a problem is identified, the right solution must be implemented and the effectiveness measured. Measurement must be part of the plan. One lake invested in an aerator but it didn't solve their problem. However, the town didn't want to see data that showed their dollars were wasted. Another lake invested in an aerator and measured results after the winter freeze did not kill the large game fish they were trying to protect. Long-term monitoring of lake conditions and project results helps plan future projects and should be included in the cost structure of projects.

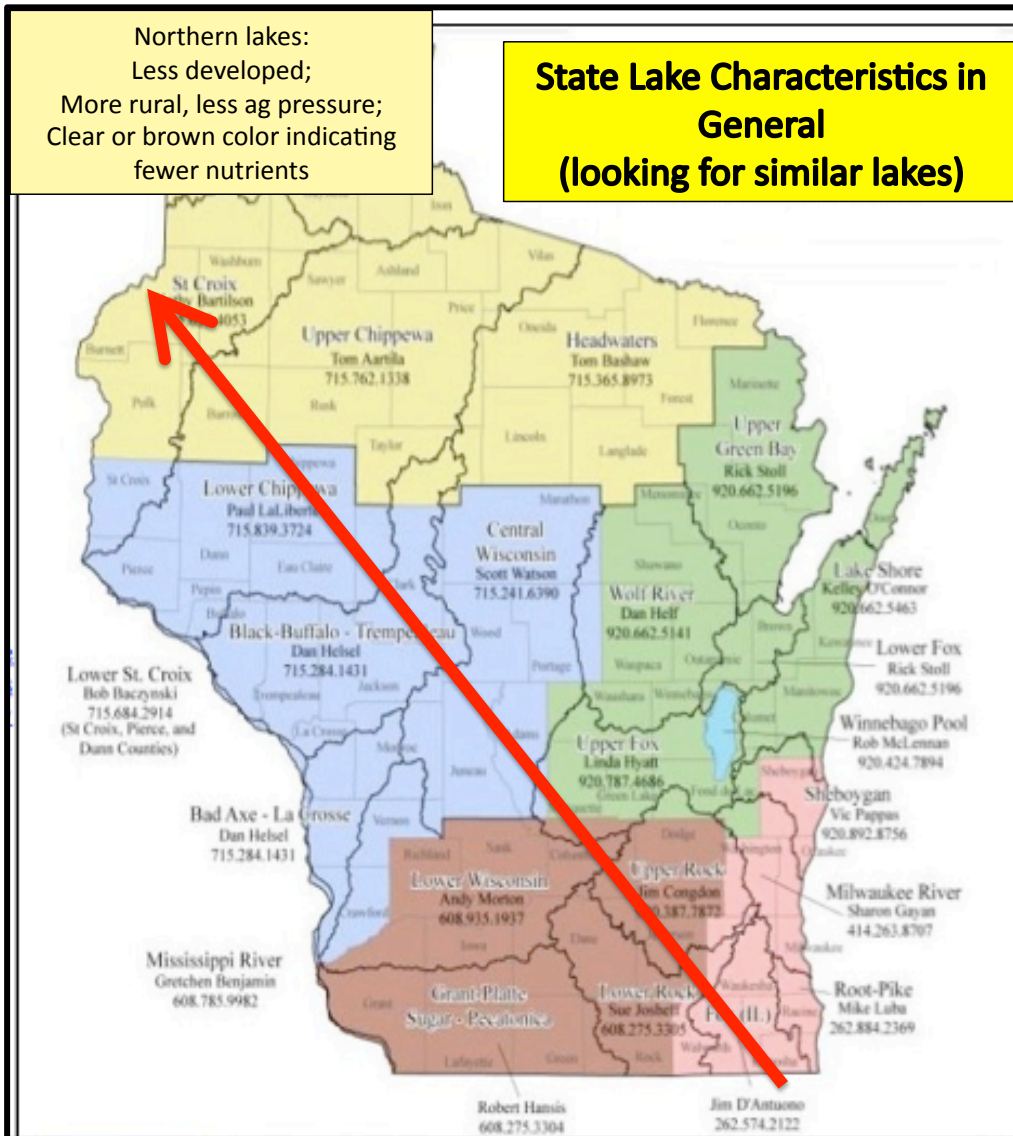
Successful lakes find a way to get things done. One lake needed dam repairs but had very little funding. There were some qualified retired engineers in the Association who were able to do the study and create a plan, saving several thousand dollars. Some other volunteers crafted parts for the dam repair in their hobby machine shop, saving additional money.

Successful lakes have a good relationship with the DNR. While there may be occasional conflicts about permits for dams or dredging, the communication lines remain open and respectful. One lake was starting to have AIS problems and needed help. They "changed their approach," worked actively with the DNR, and implemented DNR recommendations. They applied for and received a DNR AIS planning grant and members have received water quality training from the DNR.

Lastly, **successful lakes have good leadership.** We talked to Association boards, Lake Management District commissioners and staff, and Town board members. To a person, they are enthusiastic about their lakes and willing to discuss their experiences, good and bad. But passion doesn't substitute for leadership; successful lakes are able to find strong leaders who can win support to find solutions, even though they may take many years to realize.

Delavan Lake is a regional gem. We are very fortunate to live and work and recreate here. Our lake has a history of successful projects, but we have also occasionally stumbled along the way. Now is the time to recognize that there are many best practices we can utilize. The Delavan Lake Improvement Association stands strong for a proactive approach to managing our lake, and we call on the Town to implement these best practices with our help and support.

Appendix 1: Map of WDNR Basins



Northern lakes:
Less developed;
More rural, less ag pressure;
Clear or brown color indicating fewer nutrients

State Lake Characteristics in General
(looking for similar lakes)

Southern lakes:
More developed; more ag pressures; Green color indicating more nutrients

- From Wisconsin's Watershed Management Units – WDNR.pdf

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