

Lake Association Stew: A Better Recipe for Getting it Done Presented by John Baker, President, Friends of Moose Lake

This is a list of items intended to help people succeed in turning lake association "stew" into beef bourguignon. The recipe includes several hints, tips and how to's. If what's here doesn't satisfy your needs, Google searches, making contact with the UWSP Lakes department, other lake associations, or the author are other ways to find out what you need to know.

Create a list of contacts

Contacts, whether they are association members, the DNR, the township, or whoever they are, are the lifeblood of your association. **TIP:** Find someone in your group who is good with spreadsheets or word processing and automate your list. They should work closely with the fundraising and membership committees to keep the information up to date. **TIP:** Have the person maintaining the contact list also maintain the email and membership lists...best to have it all in one place.

WHO you know does matter

You need to make sure you have the right people on your team when it comes to dealing with local government, the DNR, and others. **TIP:** At a minimum make sure you have a name, email and phone for: township supervisor, county board conservation committee chair, county conservationist, DNR fisheries, wildlife, and lakes specialists.

Creating bylaws

Use sample bylaws which are readily available on the Internet or research examples at your public library. **Hint:** Make your association's bylaws as simple as possible...no names, phone numbers, or detailed rules.

Lake management planning

Yes, you will need a lake management plan. No one will pay any attention to your association if you don't know what your plan is for your lake. If you are meeting informally and don't need financial help from the state, you can create your own plan. **TIP:** If you need financial help from the state, you'll need to be a more formal organization and the plan will have to be done by a professional consultant.

How to find the right consultant

A little bit of research can save a lot of time and headaches. Ask the DNR who the consultants are that they have been working with on lake projects. Contact the consultants for references. Check the references. Look at their staff (an office of one?) and workload (with 10 projects in the works?). Interview them.

Tip: Find someone close by if you can. It makes it easier to meet with them and for them to get to your lake.

Filing for state grant money

If you need state grant money, the person who rates and takes your grant application forward must be a part of your team. **Tip:** Have at least an initial face-to-face meeting with your DNR lakes specialist to talk about your lake and your association. **Hint:** After that, invite them to meetings and send them the information you send to your members, but don't pester them to the point where they don't return your calls or answer your emails.

Achieving state non profit and federal tax exempt status

It's all in what you say you plan to do. **TIP:** Take things that have been documented in your bylaws, in your goal/vision statement, in meeting minutes, and on your website and use those as part of why and how you are organized.

Take lake measurements and get free training (and equipment!)

The DNR will supply Secchi disks for checking water clarity and training on how to use one. **TIP:** Record this data each time a measurement is taken. **TIP:** Some counties may have equipment that you can borrow for doing dissolved oxygen reading. They can also train you on how to use the equipment. **TIP:** Chemical analysis of the water in your lake can be expensive. If you have a donor who wants to contribute to something specific, consider having them pay the cost.

How to select officers and directors

Officers should be people who are familiar with organizations and how they operate. **TIP:** If someone is active in a civic club, church, or business organization, they will understand how a board of directors should operate. More important might be the selection of committee chairs and filling out the committees. **TIP:** Match committee chairs to their skills. If someone has experience organizing fundraisers, they are your fundraising chair. If someone has kept membership records, they should be your membership chair. If someone has experience with non profit incorporation or charities, they might work on the association incorporation.

Website construction

If you have someone who has experience building a website and they are willing to help, they should be your choice. Today there are a number of sites that use templates and simple instructions that allow anyone with a modicum of computer skills to build their own. **TIP:** A son or grandson can often help you do this. **TIP:** There are a few sites that will host your website for free such as Google. Most others are around \$100 per year for a basic site. The free sites can be very cumbersome to edit and update. They limit the number of pages and also the size of the site.

Creating a high quality brochure (for free)

Get some help by looking at other lake brochures to see what they thought was important to include. Buy good quality paper to have your brochures printed on.

TIP: Talk to anyone in the print business to see if they will print up 500 copies for free. Companies like Xerox, HP, Lexmark, and others sell their equipment to businesses and many times someone around your lake might have the print company selling to their company. For the print company, 500 copies is a very inexpensive way for them to earn some goodwill with the company they sell to.

Constructing a lakeside display

A display can be as simple as a single post in the ground with a plastic sign: total cost, about \$25-\$30. You can add a plastic tube full of brochures for people to take with them. **TIP:** this might be another thing that you look to your donors to fund. For less than \$200 you can get locking glass case held up by two treated poles. **TIP:** Be sure to check with the county forester or township before putting up your display case.

Communications

Local radio stations have a lot of time to fill although it can be at odd hours. **TIP:** Be PREPARED. **TIP:** Even go so far as to give the host of the show the questions you'd like them to ask. Also, newspapers are always looking for local interest stories to print. **TIP:** Give them as much information, pictures, and time so they can paint the picture you'd like to see. **TIP:** Send a letter to the editor as a free way to let people know what you are trying to do.

Association fundraising ideas

TIP: Have a business donate something of value or have a donor contribute the money so the association can buy something of value. One example might be a cart of groceries (value of \$500). Sell raffle tickets for \$1 each or 6 for \$5. Have a local sporting goods store or department donate a fishing outfit including a spinning rod and reel, a fly rod and reel, and some tackle (value of \$250). Go big and have a business donate a boat/trailer, ATV, or better yet, a snowmobile.

Recruit and retain association members

An association will only exist as long as it has members. It is crucial that you have a membership drive every year. Keep members informed so they understand why they need to renew and what they should expect to be accomplished with their dues. **TIP:** Give the membership chair as much help as they need to contact every current member to make sure they renew and to contact potential new members. **HINT:** Offer a prize to the person who signs up the most new members and another prize to the person who collects the most money from donors during the year. **TIP:** Make your membership dues as low as possible. **TIP:** Make sure those recruiting new members have a good supply of brochures and that they know what the goals of the association are.