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# Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA) News

P.O. Box 494 Eagle River, WI 54521-0494

SPRING 2016

MAY 2016

## Presidential Pebbles and Pearls

As I write these words in mid April, it would appear that spring is finally beginning to arrive in the Northwoods. Time to get outside and enjoy the lakes and rivers of our beautiful county.

After the legislative and regulatory turmoil of 2015, it is now time to take stock and determine where we go from here. The legislature will be mostly out of session this year leading up to November elections. For organizations such as VCLRA it is time to concentrate on educational activities.

One such example is the multi-county lakes workshop co-hosted by both Vilas & Oneida County Lakes & Rivers Associations at Nicolet College on **Friday June 10<sup>th</sup>**. Both John Richter from Wisconsin Shoreland Initiative and Mike Engleson from WI Lakes will be speakers. Many concerns and questions will be addressed and answered. See draft agenda elsewhere in this issue.

On the good news front, as of March 31, 2016 VCLRA has been granted its 501 (C) (3) status. Please spread the word to all; especially those that may consider a donation to VCLRA, as those donations are now tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

If your lake does not have a lake association, please consider organizing one. Information can be found on the VCLRA website. See also the workshop information in this issue from the Vilas Cty Land & Water Conservation Dept. on this same topic. It is more important than ever to be organized and ready to communicate with each other.

Once again, the annual lakes convention was a big hit. By the time you read these words, the sessions should be archived at the UWEX-Lakes website. As you seasonal residents begin drifting back to the Northwoods, please take the time to renew your 2016 VCLRA membership if you have not yet done so.

## Contained in this issue:

- Run off to ruin article
- Membership renewal form and information
- June 10th workshop agenda & 2016 calendar
- Blue Heron & Shoreland Stewardship Initiative Info
- Other Lakes Related Information

**Steve Budnik**  
President VCLRA



VCLRA will be awarding our BLUE HERON Shoreland Stewardship Award to two local properties at our "Celebrate the Lakes Day" on June 10, 2016 at Nicolet College in Rhinelander. We will be presenting the award to our Vilas County lake property owners who modeled the attributes for which this award was established.

This award was established for a threefold purpose; first to provide lake associations with the opportunity to nominate and recognize property owners on their lakes who have worked hard to maintain their shoreline property in a more natural state with minimal environmental impacts. Second, to inform lake property owners about the many ways that negative impacts of shoreline property development can be minimized.

And third, to educate lake property owners about how important shoreline biodiversity is to the overall health of their lake.

The award criteria are divided into five sections: driveway and parking areas, structures and septic areas, yard and recreation areas, shoreline area and an overview of the entire lot area.

Local Vilas County lake associations and districts are encouraged to nominate property owners on their lake who have worked hard to maintain or restore their shoreland.

To obtain more information about the BLUE HERON Shoreline Stewardship Award program and to print a nomination form, see the VCLRA website at [www.vclra.us](http://www.vclra.us) and click on the "Blue Heron Shoreline Stewardship Award Program" tab or contact us at VCLRA, P. O. Box 494, Eagle River, WI 54521.

Nominations for 2016 are due Aug 1, 2016.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO:

Sue and Bob Austin of the Manitowish River in Manitowish Waters



Fritz Behr of Lynx Lake in Presque Isle



## SUCCESS! VCLRA's Roll Out of Vilas Shoreland Stewardship Initiative

By: Sandy Gillum and Debby Soberg

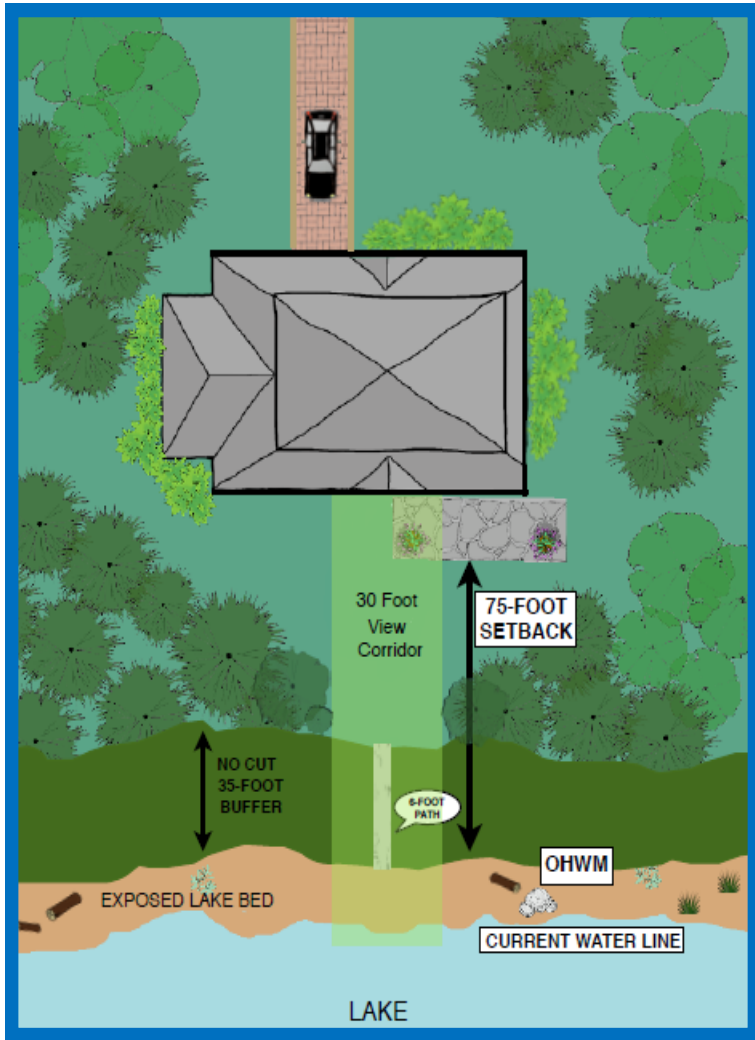
VCLRA is pleased with the initial response of Vilas County shoreland owners, who adopted the Shoreland Stewardship Covenant on over 3300 feet of shoreline in just the few months this opportunity has been available in Vilas County.

Many lake and river shoreland property owners in Vilas County are aware of the importance of protecting shorelines from degradation and the ensuing loss of water quality and habitat for the array of dependent wildlife...from eagles and kingfishers, to frogs and turtles, to minnows to muskies. Natural resource professionals have published hundreds of research articles documenting the collective stress placed on the health of lakes and rivers by development on shorelines that exceed the carrying capacity of the particular waterbody.

The Shoreland Stewardship Initiative is an educational tool offered free by VCLRA that a shoreland owner can voluntarily use to protect what they have so carefully conserved and pass this knowledge on to the next owner.

The Stewardship Initiative provides protection of your natural or revegetated shoreland through a Shoreland Steward-

**Continued on Pg. 3**



ship Covenant, prepared by a licensed Wisconsin attorney, and customized specifically for shoreline properties in Vilas County.

The Vilas County Shoreland Zoning Ordinance was passed in May 1999 and amended in November 2009. If your property meets or exceeds the four minimum Vilas shoreland conditions described in these ordinances, your shoreland is eligible for protection in perpetuity.

The four conditions are:

- 1) 75 foot OHWM minimum set back: Article V: 5.1 B.
- 2) 35 foot minimum Shoreland Buffer: Article IX: 9.1 C.
- 3) 30 foot maximum width View Corridor: Article VIII: 8.3 B
- 4) 6 foot maximum width Pedestrian Access Path: Article V11: 7.3 A. 1. f.  
(or)  
4 foot maximum width Elevated Walkway (steep or wet slopes): Article VII: 7.3 A.2.c.

Copy of the covenant is available at the VCRLA website [www.vclra.us](http://www.vclra.us). Once you have confirmed that your property meets the ordinance criteria and you have the information at hand to complete the form, the form can be notarized, and then taken to the Vilas County Register of Deeds for recording, where you pay a \$30 recording fee. The Register of Deeds will provide a receipt which verifies the recording. Your receipt should then be sent to **VCLRA, Box 494, Eagle River, WI 54521**, so that conserved shorelines can be tracked and owners presented with an 8" x 12" enameled oval metal mountable sign suitable for display at a location of the owner's choice.

Questions about the Shoreland Initiative can be directed to Debby Soberg 715-479-9316 or Rollie Alger 715-545-2711.

### June 10, 2016 Multi-County Lakes Workshop Draft agenda

**8:30-9:00** Register and networking

**9:00-10:00** Welcome and introduction of keynote speaker, John Richter from the Wisconsin Shoreland Initiative.

**10:00-11:00** Transition to Education. Individual counties will share what they are doing to further good lake practices in their counties.

**11:00-12:00** The Advantage of Collaboration. Pat Goggins from UWEX-Lakes and Mike Engelson from WI Lakes will share thoughts on working together and where we go from here.

**12:00-12:45** Individual County Annual Meetings.



## Taking Your Lake Plan to Action Workshop

So now your Lake Group has a Lake Management Plan – but you are not sure what to do next? Come to the **Taking Your Lake Plan to Action** Workshop! **June 24**, from **9 to Noon** in Eagle River!

Hosted by the Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Department

Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Staff invite you to a Lake Management Plan Implementation Workshop on **June 24<sup>th</sup>**, from **9 to noon** at **Trees for Tomorrow** in **Eagle River**. This workshop is for members of your Board, your Planning committees, and anyone interested in moving forward with your existing Lake Management Plan.

For more information please contact Quita Sheehan at the Vilas County Land & Water Conservation Department - 715-479-3721, [mashee@co.vilas.wi.us](mailto:mashee@co.vilas.wi.us)

## VCLRA Membership Benefits

VCLRA is an informational education network that helps lake associations and individual citizens make wise decisions in their effort to preserve and protect the unique waterways of Vilas County, now and well into the future. From its inception, VCLRA has established and maintained strong cooperative relationships with the Wisconsin DNR, UW Extension, and Vilas County government. With the help of these partnerships, VCLRA is able to provide benefits to lake association members and individuals who do not have lake associations.

VCLRA provides the following to its member associations and individuals:

- Providing information and assistance on lake related problems and issues,
- Sponsoring and participating in educational programs,
- Providing yearly Blue Heron Awards for recognition of individual property owners' shoreline stewardship,
- Publishing a newsletter for our membership,
- Developing Shoreline Covenant Program for property owners,
- Organize a yearly Lakes Day symposium for our members and partners to strengthen their partnerships and gain new knowledge,
- Helping in the formation of new lake associations,
- Assisting with direction to or interaction with partner agencies,
- Assisting with grant applications when an association may not qualify,
- And monitoring state and county government activities.

VCLRA is a constructive citizen group that has earned the respect of the local and state community. We encourage you to contact us with questions, concerns, or ideas. We will answer them to the best of our ability, or direct you to someone who can.

The purpose of the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association is to educate, communicate, and promote cooperation among organizations, individuals, governmental bodies and the general public of Vilas county; and to preserve, protect, and enhance our lakes and waterways for present and future generations.

*Anne Kretschmann*  
Treasurer



# Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

*Preserving, protecting and enhancing our Vilas County lakes and waterways for present and future generations*

### Type of Membership:

☐ Individual/Family \$25   ☐ Lake Organization \$50   ☐ Associate/Supporting \$75

### Section A: Individual/Family or Associate/Supporting Membership

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wish to receive newsletter via email? Yes No  
 Wish to receive occasional email alerts on lake issues? Yes No  
 Name of Lake of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Lake Organization (if established): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other affiliation (i.e. town chairman, county commissioner, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

### Section B: Lake Organization (Lake Associations and Districts) Membership

Please submit the names and contact information of organization officers/ board of directors/commissioners, each will receive the VCLRA newsletter. If person and contact information is the same as prior year write "NC" after name. Please indicate a **Key Contact Person**, ideally with email, this is used occasionally when legislative updates or call-to-actions occur.

Lake organization name \_\_\_\_\_

Website \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate number of individuals represented by lake organization \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach additional  
board members, directors,  
or commissioners, if needed.

#### President/Chairman

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Wish to receive newsletter via email? Yes No  
 Name of Lake of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Receive occasional email alerts on lake issues? Yes No  
 Key Contact Person? Yes No

#### Secretary

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Wish to receive newsletter via email? Yes No  
 Name of Lake of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Receive occasional email alerts on lake issues? Yes No  
 Key Contact Person? Yes No

#### Vice-President

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Wish to receive newsletter via email? Yes No  
 Name of Lake of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Receive occasional email alerts on lake issues? Yes No  
 Key Contact Person? Yes No

#### Treasurer

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Wish to receive newsletter via email? Yes No  
 Name of Lake of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Receive occasional email alerts on lake issues? Yes No  
 Key Contact Person? Yes No

Please make checks payable to: Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA)  
 Return completed form with annual dues before **June 1st** to: VCLRA; PO Box 494; Eagle River, WI 54521

## From runoff to ruin: The undoing of Minnesota's lakes

Land use did the damage; much of it can't be undone. In some parts of the state, however, there's still hope.

By Ron Way and Steve Berg

August 7, 2015



If 75 percent of a lakeshore remains mainly forested, the chance of maintaining lake quality is good. But when natural cover falls below 60 percent, lakes begin to deteriorate.

No one can deny the mystical bond that ties Minnesota's people to its lakes. "Going to the lake" evokes sensations so vivid that they define who we are: the lapping of water, the wail of a loon, the tug of a walleye on the line, a breeze in your face, the sun on your shoulder. Memories pass from one generation to the next.

And yet, we Minnesotans are in deep denial about the critical condition of our lakes and the culpability we share. We are loving our lakes to death. Agriculture has drained or poisoned the prairie lakes and potholes of southern and southwestern Minnesota. Forget about them; they're gone.

A similar fate awaits the heart of lake country — the thousands of recreational lakes clustered around Brainerd, Detroit Lakes and Alexandria in central Minnesota. It's not the crush of shoreline development by itself that's killing them; it's the reckless way in which development has been allowed to proceed.

Over the last half-century, quaint lakeside cabins have been transformed, by the thousands, into mega-homes with large fertilized lawns running to the water's edge. Nearby towns have been converted to suburban-style strips with vast parking lots. Add in all the golf courses, faulty septic tanks and riprap barriers that replace natural shoreline vegetation, and you begin to realize how an exponential increase in unfiltered runoff has remade these lakes into a nutrient soup that's quite literally suffocating fish and other native species within them.

This year's early halt to walleye fishing on Mille Lacs, the state's most popular fishing lake, is a particularly ominous example. "It's death by a thousand cuts," said Peter Sorensen, a fisheries expert at the University of Minnesota and one of a number of scientists who consider the damage irreversible, given the added realities of a warming climate and a stiff political resistance to land-use changes needed to restore central Minnesota's lakes. Over the next few generations, those lakes will die, too.

The best we can hope for, then, is to preserve the still relatively pristine tier of forest--

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encircled northern lakes that stretches roughly from Bemidji and Park Rapids, through the Leech Lake region and into the Arrowhead. But saving those lakes will require two extraordinary acts of courage: first, an acknowledgment that the laissez-faire path we've followed for 50 years has failed, and, second, a new resolve to pass and enforce land-use regulations that diminish the impact of human settlement.

The aim shouldn't be to inhibit future development but to change development's character in ways that protect lakes and their surrounding watersheds.

Those are monumental tasks. Admitting we've been wrong is a hard thing. We are like fugitives with "stop me before I kill again" tattooed on our chests; we can't seem to help ourselves. "Much of this has been unintentional and mostly inadvertent," Sorensen said, and he's right about that.

Local officials didn't set out to kill the lakes of central Minnesota. But desperate for tax base, they've encouraged hundreds of projects that, when considered cumulatively, have marred the character of lake country and irreparably damaged water quality in the process.

It has been a gradual transformation that most people regard simply as progress. Beginning in the years following World War II, the expansion of prosperity to a broader middle class opened lakefront property to the masses. A home on a lake came to signify the good life. There are no reliable numbers to measure the surge in lakeshore dwellings between, say, 1950 and 2010. But to suggest a tenfold increase, both in the number of dwellings and the volume of runoff, would draw few arguments.

The damage came less from numbers, however, than from careless design. The real-estate market and local governments treated lake country not as a delicate ecosystem but as an ordinary template for suburban excess. The jarring retail strip along Hwy. 371 between Baxter and Nisswa offers an ironic example. Its lineup of big boxes fronted by barren parking lots replicates the suburban sprawl that vacationers go north to escape.

Consider, too, the lakeshores themselves, now studded with triple-car garages and large-scale homes with broad, sloping lawns. We've rebuilt suburbia at the lake.

Understanding how this trend has affected lake water is crucial for any hope of avoiding similar degradation farther north.

If 75 percent of lakeshore remains mainly forested, the chance of maintaining lake quality is good, said Peter Jacobson of the state's Department of Natural Resources. But when natural cover falls below 60 percent, lakes begin to deteriorate.

Here's what happens: Runoff from farm fields and pavement creates a nutrient overload in nearby lakes. The process accelerates when natural buffers are replaced by lawns and riprap barriers at the water's edge. When air temperatures rise in the spring, the upper layer of lake water heats up, causing algae blooms that decay and consume oxygen that otherwise sustains fish and their habitat. Climate change compounds the problem by keeping the water warmer for longer periods.

By mid- to late summer, mats of green scum can dominate the upper layers, forcing rotting algae to seep into deeper, colder parts of the lake, depleting oxygen for the feeder fish like the fatty cisco needed to grow large sport fish. The lake "crashes" when sport fish can no longer thrive. Invasive species — like zebra mussels and Eurasian water milfoil — further complicate the situation.

The economic impact can be stunning. Sport fishing in Minnesota is conservatively valued at \$2 billion per year. According to Tom Watson, president of the Whitefish Property Owner's Association, tourists annually spend \$125 million directly and \$140 million indirectly in Crow Wing County alone. Lakeshore property values statewide run into the tens of billions of dollars.

Can't sick lakes be restored? Not realistically, so long as local officials continue to resist changes in land-use practices. The state's sales-tax-supported Clean Water and Legacy Fund was supposed to make a difference, but much of that money is being spent on collecting data to document

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problems that are already well-known.

Like people, lakes have a life cycle, Sorensen explains. A 60-year-old human body wracked by smoking and reckless living can't be restored to that of an energetic 30-year-old, he said. Abused lakes are like that, too.

Instead, the focus should shift to keeping clean lakes clean, insists Bill Patnaude, Beltrami County's environmental services director, pointing to his County Board's "full commitment" to maintaining high quality in its 300 lakes.

Indeed, resolving to mend our ways in order to save the lakes farther north will take an entirely new mindset, bolstered by rules that are enforced, not ignored. That will be the hardest part, not because the needed rules are difficult but because northern Minnesotans have a cantankerous attitude about outsiders telling them what to do, especially if it's "for their own good." Anyone with an ounce of political savvy knows the history of hard feelings. Often, it's portrayed as a battle over property rights or between environmentalism and economic development, but that's an obsolete frame of mind. Truth is, preserving the quality of lake water in northern Minnesota is a huge component of economic development.

There's no mystery about what's needed: larger setbacks for new lakeside homes, natural buffers between lakes and yards, a prohibition against nitrogen fertilizers, frequent inspections of septic systems, and incentives for traditional town design that limits the size of paved parking lots while encouraging native plants, rain gardens, maximum tree coverage and permeable pavers. In short, what's required is a built environment that harmonizes with nature rather than defying it.

For years, the state had a planning agency to lead such efforts. But Minnesota Planning was eliminated in 2003, and the state's Environmental Quality Board was gutted. There are laws still on the books aimed at helping guide local governments toward achieving "sustainable development." The state offers a "model ordinance" and a "milestone report" to evaluate progress. Gov. Mark Dayton has now launched a new citizens' advisory board to help fill the void. But local governments often ignore the sustainable framework, or override it when development comes calling.

Objections from seasonal property owners are also routinely dismissed, said the Whitefish association's Watson, largely because most lakeshore homeowners are nonresidents and don't vote locally.

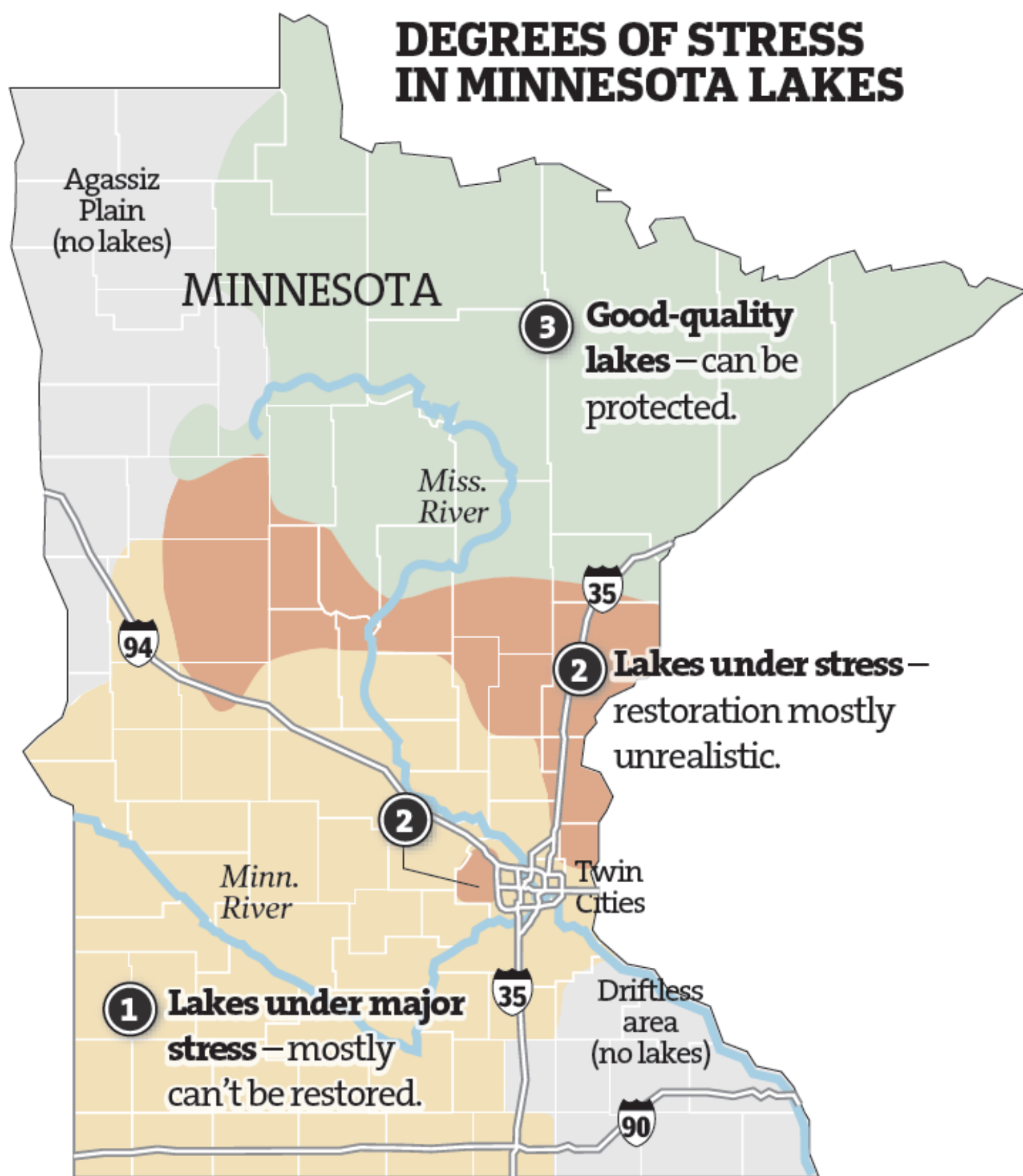
The need for rules is perhaps best illustrated by a recollection from Jim Erkel, an attorney for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. When, in 1996, officials in Two Harbors asked the owner of a new fast-food restaurant why he had cut down a grove of beautiful pine trees (planted by Boy Scouts in the 1930s) near his new store while he'd been far more careful about the environment and history around his Duluth store, the owner replied that Duluth had rules and Two Harbors did not.

"It was a light-bulb moment," Erkel said. "He cut the trees because the town let him. That pretty much explains everything."

**Ron Way is a former official with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the U.S. Department of the Interior. He lives in Edina. Steve Berg is a writer and urban design consultant. He lives in Minneapolis.**



## DEGREES OF STRESS IN MINNESOTA LAKES



Source: Provided by Ron Way using information from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Minneapolis Star Tribune

## Mark your Calendar

**June 10, 2016** North Central Counties Lake Associations Workshop and VCLRA Annual Meeting at Nicolet College in Rhinelander, WI.  
Contact Steve Budnik at 715-686-7852 / [skbudnik@centurytel.net](mailto:skbudnik@centurytel.net) or Bob Martini at 715-282-5896 / [bobmartini@charter.net](mailto:bobmartini@charter.net) for more information

**June 18, 2016** Lakes Fest in Lac du Flambeau from 10:00AM to 3:00PM contact Celeste Hockings 715-588-4163 for more information.

**June 24, 2016** Taking Your Lake Plan to Action Workshop 9:00AM to 12:00PM contact Quita Sheehan 715-479-3721

**July 2016** VCLRA Board Meeting. Date TBD

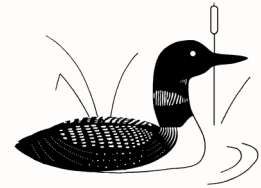
**August 6, 2016** Forest Fest. Eagle River 9:00AM to 3:00PM

**October 1, 2016** Cran-a-Rama. Manitowish Waters 9:00AM to 3:00PM

**October 2016** VCLRA Board Meeting. Date TBD

**Join VCLRA Today! Forget to Renew?**

See membership form inside this issue or go to our website at [www.vclra.us](http://www.vclra.us) and print the membership form.



**Your support helps protect the lakes!**

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