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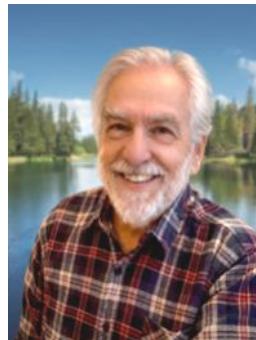
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THE President's message

Vilas County's lakes and rivers are at the heart of why many of us choose to live, work, and play here. Our beautiful waters shape our communities, our economy and our way of life.

At the same time, many of us are noticing changes. Hotter summers are warming our lakes. Ice forms later and melts earlier than it used to. Heavy rainstorms are becoming



more common, washing nutrients and sediment into our lakes. These shifts are closely linked to a changing climate, and they affect everything from water clarity and algae blooms to fish habitat and invasive species.

The good news is that Vilas County lake communities are not starting from scratch. Across the county, volunteers and lake associations are already doing important work—monitoring water clarity, watching for algae blooms, tracking aquatic invasive species, and protecting shorelines. Our local monitoring gives us something powerful: real data from our own lakes that helps us spot changes early and make smart decisions.

MANY OF THE ACTIONS THAT PROTECT OUR LAKES TODAY ARE ALSO THE BEST WAYS TO HELP THEM ADAPT TO FUTURE CONDITIONS.

Natural shorelines help absorb runoff during heavy rains. Reducing nutrients from lawns, driveways, and septic systems helps prevent algae blooms in warmer water. Clean Boats, Clean Waters efforts are more important than ever as longer boating seasons increase the risk of invasive species. Planning with future conditions in mind helps ensure our lake management efforts remain effective for years to come.

This is where the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association plays a vital role. VCLRA connects lake associations, volunteers, scientists, educators, and community partners across Vilas County.

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We support citizen lake monitoring, share science in clear and practical ways, help new lake property owners understand lake-friendly practices, and work with local businesses through the Northwoods Businesses for Clean Waters initiative to protect water quality throughout the region.

Your support makes this work possible. Whether you volunteer, share information with neighbors, support clean water businesses, or contribute financially, you are helping strengthen lakes not just on your shoreline—but across Vilas County.

Thank you for being part of this community and for caring about the future of our lakes and rivers. Together, we can protect what makes this place special—now and for generations to come.



Tom Ewing
VCLRA president

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.

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T. Ewing

Caring for Lakes in a Warmer and Wetter Wisconsin

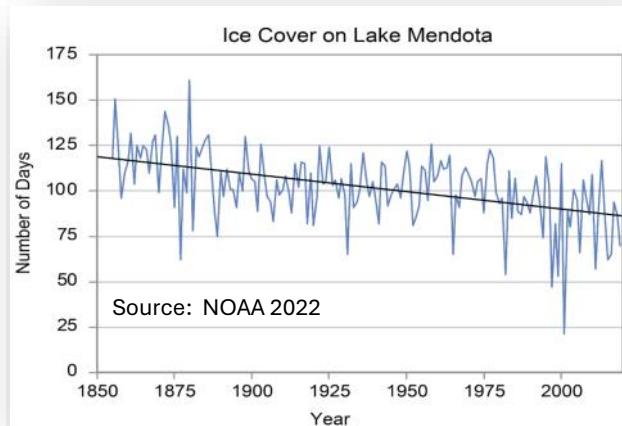
By Katie Hein, UW-Madison Trout Lake Station

Have you noticed the stark contrasts in our weather lately? We had several feet of snow by Thanksgiving in Vilas County this winter, but just two years ago, there was not enough snow to ski or snowmobile. In 2024, Wisconsin experienced the wettest March-August ever followed by record drought in late October. Extreme rainfall events are also becoming more common, with more storms dropping > 2 inches of rain. This phenomenon of extreme weather patterns and high variability is called global weirding, and it is an outcome of a warmer climate. Overall, Wisconsin has become warmer and wetter, with the 2000's and 2010's the warmest decades on record and the 2010's the wettest decade on record. Wisconsin will be warmer and wetter in the future, and the 2020's are already surpassing the previous decades.

What do these changes mean for lakes in Vilas County and what can we do as lake stewards to adapt? A key message is to recognize that the past is no longer a good guide for what to expect in the future. We are already adapting to change. Boulder Junction created The Glide, an ice-skating ribbon through the forest, to attract tourists even in winters without snow. This is an example of an adaptation strategy that recognizes and accepts change. Let's look at a few adaptation strategies for lakes that accept change.

Lake Mendota has lost about one month of ice cover over the past 150 years, and many lakes across the northern

hemisphere have shorter periods of ice cover. Winter drownings are most prevalent in late winter when ice begins to degrade and air temperatures are 23°F to 32°F. Most people know not to go on the ice when there are large patches of open water but may be fooled late in the season when air temperatures rise to near freezing. To adapt to shorter and less stable ice cover, communities can promote ice safety education and equipment like ice picks and float suits.



The amount of rainfall largely determines lake water levels, and lakes that are not connected to a stream fluctuate most dramatically between wet and dry years. High lake levels might get even higher as Wisconsin gets wetter, but we cannot rule out droughts and lower lows.

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Extreme rain events threaten culverts that were originally designed for smaller storms. Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Department inventoried culverts and can now prioritize which culverts to replace to enhance fish passage and reduce erosion. The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) recently completed a new manual for designing culverts prepared for larger future storms and floods. Upsizing old culverts accepts the reality of larger-scale storms. This adaptation strategy not only prevents road damage but also protects water quality by stopping massive erosion when roads wash out.

Resizing culverts alone will not reduce the threat of warmer and wetter conditions on lake water quality. Large rain events wash nutrients like phosphorus into streams and lakes, fueling algal blooms. Blue green algae thrive in warm, nutrient-rich water and can produce toxins dangerous to pets and humans. Educating the public about the health threats of blue green algae blooms and posting warnings at public beaches are examples of accepting change. Adaptation strategies that *resist* degraded water quality work to reduce runoff entering lakes by protecting and restoring wetlands, promoting native plants along lake shorelines, and installing rock infiltration pits or rain gardens.

Many examples of adaptation strategies that resist change aim to preserve the species living in our lakes. Longer growing seasons and warmer water temperatures could make lakes in Vilas County suitable for new invasive species that were unable to survive here in the past. Efforts to clean boats at boat launches help prevent invasive species from entering new lakes. Culturally important native beings like walleye, cisco, and wild rice are threatened by warmer temperatures. Habitat restoration and protection, fishing regulations, and/or stocking may be employed to resist losing valuable fisheries. For example, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is prioritizing land conservation purchases around lakes that have “outstanding” cisco populations. They can’t stop the lake from warming up, but they can protect cisco by preserving water quality.

Finally, some adaptation strategies take the opportunity



to *direct* change and reach new goals. While most adaptation strategies employed in Wisconsin to date focus on resisting change, we may benefit from considering strategies where we take advantage of and direct change. An example from fisheries management may be to encourage anglers to pivot toward fishing more often for warm-tolerant fish (think black crappie, bluegill, and bass) as these fisheries will likely thrive in a warmer Wisconsin. Similarly, we may incorporate native plants from a warmer USDA plant hardiness zone when designing habitat restorations. The 2023 update to the USDA plant hardiness zone map now classifies eastern Vilas County as zone 4b.

Another set of adaptation strategies that could direct change for many Wisconsin reservoirs include upgrading or removing old dams and updating water level orders. Changes in the seasonality and quantity of precipitation could make achieving some water level orders difficult. For example, winter

drawdowns rely on drier conditions in late fall and enough snowmelt and rainfall in spring to refill the reservoirs for summer activities. Conversely, large rain events could flood the surrounding landscape if water levels are kept too high in summer. Water level management is a controversial issue, and the sooner communities begin discussing how to best manage dams under a warmer and wetter climate, the better. Changing how dams are managed can result in transformational change.

Do the changes described above match or clash with your experiences? What are your hopes for the future of our Vilas County lakes and how can you resist, accept or direct change? For more information on how climate is changing and impacting Wisconsin, visit the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts website at wicci.wisc.edu and watch for a new WICCI report in spring 2026. 

Katie Hein is a research scientist at UW-Madison Trout Lake Station and co-chair of the Water Working Group for the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. She loves Wisconsin lakes so much that she built her career studying them, obtaining her master's degree in limnology and PhD in aquatic ecology.

Connecting Healthy Soil to Clean Water with Vilas County Youth

By Cathy Higley, Vilas County Land & Water Conservation



Vilas County Land & Water Conservation runs an annual Youth Conservation Poster & Speaking Contest. This year, the theme was *Soil. Where it all Begins*. So what does this have to do with VCLRA's mission to protect lakes and streams?

Actually, a lot! Charles E. Kellogg worked for the US Department of Agriculture as the chief soil scientist for the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils from 1937-1971. He is quoted, "Essentially, all life depends upon the soil... There can be no life without soil, and no soil without life; they have evolved together." Put as succinctly as I can, it is primarily plants roots in soil that create habitat for the fungi, invertebrates, and microorganisms that drive the nutrients cycling we depend on for our life as we know it. Imagine a world where nothing dead decayed. In words of the students I worked with this fall, "Ewwww...!!!"

Soil provides a myriad of other services that we rarely think about. Soil offers a way to grow food; provides the foundation for our roads and buildings (the leaning tower of Pisa was built on unstable soil); soaks up excess rain (flood prevention), slowly releases it during drier times; and sequesters carbon. Most Vilas County residents and visitors ought to be thankful that soil cleans certain elements from waste water - most homes in the county rely on a septic system and are not connected to municipal waste water treatment plants.

Soil can become degraded for many reasons, and most of them are due to land use. Having too many surfaces where stormwater cannot soak into the ground (such as roofs, decks, and driveways) aggregates rain drops and can erode the surrounding soil – how much depends on other factors like soil type, slope, and vegetation cover. While soil erosion certainly is a natural process and might sound benign or even mundane, according to the National Science Foundation the Midwest is losing soil at a rate that is 10-1,000 times greater than soil can

form. In addition, soil naturally contains phosphorus. Soil erosion from stormwater finds its way downhill, sometimes to surface water. When in water, the phosphorus in the eroded soil can fuel excessive aquatic plant growth and algae blooms.

Soil with natural vegetation soaks up more water than a typical lawn. This is for several reasons. The taller stems of natural vegetation are better able to physically slow down water and promote infiltration. Native plants generally have root systems that are fibrous and a few feet deep vs. the typical lawn grasses that have roots about two inches deep. The deep native plant roots host a physically deeper habitat that underground life is able to inhabit. These organisms, such as beetles, small mammals, ants, ground bees, etc. create burrows where water can more easily enter the soil. Putting heavy items or machines on soil such as tractors, trucks, or lawn mowers compacts soil and makes these burrows in the soil smaller - less able to take on water (or air). Less water infiltration also leads to more erosion. Lawns, impervious surfaces, and compacted soil near a shoreline only become more direct in impacting water quality due to phosphorus inputs from eroding soil.

Most of us did not learn these soil concepts in college or high school. Or if we did it was often more of a tangential subject. Yet many of us own or rent homes, care for a little bit (or a lot) of land, and live in or visit riparian properties. How do we inform local homeowners about their role in protecting their soil, and hence protecting the waters of Vilas County?

Thanks to the 45 local K-6th grade students who entered the Vilas County Youth Conservation Poster Contest, these topics are getting some public exposure. The students came up with various ways to communicate the importance of healthy soil through art, but they spent a lot of time learning about soil first. As a mom of three and a former naturalist, I am a believer in engaging gross motor movement and as many of the five senses as possible into learning – concepts just seem to stick better.

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First place winners in the 2025 Vilas County Youth Conservation Poster Contest were from left to right, Ellie Tomaszewski, Zach Tomaszewski, and Delaney Darton.

Some students used soil augers to find different soil types; others dug through the first couple feet of soil to look for organisms (they noticed how soil smells too!); and some did an exercise to find out how dependent they personally are on soil for clean water, food, clothes, and heat. Afterwards they spent up 3 weeks creating their artwork, and the ones that place will get prizes from various sponsors including from VCLRA.

My hope is that this will offer a lifetime of appreciating the intricacies, impacts, and importance of healthy soil. With any luck these students will teach others in the community how to promote soil health on their properties. The posters were on display at the Olson Memorial Library through mid-January 2026. 

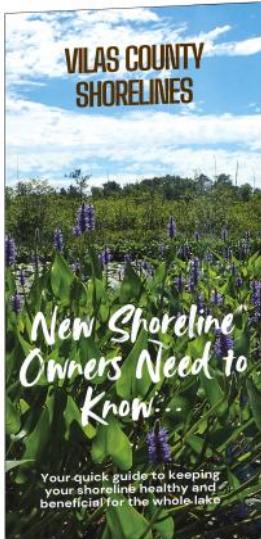
Reaching New Shoreline Owners

By Cathy Higley, Vilas County Land & Water Conservation

Sometime the new lakefront owners who cut down all their shoreline vegetation do so with good intentions in mind. They think they should be doing it - that it would be expected of others, not knowing that removing their shoreline buffer ultimately hurts the water quality, fish, and wildlife. Most lake organizations have programs to reach out to new owners on lakes with intentions of welcoming their neighbors and offering guidance on what can or can't; and should or shouldn't be done on their shorelines to promote water quality, fish, and wildlife.

Vilas County and VCLRA wanted to take yet another step to soften these encounters for lake organizations meeting their new neighbors for the first time.

During winter 2025, Vilas County Land & Water, Vilas County Mapping, Vilas County Zoning, and Vilas County Lakes & Rivers Association undertook an effort to create and mail a brochure to landowners who purchased shoreline property within the last year. The goal of this was to let new shoreline owners know that there are best practices, regulations, and permitting in place concerning their shorelines. The mailing included the brochure [New Shoreline Owners Need to Know](#), the [Vilas County Shoreline Zoning brochure](#), and an offer for a year of free membership to VCLRA and Wisconsin Lakes.



We found that from February 2024-January 2025, there were 1,009 unique new property owners of shorelines on named lakes in Vilas County! There are 20,015 total parcels on named lakes in the county, representing that **5% of shoreline parcels had changed ownership in one year!** There were 261 lakes with new property owners, most having 3 or less new owners. The lakes with the most numerous new shoreline owners were:

- Little St. Germain Lake (46)
- Fence Lake (28)
- North Twin Lake (26)
- Big St. Germain Lake (21)

Vilas County Land & Water encourages lake organizations to also use these brochure with their new (and old!) neighbors. Seeing them twice or more may help reinforce the message.

Vilas County staff and VCLRA plan to review the New Shoreline Owners Need to Know brochure this winter for some minor changes and another mailing targeted for late April. If your organization would like some brochures after the spring re-printing, please let Cathy Higley of Vilas County Land & Water Conservation know at cahigl@vilascountywi.gov or 715-479-3783 before March 1st. 

Cathy is the County Lakes Specialist and works with lake organizations to combat Aquatic Invasive Species, in-lake and lake shoreline data collection and stream monitoring. She also is in charge of the Vilas County Land & Water Youth Education Program and runs the Land & Water Speaking and Poster contests.



Photo courtesy Mike Meyer

Wisconsin's Green Fire Offers Northern Lakes Toolbox Workshops in 2025

By Mike Meyer, Wisconsin's Green Fire Senior Scientist

Managing Wisconsin lakes is challenging due to shoreland development, aquatic invasive species, and recreational impacts that threaten lake habitats and water quality. Unlike private land, lakes in Wisconsin are public trust resources, so management decisions involve many stakeholders: lake districts, associations, property owners, municipalities, counties, tribal governments, the Wisconsin DNR, and the USEPA. Lake owners and associations often need assistance evaluating risks and finding resources for effective lake management practices.

Wisconsin's Green Fire, in collaboration with Nova Ecological Services, created a curriculum and organized the Northern Lakes Toolbox workshop series which were offered in 2023 and 2025. These workshops aimed to equip lake stakeholders with practical skills for collecting and analyzing data about their specific lakes, enabling informed planning and management decisions. Management action plans were then developed for participating lake stakeholders.

The Fall 2025 workshops had strong attendance, drawing 18 participants from 17 different lake districts and associations across Vilas, Oneida, Iron, and Langlade counties. The sessions took place at the University of Wisconsin Kemp Natural Resource Center in Woodruff, Wisconsin.

Workshop objectives are to: 1) understand key factors in lake management, 2) access online data about your lake's ecology, 3) interpret data to assess water quality risks, and 4) prioritize planning for optimal lake protection. The workshops include a short course on lake ecology, hands-on use of WDNR online lake data, data gap analysis, and development of prioritized protection and restoration plans. Afterward, participants receive personalized lake reports with data analysis and recommended action plans.

Instructors included: Dr. Mike Meyer, Senior Scientist at Wisconsin's Green Fire, with 35 years of research experience on northern Wisconsin lakes for the Wisconsin DNR and private consulting, Mr. Jim Kreitlow, with 35 years experience in fisheries and water resources management for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Wisconsin DNR in Rhinelander, and Mr. Pat Goggin, who has spent 25+ years in water conservation and education as a botanist, lakes specialist and teacher on topics including shoreline restoration and lake association coaching in northern Wisconsin.

Funding for the development and implementation of the workshops was provided by the Arthur L. and Elaine V.

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Johnson Foundation, which supported the creation of workshop content; Wisconsin DNR Surface Water Grants – Lake Education, which funded the Vilas and Oneida County workshops in 2023 and 2025; and the Vilas County and Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Associations, which supplied matching funds for those years. Additionally, Wisconsin's Green Fire contributed in-kind support through staff and resources for both the development and delivery of the workshops. 

Mike joined WGF as Senior Scientist in 2022. Previously, he was a Research Scientist at WDNR until retiring in 2015. He performed research in wildlife toxicology and also oversaw projects on lakeshore protection and restoration, climate change impacts on wildlife, and common loon conservation. Mike has a PhD in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Wisconsin (1989).

Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association Presents the 2025 Blue Heron Awards

Reported by Susan Knight, VCLRA

The Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA) is pleased to present a Blue Heron Stewardship Award to two families this year, the Ciske Family on Broken Bow Lake and The Gruber Family on Irving Lake. 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.



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.

In 2025, VCLRA awarded our prestigious Blue Heron Award for Shoreline Stewardship to two properties. Brian and Jean

Ciske on Broken Bow Lake (left photo above) and Fred and Stephanie Gruber on Irving Lake (right photo above) have extraordinary properties demonstrating exceptional stewardship on their lakes. The Ciske home is set far back from the lake, with a magnificent bog mat full of pitcher plants and other bog vegetation between their house and the lake. Their lake shore is completely natural, with just a small platform for launching their small boat and kayak. The Grubers have a beautiful wetland, full of wild calla and sedges, stretching from their house to the lake. The shoreline is natural and wild and a great place for seeing wildlife, including swans. VCLRA thanks the Grubers and Cisks for their careful stewardship and we hope they are an example to their neighbors of responsible lakefront property ownership.

Lake organizations and individuals can learn more or nominate someone for the award by visiting the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association website (VCLRA.org) and selecting the Initiatives & Resources menu tab. 



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? \$ _____

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 _____

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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: _____

North Lakeland Discovery Center

By Abby Vogt, NLDC Woods and Water Director

Located in Manitowish Waters, North Lakeland Discovery Center (NLDC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to enrich lives and inspire an ethic of care for Wisconsin's Northwoods, through facilitation of connections among people, nature, and community.

The NLDC provides lifelong learning for residents and visitors alike, including environmental education programs, monitoring and research projects, drop-in activities and trails. NLDC opened its new Discovery Hall in 2023, which includes a nature center, welcome center, and two classrooms that provides the ability for increased learning for people of all ages. Children and adults are able to participate in educational programs, workshops, and events centered around the natural world around



us. We welcome you to visit our nature center, attend a program, and explore our campus and trails.

Along with all the wonderful programs we offer, NLDC is also home to the Woods and Water Program. Our



Students learn about beavers in the Discovery Hall from NLDC naturalist Jenna Richardson.

team of conservation specialists and emerging professionals are dedicated to protecting healthy lakes and preserving the Northwoods. Through hands-on work in conservation practices like invasive species prevention, shoreline restoration, and community outreach, we promote best stewardship practices and an ethic of care for our natural resources.

Each field season, NLDC hires young professionals as part of our professional development program to be immersed in the field of natural resources. These individuals learn to identify aquatic plants, survey lakes, remove invasive species, and promote healthy ecosystems during their time at NLDC. Throughout the field season, the Woods and Water staff survey and map area lakes for invasive species including curly-leaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife, yellow iris and more. Following the surveys, we spend countless hours

managing these plants through hand-pulling, digging, clipping, and releasing biocontrol beetles. Throughout the later summer months, staff conduct point intercept surveys on area lakes to collect data on the types of aquatic plants and their population sizes and densities. We often work with landowners to protect healthy lakes by restoring shorelines with native plantings, reducing runoff, and creating rain gardens on their properties.

One of the most important parts of our work is working with individuals and organizations to educate about healthy lakes and healthy ecosystems. We host and attend presentations and workshops to educate community members about important lake topics in our area. These are often discussions about invasive species, healthy lakes practices, algae, and the impacts that we can have on our lakes. We also work with a



NLDC Education Director and naturalist Licia Kuckkahn Johnson leads a group in the field examining a stump.

variety of partners, including Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (VCLRA), to educate about invasive species and healthy lakes practices. NLDC has had a long-standing relationship with VCLRA, with a position on the board, and working on VCLRA's Northwoods

Businesses for Clean Waters (NBCW) initiative. Multiple businesses within the Manitowish Waters area are a part of the NBCW initiative and we look forward to reaching more. We are excited to continue this initiative and work on other initiatives in the future to benefit Vilas County.

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The NLDC Woods and Water provides services for lake surveying, AIS removal, healthy lakes projects, shoreline projects, native plantings, and educational presentations and workshops. If you are interested in our work, visit Discoverycenter.net or call us at 715-543-2085. 

Abby graduated from the University of Montana in 2022 with degrees in Environmental Studies and Sustainability, Science and Practice. She worked as a Seasonal Lake Technician for the Discovery Center in 2022, then spent two and a half years coordinating the Timberland Invasives Partnership, focusing on terrestrial invasive species in Northeast Wisconsin. Passionate about invasive species and native plants, Abby enjoys hiking, kayaking, snowboarding, and pressing plants. She is excited to return to the Woods and Water program and looks forward to expanding the program and helping property owners with restoration. We are also pleased to have Abby as a member of the VCLRA board.

Pro-Wakesport Bill is Introduced

As we go to press, a new *pro-wakesport/pro-industry bill for regulating wakesports in Wisconsin* has been introduced: Wisconsin's Assembly Bill 1033 (AB 1033).

A public hearing on AB 1033 was held on February 11th and the turnout was large, with roughly 87% of speakers opposing the bill and citing property damage, injuries, and ecological harm. Despite this, the committee approved the bill 7–3 along party lines, potentially advancing it to the full Assembly.

Supporters of the bill—including industry representatives such as the Water Sports Industry Association and boat dealers—argue that statewide standards are needed to avoid inconsistent local rules and to protect the boating economy. Lead sponsor Rob Brooks stated the bill aims to create uniform regulations and establish enforceable shoreline setbacks.

However, the bill remains fundamentally flawed even after a last-minute amendment expanding the shoreline setback from 200 to 300 feet. The main concerns are:

- The bill may effectively preempt local control, allowing industry groups to challenge existing or future local ordinances in court. Towns and officials could face costly litigation without clear legal protection.
- The setback distance is still considered insufficient compared with science-based proposals of 500–700 feet.
- The bill contains no minimum depth requirement, despite scientific studies suggesting wake-surfing should occur only in deeper water to avoid lake-bed damage.

The bill prioritizes industry interests over lake health, local authority, and community safety. Residents are urged to contact their legislators quickly to voice their concerns.

HOW TO CONTACT THE HEARING COMMITTEE

Chair, Reps. Rob Swearingen (R) Assembly District 34 / rep.swearingen@legis.wisconsin.gov (Northeast)
Vice Chair, Chanz Green (R) Assembly District 74 / rep.green@legis.wisconsin.gov (North)
Rob Summerfield (R) Assembly District 68 / rep.summerfield@legis.wisconsin.gov (Northwest)
Clint Moses (R) Assembly District 92 / rep.moses@legis.wisconsin.gov (West)
Robert Wittke (R) Assembly District 63 / rep.wittke@legis.wisconsin.gov (East near Racine)
John Spiros (R) Assembly District 86 / rep.spiros@legis.wisconsin.gov (Central near Wausau)
Jim Piwowarczyk (R) Assembly District 98 / rep.piwowarczyk@legis.wisconsin.gov (Milwaukee suburbs)
Christine Sinicki (D) Assembly District 20 / rep.sinicki@legis.wisconsin.gov (Milwaukee)
Karen Kirsch (D) Assembly District 7 / rep.kirsch@legis.wisconsin.gov (Milwaukee, western)

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 15-17, 2026: 2026 Wisconsin Lakes & Rivers Conference, Stevens Point. Visit wisconsinwaterweek.org/home/lakes-and-rivers-convention/ for information.

April 24th, 2026: North Lakeland Woods & Water Conference* in Manitowish Waters. Visit discoverycenter.net/special-events for information. Registration open February 1st.

June 6, 2026: Lakes Fest* in Lac du Flambeau, WI. Contact Melinda Walker at 715-588-4213 or melinda.walker@ldftribe.com for more information.

June 28, 2026: St. Germain Independence Day Celebration*, in St. Germain. Contact Lois Ruediger at 715-542-2881, or email businessconnection155@gmail.com for more information.

July timeframe: Northwoods Six-County Lakes & Rivers Conference*. Visit vclra.org, or contact Tom Ewing, president@vclra.org, for more information.

July 25, 2026: Forest Fest* in Eagle River. Visit www.treesfortomorrow.com for details.

October timeframe: Annual Cran-A-Rama* in Manitowish Waters, WI. For more information, visit www.ManitowishWaters.org, or call the Manitowish Waters Chamber of Commerce at 714-543-8488.



Remember to renew your membership!

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Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association

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