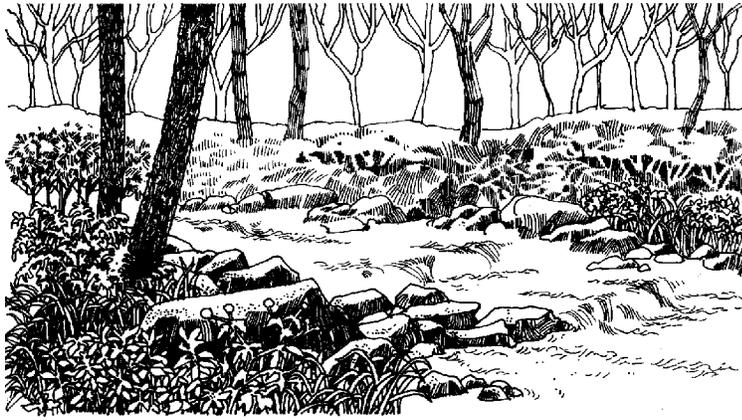

Northern Initiatives Lakes & Shorelands



Strategies and Goals for
protecting Northern Lakes,
Rivers and Shorelands



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Northern Lakes and Shorelands—

A Resource Under Pressure

To many people, northern Wisconsin is more than a place to live or vacation; it is a chosen landscape, a place with a distinctive character that inspires affection...

It is also a community. Its members work together, play together, learn together and share in all facets of the community. Because their livelihood comes from the region, they share a common bond—they care about the future of this delightful place of lakes, rivers and trees. They also share a common sense of urgency—if the attempt is not made, the opportunity to experience a wild lake ecosystem may be permanently lost for their heirs.

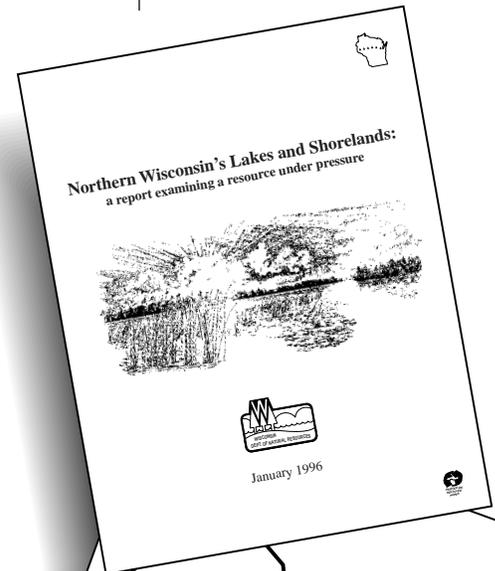
Introduction

In January 1996, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) presented a paper called *Northern Wisconsin's Lakes and Shorelands: A Report Examining a Resource Under Pressure* to the Natural Resources Board. The report was in response to the concerns and commitment of residents and visitors of northern Wisconsin. The concerns centered on assuring that land use and development are compatible with efforts to protect northern Wisconsin lake ecosystems.

The report emphasized four tools to preserve and safeguard northern lakes and shorelands: **education, voluntary conservation, technical assistance and acquisition**. This document outlines some effective ways to use these tools.

A diverse group of individuals from across the north, who share lake-related interests, gathered to form the *Lakes and Shorelands Task Team*. The team's charge was to "identify and develop strategies which can be used to enhance protection of our northern lakes, rivers and shorelands".

This team researched issues and met with a broad range of people representing public, private and nonprofit organizations' perspectives.



The goals outlined in this document evolved from these preceding reports.





Education

Of the four tools, education is the catalyst to activate the others. It can establish an understanding of the need for protection and wise use of water resources. Communication, information, education and outreach activities can assist in raising awareness and increasing knowledge and appreciation of northern lakes and shorelands.

Ideally, *Northern Initiatives* education efforts, including financial resources and staff training, should increase to reflect the size of the new Northern Region which was created by the DNR's reorganization process. Many DNR staff (most of whom are not educators) will be involved in related educational and community outreach efforts. A strong working relationship with University of Wisconsin-Extension (UW-EX) and other area educational organizations is crucial to the success of this initiative. Appropriate training in educational techniques and processes such as conflict resolution and issue analysis will enable staff to more effectively implement the *Northern Initiative* strategies. Applicable training courses are now available to staff through DNR, UW-EX, and other entities; it is essential that funding and time to attend these courses be allocated.

The DNR and UW-EX already engage in support and advocacy for environmental education and many excellent lakes education and outreach efforts exist. Partnering with the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) and other groups will greatly expand promotion of these programs. Education will provide key audiences such as students, waterfront property owners and local government officials with an understanding of the ecological basis behind lake protection and foster stewardship.

Research finds that there is a high rate of turnover in riparian ownership.

The vast majority of riparians are completely unaware of or uninformed about shoreland zoning regulations. Their primary sources of information on the subject are real estate or building trade professionals. While some realtors do provide information at closing, there is neither a consistent nor comprehensive approach to providing information. A training program for realtors could include certification for realtors in lake shore property sales. It would help ensure that the parties involved in the sale and development of lakefront property are knowledgeable about factors such as proper lakeshore development, and protection, zoning laws, etc.

◆

The Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) was legislatively established in 1990 to promote, facilitate and evaluate environmental education statewide. The Northern Initiative project should pursue funding and guidance by the WEEB grants program for selected lake education projects.

◆



Dustin Beilke, Wausau City Pages



Education Strategies

Government and Staff Training

Provide education on the value, importance and urgency of shoreland protection to local government decision-makers.

The DNR and UW-EX should provide training in education and community outreach techniques to their staff.

Educate legislators on lake and shoreland issues.

Riparians and Realtors

Provide proactive education for riparian property owners through the Wisconsin Lakes Association and UW-EX.

Offer training for realtors, developers and lending institutions.

Work with realtors to assure that new homeowners are aware of their responsibilities and the consequences of their actions as owners of waterfront property.

Support the development of a real estate certification curriculum.

School and Community Outreach

Meet with school boards to advocate environmental education.

Increase public information, educational resources and training efforts in the Department's new Northern Region in partnership with the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board.

Develop a WEB site.

Increase awareness of existing lake protection tools and processes.

Keep Northern Initiatives in the news.





Riparian \rə-'per-e-ən, ri-\ adj [L *riparius*—more at river]: relating to or living or located on the bank of a natural watercourse (as a river) or sometimes of a lake or a tidewater.

Littoral \ 'lit-ə-rəl; .lit-ə-'ral, -'ral\ adj [L *litoralis*, fr. *litor-*, *litus* seashore]: of, relating to, or situated or growing on or near a shore. A habitat zone which extends from the water's edge outward as far as rooted plants grow.



Voluntary Conservation

In the past 30 years the development of lake shorelands has equaled or surpassed that of the previous 100 years. This trend will continue with a doubling of development in approximately 15 years. There is reason to believe that all of northern Wisconsin's remaining privately owned shorelands will be developed by the first half of the next century.

If we truly want to “keep the north the north” (the guiding principal of the *Northern Initiatives* project) it is imperative to retain some of the riparian plants and animals that presently exist in the north. We all (land owners, developers, real estate brokers, government agencies, educators, industries and private conservation organizations) must pull in the same direction to preserve some of what we cherish and have taken for granted.

Protecting and conserving lake ecosystems is practiced by many riparian owners. In some places a strong sense of stewardship has been part of family philosophies for many generations. These landowners maintain significant setbacks from the water and maintain natural vegetation in riparian and littoral areas.

However, many other riparian landowners must be encouraged and motivated to appreciate the advantages of keeping natural ecosystems intact by practicing good stewardship techniques on their lands.

Of northern Wisconsin's 12,000 miles of lakeshore frontage, over 80% is in private ownership. The use of conservation and healthy stewardship techniques on northern Wisconsin shorelands is dependent on those who own that shoreland. To protect the ecological and natural scenic beauty of riparian areas, riparian landowners must be informed and motivated to act. The rapid rate at which development is proceeding underscores the need for voluntary conservation.



Riparian neighbors: property owners to the right and left in the photo above maintained the north woods character by retaining natural vegetation when they developed their land. Their neighbor in the center did not.



Voluntary Conservation Strategies

Lakes and Rivers Classification Lists

Develop lists of lakes and rivers ranked for various levels of protection. Private and public conservation agencies will use these lists in acquisition and other protection efforts.

Ensure protection of lands already in some level of guardianship.

Education

Develop and/or reprint fact sheets and pamphlets that aid riparian land owners in proper land management practices.

Provide a hotline to assist riparians in shoreland protection and restoration efforts, e.g. 1-800-SHORLND.

Produce a video that explores the challenges we face on northern Wisconsin lakes and shorelands and offers suggestions on how to address the issues.

Fund and promote demonstration projects for shoreland restoration.

Inaugurate a Lake Management Planning Team. Members would develop lake management plans with willing riparian owners on high priority lakes.

Tax Incentives

Acquire perpetual easements, which are considered charitable contributions, and/or development rights in exchange for a possible reduction in federal and state income taxes, inheritance taxes and local property taxes.

Expand local assessor education on land trust or other conservation easements.

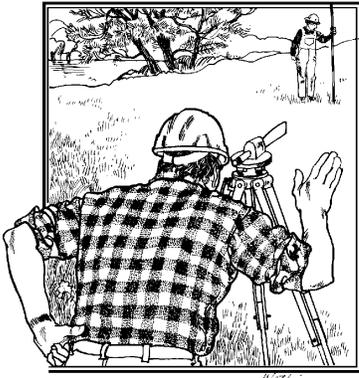
Develop a shorelands tax credit program on lands of highest ecological significance for conservation and restoration efforts.



Recognition of Good Stewardship

Develop and pilot a *seal of approval* program for riparian owners and developers. The seal of approval could aid conservation-minded developers and possibly increase resale value of property.





Technical Assistance

“To the full extent of its available resources, the Department shall provide advice and **assistance to counties** in the development, adoption, administration and enforcement of their **shoreland zoning and land division ordinances...**” (Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 115)

An integral part of the strategy will be to support upgrades of shoreland zoning ordinances. Existing ordinances have not changed significantly since the 1960s while the types and pace of shoreland development have grown dramatically. Current rules contain deficiencies and lack specifics for many regulatory situations. Some local jurisdictions are seeking greater protection of their remaining undeveloped lakes and shorelands. We need to improve the administration and enforcement of existing, state-mandated shoreland zoning regulations, i.e. NR 115. Presently, administration and enforcement costs of NR 115 are borne locally, while the State provides limited support. Consequently, consistency and effectiveness varies. As the core regulatory tool protecting shorelands, shoreland zoning must be adequately enforced. Zoning standards must be carefully reviewed during development in the north, while recognizing that some land shouldn't be developed. Past unplanned development problems must be addressed and corrected whenever possible.

Shorelands are the focal point of the north's growth and play a huge role in local zoning office workloads. Good land use controls can minimize development impacts on shorelands and surface waters, but counties, towns and municipalities need assistance to administer, enforce and upgrade zoning ordinances.

Better land use planning in concert with sound zoning ordinances will prepare the north for growth and help protect its shorelands. The State's assistance and land use policies are fragmented, but some notable initiatives are underway. A Department of Natural Resources Secretary's initiative on land use and the Governor's Inter-Agency Land Use Task Force efforts have generated a series of efforts leading to specific recommendations for improving the state's role in land use planning.



Technical Assistance Strategies

Support

Establish regional support for planning, lake classification, land use and shoreland management. This may be a clearing house that can match local needs with assistance: technology, methods, information, etc.

DNR and UW-EX should sustain and expand technical and legal support to county staff.

Ask for increased state financial support to local units of government for ordinance administration, ordinance upgrades, and education.

Land Use

Reward local government land use planning efforts with funding and support.

Foster a community consensus building process for appropriate land use planning.

Support other recommendations of the State Interagency Land Use Council.

Accelerate land information and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology.

Zoning

Develop model zoning, land use and lake classification upgrade standards and language for local adoption. Regional planning commissions should continue to play a key role.

Support recommendations of current department review of NR115. For example, require restoration instead of fines for serious shoreland violations.



Tools and partners emerge to protect northern lakes and shorelands. Photo by Kurt Bloss.



Acquisition

We call lakes with no artificial structures or other forms of cultural disturbance on their shores “wild lakes.” The shift from wild lakes to lakes with human habitation has averaged approximately three lakes per year over the past thirty years. The rate of loss has escalated rapidly in recent years and nearly all lakes (outside of those in public ownership) will have some level of development in the next 10-15 years. Ecologically significant wild shores and shorelands of unique natural scenic beauty on **developing** lakes are also being lost at a rapid pace.



Bruce Swanson

In 1995 a citizen/agency team was established to set criteria on lakes for possible acquisition. That criteria was approved by the Natural Resources Board in January 1996. The spiraling demand for lakeshore frontage has caused prices to skyrocket. Lake shoreland acquisition for protection of its undisturbed status will be limited by cost. The team believed that if the attempt is not made to purchase wild lakes, the opportunity to experience a wild lake ecosystem may be permanently lost for our heirs. Because of the urgency and cost, the following strategies are recommended.



Acquisition Strategies

Criteria and Partners

Criteria was established by a wild shoreland acquisition committee, and approved by the Natural Resources Board to select lakes of highest ecological value. Limited funds and the high cost of lakeshore property limit the number of acquisitions by the DNR to approximately five lakes. Funding for these acquisitions is available until 2000. Four to six lakes have been identified for acquisition, pending willingness of sellers.

Nonprofit conservation organizations will play a major role in the acquisition of high priority wild lakes and shorelands.

Funding Means

Include wild lakes and shorelands protection in the reauthorization of the Stewardship Program in 2000. This is essential to preserve some of the highest ecologically valuable remaining shorelands between 2000-2010.

Pursue other funding sources for acquiring wild shoreland of ecological and natural scenic beauty, i.e., Land and Water Conservation (LAWCON) funds being held by the Federal government.

The Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, land trusts and other giving entities should share services on acquisition of target shorelands. Ideally, DNR would provide appraisals and closing costs to improve the efficiency of the acquisition process.

Closure

Much of what is valued today in the landscape of this state can be traced back to the vision and determination of a few individuals. Whatever decisions we make must be tempered with the knowledge of our shortfalls. We must take the options the past has left us and set a course for an uncertain future while meeting the needs of today.



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The Northern Initiatives Lakes and Shorelands Task Team:

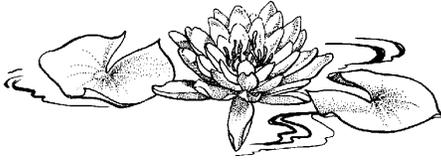
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The Great North Woods

Northern Wisconsin is a truly remarkable region. It encompasses the headwaters of major rivers and tributaries of Lake Superior. Most of Wisconsin's 15,000 lakes as well as the balance of our forests are found in this area.

Northern Wisconsin is widely recognized as a unique and distinguishable region. It is known for clean air and water, healthy forests, richly diverse wildlife, and abundant opportunities for public enjoyment of these resources. The North is a place where sound science shapes environmental policy and guides sustainable resource management. It is a place where regard for the common good guides development decisions which are respectful of wildlife and protective of sensitive areas. It is a place where residents and visitors treat each other as good neighbors in their work and in their play.

Many hope to preserve, protect and enhance these great resources. Private landowners and government agencies can cooperatively protect the character of the north and ensure its future by working together in long-range planning goals. The people that serve in local government need to be continually supported by a strong network of citizen organizations capable of working together on local resource issues. They will need to find ways to balance and blend economic opportunities while preserving and protecting the Great North Woods.



Photo by Robert Queen



