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# vilasCounty

## LAKEs AND RIVERs ASSOCIATION

PO BOX 494 • EAGLE RIVER, WI 54521-0494

VCLRA.ORG

SUMMER 2025

## THE President's message

We've been busy with preparations for the Six-County Lakes & Rivers Meeting, and our VCLRA annual meeting that immediately follows it. **Join us for "Quakes to our Lakes" — a look at threats to our waters and how we can respond.** The event will be held on the morning of Friday, July 11<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to expert briefings on timely topics and exhibits from educational, nonprofit, and government organizations, the 2025 meeting will again feature an expert panel, moderated as usual by Eric Olson, director of UW-Extension Lakes.



It should be a wonderful learning event and provide a great opportunity for meaningful discussion about issues of common interest in the Northwoods counties, and beyond for that matter. One noteworthy difference from past Six-County Meetings is that you can register online in advance and help speed up the entry process. As always, the event is free, and everyone's welcome — so come join the conversation! There's more about the Six-County Meeting, including the agenda, on the next page.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, we feature a discussion with Jeff Meessmann for an update on issue of wake enhanced boating confronting the state. He is a director in the Last Wilderness Alliance and a founding member of the Wakesport Reform Coalition. In fact, Jeff has been a pioneer in this movement and deeply involved in helping communities develop local ordinances.

Finally, we highlight one of our VCLRA initiatives, *Northwoods Businesses for Clean Water (NBCW)*, with an article about how one of our participating businesses, *We Tie It*, has been actively involved in protecting our waters and integrating lake-friendly practices into their business operations. I'm delighted by the growing interest of businesses to get involved with protecting our amazing lakes and rivers. After all, protecting our waters not only benefits the environment, but it helps ensure the continued economic vitality of our area. That's why it is so important to have the broader community engaged with our efforts.

**Please continue to support our work by renewing, donating or becoming a member today. We're making a difference!** Hope to see you next month at Nicolet College for our Six-County event and annual meeting...

Tom Ewing, VCLRA president

# 2025 Six-County Lakes & Rivers Meeting

Friday, July 11 · 8:30am - 12:30pm CDT  
Nicolet College, 5364 College Drive Rhineland, WI 54501

Come join us at Nicolet College Theatre in the Lakeside Center for the 2025 Six-County Lakes and Rivers Meeting! This in-person event will bring together experts, enthusiasts, and community members to discuss the conservation and preservation of our precious water resources. Our theme this year will be Quakes to our Lakes - What's Shakin'? Come to learn about the threats shaking up our surface water health and the tools to use to fight those impacts. The Six County Conference is targeted at Forest, Iron, Lincoln, Langlade, Oneida and Vilas Counties - but all water lovers are welcome!

The event is still free, but this year participants can register [online](#) to save time and help us streamline the entry process.

## AGENDA

- 8:30 Refreshments/Exhibits
- 9:00 Welcome/opening remarks from moderator: Eric Olson, Director, Extension Lakes; Legislative update with Wisconsin Lakes; OCLRA presentation, Lake Stewards.
- 9:30 Herbicide treatment options
- 9:50 Issues with wake boats
- 10:10 Where to find grants
- 10:30 Learn about algae blooms
- 10:45 Break/visit exhibits
- 11:00 Panel: herbicide treatments and their alternatives
- 12:30 Individual lakes or county association meetings (Breakout rooms provided)

Northwoods Six-County Lakes & Rivers Meeting Pre-registration



## 2025 Lights Out! SAVE THE DATES

Vilas County Land & Water/Oneida County Land & Water are promoting two voluntary Lights Out weekends. Darkness is important for many Northwoods plants and animals. Anyone who enjoys the beautiful night skies is invited to participate:

June 27-29: emphasis on fireflies, nighttime pollinators, and bats.

Aug 22-24: focus on bats and stargazing, including the Perseid meteor shower. And on display in June (now!) at the Olson Memorial Library in Eagle River is a photography collection by Scott Pearson, famous for his amazing nighttime photographs of the Great Lakes area.

For more information contact Quita Sheehan at [mashee@vilascountywi.gov](mailto:mashee@vilascountywi.gov) or 715-479-3747.



See page 8 for more night sky viewing info

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REPORTED BY: Tom Ewing, VCLRA president

I recently had a chance to talk with Jeff Meessmann for an update on wake surfing issues confronting the state. He is a director at the Last Wilderness Alliance, which is a founding member of the Coalition to Protect Wisconsin's Lakes. In fact, Jeff has been a pioneer in this movement and deeply involved in helping communities develop local ordinances. He was a key figure in getting questions about wake boat regulations on the Wisconsin Conservation Congress survey for the past few years. He along with other LWA members conducted several workshops on local regulation of hazardous wakes at the 2024 VCLRA convention and at the recent 2025 Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention.

Jeff, I understand that the legislature is preoccupied with the budget process and has not made much progress towards the issue of statewide wake surfing legislation.

That's correct, Tom. Even though listening sessions were recently held in Oneida and Vilas Counties in May with Senate President Mary Felzkowski and Representative Rob Swearingen, which by the way were well-attended by citizens concerned about the negative impacts of wake surfing, Felzkowski indicated wake boat regulation wasn't the focus of the sessions.

Jeff, I understand that Felzkowski still believes that uniform statewide regulation is essential – but she now would oppose any legislation that would limit local control. That's a big deal, right?

Absolutely, Tom. As you know, we have been very successful helping towns enact ordinances, many in the Northwoods. We now have 54 local control ordinances in place regulating enhanced wakes in the state of Wisconsin. And there are at least 50 more towns interested in pursuing enhanced wake local ordinances. Many of these local ordinance are all over the State, not just in the Northwoods.

Jeff, with those large numbers, doesn't that send a big message to the wake boat industry to take lake protection seriously? I mean, the notion of pushing 200' from shore and no depth limits, that's just what we already have, and their own literature boasts about the amplified waves compared to existing watercraft. Plus there's a large body of scientific research about the negative consequences...

Exactly, Tom. The Coalition is proposing 700 feet from shore and 30


feet deep. Not only that, but we need to address the ballast tank transfer of invasive species. The boating industry has admitted they have an issue with invasive species infestation in the ballast tank, especially quagga and zebra mussels that attach and infest inside ski/wakeboard boat ballast tank systems. Also in their procedures they recommend adding antifreeze to the ballast tank over winter. We know from UW research that an average of 8 gallons of water remains trapped in the ballast tanks. In the spring, they instruct operators to discharge the antifreeze into the lake. And, by the way, Wisconsin boating rules indicate it is unlawful to place, leave, or discharge waste or waste containers into or near any Wisconsin waters, including anti-freeze used in winterizing your boat. Additionally, we are proposing that wake boat operators need to either operate the boat at a single lake and use sanitizing procedures to ensure no cross contamination if used on multiple lakes.

So, what takeaway message do you want to leave us?

Tom, I would recommend communities seriously look at local control. I think we should go full speed ahead on these. Not only does that provide lake protection and safety until our legislators finally act, but it puts pressure on the legislators – all those local controls translate to concerned voters, and now it's going state-wide. As you know, I'm glad to help with these.

Jeff, I understand you will have a booth at our six-county meeting to discuss with meeting participants how local control works and answer questions.

Yes, and we also can be reached at any time at our website: <https://lastwildernessalliance.org/wakesurfing>. We have a number of resources ready to assist with local control ordinances and educational presentations.

Thank you, Jeff. 

An overview of earlier activity by our state legislature to regulate wake surfing was reported in our summer 2024 newsletter [here](#). We also covered the Wisconsin Coalition activities in the winter 2025 newsletter [here](#). To stay informed of developments, be sure to subscribe to our News Alerts at <https://vclra.org/subscribe/>.



# Northwoods business “We Tie It” partners with NBCW for clean waters

ARTICLE BY

Lori Brown, VCLRA Board

The Northwoods is a beautiful wonderland of lakes, rivers, forest, and other treasures from nature. This offers many options for recreational activities as well as enjoyable opportunities for tranquility and peaceful reflection. The natural beauty of our lakes and rivers also are the foundation of our Northwoods economy. It is not surprising then to find many in the broad Northwoods community who are invested in promoting, preserving, and maintaining the unique features found only in this environment. In support to the health of this special place and thriving economy, the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA) expanded their mission into the advancement of the Northwoods Businesses for Clean Waters (NBCW).

Providing a platform for the Northwoods community connection, the NBCW engages Northwoods businesses to form partnerships with expert conservationists, thereby forming a bond toward a common vision of working together to protect our beautiful lakes and rivers. “Partnerships are at the heart of what we do,” said Tom Ewing, President of VCLRA. “Achieving a

sustainable, vibrant Northwoods community requires working together to preserve our precious lake and river heritage.”

Bill Sherer’s “We Tie It” Fly Shop was one of the first Northwoods Businesses to join the NBCW. Bringing the wisdom that comes from years of living in the Northwoods, Bill brings incredible knowledge of



Bill Sherer, “We Tie It” owner and NBCW partner

the current waterways of lakes, rivers, and streams. In addition, he serves as a fountain of historical information and background as to what has formed today’s natural waters environment.

Always aware and thinking about his surroundings, Bill suggests that everyone using the water of our lakes, rivers and streams in any way to fully enjoy it but engage as if they “live at the top of the hill.” “Remember that everything you do or put into the water will flow via the waterways, such as the Wisconsin River and Manitowish River, into major populations. For this reason, everyone should take care to not send anything downhill,” said Bill. He noted that this simple point is important to put into practice for both individuals and businesses alike.

Bill shared examples of his own routine business practices. He puts a great deal of thought into the quality of the fly fishing supplies and equipment he carries in his shop. He further encourages people to do their homework as to what they buy




Photos Lori Brown

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and use as to how these might affect the water ecosystem such as waders and dry suits containing PFAS or checking the lead content in fishing lures and sinkers that are not safe for fish or waterfowl as like loons. One added idea he offered was to check out the options for recycling. For example, not many people know that Nylon that is used for fishing line can be recycled.

As an experienced fly fisherman and guide, it is natural that Bill spends a lot of time in and around the water. Of utmost concern to him is how we protect our shoreline from erosion and support the habitat of fish and wildlife. This includes matter-of-fact recommendations around the cutting of trees that have fallen in the water or the support of thriving trees at the water's edge. Very seriously, he speaks to concerns about being vigilant in the spread of invasive species. To this end, he guides others to be attentive to wader and boot washing as well as watercraft decontamination and to boldly act in helping others to do the same.


As proud owner of the oldest, single-owned fly-fishing shop in the state, Bill Sherer has earned the title of "Godfather." Offering mentoring advice to those who love the waterways like he does, he emphasizes the need to "keep talking" to anyone and everyone about what is important in protecting and promoting clean water. Bill concluded that "It's better when we take action together to secure the natural beauty and recreational value of our lakes, rivers and streams. We will all benefit and be able to enjoy it into the future." 

## Cathy Higley honored with an *Invasive Species Action Award*

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Invasive Species council presented winners of the 2025 Invasive Species Action Awards, during Invasive Species Action Month.

The governor-appointed Council advises the DNR and the state legislature on invasive species issues.

The council awards individuals and groups in professional and volunteer settings that positively impact the fight against the spread of invasive species. The winners represent all regions of Wisconsin. They used many different approaches in their efforts, but each winner is united in putting in long hours in the ongoing work against the spread of invasive species.

We wish to congratulate Cathy Higley as one of the award winners. Cathy was cited for assisting over 100 lake associations and for her leadership role and technical contributions in the Northwoods Businesses for Clean Waters initiative. Congratulations Cathy for this well-deserved recognition, and thank you for all your contributions to VCLRA! 



Recipients of the 2025 Invasive Species Action Awards stand with their plaques during the recognition ceremony held at the Wisconsin Cranberry Research Station on June 4.

*Photo credit: Wisconsin DNR*

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Contact: Tara Bergeson, DNR Invasive Species Team Leader  
Tara.Bergeson@wisconsin.gov or 715-448-0974



## LET'S PROTECT OUR LAKES AND WATERWAYS

### Join VCLRA *now* — we're stronger 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 to 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 many benefits 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
- Biannual newsletters 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 and partners are key stakeholders in our mission. Support us! Become a member and help protect our beautiful lakes and rivers. If you are already a member, please renew your membership today.

*Susan*

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.  
We encourage you to join or renew online at: <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/> — it saves us work!

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

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

### COMPLETE ONE BELOW

**Individual or Family Membership** ☐ New or ☐ Renewal

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address: No. & Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

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.): \_\_\_\_\_

You will automatically be subscribed to electronic news alerts and newsletters, which can be canceled by clicking the unsubscribe link. Please forward this link <https://vclra.org/subscribe> to others in your family you wish to also receive electronic email alerts and newsletters.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Lake or river organization name: \_\_\_\_\_ Website, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Key point-of-contact: ☐ President/Chair ☐ Vice-President/Vice-Chair ☐ Secretary Other officer: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address: No. & Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

President (if not POC): Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address: No. & Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

The above individuals will automatically be subscribed to electronic news alerts and newsletters, which can be canceled by clicking the unsubscribe link. Please forward this link <https://vclra.org/subscribe> to others in your organization to also receive electronic communications.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Business or non-profit name: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address: No. & Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Please forward this link <https://vclra.org/subscribe> to others in your organization you wish to receive electronic email alerts and newsletters. The point-of-contact listed above will automatically receive our electronic communications, which can be canceled by clicking the unsubscribe link.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to: **Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA)**. If you process your membership on line but want to pay by check instead of credit card, include a copy of your emailed membership acknowledgement with your check, or write the name of your organization on the check memo field, and mail to: **VCLRA, PO Box 494, Eagle River, WI 54521**. We encourage you to join or renew online at: <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/>, or return this form with annual dues to our address above.

# Celebrate our night skies

ARTICLE BY

Keith Montgomery, VCLRA board

Photo Tom Ewing

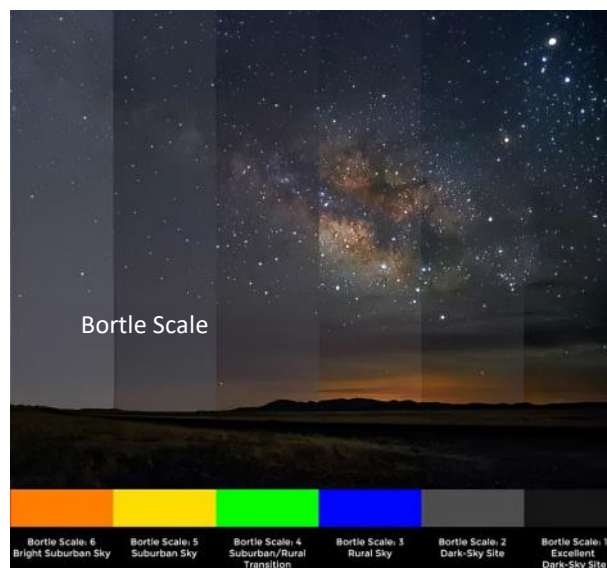
We all know just how wonderful the night sky is in northern Wisconsin. It's something to be appreciated and celebrated. I know I've tried and failed to see the Northern Lights and the Perseids in Wausau and then forget about ever seeing the Milky Way or something as special as a comet -- it just can't be done because of light pollution. Yet, I can sit at the end of my dock on Black Oak Lake and look up and enjoy the wonders of the night sky. It's amazing, and something not to be taken for granted in my life.

At night, the sky in parts of Vilas County — but not all of Vilas County — is dark compared to most of Wisconsin and the Midwest. Black Oak Lake is Class 3 on the "Bortle Dark-Sky Scale" — a rural sky. The Bortle scale (see figure) was devised in 2001 and is a nine-level numeric scale that measures the night sky's brightness at a particular location. The scale quantifies the observability of celestial objects against the interference caused by light pollution.<sup>1,2</sup>

There are darker skies in the north, such as in the heart of the Chequamegon and Nicolet forests. Class 1 can be experienced further north in the UP. In our neighborhood, Land O' Lakes and Watersmeet create an "afterglow" that adds light to our skies,

and then there are our residences on Black Oak Lake as well as Forest and Big Portage Lakes. But our night sky is still pretty darned good!

For us, clouds appear faintly illuminated in the brightest parts of the sky, especially to the east, but the Milky Way still appears complex, although not as complex or as structured as it appears in darker-sky areas. We also miss some stars of lower magnitude. But we're privileged to see what we do: Only 2 out of 10 people on Earth can see



the Milky Way at all.

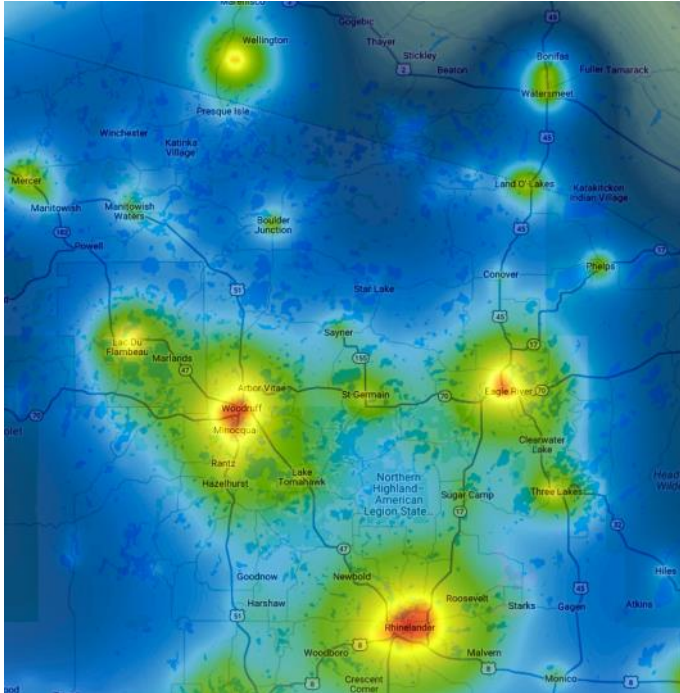
How can we help maintain or improve our night skies?

- ★ Consider if outdoor lighting is truly needed, or if reflective markers, for example, could eliminate the need.

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- ★ Target the light beam by shielding it so that it points downward and does not spill the light upwards or further afield (creating glare across the lake).
- ★ Use the lowest light level necessary – "warm white" rather than "bright white" or "daylight", and use the lowest wattage needed for the task.
- ★ Use lights only when needed for outdoor activity – use motion detectors or turn lights off after dark if you are indoors and deactivate lights that turn on automatically at dusk and remain on all night.

What benefits would we create by doing this?

- ★ Better visibility of celestial objects – stars, constellations, the Milky Way, meteors, comets, and the Northern Lights (like we saw last September).

- ★ Aesthetic and spiritual benefits to us – the wonder in contemplation of the expanse and depth of the night sky.
- ★ Ecological benefits to insects, birds, and bats -- and better sleep for us!
- ★ Energy and carbon dioxide savings -- and money savings.

It's all something to consider. Be courteous — excessive area lights and floodlights carry a long way and destroy the natural nighttime look we all appreciate. 

#### References:

- 1) Saving Dark Skies, Marybeth Kiczenski, The International Dark-Sky Association, <https://www.oclw.org/uploads/3/1/6/2/31627513/lightpollution-presentation.pdf>
- 2) Light Pollution Map created by Jurij Stare. Displays light radiance from NOAA and SQM data. <https://www.lightpollutionmap.info/>



## 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](mailto: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.

**June 29, 2025: St. Germain Independence Day Celebration\***, 10—2:30. Held at St Germain Community Park. Visit <https://vilaswi.com/event/st-germain-independence-day-celebration/> or call 715.-477-2205 for more information.

**July 11, 2025: Northwoods Six-County Lakes & Rivers Conference & VCLRA Annual meeting\***. Visit [vclra.org](http://vclra.org), or contact Tom Ewing, [president@vclra.org](mailto:president@vclra.org), for more information.

**September 20, 2025: Harvest Festival\*** in Manitowish Waters, WI. See [manitowishwaters.org/harvest-festival/](http://manitowishwaters.org/harvest-festival/) for more information.

### We're stronger together!

Support us with your membership. Join or renew at <https://vclra.org/join-or-renew/> today using credit card or check. Let's partner to protect our beautiful lakes and rivers.



VCLRA Annual Meeting, July 11<sup>th</sup>

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Six-County Lakes & Rivers Meeting in July,  
wake boats, membership renewal and more!

[vclra.org](http://vclra.org)

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**Lake County Journal**

**VilasCounty**  
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