

THE VERMILION



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To Protect and Improve Lake Vermilion

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



With this issue of the newsletter, we are completing two years of our new color newsletter. We strive to provide a variety of articles to educate, inform, and entertain our members and readers. Board member Lori Ptak is our new communication leader, coordinating the newsletter and doing an excellent job. We are always interested in recommendations on articles or articles that you would like to submit. Please contact Lori with your ideas (lori@ptak.org).



Terry Grosshauser
VLA President

Many board members and members have taken new leadership roles this last year, and I am very pleased with the transition. Pat Michaelson continues to meet with potential volunteers and is very successful in finding volunteers to take on some of our new responsibilities. If you have an interest in volunteering and getting to know more people in the community, please contact Pat (plmichaelson@gmail.com).

We welcomed a new board member this fall and his name is Robert (Bob) Pearson. Bob is a semi-retired lawyer who still practices Business Law in Duluth. He is a Tower graduate, and his family has a long history in the Lake Vermilion area. Bob has agreed to work on a potential grant related to the BP oil spill funds that will be available for preserving and restoring loon populations in the state of Minnesota. Bob and his wife Renee are both avid fisher people and thoroughly enjoy Vermilion. We now have 15 board members, but under our new bylaws we can have as many as 18 board members.

I am member of the DNR state Walleye Workgroup, and they usually review the status of Mille Lacs and review any new completed studies. See the articles about the impact of invasive species and new infor-

mation on Lake of the Woods. The news is not good since many of the largest legendary walleye lakes are now infected with zebra mussels, and damage to those walleye fisheries could be significant. Mille Lacs has lost so much of the low end of the food chain that there is a severe shortage of forage fish, limiting growth of walleye and survival of young-of-the-year walleye.

We have finished our grant request to St. Louis County for AIS projects and inspection hours. With more lakes in the region requesting funding, there is a chance we will not have as many hours for boat checkers on Lake Vermilion as we had last year. Approval of the grant request will not be known prior to printing of this newsletter.

On the fisheries front, the 2019 lake-wide walleye gill-net catch rate of 12.2 fish/net was up slightly from 2018 (11.6 fish/net) but still fell below the historic 25th percentile. Additionally, the three-year moving average of 13.1 fish/net fell slightly below the lake-wide management plan objective (14 fish/net). Fall electrofishing targeting young-of-the-year walleye had average catch rates lake-wide with above average size fish at over 6 inches. The high catch rates and large average size indicate a potential strong 2019 class in East Vermilion while below average catches were observed in West Vermilion. Average to above average catches of walleye under 9 inches and over 17 inches were observed lake-wide in 2019, along with average to below average catches from 9 to 17 inches. Hopefully the 2019 class, because of the size, will become a strong year class. More information on the fishery will be in the May newsletter.

Please make a note on your calendar for this year's Annual Meeting which will be on Saturday, August 8 at Camp Vermilion on the west end. The May newsletter will contain more information about the format of the annual meeting.

I welcome your communication and suggestions on any subject related to protecting and improving Lake Vermilion.

The Canada Jay: North Woods favorite trickster

In the Lake Vermilion area, we are lucky have a playful little bird called the Canada Jay.

Residents of the area enjoy the jays in their backyards, getting them to eat bits of bread out of their hands. Some jays even visit hunters sitting in their deer stand!



Lori Ptak
VLA Newsletter
Volunteer

Previously known as Gray Jay, the American Ornithological Society officially changed the name to Canada Jay which is more aligned to its scientific name *Perisoreus canadensis*. These jays seem to be very common to us, but they really only occur in the northern heavily wooded areas of the U.S. and Canada, and those woods have to have a strong coniferous, or evergreen, component. Dee Kuder, who leads birders in the Crane lake area, said that folks from around the country travel to our area to add Gray Jays to their life lists.

These smart little birds are also known as the “camp robber”, since they hang around campsites to steal food. More aliases include timberjay, moose bird, whistling john, or whiskey jack (the latter derived from the Algonquin Indian name for the bird, “wisaka-jack”).

Since they start nesting in the dead of winter, they spend the fall and winter caching food in preparation for feeding young chicks in March and April when there really



isn't much food to be found in the forest. They like bits of bread because they can stash them to eat later, usually on tree branches or under loose bark.

Besides bread and suet, Canada Jays scavenge carcasses. They have also been seen making cold-weather meals out of ticks that have attached themselves to the backs of moose. Canada Jays eat about 50 calories a day—the equivalent of a small spoonful of peanut butter.

Lynn Rogers studied these jays from 1969-2003 near Ely, and found they were able to carry food in their beaks up to 33-percent of their body weight, and could carry up to 57-percent of their weight in food when transferred

to their feet. (This is more than the common raven, relative to body weight, with whom they compete for carcasses).

Terry Grosshauser, Lake Vermilion resident and VLA president, observes the jays around his house in the early fall and winter. He says they will find you and make noise when they want food. They have a great variety of calls and notes, which Sigurd Olson, in his book *The Singing Wilderness*, calls “a strange ventriloquism.... the muted warbling that seemed to come from everywhere at once.” To hear their call, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jbYyKyNSnOU>.

**Canada Jay cover photo by
Marshall Helmberger/The Timberjay**

Corey Kitzmann sets new Catch and Release State Record for Muskie

Corey Kitzmann, 31, a teacher from Davenport, Iowa, set the new catch and release state record for Muskie, at 57 1/4 inches, caught in Lake Vermilion on August 6. The DNR certified the muskie using a video of the measurement and a witness. The girth of the muskie was 25 1/2 inches and equates to approximately 47 pounds using a weight formula. The fish was released into Vermilion in good shape so she still swims out there for other anglers to enjoy.

Leonard Kitzmann, Corey's grandfather, has been a member of the Vermilion Lake Association for a number of years. Corey's grandfather and grandmother purchased some land on Lake Vermilion in a roadless area a long time ago, and in the 1990s, they were able to build a cabin on the lake with the intention of having a place where the family could gather and spend time together—a familiar story for many families on Lake Vermilion. Corey's father introduced him to muskie fishing when he was eight years old. He caught two muskies that first year and was hooked on muskie fishing and Lake Vermilion. He is a very avid fisherman; he even retied the double bladed bucktail he used to catch the monster.

Corey, his brother, and their wives are all teachers and are able to spend a lot of time at the cabin during their summer vacations. They both have children and are



introducing them to all of the activities available while being at the cabin. That is four generations that have enjoyed the cabin, lake, and wildlife around one of the most beautiful lakes in the country.

Shortly before going fishing on August 6, Corey received a phone call that a very good friend and family man whom he taught with had passed away. Since Corey was alone at the cabin, he decided to go fishing, thinking about all of

the ways his buddy had impacted his life and the memories they had shared together.

The large muskie hit at one of Corey's favorite spots. After a jump or two and the fish circling the boat a couple of times, he landed it by himself. A nearby boater was watching and came over to help with the picture-taking and release. He also became the witness that the DNR requires.

Continued on next page

Record Muskie...continued from previous page

Corey not only set a state record, he now holds the family record as well. Needless to say the family is competitive and has caught quite a few 50-plus inch muskies. If they are anything like my family, the conversation always turns to who has the largest fish and the bragging rights could last a long time with

this fish. Congratulations to Corey and the entire Kitzmann family for their stewardship of beautiful Lake Vermilion and its fishery.

by Terry Grosshauser, VLA President

How does the new state record Muskie caught this past August on Lake Vermilion compare to the all-time world record?

A considerable amount of excitement was generated during last year's open water season when on August 6 Corey Kitzmann of Davenport, Iowa, caught and released the largest Muskie ever recorded in Minnesota waters on Lake Vermilion. The fish measured 57 1/4 inches long and had a girth of 25 1/2 inches. The DNR estimated that the fish weighed 47 pounds based on the above-referenced measurements. The prior record for largest Muskie caught in Minnesota waters was a 56-7/8-inch fish caught in 2016 on Pelican Lake in Otter Tail County. So all that begs the question - just how close did this fish get to the all-time Muskie record?

The largest Muskie ever caught was landed by an angler named Louis Spray on October 20, 1949, at Chippewa Flowage in northwestern Wisconsin, just



east of Hayward. This location is about 190 miles southeast of Lake Vermilion. The fish measured 63 1/2 inches long, and had a girth of 31 1/4 inches. It weighed 69 pounds 11 ounces. Way back in 1949, the standard practice was to land the fish and take it home, so an exact weight of the fish was recorded. As it turns out, the world record fish was quite a bit larger than our new Minnesota record by 6 1/4 inches in length, 5 3/4 inches in girth and around 21 to 22 pounds in weight.

If you want to see that fish mounted, then you are in luck.

Back in the days before catch and release became the norm, the fish was taken to a taxidermist and mounted. It was donated to The Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum in Hayward, Wisconsin by the Chippewa Flowage Association of Hayward, Wisconsin, which at some point had acquired it from Spray. The thing I remember most when I saw it was the enormity of its head. I remember thinking that it was about the size of an alligator's head.

**by John Yocum,
VLA Board Member**

“As property owners and visitors of Lake Vermilion, we have an obligation to alter our way of life to protect Lake Vermilion, rather than alter Lake Vermilion to protect our way of life.”

Terry Grosshauser
VLA President

**Summer evening air
as untouchable as a dream
of warmth
in the middle of winter**

The author of this haiku poem is Dr. Clarke Garry, who lives in Togo. He's a retired entomologist from UW River Falls and is active in the Northwoods Friends of the Arts Writing Group in Cook.

“My haiku follow the tradition of “one-breath” poems by Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828) and for that reason do not fulfill a 5-7-5 syllabication pattern that some readers expect.”

Memorial Gifts

The Vermilion Lake Association regularly receives donations in memory of loved ones or friends. These gifts were received between June 25, 2019 and Jan. 9, 2020. We are grateful for these gifts and also wish to honor those who have passed away:

Liz Abrahamson
Ray and Gladys Ashley
Phil Bartusek
Bud and Betty Bystrom
Leah Carr
Dan Cownie
Robert Cumming
Leo DuCharme
Annie Duren
Rick W. Dyer
Arnold Engman
Dr. Bayard French
Miller Friesen
Marie and Ken Grosshauser
Skip Hendrickson
Mel Hintz
Elizabeth Holmes
Jerry and Rebecca Ketola
Patty Knoer
Joe Larson
Keith I. Loken
Dale Lundblad
Carol Rautio Mack
Jay Magnuson
Joe Martin
George E. McCall

Jim McKinney
Rod McPeak
Connie Metcalf
Fred and Frances Mihelich
Judy Moline
Christopher Nicklow
Edgar Peterson
Pete Peterzen
Angelo Poaletti
Jim Postudensek
Trevor Reichel
Ositha Rupert
Sheldon Sandberg
Mark Schelske
Dick Schultz
Rudy Schutte
Theodore Schweiger
Greg S. Seashore
Marion Sederstrom
Alpha Smaby
Robert E. Smith
Dr. Martin Struck
Jesse L. Swanson
Gary VanBaak
Bill Worringer
Earl J. Zimmerman
Dave Brown and Kay Shive
Tim Flanagan
Helen Hall Marturano
My Parents and Grandparents from Gordon Bockus

Impact of Zebra Mussels on the Fishery of an Infested Lake

The Case for Protecting Lake Vermilion

I am a member of the DNR's statewide Walleye Workgroup, and members from all over the state meet two or three times a year with DNR staff. Many topics are discussed, with the group airing their concerns or ideas about improving the walleye fishery in the state.



Terry Grosshauser
VLA President

The Lake Mille Lacs status and what the DNR has learned about the lake are always on the agenda. I have tried to follow the status of this lake because of the severe impact of invasive species that is occurring on the lake. Mille Lacs used to be a tremendous fishery for walleyes—nicknamed a “walleye factory”—with the take in some years well over 200,000 pounds and with many party boats where individuals could bring home a limit of walleye. Then there was infestation of zebra mussels along with spiny water fleas which started slowly and then exploded exponentially, covering most of the lake. The lake is much clearer since the zebras are completely filtering the lake of algae and microorganisms.

So, what is happening? A significant portion of the low end of the food chain is being lost to zebras. The loss is significant enough that there is not enough food for the forage fish in the lake. Walleye spawning is still occurring at a very high rate, but because of the

shortage of microorganisms and forage, most of the walleye don't survive to second year, and walleye eat walleye. The DNR has limited the public walleye take for Mille Lacs to 15,000 pounds. The DNR has tried additional stocking with no change to the fishery. The DNR indicated that the reason the fishing has been good for walleye this year is that they do not have enough food. They are now long and skinny.

The DNR also presented three case studies on three separate lakes, Lake Ida, Miliona, and Minnewaska. All were popular walleye lakes supported in some cases by lake association stocking. Between 2012 and 2014, zebra mussels were found in all three lakes. After exponential growth of zebra mussels, the result was that young of the year walleye dropped to near zero in each lake, and walleye gill netting in the fall fell from state averages of 10 or more walleyes per net to three per net. In all three lakes, the natural fry and stocked fry did not survive to the next year.

Again, what's happening? The DNR's comment was that the zebra mussels may have disrupted the food web, carrying capacity, growth, and overwinter survival of young of the year walleye. There has been limited success with fingerlings or one-year-old fish, and the DNR is struggling



with approaches to increasing the population. Fingerling stocking is very expensive when compared to stocking fry, and reduced license sales puts more pressure on limited DNR budgets. In each lake, anglers express frustration with the walleye fishing.

Zebra mussels are now in Leech, Cass, Winnie, and both Upper and Lower Red Lake. Last November, the DNR announced the discovery of zebra mussel veligers (larvae) in Lake of the Woods (see two related articles).

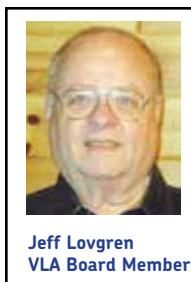
Minnesota lakes are changing due to warmer summers, clearer water, and more competition for walleye forage by other predators including bass, crappies, and northerns. Vermilion has the second most fishing pressure in the state. As AIS spreads into the largest lakes, the need to protect Lake Vermilion increases significantly. The continued spread of zebras and other invasive species is a serious concern for all Minnesota lakes and anglers.



*Moving the Objective
to 100% Inspections*

Working Together to Inspect Boats Coming to Resorts

Lake Vermilion is a popular destination for fishermen and recreational boaters from all over the Midwest. We estimate about one-third of the 16,000-plus boats launching at Vermilion each year do so at our resorts, campgrounds and marinas.



Jeff Lovgren
VLA Board Member

That's a big number— perhaps 5,000-plus watercraft— which could introduce a game-changing invasive species to our lake.

To make matters worse, data on incoming resort boats tell us those boats – compared to boats coming to public accesses – were much more likely to have come from

other states (up to 40-percent) or from a Minnesota lake with known invasives (up to 20-percent). Overall, the percentage of boats with elevated risk is about twice the number at public accesses.

Our resort partners know this. Concerned for our lake and for their own business, many have been inspecting their guests' boats for AIS for several years. The Vermilion Lake Association and North St. Louis SWCD have been helping the resort community with tools, inspector training, and data analysis.

Beginning in 2020, we're all working together to raise the bar. Our objective is to inspect 100-percent of all incoming watercraft at resorts, campgrounds and marinas on Lake Vermilion.

We're not going to get there in one year. We have over 20 private accesses on Vermilion and each has unique challenges. At some, it's limited staff on busy Saturdays. For small resorts, there may be no staff at all beyond the owner. Sometimes, a launch ramp may be remote from the main resort property. We know a variety of solutions will be needed.

In 2020, we plan to improve the in-person inspection training for resort employees after they complete their online training and certification. We will continue the per-boat stipend paid to resorts to help offset their inspection expenses. We plan to shorten the boater survey to 4 or 5 questions – questions like, what lake were you on last – to make the survey fit better into a resort's normal welcome process. We also plan to provide better information to the inspector on which lakes have invasives of special concern to Lake Vermilion. And some resorts will need a DNR-trained inspector to supplement their own team during the hectic Saturday cabin change-over.

The inspection partnership at Lake Vermilion – the resort community, our lake association, and North St. Louis SWCD – is breaking new ground as we expand our excellent inspection work at public accesses to private accesses. No one is doing what we are doing to further protect our lake. Much is left to be done, but the 100-percent inspection objective is visible on the horizon.

Water sample reveals zebra mussel larvae in Lake of the Woods

Excerpts from Minn DNR News Release,
November 8, 2019

The Minnesota DNR has confirmed zebra mussel larvae in water samples taken from one of three sites in Lake of the Woods on the northern Minnesota border. While no adult or juvenile zebra mussels have been reported, the number of larvae is substantial.

The Minnesota portion of Lake of the Woods will be added to the infested waters list for zebra mussels, so that people who harvest bait, fish commercially, or use water from the lake take necessary precautions.

Recent DNR analysis of large lake zooplankton monitoring samples showed from four to 186 zebra mussel larvae, called veligers (VEL-uh-jers). “We don’t know if the lake’s water chemistry is conducive to zebra mussel survival,” said DNR research scientist Gary Montz. “It is possible that calcium levels or other factors might prevent propagation.”

The DNR and other agencies will continue to monitor the lake, in part to learn more about how the lake’s water chemistry affects zebra mussels. The invasive species spiny water flea was confirmed in Lake of the Woods and connected waters in 2007. Invasive species are sometimes introduced in a lake from connected waters or tributaries rather than human transport directly into the lake.

Lake of the Woods is the sixth largest fresh-water lake located in or partially in the United States. Most of the lake extends into the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Manitoba.

What do veligers in Lake of the Woods mean for Lake Vermilion?

The recent discovery (see Minnesota DNR news release at left) of zebra mussel veligers at Muskeg Bay in Lake of the Woods has important implications for Lake Vermilion. Both lakes have generally low calcium levels, well below the levels thought suitable for zebra reproduction.



Jeff Lovgren
VLA Board Member

Muskeg Bay is in the southwest corner of Lake of the Woods near Warroad. Several marinas, resorts, a city campground, and a casino are on the bay. The Warroad River runs through the city into Muskeg Bay. In 2020, we expect DNR scientists

will be looking for adult zebras – both in the bay and in tributaries – and studying the water chemistry and other factors which might affect zebra mussel reproduction.

No veligers or adult zebra mussels have been found at Lake Vermilion. However, the Lake of the Woods discovery re-opens the question on whether zebras might conceivably get a foothold at the mouth of East Two River where it enters Pike Bay.

East Two River has relatively high calcium levels at certain times of the year when rainfall is low. Calcium concentration extremes from 10 mg/l to 30 mg/l have been recorded in the river before being diluted as the water enters Pike Bay. When calcium levels are steady, about 20 mg/l is viewed as a minimum for reproduction. Scientists do not know whether zebra mussels can reproduce when the water chemistry varies significantly during the season.

Our Vermilion AIS team will watch closely as DNR scientists study the Lake of the Woods discovery. Until more is known, as a precaution, VLA volunteers will re-start veliger sampling with plankton nets this summer near the outlet of East Two River.

The Old Cedar Grove

*A treasured visit to
a secret tree stand
lives on in a visitor's
memory.*

In 1850 old-growth forests composed 51 percent of Minnesota's timberland. Forests in the northeastern triangle of the state were so thick and looming in some areas that they blocked the sun. My great-grandfather Peter Pearson, fleeing the effects of famine in Sweden, was among the immigrants who arrived in the region in the late 1800s to carve a new life out of cutting trees. Settling in the boom town of Tower, he sawed Norway and white pine for lumber, spruce and balsam for pulpwood, and birch for railroad ties. By 1994 old-growth forests had dwindled to four percent of Minnesota timberland.

A tree is a tree is a tree, one might think, especially in a state that is blessed with billions of them. But I have a particular fascination with old, especially old-growth, trees. Perhaps that's because I'm sensitive to my great-grandfather's role in their demise, or maybe it's the result of having spent hours gazing up at the long needles growing from gnarled branches on the 100-foot-tall Norway pines holding my hammock on the shoreline

at our family's longtime cabin on Lake Vermilion.

In her quietly mesmerizing book, *Nature's Temples: The Complex World of Old-Growth Forests*, scientist Joan Maloof defines an old-growth forest as one that has "escaped destruction for a long enough period of time to allow natural and biological ecosystem functions to be the dominant influence." From a conservation perspective, old-growth forests often hold a wider range of life and are, tree for tree, generally taller than managed forests. They also harbor history, beauty, and mystery. The oldest known tree in the world is a Great Basin bristlecone pine in California that is pushing five millennia. By comparison, Minnesota's ancient ones date back four centuries or more. Many can be found in ten easily-reached protected areas open to the public across the state, according to the Department of Natural Resources website.

But other unsung stands of old-growth forest still exist—if you know where to look. I was thrilled, several years ago, when my friend Marcus Hess invited me to see a hidden grove of old-growth cedar on an island in a large bay on the west end of Lake Vermilion. On a windy day we paddled our canoe a half-mile straight into a headwind. The waves were white-capped, wet, and invigorating.

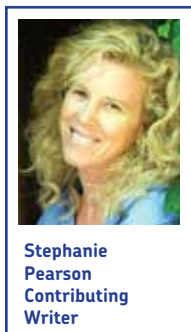
When we reached the island, we beached the boat in an isolated cove, then started bushwhacking through dense scrub in the direc-

tion of the trees. It was slow going without a trail. After half an hour, the underbrush cleared and the mellow, soothing aroma of cedar led us to what looked like an outdoor chapel. Light filtered through the dense canopy, and, with no underbrush, the forest floor appeared to be swept clean. Despite the wind on the lake, the trees held the silence. I sat in wonder on a downed log, guessing at why they had escaped the fate of saws and disease, grateful to my friend for sharing his secret.

A year later Marcus died suddenly of cancer. He was the only person I knew who knew of the trees' existence. Because my memory of that day now feels so fleeting and dreamlike, I recently confirmed with Terry Bergstrom, a DNR forestry technician based in Cook, that the cedars are indeed old-growth. He told me they sit on 30 acres of public land, a plot that is "unusual for how parklike and pure the cedar is."

I'm tempted to try to find the cedars again, to share their beauty with others, as Marcus so generously shared them with me. But I've decided not to act upon that impulse. It's probably best to just let them be.

Stephanie Pearson writes for Outside and other publications. This essay was published in the November 2019 Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine, and is reprinted with permission.



Volunteering....One of the Little Joys of Living in the Northland!

Whether you live on the lake or in one of the surrounding small towns, volunteers are highly regarded by those who need something done. It might be something small like dropping off someone's mail or maybe something bigger like inspecting boats for invasive species. Volunteers are always needed and appreciated.



Frank Siskar is one of those highly regarded people. He started volunteering with his family when he was a young boy. Whenever someone needed help, the Siskars would show up.

For many years Frank and his father would come to Lake Vermilion to fish and dream of having a cabin on this great lake. Dreams do come true and for them it happened in the late 70s.

That same dream came true again, this time for Frank and his wife Kathy. For many years they looked for cabins on Lake Vermilion but couldn't find the perfect place for them. They redesigned their dream and started looking for property to build on. They found the perfect lakefront property and started building their dream home. For the next 25 years they were part-time residents on the lake but that didn't stop them from volunteering.

Frank was always thinking of ways he could help. Seated at a restaurant in North Dakota he started reading a paper placemat that had local information printed on it. He brought that placemat home with him and shared his great idea with the president of the then "Sportsman's Club" (now the Vermilion Lake Association). After much thought and discussion, they worked out a plan. The club would print information about the lake, AIS and the surrounding areas on paper placemats. They would then deliver the placemats at no charge to the resorts and restaurants around the lake. This was truly a win-win situation for both the club and the restaurant owners. Information for the visitors and free placemats for



Frank and Kathy Siskar

the restaurants.

For almost 20 years Frank has volunteered his time as a trained boat inspector. He would inspect while he talked to the boaters, sharing information with them about the importance of boat, trailer and motor inspection. These steps will help to stop the transporting of Aquatic Invasive Species from lake to lake.

As a side note: If you ever hear Frank speaking and you see no one else around, look for one of his furry or feathered friends. An inquisitive grouse that he refers to as WC, short for Wood Chicken, loved to watch him work and would move in closer to hear him talk. They became great friends and WC would follow him around the property, even flying onto the back of the four-wheeler to take a ride. Frank, with his gentle voice and welcoming smile, has also befriended a pine marten.

Get Involved, new Volunteers are always welcomed and appreciated. Contact VLA Volunteer Coordinator, Pat Michaelson at plmichaelson@gmail.com.

VLA Volunteer Needed

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Educational Materials Coordinator

Work with VLA Leader to manage inventory of AIS banners, signs, posters, tri-fold brochures, bobbers and other materials.

Order new supplies as needed from: WAFisher, Timberjay, DNR etc. Revise content when needed

as well as minimal new development of materials from scratch with assistance of print-partners. Coordinate with “storage room” owners on each end of lake to maintain appropriate stock for users. Low hours required, typically during early spring and summer season. This is a great position for a seasonal member who would like to share their organizational or printing skills as a new volunteer!

Contact Pat Michaelson, Volunteer Coordinator at plmichaelson@gmail.com or 612-306-7702.

Pollinators are key to Minnesota's environmental health



Without them, we wouldn't have some of our favorite foods. They are vital to a healthy environment. They're also beautiful and fascinating to watch. They're pollinators, and education is important to understanding, appreciating and helping them.

Bees, butterflies and hummingbirds are needed to pollinate plants that provide Minnesota food crops such as fruits, vegetables and herbs. Some of these foods are important for wildlife, too. Black bears, for example, eat raspberries that are pollinated by bumble bees. Honey bees and native pollinators contribute millions of dollars to Minnesota's agricultural economy.

Pollinators play a critical role in keeping our environment healthy. They help maintain the health of the many plants that stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. These plants also buffer waterways, store carbon, and provide habitat for other wildlife. Plus, flowering landscapes are beautiful. Without pollina-

tors, our environment would look very different.

“Pollinators are so important, not just to flowers but to our whole environment, and there are many simple things Minnesotans can do to help pollinators,” said DNR invertebrate ecologist Jessica Petersen.

To help pollinators

- ❖ Plant a variety of flowers, especially those that are native to the area.
- ❖ Keep gardens blooming all season long; choose plants that provide pollen and nectar in the spring, summer and fall.
- ❖ Provide nesting sites by allowing dead branches and logs to remain, leaving bare earth for ground-nesting insects, or installing bee nesting blocks.
- ❖ Reduce pesticide use.
- ❖ Become a citizen scientist and help researchers collect data about pollinators and their habitat.
- ❖ Tell friends and family about pollinators and inspire them to take action.
- ❖ A list of pollinator resources is available on the DNR website.

Article courtesy of MN DNR

Closing the Book...a look back

*One season turning toward another.
A new year. 2020's book of life has
arrived,*

*Unmarked by life's seminal events and
sorrows and joys.*

*Yet.... there is always time to look back
and say thank you.*

*Vermilion lost two quiet stewards of
her waters this past year.*

*Formalities? They never mattered, they
were simply Mel and Dale, two quiet
giants.*

*The names of Hintz and Lundblad are
now writ large on the lake's beautiful
waters.*

*As for the loons, the fishery, places
to enjoy Vermilion's gifts, the waters'
quality.....*

*All....beneficiaries of Mel and Dale's
leadership and decades of dedicated
hard work.*

*And of course who kept the news com-
ing? Championing the message and the
efforts of so many. Informing countless
readers of Vermilion's beauty and the
efforts to keep it so? Who was at the
helm to amplify the call of the Lake?
I think we know. Serving for eight of
the Association's fifty plus years as its
President....Mel and Dale.*

*Well done good and faithful stewards.
All who call Vermilion home remain
ever grateful for your service, your
leadership and most importantly your
friendship.*

*I would like to close and honor Mel
and Dale with an all too familiar
sound.*

*A melancholy sound, a sound we have
heard countless times over the years.*

*The bugler's sound, a sound which has
but four soulful notes.*

*Like angels, those notes float in the
air....calling our boys home.*

*We know this call, a last farewell....
Taps....whose soft words now complete
my goodbye to both:*

"Day is done..... gone the sun.....

*From the lake, from the hills,
from the sky.....*

*All is well.... safely rest.....
God is nigh".....*

Amen.

Tom Aro

January 2020



Want to Protect Your Lake? Here's How

by Jeff Forester, Executive Director,
MN Lakes and Rivers Advocates

Chicken Little was right. The sky is falling. Or, more to the point, our lakes and rivers are becoming impaired at an unacceptable and accelerating rate. Walleye fishing is good but uneven and could be better. Long-time lake lovers are seeing a decrease in aquatic plant beds, which are critical for water quality and fisheries.

One statewide group works at the legislature to address the threats to our lakes— Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates. With two full time lobbyists, a media specialist, and a state of the art “one click” email action alert system, MLR is able to frame lake issues for state policy makers, educate them about solutions, and provide a large enough grassroots base in support to see that those solutions are funded and codified in state statute.

In this last legislative session, MLR was able to restore aquatic invasive species management grants for lake associations, fund the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, and

rebate the sales taxes which lake associations pay for chemical treatment of lakes.

Three reasons for you to join MLR today:

➤ As non-profits, lake associations are limited in the political advocacy they can do. But as individuals, you can and should engage; so let your elected officials hear your voice.

➤ With professional lobbying and their email action alert system, MLR amplifies your combined voices and tracks the process so that your communications are well informed and timed for maximum impact.

➤ Grassroots action truly is a numbers game. There are over 300,000 lake home and cabin owners in Minnesota. The lake is a core value for all of them, yet fewer than one-percent have made the choice to engage on lake issues.

Go to www.mnlakesandrivers.org. Click on the Membership button, and join at whatever amount works for you. Or ask your Lake

The Vermilion Lake Association is a Minnesota Lakes and Rivers (MLR) member and strongly supports their work. MLR was an original advocate for moving \$10M to counties annually for AIS prevention. This money funds the grants that VLA and North St. Louis SWCD receive for our AIS prevention initiatives.

As a result of our support of MLR, we were included in a meeting with DNR Commissioner Strommen to voice our thoughts on how to improve relationships with the DNR. Please consider a personal membership in MLR.

- VLA Board of Directors

Association officers for an MLR membership form, and mail it in with a check.

Please call 612-961-6144 or email me at jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org with any questions or comments you may have. It would be my pleasure.

Check it out!!!

Have you checked the Vermilion Lake Association website lately? Under “Fishing News and Videos, there are links to key websites with fishing reports, news articles, and

other information. There is also a recently added collection of videos showing techniques, tactics and tips for catching various species of fish in Lake Vermilion, as well as information on such topics as life cycle, habits and habitat of the fish in the lake. Under “Shore Lunch Sites” there is a link to an easy-to-print PDF map with GPS coordinates and additional info.

Tournament Fishing and Protecting the Lake

A beautiful lake with excellent fishing is going to attract fishing tournaments. Lake Vermilion hosted nine fishing tournaments in 2019, three more than 2018. Of these, three targeted walleyes, five were bass tournaments and one was hunting for musky. These tournaments bring hundreds of boats to Vermilion from all over the Midwest including from lakes infamous for invasive species.



Dick Vohs
VLA Member

That is why the Vermilion Lake Association (VLA) has been working with fishing tournament directors to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Our goal is for every boat to be inspected before putting into Lake Vermilion.

Fortunately, as a group, tournament anglers are as respectful of our fishery as anyone. In 2019, seven of the nine tournaments had 100% of their boats inspected. In 2018, fewer than 60% of tournament boats were inspected. The VLA is increasing our efforts, mainly through frequent and clear communication and being sure it is easy and convenient to

get boats inspected. Most of the tournament directors are responding with willing and even aggressive participation. We hope to get all of the 2020 tournaments to get all their boats inspected.

The VLA partners with the North Saint Louis County Soil and Water Conservation District (NSLCSWCD), the 1854 Treaty Authority and Fortune Bay Marina. Most of the tournaments use the Fortune Bay facilities. This partnership works to make it easy for competitors to get inspections at all their entry points.

In addition to increased success in AIS prevention, this year we saw a new “catch-record-release” procedure known as CRR used by two of the tournaments to avoid fish mortality. The Classic Bass Champions Tour and the Student Anglers Champions Trail used CRR to quickly record and release fish in the place where they were caught. Here’s how it works. Traditionally, tournaments keep fish in live wells and weigh in at a central location where the fish are then

Continued on page 19

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Bob Pearson, 5773 Puncher Point Rd, Tower, MN 55790, 218-753-4212, rpearson@duluthlaw.com

Order your trees and native plants now



St. Louis County 2020 Tree Sale

The annual North St. Louis County Soil and Water Conservation District Tree Sale is now underway.

A wide variety of coniferous and deciduous trees and shrubs are available, along with some fruit-bearing and decorative shrubs.

Tree orders are due by May 1. Native plant orders are due April 22. Pickup dates are Thursday, May 7 from 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. and Friday, May 8 from 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. Questions, please call 218-749-2000.

New this year, we will be accepting orders online! Visit <https://www.nslswcd.org/programs-services/annual-tree-sale/shop/> to check out product descriptions and place your order.

As trees and other products sell out, the website will have the most up-to-date inventory. Paper order forms are still available at <https://www.nslswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020-NSL-Tree-Sale-Order-Form.pdf>, and will be processed as they are received at our office.

Native Plant Sale

We have added native plants to our sale. The plants will be sold as kits, each containing 36 plugs of 6 different species, all ready to plant (or keep them in the trays until you are ready to plant). Each plant is grown in a 2" x 2.25" x 3.25" cell. Each kit will include 5 flowers and 1 grass species. Three different kits are available with specially selected plant varieties for specific sites: Pollinator Habitat, Shoreland/Rain garden, and Woodland Shade.

Native plants are a great way to add beauty to your yard or landscape, while also benefiting wildlife, soil health, and water quality. Due to the time needed to assemble and package kits, plant orders will close April 22.

Donations

The Vermilion Lake Association has qualified as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3). Your charitable gifts and membership dues are generally tax deductible for federal income

tax purposes. Please consult your tax professional.

To accommodate a wide range of donor interests, the Vermilion



Lake Association has three funds to which gifts may be directed. Any size gift is appreciated and acknowledged.

General Fund: Gifts to this fund are used for a broad range of lake association activities.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Fund: Gifts to this fund are used to prevent new AIS infestations and to manage infestations already present.

Shore Lunch Site Improvement Fund: Gifts to this fund are used to improve and maintain Lake Vermilion's eight shore lunch sites.

How to Make a Donation

If you'd like to send a check, please make it payable to "Vermilion Lake

Association, Inc." and mail to the address below. If you wish, you may direct your donation to a specific fund.

All gifts are appreciated and acknowledged. Please include your name, email, and mailing address.

If this is a memorial gift, please let us know who the gift is in memory/in honor of.

Vermilion Lake Association, Jerry Lepper, Treasurer, P.O. Box 696, Tower, MN 55790

Donate online at <https://www.vermilionlakeassociation.org/get-involved/donate/>

Assessing Lake Vermilion's Shoreline Habitat

Natural lakeshores are unique transition zones between the land and water that provide valuable ecological functions benefiting fish, wildlife, and water quality. Shore habitat loss is a major issue that affects the health of lakes. As human activities alter lakeshores, critical habitat for fish and wildlife may be



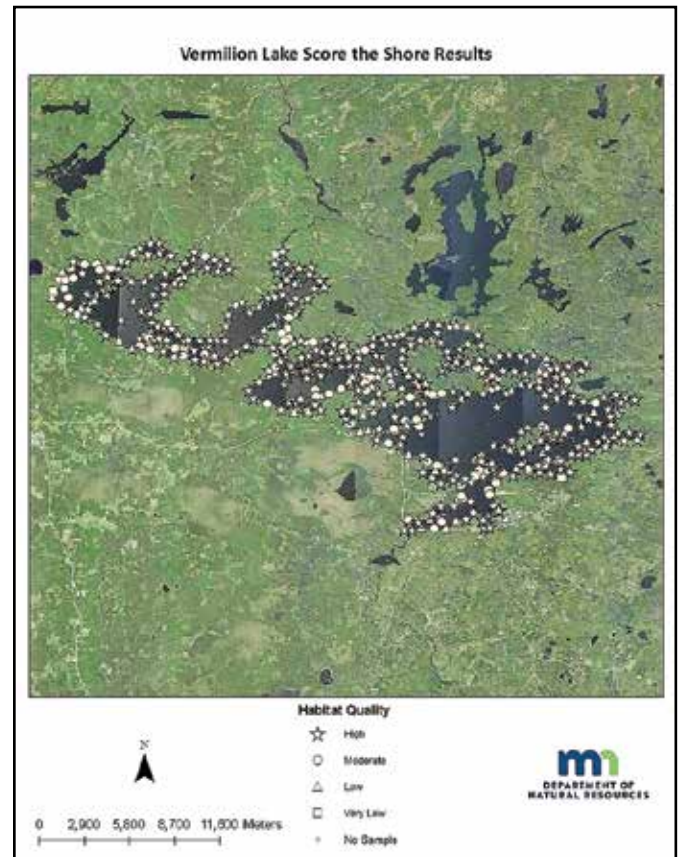
Matt Hennen
DNR Tower Area
Fisheries

changed or lost. Also, important water filtering and stabilization functions that unaltered shorelines provide can be diminished. Lakeshores can change from “wild” naturally vegetated areas to “domesticated” sites of turf grass and hard surfaces that reduce habitat availability and create more direct run-off into our lakes.

Minnesota DNR Fisheries Tower Area staff conducted an assessment of lakeshore habitat on Lake Vermilion. The assessment, called Score the Shore, is a natural resources survey designed to rapidly assess the quantity and integrity of lakeshore habitat. Objectives of the Score the Shore Survey were 1) Describe the lake-wide lakeshore habitat; 2) Detect substantial lake-wide lakeshore habitat score changes over time; and 3) Compare lake-wide lakeshore habitat scores within and between watersheds and ecoregions to assess patterns and trends.

Visual observation and assessment of 549 Score the Shore sites on both public and private lands was completed from a boat during the summers of 2017 and 2018. Sites were evenly spaced every 1,000 meters around the lakeshore (including islands) and occurred on both developed and undeveloped lands. Approximately 100 feet of shoreline was assessed at each site and habitat scores could range from a low of zero to a high of 100. Higher scores occurred at sites with more trees, shrubs, and natural ground cover, and fewer docks, boat lifts, and structures in the nearshore area. A lake wide score, ranging from 0 to 100, was calculated by averaging the individual scores from each survey site.

The average lake-wide habitat score for Lake Vermilion was approximately 92 out of 100, indicating that overall lakeshore habitat quality was high. The Lake Vermilion shoreline habitat score was higher than the statewide lake score average of about 74. About half of the sites were on developed land and the average score was 83. Concentrated areas of very low to moderate habitat



quality were generally found along the more developed southern and western shorelines in areas including Pike Bay, Daisy Bay, Frazer Bay, Oak Narrows, Wakemup Narrows, and Head of the Lakes Bay. A few unique aspects to the Lake Vermilion survey compared to other lakes in the state included the presence of boathouses (both “wet” and “dry”), the large amount of natural ledge rock habitat, and the high number of island sites.

Overall, lakeshore habitat on Lake Vermilion is in satisfactory condition and generally folks have been good stewards of the land. However, there are always areas where improvements can be made. If you are interested in assessing your own shoreline, DNR has created a tool for lakeshore owners to assess habitat on their property called Score Your Shore (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/scoreyourshore/index.html>). Additional resources for shoreland management can be found at <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/shoreland-mgmt/index.html>.



Summertime Family Fishing and Shore Lunch

As each year comes and goes, the winter months seem to make the mind wander and replay moments on the water from the past summer. Most of those memories come from time on the water with my family and other families. There's something special about young, smiling faces. The one memory that never seems to fade from a kid's memory is the shore lunch. They might catch 20 fish and forget every one of them, but one thing is for certain, shore lunch is never forgotten! Here are a few recommendations for a trip catered to family fun!

Have a game plan of the spots you are going to fish

(sand flats/humps, weed lines, and rock piles).

Have all the rods rigged and ready before you hit the lake--and extras!! You want to limit wait times to a minimum in the boat.

Have plenty of bait (minnows, leeches, crawlers)—minnows, spring/fall; leeches and crawlers, summer.

The key to “family fishing” isn't necessarily species specific. The name of the game is “Tight Lines”! Fish for whatever is biting best at that time of the day. Another name I like to call it is “Operation Shore Lunch”! People of all ages just want to catch fish; some enjoy walleye, some enjoy bass, some enjoy pike, and some enjoy panfish, but in all reality, they just want to catch fish! A shore lunch is a nice way to end the morning outing and enjoy your catch. On a typical family outing, whether it's with family or a family of clients, here are few go-to places/tactics:

The perfect (summer) trip:

Leave the dock between 7-8 am.

Walleye fish for the first 1-2 hours on the mud or sand flats/humps with crawlers.

Bass fish 1-2 hours on some rock reefs (5-14 ft) with a slip bobber/leech, or “dead stick” vertically with just a split shot/leech just off the bottom, lifting up and down.

Pan fish 1 hour, bobber up on a weed line with a 1/3 of a crawler in 4-8 ft. Bluegill heaven!

If there is any time left, cast for pike for the last hour on weed edges in 6-12 ft. with soft plastics, inline/tandem spinners, shallow crankbaits.

Head to one of the great shore lunch spots (<https://www.vermilionlakeassociation.org/other-programs/shore-lunch-sites/>) available to us on many parts of the lake, and enjoy your catch at the water's edge. (My favorite shore lunch: fish, potatoes, beans, corn, and garlic bread.)

For shore lunch tips and tricks feel free to contact me, and I'd gladly help you get started!

**Steve Amundson, VLA Member,
Spring Bay Resort & Guide Service, 218-780-5941**

Japanese Knotweed: A Destructive Invasive Plant

Be on the lookout for invasive Japanese knotweed moving north. This destructive plant is very easy to recognize, often growing over 10 feet tall, with large heart shaped leaves, and stems that look like bamboo.

In its native habitat of north east Asia, knotweed is adapted to breaking up volcanic rock. Its tough roots can get into septic systems, pipes, and even break through driveways and building foundations. Along rivers and lakes, it spreads quickly, crowding out all other plants and causing erosion.



Knotweed was introduced as an ornamental plant, and in packing material. Currently, the most heavily infested area in the state is around Duluth, because of the shipping port. With lots of travelers coming up through Duluth, it's important to keep watch in Northern Minnesota.

What should you do if you find it?

Report it! The earlier we find new infestations, the easier they are to get rid of.

Don't move it. Knotweed can spread by seed, or by small stem and root pieces. Most yard waste disposal sites are not equipped to get rid of it properly. Don't risk spreading it.

Fight back. If you find knotweed on your property, work to contain and get rid of it. Consult a profes-



sional on how to get started. Have patience and stay committed, it can take several years to kill the root system.

For more information, you can contact Beth Kleinke, St. Louis SWCD District Forester at Bethk@southst-louiswcd.org.

Tournament Fishing...from page 15

kept or released. Under the new procedures, anglers use a tournament-provided scale, the Classic Bass Champions CRR app, and a smart phone to take a photo that shows the whole fish and scale. Then the fish is released. The weight is recorded online which allows the tournament to keep a real time leaderboard. Officials and competitors can follow the action. More important, it is a very effective way to protect the fish.

Tournament fishermen have sometimes been skeptical of lake associations and vice versa. However, tournaments are part of a good fishing lake and anglers and residents alike have a shared interest in sustaining the fishery. So we appreciate that more of the tournaments are working with us to prevent mortality and avoid AIS and we will continue to support them in their efforts.



Vermilion Lake Association

PO Box 696

Tower MN 55790

Volunteers Make the Difference

The Vermilion Lake Association has been fortunate over the years to have a dedicated group of leaders and volunteers to staff our important activities. We are grateful for their help.

Please consider joining this team. We have needs for both workers and leaders, for those with only a few hours to spare, and for those who can make a larger time commitment.

If you think you may be interested, please contact Pat Michaelson, VLA Volunteer Program Leader, at 612-306-7702 (cell) or plmichaelson@gmail.com.

Vermilion Lake Association

Sheri Sawatzky, Member Records • P.O. Box 696 • Tower MN 55790
sherisawatzky@gmail.com • 218-780-8178

Membership year runs from Jan 1st through Dec 31st

☐ 2020 New Member ☐ 2020 Renewal

Membership level

☐ \$15.00 Individual ☐ \$20.00 Couple
☐ \$25.00 Family ☐ \$50.00 Business or Organization

Member Name _____

Spouse Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email (requested) _____

Phone (requested) _____

Please clip or copy this form and send to the address above.

Become a Member

Join those who love Lake Vermilion as much as you do. Help us continue the many activities you've just read about.

Not sure? Check us out at our website VermilionLakeAssociation.org. We're pretty sure you'll like our vision for the future and the work we have underway now to make Lake Vermilion even better.

Please mail a check with the form on this page or join at our website using PayPal or a credit card.

The Vermilion Lake Association is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Do You Qualify?

Trick question. Anyone can join the lake association whose mission it is to protect and improve Lake Vermilion. No need to be a property owner. No need to be a fisherman or a kayaker. Just someone who cares about our great lake and wants to protect her for the next generation.