



CHRIS WHALEN

LAKETIDES

The newsletter for people interested in Wisconsin's lakes



PAUL SKAWINSKI

WATER CONNECTS US ALL

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By Extension Lakes Staff

Humans have interacted with water for thousands of years. Since the retreat of the glaciers, the seasonal rituals of native tribes have been guided by water. The oral histories of the Anishinaabe migration tell of a journey from the east along what we now call the Great Lakes to a place where “food grows on the water.” That food is wild rice, known as manoomin in Ojibwe, and is both sustenance and a powerful reminder of our connection to water.

In more recent years, European explorers used the waterways to access the region’s fur and forests, and by the 1800s, Wisconsin’s lakes and rivers became popular destinations for vacations.

Today, we still depend on clean water for drinking and growing food, but also for recreation, livelihoods, and the places we call home. Now there are many more of us sharing these waters. That is why it is so important for us to work together to protect and preserve our shared lakes and rivers.

One way to do this is through the Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Partnership. This collaboration of statewide, regional, and local groups, as well as individuals, is working together to care for our shared waters.

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“Over half a billion people owe their livelihoods directly to water, and two-thirds of the global economy is derived from activities that involve water in some form.”

**~ Wallace J. Nichols,
Blue Mind**

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GRINDSTONE LAKE FOUNDATION
SAVES NATURAL TREASURE

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(Water Connects Us All, cont. from pg. 1)

Are you part of the Partnership?

Absolutely! Just by reading this newsletter, we know that you think protecting Wisconsin's watery gems is important. Whether you live on a lake, fish a river, volunteer with a local organization, work in water resources, or simply care about the places that make Wisconsin special, you are part of this effort.

We may have diverse family histories, experiences, educations, and perspectives, but water connects us. It connects communities, economies, wildlife, recreation, and our sense of place. It also connects our individual efforts. What happens in one lake, river, or watershed can teach, inspire, and affect people working in another.

Partnership History

The Partnership began taking shape in the early 1970s, when university researchers and state resource managers worked together to find new ways to protect lake health. The Inland Lakes Demonstration Project showed that science and state resources were important, but so was the involvement of local people who knew and cared deeply about their lakes.

Learn about the Partnership's history on the Extension Lakes website at uwsp.edu/lakes.



In 1974, a formal partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin, and local lake groups formed as the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership. That same year, the legislature passed a law enabling lakes to form lake districts, giving communities a new way to organize, plan, and take action for their lakes.

Since then, the Partnership has grown to include lake associations, river organizations, water professionals, volunteers, researchers, and others who share a common goal: healthy waters for generations to come. Connect all these groups sharing knowledge, challenges, successes, and solutions, and you get the Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Partnership.

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AMY KOWALSKI

The Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Partnership gathered in person to meet and then tour this site in Wrightstown where they used dead ash trees as streambank stabilization.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

SCORE MY SHORE: WHAT YOUR PROPERTY CAN TELL YOU ABOUT LAKE HEALTH



By Amy Kowalski, Communications Specialist, Extension Lakes



**What's your shoreline telling you?
Take a few minutes to find out!**

MARK BUGNASKI PHOTOGRAPHY

Own property along a Wisconsin lake or river comes with incredible rewards: peaceful views, wildlife sightings, and time well spent on (and in) the water. It also comes with a sense of responsibility to steward the land that borders these waters to make sure future generations can also enjoy them.

We all know what we do on the land affects our shared waters. You probably follow shoreland zoning laws and think, "I'm doing my part." But these standards were a compromise, like many Wisconsin laws, and don't measure up to what the science is telling us.

How healthy is your shoreland property?
Head over to the Healthy Lakes & Rivers

website (healthylakeswi.com) and click on "Score My Shore" to find out! Or simply scan the QR code above and get started.

Wisconsin Score My Shore - Shoreland Evaluation Survey

This easy-to-use online survey helps you take a fresh look at your property. Think of it as a friendly check-in rather than a test. Answer simple questions about what you see and do as you walk from your driveway and house (Upland Zone), through the nearshore area (Transition Zone) and look into the water (In-Water Zone).

One of the most helpful features is that the survey is dynamic. Your answers guide what comes next, so you get information tailored to your property. At the end, you receive a

score (like a credit score), ranging from “Entry” to “Protection” level, along with practical suggestions for improvements.

Even better, the survey directs you to simple, often low-cost actions. Planting native vegetation, redirecting runoff, or leaving natural features in place can help support fish, wildlife, and water quality.

Neighbors Make a Difference

Research consistently shows that land use and shoreland management on adjacent properties strongly influence water quality and habitat. When several neighboring properties add native plants or reduce mowing near the water, the benefits multiply. Together, those connected shorelines create habitat corridors for fish, frogs, turtles, and birds – something a single property can’t do alone.

Strive for Progress, Not Perfection

It’s also important to recognize that no developed shore is perfect, which makes it difficult to score in the “Protection” category of the survey. Many properties already have homes, driveways, or other hard surfaces close to the water. Strive for progress, not perfection. Taking small steps toward more natural conditions can make a meaningful difference.

Attention lake groups!

Use this survey to:

- Build awareness across membership.
- Encourage voluntary action without pressure.
- Create a shared starting point for conversation.
- Support lake-wide improvements over time.
- Strive for progress and track it.

Find lessons on how to build a successful Healthy Lakes & Rivers program in your area. healthylakeswi.com/partner-organizations



A Private, Flexible Way to Learn

Score My Shore also offers a private way to learn. If you’ve ever wondered what a site visit might involve but weren’t ready to invite someone out, this tool lets you explore at your own pace. You can even preview the survey, pause and return later, or update your answers before submitting.

So, what’s your shoreline telling you? Taking a few minutes to find out could lead to healthier water, more diverse wildlife, and a shoreline you can feel even better about sharing with family, friends, and neighbors. And when those neighbors get curious, you’ll have something valuable to pass along, because it takes all of us to make healthy lakes and rivers together! 💧

Five free ways to give back to your lake/river:

1. Leave fallen trees in the water – they protect shorelines and provide habitat for fish, turtles, songbirds, and more.
2. Don’t mow – let the water’s edge grow and see what pops up (remove invasives).
3. Skip the fertilizer – most soil does not need a boost.
4. Protect existing natural areas.
5. Redirect gutters/downspouts away from the waterbody.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

TURN EDUCATION INTO ACTION WITH A SURFACE WATER GRANT FROM THE WDNR

By Sara Windjue, Leadership and Capacity Development Specialist, Extension Lakes

Want to inspire, engage, and activate people in your community to take action for our waters? Include environmental education (EE) in your WDNR Surface Water Education Grant application to help raise awareness and create positive change! In our last issue, we introduced the five tenets of EE and how they can spark community interest in your local waterways. Let's use those ideas to strengthen your grant application, and more importantly, create lasting change in your community.

Did you know?

The Surface Water Education Grant ranking sheets can help you understand the criteria and improve your application (found in the appendices of the Surface Water Grant guidance document that is published each year at dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/SurfaceWater.html).

Think Holistically

A thoughtful, layered approach that is clearly explained in your proposal (not just a list of activities) takes time but will help strengthen your proposal and ensure the education you provide really makes a difference. Remember to consult the Five Tenets of Environmental Education.

- 1. RAISE AWARENESS** – All education starts here. Be sure to describe how you will raise awareness of an issue. Consider showing examples or comparisons.
- 2. INCREASE KNOWLEDGE** – Build on the awareness gained and begin to introduce new concepts. Brainstorm fun activities that get people learning while they're with you, but also while they're at home with their families or friends.



SARA WINDJUE

Pick a specific focus area and show how you'll measure success.

3. **IDENTIFY VALUES** – Describe how you will help people understand what they value and why. This will require you to research how values can be identified through educational programming.
4. **DEVELOP SKILLS** – If your project includes skill building, explain what skills you want the participants to develop and why they are important. How will this help change behavior?
5. **TAKE ACTION** – Explain what you want your audience to ultimately do with their new knowledge, values, and skills.

Now you are ready to write a strong grant application using the following tips.

Make Your Project Impact Clear (Grant section: Project Impact)

Fully explain why this topic is important to the environment, to people, and to the economy. Assume that those reviewing the grant do not understand why the topic is important. Research what others have done and what has worked. Reference these projects and why you intend to replicate a past project or do something different.

Partner with a local school, nature center, or college program. This can help strengthen your proposal AND bring new energy and expertise to your project.



Design with People in Mind (Grant section: Project Design)

How will your project provide engaging, in-person education or outreach? Not all audiences learn the same way and your proposal should reflect that.

Think through these questions and include the answers in your proposal:

- 💧 Are you trying to reach children, families, adults, or all three? Each audience may need a different engagement method.
- 💧 How many people will you realistically engage? Why did you choose this number and how will you reach it?
- 💧 Will you be providing the education or partnering with an experienced educator? Consider working with your local school district or college;

(Continued on page 15)

Getting into the water with Dickey Fish

By John Lyons, University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum
Dave Marshall, Underwater Habitat Investigations, LLC

Little fish, those under a few inches in length, garner little attention or appreciation. But they play an outsized role in the health of Wisconsin's lakes.

There are two types of small fish, the juveniles of the panfish and gamefish, who grow quickly and are only small for their first few months, and the inherently small species, which we affectionately term "dickey fish". These species never exceed a few inches in length. Wisconsin's lakes collectively support about 30 dickey fish species. Some are quite beautiful and others nondescript, but all are important.

Although easy to miss, dickey fish are essential players in the food web. They eat

algae, tiny invertebrates, and the detritus from decayed plants and animals. In turn, they are eaten by larger fish, especially carnivorous species like crappie, bass, catfish, pike, musky, perch, and walleye. Dickey fish are the link between aquatic plants and the gamefish that so many of us love to catch. A healthy sport fishery requires a healthy dickey fish community.

Most dickey fish are found among aquatic plants where they hide from predators, eat the algae and invertebrates the plants support, and lay their eggs on the leaves and stems. Unsurprisingly, when native aquatic plants decline, so do dickey fish. And when native plants are displaced by non-native species such as Eurasian watermilfoil or curly leaf pondweed, dickey fish suffer. The native plants provide much better habitat.

Over 150 years ago, Wisconsin's lakes were full of small, plant-loving fish living among native underwater plants. Today, those fish are much harder to find. In

Found mainly among sparse plants and on the edge of thicker plant beds is the western banded killifish, uncommon in medium to large lakes across the state.



KONRAD SCHMIDT

Weeds

KONRAD SCHMIDT

Where did the name “dickey fish” originate? Biologists sometimes use the slang term “dicky” to refer to small, visually non-descript species, most commonly among birds and non-game fish. This dates back to 18th century English when the nickname Dicky was often used as a pet name for small animals, and a nursery rhyme popularized calling small, common yard birds “dicky birds”.

One of the most colorful dickey fish, the Iowa darter, is common in lakes throughout Wisconsin.

Many lakes probably still have a few dickey fish, and gamefish should still have a species or two to eat. So, why should we worry?

The issue is what’s called “redundancy” in ecological terms and “having a backup plan” in everyday life. Basically, the more species you have, the less likely you’ll have a year when all dickey fish are scarce and gamefish go hungry. The abundance of each dickey fish species fluctuates dramatically from year to year. Often these fluctuations are in synch, good or bad, but when you have lots

(Continued on page 10)

Lake Mendota in Madison, for example, there were once 10 dickey fish species, but now only two remain and neither is common. While we don’t have as much long-term data for every lake, similar declines are happening across the state.

Much of this change can be directly linked to human impacts. The introduction of common carp, runoff from soil erosion and fertilizers, and harmful blue-green algae blooms have all taken a toll. Shoreline development has also reduced important plant habitat, and invasive species like Eurasian watermilfoil have spread. Even some well-intended efforts to control invasive plants can sometimes remove too much of the good habitat these fish depend on. Together, these changes have made it harder for these once-common fish to thrive.

The blacknose shiner is a widespread plant-associated minnow found in all sizes of lakes throughout the state.



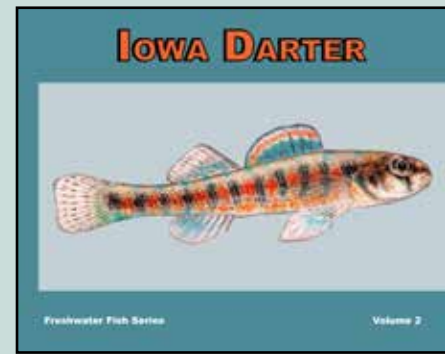
KONRAD SCHMIDT

(Dickey Fish, cont. from pg. 9)

of species, there will be one or two that will do well when the others do poorly, and consequently there will always be enough food for gamefish. But when the variety of dickey fish is low, the chances rise that all species will have a bad year together and gamefish won't have enough to eat.

It's like having a balanced investment portfolio; diversity makes it more resilient when things don't go as planned. Similarly, if there are only one or two dickey fish species, the food base is at risk of collapse when conditions aren't favorable. With many dickey fish species, the lake ecosystem can better ride out the occasional tough times.

Do you know what kind of dickey fish are in your lake? Most lakes don't have adequate data even though it only takes a couple of days to conduct a survey. And as fish biologists, we strongly recommend it. Find your local fisheries biologist on the WDNR website at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/people/fisheriesbiologists>.



Iowa Darter (age 8+)
Freshwater Fish Series, Volume 2

Learn how these native Wisconsin fish grow, where they like to hang out, and what you can do to keep their waters healthy.

Find this and other print publications under "Educational Resources" on the Extension Lakes website at uwsp.edu/lakes.

If you know there are a good variety of dickey fish in your lake, conservation is key. Protect the water quality and habitat, especially the aquatic plants that are essential for dickey fish to thrive. If a fish survey reveals no or just a few species, your lake community could explore restoration. Helping these fish make a comeback often starts with improving water quality and habitat, especially aquatic plants. But this alone may not be enough. Dickey fish can't easily move from one lake to another, so even if conditions improve, they may not re-establish on their own. The good news is that restoration is still possible. Although the process is complex, projects throughout the Midwest, including Wisconsin, show that dickey fish can be successfully re-introduced through stocking.

While dickey fish are small and inconspicuous, these fish are key to a healthy lake ecosystem, and losing them could have perilous consequences! 💧



The Tadpole Madtom is a plant-associated catfish found in medium to large lakes throughout the state.

LAKE ORGANIZATION CAPACITY

In each issue, we share ideas and resources to help your organization build its capacity to care for Wisconsin's lakes. This time, we're digging into a tool used to enhance the internal functions of your organization.

USING A SKILLS GAP ANALYSIS

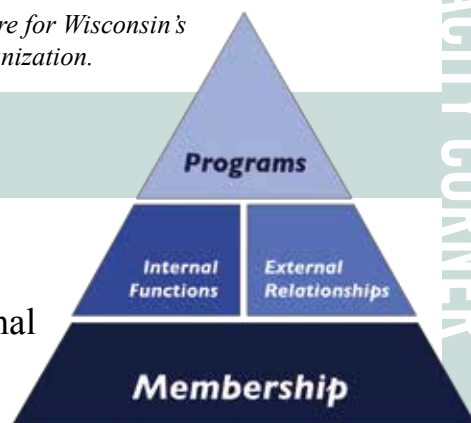
By Dave Quady, Sand Lake Association

What does the makeup of your community look like? Let's talk about how your organization can benefit from better knowing its membership (associations) or property owners and electors (districts). A simple survey of your lake community can uncover hidden talent, strengthen your organization, and help you reach your goals.

Have you ever wondered who in your community knows how to raise funds, understands accounting applications, or is involved with the county, town, or DNR? Lake groups should spend time getting to know their community's skills and experiences to create a more robust organization, and invite those folks to join your board.

The Organizational Capacity section of the Extension Lakes website explores Internal Functions, including how using a **Skills Gap Analysis will help to better understand your board's talents and help fill gaps**. The tool provided is customizable, but should not be overused. (<https://www.uwsp.edu/extension-lakes/lake-organizations/internal-functions/>)

This is just one more tool in your capacity toolbox that can help you build stronger relationships and do more to protect our shared waters. 💧



Dave's

HOT TIPS for a Successful Skills Gap Analysis

1 Keep it short, simple, and clear.

Ask 6-10 concise questions that take under 10 minutes to complete. Simple and inclusive will get you more responses, but allow for open-ended feedback!

2 Test, review, and make updates.

Before sending it out broadly, ask a small group to test the survey and tweak it as needed.

3 Provide a timeline and reminders.

Ask for responses in 1-2 weeks, with reminders after 4-5 days and a final reminder a few days before the deadline. Stick to your deadline.

4 Use free online survey tools.

Survey tools make it easy to take and compile results. Examples include Google, Microsoft, SurveyMonkey, and Typeform.

5 30-40% response rate is a win.

That's great! If you're under 20%, review the survey length, questions, audience, and approach.

6 Use the results and say thank you.

Organize, review, and discuss the results, then put them to work. Make sure to thank those who took the time to respond.

Grindstone Lake Foundation Saves Natural Treasure

By Cindy Parker, Grindstone Lake Foundation

In 2018, members of the Grindstone Lake Association gathered for their annual picnic and shared a common concern: what would happen if the 57-acre former cranberry bog on the lake's southwest shore was developed?

Rather than leave its future to chance, they took action! Early talks led to the creation of the Grindstone Lake Foundation, with a clear vision to protect more than a quarter mile (1,537 feet!) of natural shoreline, safeguard water quality, and create a community-supported nature area for everyone to enjoy.

Turning that vision into reality took an entire community. A generous benefactor provided the loan to purchase the property, while neighbors, lake residents, and supporters raised more than \$850,000 to repay it. The Foundation also secured a \$200,000 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Surface Water Land Acquisition Grant that permanently protects the land through a conservation easement, ensuring it will remain undeveloped.

What started as a discussion at a summer picnic became a conservation success story!

Snowshoeing along the lakefront trail is a great way to enjoy the Grindstone Lake Nature Reserve in the winter!

Nature Is Making a Comeback

Years of cranberry farming changed how water flowed across the property. As old agricultural infrastructure is removed, the land's natural hydrology will be restored, allowing native wetlands to return. Healthy wetlands naturally filter water, reduce runoff, provide wildlife habitat, and help keep Grindstone Lake healthy.

A True Community Effort

This project has been powered by volunteers at every step. Local fire departments safely burned deteriorating buildings, volunteers established trails, and the Foundation secured another Wisconsin DNR grant to begin planning the next phase of wetland restoration.

Today, the Grindstone Lake Nature Reserve is open to everyone. Whether you're walking the trails, watching birds along the shoreline, or simply enjoying the quiet beauty of Wisconsin's Northwoods, you're experiencing what can happen when a community comes together to protect a place it loves.

Now that's a legacy worth sharing! 🌱



CINDY PARKER

Did you know?

Those grassy trails weren't always trails! They were once berms separating cranberry beds. Today, they're becoming scenic walking paths where visitors can experience the beauty of the restored landscape.



Learn more about Grindstone Lake Association at grindstonelake.org

MIKE WARDEN

(Water Connects Us All, cont. from pg. 3)

You Make the Partnership work!

The Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Partnership is not mandated by the legislature, nor is it a single organization with a dedicated funding source. It is a committed network of people who understand that we can accomplish more together than we can alone.

Being part of the Partnership can be as simple as sharing an article with your neighbor, attending a local lake or river group meeting, learning something new about a waterbody near you, volunteering locally, or helping someone else find the resources they need. It can mean joining a lake or river organization, participating in regional efforts, attending the Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention, or lending your voice to statewide conversations about water. There is a place for everyone.

Wisconsin's waters connect us all. How will you help ensure they remain healthy, vibrant, and treasured for future generations? 💧

Get updates about the topics that interest you with GovDelivery.

Wisconsin DNR's GovDelivery service is a free digital notification platform that allows you to sign up for automated email or text message updates on specific topics, news releases, public hearings, and outdoor recreation notices. <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WIDNR/subscriber/new>

Join a statewide nonprofit.



**WISCONSIN
LAKES**

wisconsinlakes.org



wisconsinrivers.org

Attend the Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Convention April 14-16, 2027

2027 Theme: Water Connects Us All

Water weaves us together. It nourishes all life and creates places where communities gather, unite, and find common purpose. Protecting our waters is a shared responsibility that connects us to past and future generations. Keeping these waters healthy is the foundation of healthy communities. Save the date and join us at the Lakes and Rivers Convention next April.

[**wisconsinwaterweek.org**](http://wisconsinwaterweek.org)

Friday Keynote

James Edward Mills

Mills is a freelance journalist and independent media producer who has worked in the outdoor industry for over 30

years. Learn more about his projects and perspective to help make sure our natural resources are available to everyone and conserved into the future.



NICK BEFARD



DEREK THORN

(Turn Education into Action cont. from pg. 7)

students training to become teachers are great partners.

- ◆ Will the education be online, in-person, or both? Details matter; describe how long each event will last, where it will take place, and how often.
- ◆ If your project includes an electronic component, how will you engage people with your content?

Build More Than a Project, Build Capacity

(Grant section: Capacity Focus)

Describe how your organization will develop or enhance partnerships while getting things done. Since capacity is a big area, decide how your activities will focus on strengthening membership, internal functions, external relationships, or programs. Explain how your activities

One event raises awareness. A series of experiences changes behaviors.

will improve the capacity area you choose to focus on and show how you will measure success. Pre- and post-surveys, participation numbers, or new partnerships can all help show your growth.

To learn more about specific tools to help strengthen capacity, visit the Extension Lakes website (uwsp.edu/lakes) where you can find a whole section focused on organizational capacity.

Turn Funding into Lasting Change

A strong grant proposal does more than check boxes. It shows how your project will move people from awareness to action. ◆



Extension Lakes
College of Natural Resources
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Lake Tides

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Reflections

“Preserving, protecting, and restoring our waters are tasks for many lifetimes, and sometimes the effort can seem overwhelming. But as long as we stay connected with all of the many, many blessings that water provides, and continue to keep that love in the forefront of our minds and hearts, as long as we remind ourselves to hope, then our stories will help connect others to water and encourage them to do what they can to help care for this beautiful Blue Marble world.”

~ Wallace J. Nichols
Blue Mind

MAGGIE SANDERS



CAROL WATKINS

SUPPORT LAKE TIDES

