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Lakes forum deals with a variety of issues

Terrell Boettcher
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During their recent spring meeting, members of the Sawyer County Lakes Forum were warned that pending legislation would eliminate county zoning in Wisconsin.

Members also learned how they can access lake grants to improve water quality or control invasive species on their lake.

Story Continues Below

Phil Nies, a supervisor in the town of Bass Lake, told the group that Assembly Bill 656 passed both the Assembly and Senate, and went back to conference. If the bill passes, "you would have to reimburse a person if his property were devalued because of zoning," he said.

Nies urged concerned persons to call their legislators. "They have basically paved over the state and it's coming this way," he added. "We have built up our lakes and they (developers) want to exploit it even further; they want to

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fill the swamps and marshlands.”

Sandy Raby of the Big Chetac/Birch Lakes Association said she would like to see Sawyer County “pass an ordinance prohibiting the use of lawn chemicals within so many feet of a lake. Right now, people can go to Menard’s, buy the biggest bag of nitrogen they can find and dump it on the lawn up to the water’s edge if they’re within their 30-foot corridor. It washes right into the lake.”

The Lakes Forum voted to send a letter of support to the town of Edgewater and Big Chetac and Birch Lakes Association for their grant application seeking to reduce or eliminate the annual huge algae bloom on the lake.

Raby said that last year the DNR posted signs at boat landings on Big Chetac “calling us a public health risk. It is a significant problem; the algae bloom was horrific,” she added. “We are a town that relies a lot on visitors and people staying on the lakes, so we need to fix this problem.”

Lakes Forum board president Bruce Meyers said the county land and water conservation and zoning departments send out an informational packet to new lakeshore owners explaining the rules. The Lakes Forum helps fund these mailings. Last year, the county mailed 2,000 of these packets.

Dale Anderson of the Nelson Lake Association said they send out a welcome packet to new shoreland owners. “The turnover is rather astounding,” he added.

Likewise, the Chippewa Flowage Area Property Owners Association “sends out a very large packet of information to new owners,” said Chuck Block.

Iona Stover of the Tiger Cat Flowage Association said the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) has posted information about the toxins in fireworks which fall into the water. She has included that article in the association’s newsletter.

Waldo Asp, town of Edgewater, urged people to watch for dead or sick birds so authorities can investigate the possibility of bird flu.

Asp also said there needs to be a county ordinance dealing with the eventuality of a bird flu pandemic, including such things as quarantining cats. Another speaker urged people to keep their bird feeders clean.

The Sawyer County Lakes Forum currently includes 23 lakes and rivers associations. Its stated purpose is to facilitate communication between those groups.

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Guest speaker Pam Toshner, new lake management coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources northwest lakes region, explained that lake associations must be open to nonriparian members in order to qualify for lake grants. Also, the DNR prioritizes grants based on public access, so lakes without public access "have a really hard time getting a grant," she said.

A portion of the gas tax (based on 50 gallons of gas per boat per year) goes to the water resources account within the DNR. Currently, it totals around \$13 million, of which \$4 million per year is available for lake grants, Toshner said.

Over the past 10-15 years, Sawyer County lake associations have received \$195,000 in lake management planning grants plus \$200,000 in protection grants (not including aquatic invasive species grants), Toshner added. The local sponsor must provide 25 percent of a project's total costs, which can be volunteer time, donations or cash. There is a \$100,000 cap per lake for all grants over time.

In partnership with the LCO Tribal Conservation Department, the Grindstone Lake Association (GLA) has received \$30,000 thus far to study hydrology, water quality, nutrient loading and aquatic plants, Toshner said. GLA water quality chairperson Bruce Paulsen said GLA has issued requests for proposals from three consultants to develop a lake management plan.

The study on Grindstone found the sedimentation rate is among the lowest ever measured on any Wisconsin lake. No Eurasian watermilfoil was found. At the request of lakeshore owners, the county sanitation department will conduct a study of all septic systems on Grindstone Lake in 2006 and 2007.

Toshner said individual grant amounts which are available for specific projects are: \$50,000 for a local town to develop ordinances or regulations regarding lakes; \$100,000 for shoreline or wetland restoration; \$200,000 for land acquisition or conservation easements; and \$200,000 for lake plan implementation.

Toshner said there are three types of grants for aquatic invasive species projects: rapid response for an initial infestation of an alien species (\$10,000); education, prevention and planning (such as Clean Boats, Clean Waters), \$75,000; and an established-infestation control grant, up to \$75,000. These grants require a 50 percent local match.

Toshner said three rapid-response projects are underway in Sawyer County, each involving herbicide application: Clear Lake (Eurasian watermilfoil, reinfestation); Osprey Lake (Eurasian milfoil); and Musky Bay on Lac Courte Oreilles (curly-leafed pondweed).

These rapid-response projects “buy time until you have your aquatic plant management plan in place,” Toshner added. These plans require a comprehensive survey of baseline data on a lake.

The group was introduced to Kristine Maki, the newly-hired aquatic invasive species control specialist for Sawyer County. She works through the county land and water conservation department. “I’m really excited for you guys,” Toshner said. “Kristi is top-notch, well-respected in the state.”

The Nelson Lake Association has installed information kiosks and distributed keychains and information cards to resorts and boat dealers to help inform lake users how to identify Eurasian watermilfoil and urge them to “stop invasive species.”

The city of Shell Lake has obtained a grant and hired full-time boat inspectors, Toshner said. Lake associations can hire an inspector and pay a stipend, but can’t create a staff position due to tax and liability issues, she indicated.

Fred Blake from the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association said some lake associations may not qualify for grants. But the law has been changed so that the Sawyer County Lakes Forum could sponsor a grant for a local lake association. A town board or the county could sponsor one as well.

For instance, Blake said, the Washburn County association has sponsored a grant to clean up excess weed growth and algae blooms on Potato Lake west of Stone Lake on Highway 70. “All we do is pay the bills,” he said. “The money comes through us.”

Lakes Conference

The annual Northwest Lakes Conference will be Friday, June 30 at Telemark Resort and Conference Center, sponsored by the Wisconsin Association of Lakes, the lakes and rivers associations of Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Sawyer and Washburn Counties, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

There will be a series of pre-conference workshops on June 29 at Telemark.

Future meetings

The group approved three amendments to the forum’s bylaws:

- Members will elect eight lake management organization delegates and/or

associate members to serve as the board of directors (an expansion from the previous five board members). One of the delegates will represent the Winter Lakes Alliance. The board of directors meets quarterly.

The forum's next meeting will be this September, at which time six persons will be elected to the board, including three new directors. The terms of Bruce Meyers, Dale Anderson and Ken Swenson will expire this fall.

- Any property owner on a lake or river in Sawyer County who is not represented by an organizational member is eligible to become an associate member. No more than four persons residing on a lake or river may be associate members. If more than four wish to be members, they must form a new property owners association for that lake or river.
- An associate member is entitled to voting privileges.

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