

TOP 10 LAKE PRACTICES

Protect your Waterfront Investment

Use these simple shoreland stewardship practices

1. Do not use fertilizer; if you must use zero phosphorus fertilizer
2. Properly dispose of household hazardous wastes
3. Minimize erosion by diverting runoff
4. Inspect and maintain your septic system regularly
5. Reduce impervious surfaces on your property, like rooftops and driveways, and build away from the shore
6. Plant native trees and shrubs and protect your wooded areas
7. Direct downspouts onto your lawn/landscape or into an infiltration area – not onto hard surfaces
8. Install a rain barrel
9. Build a rain garden
10. Protect or restore your shoreland buffer
11. Watch for aquatic and terrestrial invasive species
12. Leave fallen trees to provide habitat for fish and wildlife

Source: *Protecting your Waterfront Investment*, by Lynn Markham and Kate Demorest, Center for Land Use Education, UW-Extension

Firewise Tip

Now that you live in the northwoods, these tips will help reduce the risk of losing your home to wildfire:

- Keep propane tanks 10 feet clear of vegetation
- A 3-to-5-foot “fuel free zone” around your foundation keeps flames away from siding
- Reduce combustible materials near your home by chipping branches and small trees
- Make sure your driveway is at least 12’ wide with a vertical clearance of 14’ for fire department access
- Keep your rain gutters free of flammable leaves and pine needles and other debris
- Keep all firewood at least 30 feet from all structures
- Minimize evergreens within 30 feet of buildings

Source: *Firewise Landscaping – A Guide to Protecting Your Home from Wildfire*, DNR PUB-FR-417-2008, UW-Extension

Boater Transport Laws

INSPECT your boat, trailer and equipment

REMOVE any attached aquatic plants and animals before launching, after loading and before transporting on public roadways

DRAIN water from boats, motors and equipment

NEVER MOVE live fish from one lake to another; left over live bait can be moved to another lake only if no new water from a previously fished lake was added

DISPOSE of unwanted bait in the trash

BUY MINNOWS from Wisconsin dealers

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Practice Safe Ice

“No Ice is Safe Ice.” The majority of Vilas County lakes are seepage lakes fed by springs. As with rivers and streams, running water is rarely visible under the ice – THIN ICE! If there is snow cover on the ice, look for depressions or darker areas of snow and avoid these areas. Many sportsmen carry hand-held ice picks when crossing lake ice. These can be as simple as two 6” sections of closet pole with a nail/screw in one end – they are very helpful when trying to claw your way out of a hole in the ice. The Wisconsin DNR has established minimum limits for new, clear ice under the best of conditions (no snow cover, etc.):

- 2” Stay Off!
- 4” Ice fishing on foot
- 5” Snowmobile/ATV
- 12” Small car
- 15” Medium truck

No Lead Tackle

Lead fishing tackle kills loons, eagles, swans and other aquatic wildlife dependent on Wisconsin’s lakes, rivers and streams each year. All it takes is one lead sinker to kill a loon. Choose a non-toxic equivalent – it only costs a few cents more and saves lives. Dispose of old lead sinkers and jigs properly at your local hazardous waste collection site. Instill strong conservation ethics in your kids by outfitting their tackle boxes with non-lead tackle. Use non-lead ammunition for hunting.

Source: <http://www.wisconsinbirds.org/RackCard.pdf>

Fireworks

Although fireworks are legal to sell in Vilas County, they do not fit well with our northwoods lakes. In addition to posing a fire hazard, they contain toxic chemicals that can contaminate waters. Fireworks can also leave behind plastics and metals that do not degrade. These pose a threat to loons and other water fowl if ingested. Finally, fireworks make loud noises that carry long distances. Many cherish the northwoods for peace and tranquility.



Photography by Tom Ewing

Vilas County Boater Courtesy Code

NOISE – Sound travels over water

- Recommended water ski and personal watercraft hours is from 10AM to 6PM
- Quiet please after 10pm

SPEED – Give other lake users a break.

- Slow down for safety and to reduce shoreline erosion
- Watch for no-wake zones and speed limits

WILDLIFE – Keep your distance.

CLEAN LAKES – Leave no trace. Don’t litter.

SAFETY – Wisconsin boating laws.

- Boaters – Stay at least 100’ from swimmers, divers, snorkelers, anglers, other watercraft, rafts and docks
- Personal Watercraft – Stay at least 200’ from shore when operating faster than “slow-no-wake” speed
- Waterskiing and personal watercraft – not permitted after sunset
- Wearable personal flotation device required for each boater

Practice Fish CPR

While performing CPR on a fish presents a fairly disgusting image in our minds, it really refers to anglers Catching, Photographing and Releasing fish. In order to do this successfully use the following guidelines:

1. Don’t tire the fish unnecessarily,
2. Have a camera ready before you boat the fish,
3. Remove the hook/lure cleanly and quickly as possible
4. Handle the fish as little as possible
5. Hold large fish like pike and Muskie horizontally
6. Snap a quick picture
7. Release the fish gently and quickly as possible

Feeding Water Fowl & Swimmers Itch

Do not feed waterfowl. Although waterfowl like a free handout, is it not healthy to feed ducks and geese. Their waste is also not healthy. Waterfowl can harbor parasites that can cause swimmer’s itch. How to minimize the possibility of swimmer’s itch? Start by not feeding them. Help keep them off your lake shore by not cutting the grass to the water’s edge. Water fowl have many natural predators and like to see in all directions. Let the grass and wild flowers grow in a 35’ buffer from the water’s edge inland. Limit dock access to a 6’ walkway. Limit cutting trees in the 35’ buffer to a 30’ maximum viewing corridor. All three of these pointers are not just suggestions, but part of the Vilas County Zoning Regulations. Moreover, by following these lake shore management best practices, you protect your lake by limiting run-off from rain.

Protect Loons

For so many people, loons are an integral part of their Northwoods lake experience. Loss of habitat, declining water quality, and increased recreational use of lakes influences loon presence and survival.

There are many steps we can take to help. Loons need good water quality, healthy lake ecosystems and habitats to survive and thrive. Shoreline restoration, properly functioning septic systems, and use of phosphorus-free products help protect and restore loon habitat.

Practice good loon etiquette. Watch and recreate at least 200 feet away from loons and keep pets away. Pets disturb nesting loons and can destroy loon eggs.



Green frog populations are sensitive to shoreline development, suggesting a link between habitat quality and development.

Vilas County

LAKES AND RIVERS ASSOCIATION



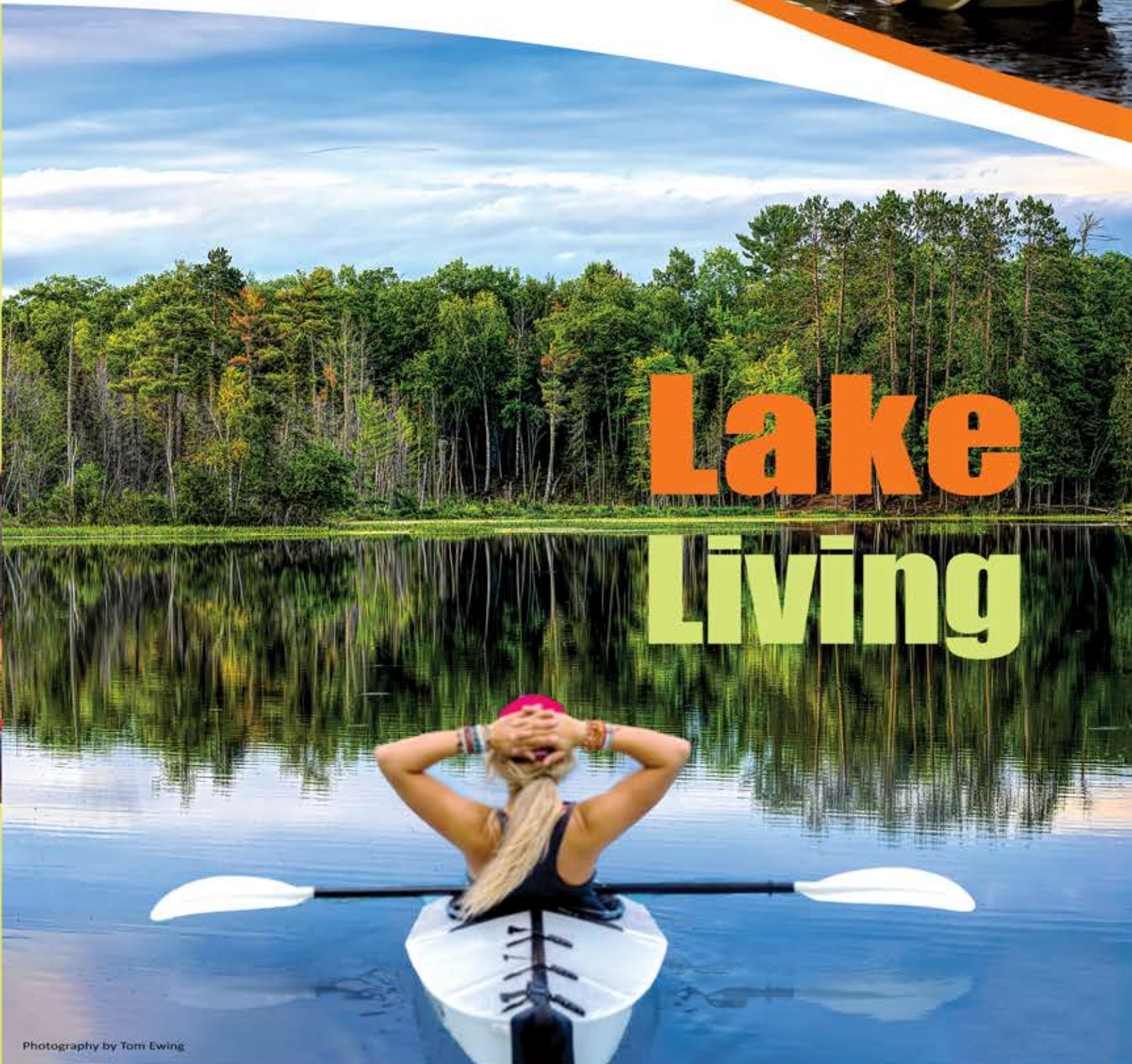
We're passionate about our lakes and rivers. It's in our nature!

In fact, nature has blessed Vilas County, Wisconsin with one of the highest concentrations of inland freshwater on the planet. Whether you live, work, or play here, these remarkable waters likely drew you here. They inspire us, connect us, and define our Northwoods way of life. But clean, healthy water is more than beautiful – it powers our economy, sustains property values, supports local businesses, and preserves our outdoor heritage.

JOIN US. TOGETHER, WE CAN ENSURE VILAS COUNTY'S AMAZING WATERS REMAIN HEALTHY, VIBRANT, AND CHERISHED FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.



Lake Living



Photography by Tom Ewing

Advocacy

Protecting our lakes through community voice and science-based action.

VCLRA champions science-informed policies that safeguard our waters and shorelands – engaging in hearings, advising policymakers, and supporting research that strengthens lake protection.

Education

Engaging and inspiring communities to protect our waters through education and outreach.

VCLRA fosters community learning that builds the foundation for lasting stewardship through our website, newsletters, workshops, youth programs and community events.

Conservation

Empowering lake communities to promote conservation.

VCLRA promotes the formation of lake associations and districts, providing support, tools and training. We also develop conservation programs, and sponsor worthy projects and scientific research studies.

