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VilasCounty

LAKES AND RIVERS ASSOCIATION

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VCLRA.ORG

WINTER 2023 - 24

Celebrating 30 Years (1994—2024)

THE President's message

A 30-year legacy of progress for protecting Vilas waters

I felt a bit nostalgic browsing files dating back to VCLRA's early history. According to our *articles of organization*, a group of 30 people assembled at the Boulder Junction Community Building for an organizational meeting of the Vilas County Lakes Association (VCLA) on

Wednesday, August 17, 1994. Bylaws were adopted by unanimous vote the following day, with the organization's stated purpose to educate, communicate and promote cooperation to preserve, protect and enhance our lakes and waterways for present and future generations.

The photo at right shows the VCLA board of directors that was in place on our 10th anniversary. Sandy Gillum (leaning on the boulder) had assumed the role of president from the late Mary Platner. Both of these women were legendary advocates for lakes that I'm proud I got to know. They, along with other passionate lake volunteers, built a strong foundation for a thriving organization well into the future.



Members of VCLA's 2003-2004 board

I feel honored and humbled to have a role in today's Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA) — an amazing organization committed to the welfare of our lake and river heritage that many dedicated and talented volunteers helped shape over three decades.

It's been a challenging, but productive year

We've worked diligently during 2023 to champion the protection of our beautiful Vilas County lakes and rivers.

Google Search



vclra.org

VCLRA has continued to leverage technology and innovate in ways that help us grow our outreach and better accomplish our mission to protect our waters. In fact, VCLRA's website was recognized this past December by Google for reaching a milestone level of 10,000 views per month (versus 1000 views/month only a year ago). Clearly we are engaging a much broader community than ever before.

This undoubtedly helped us reach large numbers of concerned individuals about a legislative attempt to craft weak wakesurfing regulations a few months ago. Your huge response and presence at the November legislature listening sessions held in Eagle River, Minocqua and Rhinelander made a big difference! We have a status update on the wakesurfing issue later in this newsletter.

Also, we had a record turnout at the Six-County Lakes and Rivers Conference in July. Your inputs and suggestions throughout the year help to shape this key annual Northwoods event that VCLRA hosts jointly with Oneida Lakes and Rivers Association (OCLRA). In addition to expert briefings on timely topics and exhibits from educational, nonprofit, and government organizations, the 2023 conference featured for the first time a moderated expert panel that examined law enforcement challenges from enhanced wake boats, short-term vacation rentals, zoning violations and other issues that impact our waters.

Continued on next page

President’s Message, continued from page 1

We are pleased that we awarded two scholarships in 2023 to worthy Vilas County high school seniors — it truly is one of our joys to make these awards to encourage youth to discover and protect our natural world. Plus, VCLRA carried on our tradition of recognizing local lake stewards with a Blue Heron Award.

Finally, we added strong, new partnerships and initiatives to protect our beautiful waters, and more!

Looking ahead

I’m grateful to our board members, our partners and collaborators, and our member family and lake organizations for their passion and dedication to protecting our Vilas County lakes and rivers. When we work together, we’re stronger; our voice carries farther and with more authority.

Please continue to support our efforts by renewing or becoming a member today! This year we celebrate VCLRA’s 30th anniversary. Will you consider adding a donation of \$30 or more to your membership? Your added support will go a long way in helping protect Vilas County’s waters into the future.

Happy New Year!



Tom Ewing, President
president@vclra.org

Tourist Rooming House Ordinance in Vilas County

As we reported in a blog post on November 21, 2023, Vilas County has established a Tourist Rooming House Ordinance to regulate short-term rentals. This is an important tool to support protection of Vilas County lakes, rivers and ground water.

Included in the ordinance are requirements limiting occupancy based on septic sizing and requiring one parking space per each two occupants plus one additional. Learn more about the Vilas tourist rooming house ordinance here: <http://tinyurl.com/vctourist>



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Northern Lakes Toolbox Workshops

ARTICLE BY

Terry Daulton*, Wisconsin Green Fire

Wisconsin's lakes are one of its most valued resources. University of Wisconsin Extension estimates 750 lake associations and districts work on stewardship across the state representing thousands of lakeshore owners and enthusiasts. While many training opportunities exist, fully engaging in lake management is often beyond the capacity of lake groups. To address this need, in August/September Wisconsin Green Fire (WGF) conducted two Northern Lakes Toolbox workshops in late summer - early fall of 2023. The workshops were three-day sessions of four hours per day. Day one was an introduction to lake ecology, day two was a data collection day using Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) online resources, and day three was identification of action strategies and next steps for each lake association participant.



The instructor, Jim Kreitlow, assists Susan Holloway of Little Tamarack Lake.

The goal of the workshops was to provide lake leaders with tools to obtain and interpret data about their lake, and then use the information to make lake planning and management decisions. The primary data source for the toolbox is the WDNR Lakes Program. The session also included Tribal perspectives, given by Lac du Flambeau Tribal Natural Resources Director, Celeste Hockings.

Specific workshop objectives included retrieval and review of available lake information, identification of data gaps, charting a path towards data collection, planning, and lake management, providing an overview of WDNR Surface Water Grant Program




From left to right, George Lannert and Doug Pinney of Plum Lake.

(\$6 million granted to lake management annually), and identifying methods for increasing lake associations' capacity.

The sessions were attended by 12 lake association leaders from Vilas County, Oneida and Iron Counties. One participant shared the following observation, "There is a lot of data out there and I now have a better idea how to get at the data to help define an action plan to improve and maintain the health of our lake."

When asked what they would do with the skills and information, lake leaders were enthusiastic. One participant said "I will recommend applying for programs/grants for our lake for aquatic invasive species education and increased water monitoring." Another was interested in attending the session for a second time to learn more about how varied lakes would benefit.

Based on the results of these pilots, WGF may offer sessions to broader audiences including at the 2024 Wisconsin Lakes Conference. Funding for the project was provided by the Arthur L. and Elaine V. Johnson Foundation and WDNR Surface Water Grants (Lake Education), with in-kind support from WGF. Additional funding was provided by VCLRA. 

**Terry Daulton (email: tdaulton@wisconsinfire.org) is on the WGF board of directors. She is an artist as well as scientist/educator and her paintings reflect her deep ties to the Wisconsin landscape. In addition to her work with WGF, Terry volunteers her time with her local lake association and LoonWatch advisory Council.*



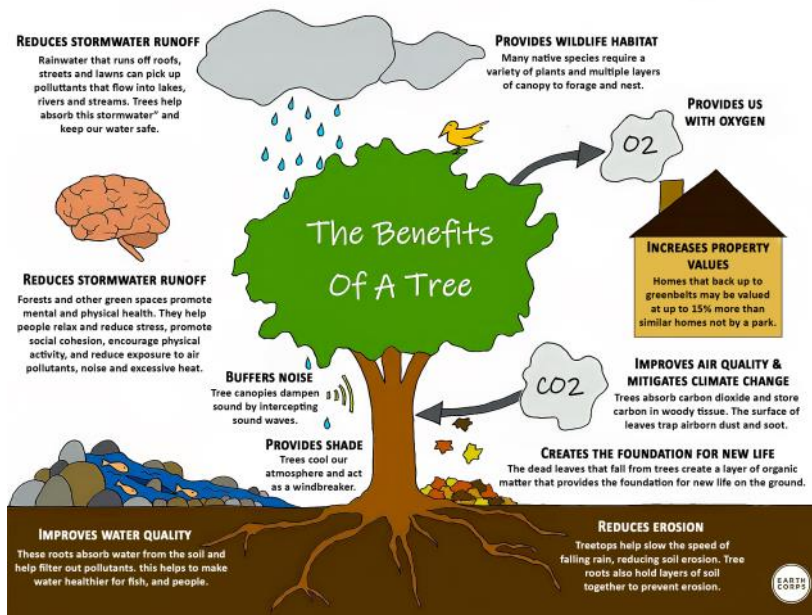
TREES!

Vilas County's beautiful trees are essential for healthy lakes, plus they provide high-quality freshwater, maintain species biodiversity, naturally store carbon and more.

ARTICLE BY

Jane Feely*, Trees for Tomorrow

When it comes to shoreland trees, some benefits are readily apparent—whether it's providing space for nesting birds or an aesthetic wall to make your lakeside retreat feel more secluded. Some benefits may be less obvious, in particular, just how vital trees are for maintaining healthy lakes. To appreciate the role of these trees—and to understand the necessity of their preservation and protection—it's important to understand just how much they provide.



Recreational Benefits

Aside from the aforementioned shade, trees are commonly regarded as a sound barrier against unwanted noise. Which is true, though perhaps not in the way you might have anticipated. One study showed that 90% of surveyed participants believed that shoreland plants attenuated noise, and 55% over-estimated the plants' actual ability to reduce noise. So, regardless of the trees' actual ability to block sound, their presence makes individuals less likely to notice the sound via "psychological noise reduction".

Forested areas are also beneficial for humans' physical and psychological health. According to one study, exercising in forested areas reduced blood pressure significantly more than exercise in an urban area. Trees can also reduce stress hormones and help engender a positive emotional state. Maintaining an abundance of trees around shorelines can create an environment that improves human health.

Overview of the benefits provided by trees, created by earthcorps.org

Continued on next page

Air Quality

It would be difficult to cover the benefits of trees for lake systems without discussing their creation of oxygen. Trees remove carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the air via photosynthesis and create glucose and oxygen. This process stores carbon within the tree’s fibers, where it’ll remain until decomposition, or until an unexpected fire sends CO₂ back into the atmosphere. Trees are excellent carbon sinks; a mature tree can sequester up to 48 pounds of carbon dioxide a year! The sequestration of carbon dioxide reduces the amount that enters the atmosphere, lowering the abundance of greenhouse gases reflecting heat back onto Earth.

Pollutant Filter/Buffer

Shoreland trees offer a natural buffer against pollutants and nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. These nutrients can be found in pesticides and chemical fertilizers; as stormwater washes over lawns or other areas that use these treatments, it picks up the nutrients as it passes through. If these nutrients enter a lake in excess via storm-

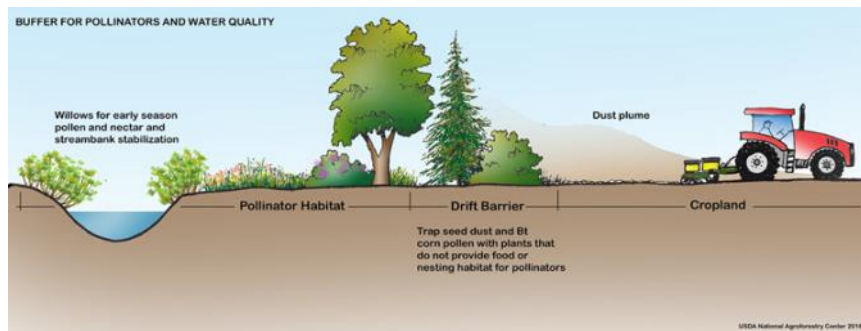


Diagram demonstrating the potential of shoreland trees to be a pollutant buffer, created by the National Agroforestry Center

water runoff, it can lead to an algal bloom, turning a clear waterbody into a soup of green muck. A dense canopy cover slows rainfall, allowing time for it to be absorbed by the forest floor, and reducing overall stormwater runoff (in one study, 54% canopy cover reduced runoff by 11%). Trees also filter nutrients and contaminants from soil


and water, where they are subsequently implemented for growth or stored inside their wood.

Erosion Control

The sturdy roots of shoreline trees serve as erosion control. Without their presence to stabilize banks, the risk of streambank erosion increases, leading to sediment entering the water. This can result in the degradation of wildlife habitat, an increase in turbidity (e.g. the water clarity worsens), and nutrient concentrations increase—potentially resulting in algal blooms.

Wildlife Benefits

Trees also benefit lake ecosystems by providing habitat and food for wildlife! A careful gaze around shoreland trees will reveal signs of animal life—like the eyrie of an eagle, perhaps, or foliage riddled with bite marks. However, a tree dead and downed into the lake still offers bountiful benefits for the organisms inside the water. Several fish species will use the protection of a downed tree for spawning (such as sunfish and largemouth bass). Young fishes can hide around the branches of a downed tree from their predators. Fifteen or more fish species could occupy the same dead, downed tree simultaneously!

The benefits of shoreland trees are numerous and go beyond the examples covered in this article. Of course, the relationship goes both ways—trees are dependent on water (being 50% water themselves) and a 100-foot-tall tree can take in 11,000 gallons of water in a single growing season. When the ice thaws and you’re next out on the water, take a moment to appreciate all that these natural features do to help make Vilas County such a beautiful and special place. 

**Jane Feely is an environmental educator at Trees for Tomorrow (TFT) in Eagle River, WI. She can be reached at jane@treesfortomorrow.com. Visit: <https://www.treesfortomorrow.com/> for more info about TFT.*

NORTHWOODS AUTHOR’S CORNER

The Northwoods is fortunate to have many talented authors that inspire us to enjoy, protect, and preserve our beautiful lakes, rivers, and forests. VCLRA is pleased to highlighting these writers whose work has been influenced by their life and experiences in our Northwoods.

John Bates

John Bates is a Northwoods naturalist and author who is a regular guest on Wisconsin Public Radio, and has a long-standing biweekly column, “A Northwoods Almanac,” which he writes for the Lakeland Times in Minocqua. He has authored ten books, most recently *Wisconsin’s Wild Lakes: A Guide to the Last Undeveloped Natural Lakes*.

For the nature lover, Bates’ collection is worth a look, with titles like *Our Living Ancestors: The History and Ecology of Old-growth Forests in Wisconsin (And Where to Find Them)*; *Graced by the Seasons: Fall and Winter in the Northwoods*; *A Northwoods Companion: Spring and Summer*; *A Northwoods Companion: Fall and Winter*; *River Life: The Natural and Cultural History of a Northern River*; and *Trailside Botany: 101 Favorite Trees, Shrubs & Wildflowers of the Upper Midwest*.

His books are available from Manitowish River Press, <https://manitowishriverpress.com/>.



Photo by Mackenzie Martin, WXPR



Let's protect our lakes and waterways! Join VCLRA *now* so we can all work together!

If you're as concerned about wake boats, short-term rentals and aquatic invasives (like Eurasian water milfoil) as we are, we hope you'll join us to support our advocacy and education work. In fact, we need you to join us. VCLRA helps individuals and lake associations make wise decisions about their lakes and gives them a voice in preserving and protecting our unique lakes and waterways.

From its inception in 1994, VCLRA has maintained strong working relationships with the Wisconsin DNR, UW Extension, Wisconsin Lakes, and town and county officials and administrators in Vilas County. This allows VCLRA, a lake conservation and education organization, to provide the benefits below to lake associations and their members as well as individuals who do not have a lake association:

- Information and assistance on lake related problems and issues
- A bi-annual newsletters rich with insightful information addressing key challenges that impact Vilas water
- Help with forming new lake associations
- Connecting with and interacting with partner organizations and government agencies
- Assistance with and sponsorship of grant applications when an association may not qualify

VCLRA is a constructive citizen group that has earned the respect of the local and state community. Our members are an important part of what we do. Support our mission. Become a member and help protect our beautiful lakes and rivers. If you are already a member, now is the time to renew your membership.

Susan Knight

VCLRA membership director



VCLRA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. You can now join or renew your membership online at <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/> using a credit card or check. You can also use the mail-in form on the reverse side or print the form out at <https://vclra.org/mail-in/>.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

We are a 501(c)(3) organization; membership fees and donations may be tax-deductible to the extent of the law
We encourage you to join or renew online, if possible: <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/>

Select one: Individual or Family \$25 Lake Organization \$50 Business Associate-Supporting \$75

Will you consider adding a small donation to your membership? \$ _____

Individual or Family Membership New or Renewal

Name(s): _____

Permanent address: Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Email Address: _____ Ph: _____

How do you wish to receive our newsletter? Print Email Email alerts on lake issues? Yes No

Name of lake or river of residence, or enter "Off-lake": _____

Name of lake or river organization (if established): _____

Other affiliation, if any (e.g., town chairman, county commissioner, etc.): _____

Lake or River Organization Membership (Lake Associations and Districts) New or Renewal

Is there a change in the organization's contact person from last year: Yes No

Lake or river organization name: _____

Website, if any: _____

Approximate number of individuals represented by lake or river organization: _____

Key contact person: President/Chair Vice-President/Vice-Chair Secretary Other officer: _____

Name: _____

Permanent address: Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Email Address: _____ Ph: _____

How do you wish to receive our newsletter? Print Email Email alerts on lake issues? Yes No

Do you wish to receive additional printed copies of our newsletter to distribute? If so, how many: _____

On a separate sheet, feel free to list anyone else in your organization who should receive a copy of our newsletter directly by mail or email and/or receive email alerts.

Associate-Supporting (Business, other non-profit) New or Renewal | Business or Non-profit

Business or non-profit: _____ Contact name: _____

Address: Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____



Please make check payable to: **Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA)**
Return form with annual dues before **June 1st** to: VCLRA, PO Box 494, Eagle River, WI 54521
Or join or renew and pay online by check or credit card at: <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/>

Wakesurfing legislation update

Reported by Tom Ewing, VCLRA

Hopefully, you have followed our posts on VCLRA's News & Article Blog vclra.org/#news&articles and are aware of recent activity by the state legislature to regulate wakesurfing. VCLRA has been reporting on this issue for several years, and we have promoted and supported regulation efforts conducted by our partners [Last Wilderness Alliance](#) and [Wisconsin Lakes](#).

It is widely accepted that wakesurfing boats are very powerful and can generate energetic waves as well as significant downward thrust. As such, these boats can have greater impact on lake health and public safety compared to other watercraft if appropriate minimum standards are not incorporated in legislation regulating wakesurfing. It is thus disappointing that, as we reported in a news alert we posted on October 13, 2023, Wisconsin wakesurfing regulation was proposed with simply a 200-foot minimum distance from shore criterion on lakes greater than 50 acres by Rep. Robert Swearingen (R-Rhineland) and Sen. Mary Felzkowski (R-Irma). Moreover, the Swearingen/Felzkowski bill (now known as AB656) would prohibit communities from setting more restrictive local regulation of wakesurfing. The draft bill is here: docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/raw/proposal/2023/-3518.

Per [Wisconsin Lakes](#): *sound science sets a minimum distance of 500-700 feet from shore and depths of upwards of 30 feet to control impacts from wakesports. Wisconsin needs meaningful minimum standards with authority retained by local governments to pass ordinances stronger than those minimums. The bill also fails to address the issue that ballast tanks used in wakeboats cannot be fully drained of lake water, leading to increased risk of transferring aquatic invasive species like spiny water flea between lakes. Moreover, the AB656 bill repeats existing standards in other statutes, such as prohibiting wakesports on lakes of 50 acres or less, which is already the case for wake creation by all boats in Wisconsin.*

In our October 13 news post, we urged our followers to contact their elected officials to ensure wakesurfing legislation is not rushed through without informed stakeholder discussion, plus provided resource information for an informed response. Other organizations also carried similar messages.

Swearingen and Felzkowski heard a strong response from the lake community. In a news alert we posted on November 8th, we reported that the legislators responded by holding listening sessions for public input on November 13th at three locations: Eagle River, Minocqua and Rhineland. We urged you to attend any of these listening sessions and, again, there was a resounding response, with standing room only at each session. A VCLRA board member who attempted to attend all the sessions reported his experiences in a VCLRA news article we posted on November 17th.

Our takeaway from these sessions is that the majority of participants wanted stronger measures and were concerned about adverse impacts to lakes and public safety from wakesurfing. The AB656 bill has since been referred to the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation.


Subsequently, we reported in a post on December 7th that a new competing bill (referred to as LRB 5069) had been introduced by Sen. André Jacque (R-DePere) that would prohibit wakesurfing on lakes smaller than 1,500 acres and within 700 feet of shore for all other lakes; however, this bill has yet to be introduced. Still, it represents a positive development. The draft bill language is here: https://wisconsinlakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/23-5069_1.pdf.

According to [Wisconsin Lakes](#), a proposed substitute amendment to AB656 (an amendment that would completely replace the existing language), which has not been formally introduced as of this writing, would: prohibit wakesurfing and wakeboarding ("wakesports") within 500 feet of shore or in less than 15 feet of water, require a watercraft engaged in wakesports to be equipped with a depth finder, require development of an educational course to be made part of the state's standard boater certification program, and allow local governments to pass ordinances stricter than the standards contained in the bill. However, to enact a stricter ordinance, the local government would require an overly burdensome mandatory enforcement component of at least 1500 hours of enforcement on the lake over a two year period.

Despite issues with the substitute amendment, there is at least positive movement. Note that this amendment is still in draft form. It could look very different if and when it is introduced. No hearings are currently scheduled for any wakesports bills. However, something could be scheduled on short notice — only 24 hours notice is required by statute. You can also track the Wisconsin legislation hearing calendar at committeeschedule.legis.wisconsin.gov/.

VCLRA will also keep you informed of any developments. Be sure to subscribe to our blog at vclra.org/#news&articles (it's free) to be alerted via email when news breaks.

Finally, Vermont is close to passing a strong wakesurfing boat ordinance that may be enacted by summer. As currently proposed, the rule would prohibit wakesports on lakes, ponds, and reservoirs that do not have a minimum of 50 contiguous acres that are both 500 feet from shore on all sides and a minimum of 20 feet deep (eligibility rule). The rule limits wakesports to defined areas that are 500 feet from shore, 20 feet deep, and 200 feet wide (operating rule). Finally, the rule would require a "wakeboat" to only be used in one lake per summer unless the wakeboat is decontaminated at a certified Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) service provider (home lake rule).

Progress on Vermont's ordinance can be followed on their rule making page: <https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/lakes-ponds/lakes-and-ponds-rulemaking>. A useful overview presentation from their August 2023 public hearings is here: <https://qr.link/3F9UtQ>. 

VCLRA announces the 2023 Blue Heron Award

REPORTED BY
Susan Knight, VCLRA

The Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA) presented its Blue Heron Stewardship Award to the Vaughn family on Irving Lake this year. The presentation was made at the Six-County Lakes & Rivers Meeting on July 14, 2023 at Nicolet College and at the Ballard–Irving–White Birch Lakes Association annual meeting held on July 29, 2023.


The Blue Heron Award recognizes lake property owners who champion strong lake stewardship principles in the development and use of their waterfront property to minimize environmental impacts. VCLRA makes these annual awards to generate awareness and educate lake property owners on the importance of shoreland stewardship by showcasing excellence in lake-friendly waterfront development.



From left to right: Katie Feldman, Sue Vaughan, Ken Vaughan, Ruth Armstrong and Steve Armstrong.

Recognized properties serve as an example to other lake property owners of the varied ways lakeshore properties can be developed to minimize shoreline disruption and the importance of shoreline biodiversity to the overall health of their lake. Selection is based on scoring well on criteria covering five areas of a lake property that can impact lake health: driveway and parking areas, structures and septic areas, yard and recreation areas, shoreline area and an entire lot overview.

The Vaughn family is among several on the Ballard–Irving–White Birch chain who have previously won this award, which consists of a painted “pebble” – VCLRA’s traditional token of recognition for excellence in stewardship. Past award winners include the Spear, Millar, Sandman and Heitz families. VCLRA thanks the Ballard–Irving–White Birch Lakes Association for recognizing the extraordinary example these families are setting for others.

Lake organizations and individuals can learn more or nominate someone for the award by visiting VCLRA’s Blue Heron Award webpage: <https://vclra.org/blue-heron-program/>, or by emailing Susan Knight at seknight@wisc.edu. 

The Blue Heron Shoreland Stewardship Award

BE PART OF A GRAND TRADITION!

Do you know someone who makes a conscious effort to preserve an outstanding natural shoreline? **We want to recognize them for their effort!**

To obtain more information about the Blue Heron Shoreline Stewardship Award program, or to make a nomination using our online form or a print-and-mail form, visit <https://vclra.org/blue-heron-program/>. Susan Knight can be reached by email at seknight@wisc.edu, or by phone at 715-892-7104.



Mark your Calendar

VCLRA booth exhibit venues are marked with an asterisk(*). Some events may not have firm dates as of this publication, so check online for updates.

April 10-12, 2024: Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention, Holiday Inn Convention Center, Stevens Point. Information available on wisconsinwaterweek.org/home/lakes-and-rivers-convention/.

June 15, 2024: Lakes Fest* in Lac du Flambeau, WI. Contact Celeste Hockings at 715-588-4163 or Chockings@ldftribe.com for more information.

July 14, 2024: Northwoods Six-County Lakes & Rivers Conference/VCLRA Annual meeting*. Visit vclra.org, or contact Tom Ewing, president@vclra.org, for more information.

July 27, 2024: Forest Fest*, Trees for Tomorrow in Eagle River, WI. See treesfortomorrow.com for updates.

October 5, 2024: Cran-a-rama* in Manitowish Waters, WI. See manitowishwaters.org for more information.



Renew your membership or join VCLRA Today!

Visit our website at vclra.org and register your membership online by check or credit card. We're stronger working together! Help protect Vilas County's waters into the future.

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vclra.org

Vilas County
LAKES AND RIVERS ASSOCIATION
PO Box 494, Eagle River, WI 54521