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*A Newsletter for People
Interested in Wisconsin's
Inland Lakes*

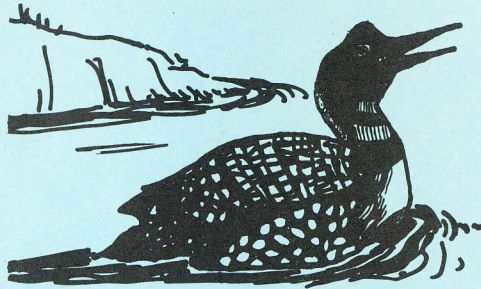


*Lake
Tides*

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IN THE WAKE OF A LOON

Some of you operate aerators to keep your lake from winter-killing. Our guest column in this issue describes one such effort. Unless you tend the compressor or unless you are an ice fishing fanatic (like Lowell is), you probably aren't thinking about the lake this time of year.

But even if you don't get numb feet ice fishing or don't keep the water open with an aerator, you should be thinking and planning for the coming year. When will your group get together? Have you made provisions for a meaningful meeting where people will improve their understanding of the lake and where they will make some decisions about its future? If we can help, let us know; but please don't wait till the week before the meeting.

We wish you a fulfilling new year and look forward to working with you in 1978!

Sincerely,

George Gibson
George Gibson
Lake Management Specialists

Lowell Klessig
Lowell Klessig
Lake Management Specialists

ECO NOTES

WILL THE LOON'S WILD CRY SOON BE ONLY A MEMORY?

Reported by Tom Sinclair,
University of Wisconsin-Extension

(Editor's Note: Since a component of "Lake Tides" is called "In the Wake of a Loon," it is appropriate that this essay on our mascot be included here. It should remind us that our lake responsibilities extend beyond self-interest.)

The eerie, laughlike cry of the common loon once danced over thousands of lakes in the northern United States. But the cry grows fainter these days, muffled by the roar of powerboats.

Mechanized man is nudging the loon out of areas where it formerly was plentiful, driving the bird to sanctuary in only the wildest, most remote locales.

"Many of the traditional loon nesting lakes in the northern states -- Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York and several New England states -- are probably no longer suitable for loons," says Stanley Temple, wildlife ecologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Loons aren't compatible with man's recreational use of lakes because of an instinctive reaction to disturbances near their nesting sites, says Temple.

A loon migrates north in early spring to build a floating nest in vegetation along a lakeshore, usually near the same lake where it was born. If there is any disruption, the incubating bird flies out onto the open lake to escape a presumed predator or to lure it away from the nest.

The tactic works well with natural predators, but not with man. Where powerboats pass frequently,

the loon leaves its nest for too long. The single egg -- a female loon lays one egg a year -- becomes chilled and fails to hatch.

But the reproduction failure and decline in the loon population isn't always evident to observers. Loons that do not bear young continue to return to their original nesting lakes, and people may assume they are thriving when they really are not.

"Loons are long-lived -- perhaps 20 to 30 years -- and there might be a period of 10 to 15 years when you would still see them on the lakes," Temple says. "But they wouldn't be breeding. When those old individuals die, that's pretty much the end of it."

In Wisconsin, loons are seen on many lakes, but they reproduce only in the northern area of the state. Reproduction is most successful at true wilderness lakes such as those in upper Minnesota.

The threat to loons is great enough that two eastern states, Vermont and New Hampshire, have designated parts of some lakes loon nesting areas. Powerboats are prohibited in those areas during the nesting season.

Boating isn't the only threat to the wild birds. They are highly vulnerable to pesticide concentrations because they feed at the top of aquatic food chains, according to Temple.

High pesticide levels in loons are reflected in classic symptoms found in other predatory birds whose bodies have absorbed harmful quantities of the chemicals. Perhaps the most damaging is abnormal thinness of eggshells that further reduces reproductive success.

Man's development of once-wild lands also takes its toll on loons in unlikely ways, says Temple.

Highly adapted to aquatic environments, loons are unable to land properly on dry ground. But they do not like to land on rough water when they can avoid it.

The birds migrate at night. Occasionally in the fall, they fly over a wind-whipped lake on a rainy night and spot what appears to be a long strip of calm water along the shore. The strip actually is a wet blacktop road.

"Loons that try to land essentially crash. They may break their wings or injure themselves some other way," Temple says.

"Even if they aren't hurt, they can't take off again. They have to take a running start on water and build up enough speed to get airborne."

Stranded out of water -- loons are very clumsy walkers -- the birds may be hit by cars or attacked by other animals.

The world of man has been harsh on the loon and pressure from man grows stronger every year. If the birds are to remain in the northern United States, it may require a conscious effort to protect them.

The cry of the loon is with us yet. It is largely up to man to decide whether it is worth saving for tomorrow.

REPORT FROM LARGON LAKES DISTRICT

By: Ralph W. Peterson
and Robert J. VanStone

Largon Lake is a small, shallow lake in McKinley Township, Polk County, Wisconsin, covering approximately 130 acres in area. It is 14 to 16 feet deep at the lowest level of its dish-shaped bottom. Connected to it by a small stream is Little Largon Lake, which is perhaps twice as deep but only 1/5 as large. The setting is pastoral and wooded, the shore is rocky and there is not much to attract the swimmer, the water-skier or the weekend sun worshipper. They are just quiet, country lakes.

For many years beaver had maintained a dam at an outlet on the westerly shore of Largon. In the spring of 1974 the dam was swept away and the lake level fell precipitously. The beaver had been trapped out during the winter months and no repairs to the dam were in the offing from that source. There had often been talk among the local residents of an artificial dam to meet just such an emergency but somehow the project had never gotten underway. In the summer of 1974, however, discussions began again in earnest.

The writers, along with other cabin owners -- all non-resident "newcomers" to the area -- took the matter up with the McKinley Town Board. Meetings were held and much discussion ensued, but no course of action resulted. Dams were too expensive.

In the fall of the year, several of the more concerned cabin owners undertook to stand in for the departed beavers and erected a sandbag and rubble dam that served to check the lake in its outward flow. Within a week the Town Board was notified by the DNR that the dam must be removed. It was "illegal."

In the following several months the Town Board searched diligently for funds to meet the cost of constructing a suitable dam, estimates for which ran as high as \$21,000. The Board eventually unearthed potential financial aid in the form of state funds available through the Polk County Board. Polk County indicated it would expend up to \$5,000, but only as a match to the contribution of the Township. The ball was back in our court.

In September of 1975, at a packed town hall meeting, the subject of the Town's contribution was vigorously debated. Cabin owners, none of whom had a vote at the meeting because they were not permanent residents, appeared and spoke in favor of the project. The lake had public access and the dam was not just for the benefit of the "lake people" as some of the opponents had characterized us. It was for the benefit of the entire Township. So went our plea.

The Town Board, which had shown a cooperative attitude throughout, made it clear that it favored the project. Several local residents who, at best, could benefit only indirectly from the project joined with the proponents and, despite the opposition of a vocal few, the meeting voted, narrowly, to approve the expenditure of up to \$5,000 of Township funds for the dam. It proved to be a turning point.

For some months previously, the cabin owners had been discussing the feasibility of forming a lake district in order to acquire some standing that might be useful in pushing the dam project. The writers circulated a petition and obtained the signatures of all but three of the 24 cabin owners. In November of 1975 the District was formally chartered with the Township as one of the property owning members.

In the meantime, the Town Board had been busy applying Yankee ingenuity and as a result a dam which many thought could not be built for less than \$20,000 was finally constructed in May of 1976 at a cost of approximately \$2,800. Engineering services had been donated by members of Impact Seven, an anti-poverty community development corporation; Polk County and the Town of McKinley had made their financial contribution; and the Polk County Sportsman's Club, long interested in the welfare of the lake, had made a generous contribution.

Unfortunately, the dam was not completed in time to retain any of the 1976 spring runoff -- the "illegal" dam had been removed -- and the level of the lake fell astonishingly during the arid summer of 1976. The water line eventually receded to a point 25 feet or more from the base of the dam.

The lake had winter killed the previous winter and there were those in the community, opposed to the dam from the beginning, who said that regardless of the level of the lake it would always freeze out periodically as it had done in the past. The DNR was more optimistic, however, and announced at our 1976 annual meeting, that it had plans to chemically eliminate the bullhead population which had taken over after the freeze out and had plans also to restock with game fish in the spring of 1977.

With the dam completed, and chemical treatment and restocking promised, it was concluded that we, as a district, had a moral commitment to do what we could to preserve these benefits. A committee was appointed to report on the feasibility of an aeration system.

After studying various types of equipment and talking to many experts in the field, the committee

felt there was enough expertise and talent within the membership to design, build and install our own system at a much lower cost than a comparable commercial system which had been estimated at between \$7,000 and \$8,000 installed. Designing the system and locating the best sources for needed components took 6 months. During this time we also explored possible areas for financial assistance.

The system was assembled and installed completely by volunteers from the district who donated their time on weekends. Final installation was completed in late July of 1977 at a total capital cost of \$2,400. Of this, \$1,000 was obtained by a grant from Polk County, and additional contributions of cash and materials were obtained from various local firms and individuals. Responsibility for the balance of the capital cost was accepted by the district members along with yearly electrical costs projected at \$550 per year based on 24 hours per day, 365 days per year operation. We are confident, as are the experts we consulted, including the DNR, that the system will perform as intended.

We feel that the district has accomplished much in a short period of time. While it is true that, at times, there has been some opposition to our aims it is evident by what has been accomplished that those of good will are in the majority among both the local residents and the district membership. We have high hopes for the future of the lakes and the lake district as well.

RUMBLINGS IN THE ROTUNDA

As mentioned in our last issue, Assembly Bill 537 to amend Chapter 33 has been passed by the Legislature. The amendment has now been signed into law by Governor Schreiber and is included below.

33.23 MUNICIPALITIES MAY ESTABLISH DISTRICT.

The governing body of a city or village may by resolution establish a public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district if the city or village encompasses all the frontage of a lake within its boundaries. Creation of districts by towns under this section shall conform to the procedures of ss. 33.25 and 33.26 except that the town clerk shall perform the functions of the county clerk and the town board shall perform the functions of the county board and shall arrange the hearing. The governing board which forms the district shall perform the function of the board of commissioners. Districts created by towns under this section may adopt the form of governance provided under s. 33.28 by petition to the town board. Upon presentation of a petition requesting the change and signed by at least 20% of the property owners within the district, the town board shall direct that the change shall become effective at the time of the next annual meeting, and shall provide for the necessary election of commissioners at that time.

Note: This change only affects you if you own property on a lake which is entirely in one town and does not have a lake district at the present time. In those cases, a petition is now required to either the town board or county board.