

# THE VERMILION



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*To Protect and Improve Lake Vermilion*

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welcome to our May issue of the Vermilion Lake Association newsletter. This newsletter is being prepared in early April while the state has required people to stay at home because of COVID-19. The Lake Association board hopes that you and your family are safe and can avoid the virus. We all have something to look forward to and it is spending time enjoying Lake Vermilion this summer.



Terry Grosshauser  
VLA President

Although cormorants still cannot be controlled on lakes, the federal fish and wildlife department asked for public comment on controlling the populations of cormorants on lakes throughout the United States. The overpopulation of cormorants has been a problem on several lakes including some of the Great Lakes. As an organization, we submitted a letter supporting efforts to control overpopulation situations on lakes.

The good news is that both the Vermilion Lake Association and North St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District received grants again for 2020. These grants support our continued efforts to check and clean boats coming into Lake Vermilion. DNR data on boat checks during 2019 on Highway 53 yielded tickets on 31 percent of the boats checked which was an increase from about 15 percent for 2017 and 2018. These numbers are disgustingly high, indicating a strong need for our boat checking as a protection for Lake Vermilion. Funding is getting tighter every year as other lakes in the county are also requesting funds from a fixed amount of grant money.

**Cover photo: 88-year-old Jerome Eckrich Jr. and his son Jerry enjoying some May fishing with Steve Amundson. Jerome fell in love with fishing on Vermilion in 1945, the same year he built his cabin on the west end of the lake. See story on page 8**

With regard to our picnic sites, Mike Ptak has coordinated the purchase of new decking for the dock at the Bystrom Bay site which was showing considerable wear. The guides league will be adding an additional picnic table at Bystrom Bay too. We have eight picnic sites; please try one you have not visited before. I am sure you will enjoy the experience. This year Mike Ptak will be responsible for the eastern picnic sites and John Zwieg will be responsible for the picnic sites on the west side.

We are planning to deploy our three artificial loon nests again this year. We have improved the nests each year and had success last year. If you see an artificial nest or a loon on a natural nest, please stay at least 300 feet away from them. The loons can abandon a nest and the eggs if people get too close. We are working with the MPCA on a "Get the Lead Out" program which would allow for trade in of lead fishing weights for weights made of non-toxic materials. According to the MPCA and DNR, approximately 10-20 percent of the loons are lost each year from lead poisoning (See article on the MPCA program on page 6.)

Please see the DNR update on Vermilion's fishery and all aspects of the lake on page 10. We are fortunate to have a DNR large lake specialist, Matt Hennen, dedicated to studying all aspects of our fishery and providing us with annual updates. Not all lakes have a dedicated resource like this.

Also please see the article on wake boarding on page 23. There was a bill being considered in the state legislature requiring that wake boarding boats must not operate within 200 feet of the shore. Unfortunately this bill will not proceed due to the emphasis on the virus issue. Please, if you enjoy wake boarding, do not do it near the shore or in shallow bays. Wake boarding will destroy shorelines and churn up the lake bottom in less than 12 feet of water and cut important weed growth.

The board and I have discussed activities for the summer with consideration for the COVID-19 virus and its impact on our activities. We believe the annual

**Continued on next page**

# VLA Annual Meeting planned for August 8 at Camp Vermilion has been CANCELED

**D**ue to the Covid-19 pandemic, the VLA Board decided it's best to CANCEL our membership gathering for this year. While we're hopeful many of you will be enjoying the lake and cabin time by then, we're not certain a large group meeting will be in the best interest for our

greater community.

Please watch for more information in the summer newsletter, on Facebook, and on our web-site as we explore options for a remote information session and informal meeting of some kind. Please feel free to contact any board member

if you have concerns or suggestions.

Our thanks for your understanding and ongoing support.

**Pat Michaelson and the VLA Annual Meeting team**

## DNR egg-takes suspended for 2020

*Pike River Hatchery will closed for the season*

**D**ue to the COVID-19 situation, the Minnesota DNR has decided to suspend all egg-take operations this spring. This includes walleye, northern pike, muskellunge, lake sturgeon and steelhead. While this is disappointing news, social distancing guidelines, stay-at-home orders, and concern for the health and well-being of our employees and the public prevents the DNR from accomplishing this task safely. Although the suspension of egg-takes is disappointing news, please keep in mind that an occasional missing year-class of walleye is common in our walleye fisheries. A fish population

is made up of numerous ages of fish, and even our best walleye lakes regularly have a missing or weak year-class. Also, research on walleye has shown that the survival of juvenile fish in the year following a missing year class is often higher than average due to reduced competition. DNR plans a robust egg-take and stocking of lakes for 2021 that will fill some of 2020's quota, as well as what was already planned for 2021. Together, these things will blunt the impact to fishing in the future when the 2020 year-class would have begun to contribute to the fishery. For additional information on this topic, please see DNR website.

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### *President's Message....from page 2*

meeting should be canceled this year even though the state forecast for the peak is June or July. The concern we have is that members and volunteers will likely remain apprehensive about attending a large gathering like our annual meeting.

This is a very difficult decision and we had to make it in early April with limited information.

We realize it is not ideal, but we are investigating holding an on-line meeting to provide information on activities, answer questions, and vote on retaining board members. Thanks for your continued support and watch for updates this summer in the August

newsletter, website, and Facebook.

We are fortunate that the entire newsletter is coordinated via email with no meetings, allowing us to complete this newsletter and meet state regulations. Please follow state recommendations for preventing further spread of the coronavirus so you can continue to enjoy the beauties of Lake Vermilion. I am sure that members and visitors will relish their time on Lake Vermilion even more this year after dealing with the pandemic. We always welcome your communication and you can expect a quick response.



**AIS Detector Bob McNamara examining a vegetation sample. Vegetation monitoring at public and private accesses is a key element of the Lake Vermilion AIS Program.**



## Lake Vermilion AIS Prevention Funding Approved

**S**t. Louis County Commissioners have approved a \$62,537 grant to the Vermilion Lake Association (VLA) to support aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention at Lake Vermilion during 2020. The prevention program includes six projects, with special emphasis on watercraft inspections and on early detection of new infestations.

“The AIS challenge at Vermilion is very large,” said Terry Grosshauser, president of the 2,600-member lake association. “About 16,000 boats launch at Vermilion’s 40 public and private accesses each year. With serious vegetation threats like hybrid watermilfoil and starry stonewort expanding rapidly in Minnesota lakes, we

must do all we can to protect Lake Vermilion and its business community.”

“We need to be extra vigilant with veligers (zebra mussel larvae) discovered last fall in Lake of the Woods,” continued Grosshauser. Lake of the Woods and Lake Vermilion are both low-calcium lakes believed to be inhospitable to adult zebra mussels.

Countering this growing threat takes an army of volunteers and significant funding. “Our AIS volunteers will donate over 2,000 hours in 2020,” said Jeff Lovgren, Lake Vermilion AIS program coordinator. “We cannot do this without their generous time commitment.”

“Strong partnerships make this difficult and complex task possible,” continued Lovgren. “We are pleased with the close working relationship that has developed among our lake association, North St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District, the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, and the business community around Lake Vermilion.”

If you are interested in joining the VLA volunteer team on AIS or other projects, please contact Pat Michaelson, Volunteer Coordinator, at [plmichaelson@gmail.com](mailto:plmichaelson@gmail.com) or 612-306-7702.

*Adapted from VLA News Release, March 10, 2020*

# Taking Extra Minnows and Leeches with You? Do it Right.

**S**o, we hear the fishing was so good on Lake Vermilion that you have some minnows and leeches left over to take home? No problem ... but let's do it right to protect the next lake you visit.



Jeff Lovgren  
VLA Board Member

If you bought the minnows and leeches at a commercial bait store, like Northwoods Bait and Tackle in Cook or the Y-Store outside Tower, the minnows and leeches themselves came from a licensed Minnesota source and are OK to move. But the water in the minnow bucket or leech container is another thing.

To prevent unintended spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) from one lake to another, by Minnesota statute, Lake Vermilion's water must stay here. But the solution is simple:

Bring a gallon of tap water or bottled water with you



in a plastic jug such as a milk jug. Leave it in your tow vehicle to assure an inspector or CO that it's not Vermilion water. Perhaps freezing part of the water or bringing a Ziploc bag of ice cubes would be a plus.

At the access, as you are exiting Vermilion, dump

all the water from your bait bucket and leech containers on the ground and refill both with the water you brought with you. The minnows would appreciate some ice cubes, too.

Don't dump unwanted bait into Lake Vermilion or along the shore. Unwanted bait belongs in the trash or compost bin.

Have a safe trip home or to your next lake.

## *Considering Watercraft Risk Improves Vermilion's Inspection Program*

**N**ot all boats arriving at Vermilion's public accesses carry the same AIS risk. In 2020, we're taking the first step toward forecasting the risk of incoming boats and using that assessment to decide when and where to deploy North St. Louis SWCD's inspection team.

Boats coming from other lakes, especially lakes with known AIS infestations posing a threat to Vermilion, present a higher risk than those coming out of storage or returning to Vermilion having just left Vermilion. Our risk ranking is shown in a nearby table.

Inspector survey data shows significant differences among our 17 public accesses in the probability that a boat last visited an elevated or high-risk lake. The higher risk level at some accesses – for example, Everett Bay public access adjacent to Everett Bay

**Risk Level of Boats Entering Vermilion**

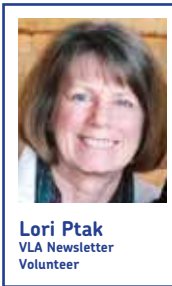
| Risk Category          | Description of Last Lake   | 2019 Risk per Boat | 2020 Risk per Boat |
|------------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| High Risk per Boat     | Minnesota lakes with Eurasian, starry or zebras. Unknown out-of-state lakes. | 1.00               | 4.00               |
| Elevated Risk per Boat | Other Minnesota lakes.   | 1.00               | 2.00               |
| Low Risk per Boat      | Re-entering Vermilion or coming out of storage.                              | 1.00               | 0.25               |

Lodge – is similar to that expected at a private resort. Others, like Stuntz Bay, are used predominantly by local Vermilion boats and are a low risk.

This summer, we will use risk-weighted incoming traffic forecasts to guide inspector staffing at Vermilion's public accesses.

# Protecting Our Loons

Minnesota has about 12,000 loons each summer, the most in any of the lower 48 states. Vermilion Lake Association volunteers



counted 195 loons during their annual loon count in July 2019, the lowest number since 1992. Because most of Minnesota's loon population winters in the Gulf of

Mexico, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife awarded Minnesota agencies almost \$5 million for loon conservation efforts as part of the BP oil spill settlement. While this funding is not yet in place, the DNR



objectives for these funds include 1) protect and expand loon nesting habitat; 2) increase the use of artificial nesting platforms; and 3) encourage local lake associations to develop loon management plans to the end of achieving DNR designation as a "Loon Friendly Lake".

A portion of the settlement money will fund the new "Get the Lead Out!" campaign run by the Min-

nesota Pollution Control Agency. Carrol Henderson, who retired from the MN DNR in 2018, says loons are especially susceptible to lead poisoning because they swallow pebbles at the bottom of lakes to help them grind up their food. When they accidentally pick up a lead jig or sinker off the bottom, one split shot or one jig can kill the loon from lead poisoning. See the article below by MN GreenCorps members Noelle Hitz and Alero Moju which explains this three-year program.

For more information on how to "Get the Lead Out!" check the Get the Lead Out page at Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

## Get the Lead Out

Our main objective is to prevent loon deaths and increase adult survival rates by reducing exposure of common loons to lead through advocacy of intervention activities that promote the use of non-toxic fishing tackle in Minnesota.

Lead poisoning, resulting from ingestion of lead fishing tackle, is recognized as one of the leading causes of death in breeding common loons, and ingestion of lead fishing tackle has been found to be the cause of death in 10 to 20 percent of MN loons. Studies indicate that replacing lead fishing sinkers and jigs with non-toxic alternatives provides immediate benefits to loon populations.

Get the Lead Out!, a program facilitated by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, hopes to provide a proactive educational and assistance program

that encourages Minnesota anglers, retailers, tackle manufacturers, nonprofits and schools to use environmentally friendly non-lead fishing tackle. Some program activities are lead tackle exchanges, providing retailer point of purchase displays, and presenting/angling events.



There are numerous opportunities for partnership with GTLO! through hosting one of the following events: tackle exchange, education/outreach, and sport shows. If there are any opportunities not listed above that you would like to partner with us on, please contact MN GreenCorps members Noelle Hitz at [noelle.hitz@state.mn.us](mailto:noelle.hitz@state.mn.us) and Alero Moju at [alero.moju@state.mn.us](mailto:alero.moju@state.mn.us).

*The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Get the Lead Out! campaign is a Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) project. The work is being paid for with funds provided by BP as part of a 2016 settlement agreement with federal and state governments to compensate the public for injuries to natural resources and recreational use caused by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.*





## A Big Reminder to Protect Lake Vermilion

As you approach Cook on Hwy 53, you can't miss this new reminder that a clean boat protects all lakes from aquatic invasive species. Let's all do our part statewide as responsible anglers and recreational boaters. Additional information about Vermilion's AIS program can be found on the Vermilion Lake Association website. photo courtesy of Wildlife Forever.

## An AIS Identification Guide to Help You Help Our Lake

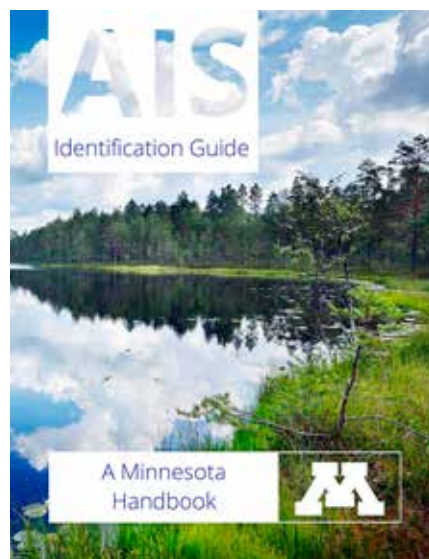
Lake Vermilion welcomes all the help she can get to protect against invasive species. If you're a cabin owner or frequent lake visitor and you'd like to become better at identifying aquatic species at Lake Vermilion, we suggest you obtain a copy of the same identification guide used by our trained AIS Detectors and volunteer access sentries.



Mary McNellis  
VLA Board Member

The spiral-bound reference is water-resistant and called ... what else ... AIS Identification Guide. It's produced by the Minnesota AIS Research Center and is available in-person or online at UM Bookstores for about \$40. ISBN 978-0-692-90536-4. It is an outstanding reference which belongs on every cabin coffee table.

Questions? Please contact AIS Detector and VLA Board Member Mary McNellis, [mmcnellis@stcroix-re.com](mailto:mmcnellis@stcroix-re.com), 612-804-8604.





# Opening Fishing: Wetting a line is just a bonus

Most of us can agree on one thing. Open water never comes soon enough when living in the Northland. The winter days may be short, but the DVR has a long list of fishing shows at the tips of our fingers.

As spring arrives, most of us have our boats and gear ready and raring to go! Always itching to wet a line, try out that new technique, or test out our new Humminbird or Minn Kota on the boat.

Opener has always had that sense of tradition to it. It might be the camaraderie, rituals, and superstitions that we've all come to enjoy most. Whether you're a diehard, fair weather, or cabin couch fisherperson, opening fishing has something for everyone. It's not always about the fish, and obviously a full live-well won't hurt your feelings any either, but opener has always been more.

In light of recent events, this article won't be giving you that secret fishing spot, or secret technique, or that secret lure. Instead, it's going to tell you to enjoy the people you are with, enjoy the conversation, enjoy the cup of coffee, the food, the laughter, and the weather even if it's snowing. Some of the best fishing time is cabin time! The one thing I am going to leave you with is my favorite story about opener. It's one of my favorite memories as a kid growing up in Frazer Bay.

There we were, ready to go out on opening morning as a family. Boat is loaded with snacks and drinks for all of us. We take a trip across the bay to our favorite spring fishing spot. We didn't have a GPS, but we did have Dad, who used the 3-point system, which was usually a rock, tree, and some other random object that would line us up in the perfect triangle where the fish were supposed to be. The jigs and bobbers were tipped with some nice rainbows from "Bait Shop Joe." Now we wait for what I call the Minnesota Handshake, that slow steady pull that walleyes are notorious for. Bobber-Down! The lines are going down left and right, and Dad can't rebait our hooks fast enough. Then the famous statement that can cool the hottest bite, "I have to go to the bathroom." Sometimes Dad could bargain by saying use the



bucket, but sometimes a trip to shore was in store. Back on the water and a few hours later we'd have enough walleyes for a fresh shore lunch style meal at the cabin, followed by a camp fire, fishing off the dock, and a hot "SOW-NA" to cap off the evening!

Let this year's opener be the start or continuation of your tradition with family and friends on one of the most amazing lakes this world has to offer! Enjoy the good times, and God Bless!

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



# Connecting to Water

Greetings! I hope this newsletter finds you well. I expected to be writing a different article about this time for the Spring newsletter. The North St. Louis Soil & Water Conservation District had been selected to host a traveling exhibit at the Minnesota Discovery Center from April 16-June 15, called “We Are Water.” However, COVID-19 developments made it clear to us and our partners by mid-March that we should postpone. We are now planning to host the exhibit along with related events in May-June of 2021.



The exhibit and related programming created by the Minnesota Humanities Center focuses on how water connects to our everyday lives in ways we sometimes forget. The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted ways we rely on water that weren't necessarily on the top of our list to talk about through the project. It also made clear why education about water can be so important.

We are very lucky to have an abundance of water in northern St. Louis County. We are also lucky to have easy access to clean, safe water for drinking, swimming, fishing, and of course, hand washing. As disin-

fecting products became nonexistent at stores around the county, we were reminded that frequent washing with soap and water is an even better defense.

Hand sanitizers weren't the only things disappearing off of the shelves. As toilet paper disappeared, some people resorted to using “flushable” wipes and other paper products as a replacement. However, flushing anything other than toilet paper can put additional stress on wastewater treatment plants and septic systems. In northern Minnesota, we have many septic systems near water resources. Proper septic system maintenance is essential. A failing septic system, including from flushing things a septic system can't handle like “flushable” wipes and paper towels, can lead to contamination of drinking water, lakes, and streams.

And I can't forget to mention, one benefit of having good water quality in our lakes and streams in northern Minnesota is having such beautiful places to exercise, relax, de-stress, and enjoy. It's something to especially appreciate during times of uncertainty. Thank you to everyone for being good stewards of our land to protect Lake Vermilion and the larger watershed now and for the future.

For more information on We Are Water in the future, visit [https://www.nslswcd.org/project\\_post/we-are-water/](https://www.nslswcd.org/project_post/we-are-water/).

## *Is your Membership current ???*

You can check your current enrollment status off the newsletter mailing label. We want to make it easy for you to know if your membership dues are up to date. The first line indicates your status.



For example, “Member 2020” indicates our records show you're paid through calendar year 2020.

Please email or call me with mailing address or email address changes.

Sheri Sawatzky, Chair Membership Records  
[sherisawatzky@gmail.com](mailto:sherisawatzky@gmail.com) or 218-780-8178

## 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.

# Status of the Lake Vermilion Fishery

## 2020 Angling Prospects

Lake Vermilion continues to be a solid multispecies fishery that provides both catch and harvest opportunities for several species. The annual DNR survey indicated that walleye abundance is down for the



Matt Hennen  
Large Lake  
Specialist DNR

second consecutive year and anglers will again notice differences in catch and harvest rates between the east and west basins. However, compared to the 2019 fishing season, anglers may note an increase in the numbers of fish of preferred harvest sizes in East Vermilion, especially as fish from the strong 2016 year-class grow throughout the summer. Additionally, anglers can expect to catch numbers of small walleyes under 10 inches as DNR sampling indicates a potential strong 2019 year-class in East Vermilion. On the other hand, anglers may note a decline in the numbers of preferred harvest size walleyes in West Vermilion as there seems to have been a significant amount of harvest in 2019 that reduced abundance. A strong 2018 year-class in that basin will poten-

tially provide good catch opportunities with some fish growing into the harvestable range as summer progresses. Walleyes over 20 inches continue to be well represented and will provide opportunities for a memorable catch.

Anglers seeking muskellunge (muskies) will find opportunities for fish with a large average size and with trophy potential as a significant portion of the population are 50 inches or larger. Anglers targeting smallmouth bass should find good numbers throughout the lake, but West Vermilion tends to hold higher numbers with smaller fish on average while East Vermilion has lower abundance but larger fish. Additionally, largemouth bass can be found in low numbers overall but certain areas, primarily in West Vermilion, provide the best catch opportunities. Although overall low in abundance, northern pike can be found in specific areas providing harvest opportunities with the possibility to catch fish up to 40 inches. Additionally, black crappie and bluegill will continue to provide angling opportunities. Whitefish and cisco (tullibee) offer harvest opportunities primarily during the fall sport gill-netting season.

## Fisheries Management

Lake Vermilion is comprised of two major basins, East Vermilion (east of Oak Narrows) and West Vermilion (west of Oak Narrows), that are significantly different in terms of habitat and fish communities. The lake is part of the DNR Large Lake Monitoring Program which includes annual fisheries population assessments, water quality monitoring, zooplankton monitoring, aquatic invasive species surveillance, and regularly scheduled creel surveys on the 10 largest lakes in Minnesota. Since 1984, standardized fish population assessments have included a variety of sampling gears to collect various fish species at different life stages. The gears include gill nets, trap nets, shore-





line seines, and electrofishing boats. Fisheries assessments are standardized so that the sampling gear is used at the same locations during the same time of year to best track population trends. Length, weight, age, and other data are collected for fishes of management concern.

The current management plan for Lake Vermilion guides fisheries management for a six-year period, 2017 to 2022. A special regulation exists for walleyes where all fish from 20 to 26 inches must be immediately released. There is a four fish possession limit with only one fish over 26 inches allowed. All other fish are managed under state-wide fishing regulations. DNR continues to operate the walleye spawn take and hatchery at the Pike River, a major tributary to Lake Vermilion. A portion of the walleye fry produced at the Pike River Hatchery are put back into Lake Vermilion. In the past 10 years, between 5 and 15 million fry have been stocked annually into Lake Vermilion. A fingerling muskellunge stocking program began in 1987 with the goal of establishing a low density, high quality population. The most recent management plan calls for a base stocking quota of 3,000 fingerlings annually with up to 2,000 surplus fingerlings per two-year period as available. In 2019, the base quota of 3,000 fingerlings were stocked along with 2,026 surplus fingerlings.

## Walleye

The DNR's 2019 annual fall gill-net survey had a lakewide walleye catch rate of 12.2 fish/net which was a slight increase from 2018. However, the catch rate fell below the 25th percentile for survey data dating back to 1984. Below average catch rates were observed in both basins. The lower catch rate in East Vermilion is mostly due to a weak 2017 year-class. In West Vermilion, the lower catch rate is likely the result of angler harvest throughout the summer of 2019, as there was a noticeable decline in fish from 14 to 18 inches from what was observed in 2018. Anecdotal information suggests that fishing pressure and harvest increased in that basin compared to previous years.

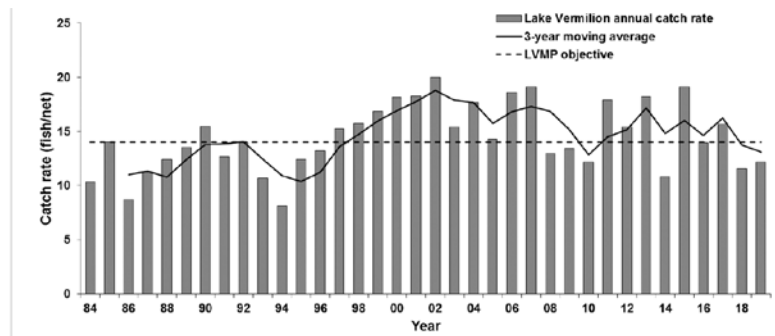


Figure 1. Gill-net catch rate (fish/net) of walleye in Lake Vermilion from 1984-2019. The horizontal dashed line represents the management plan objective. The solid line represents the 3-year moving average.

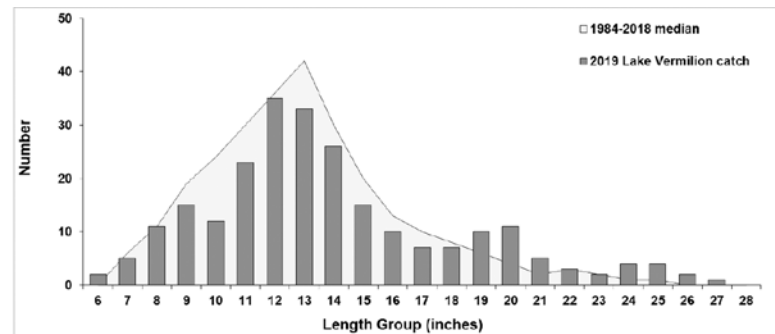


Figure 2. Length frequency distribution of gill-net captured walleye (dark bars) in Lake Vermilion in 2019 in relation to the historic median length frequency distribution from 1984 to 2018 (light gray).

The average length of walleyes captured in the 2019 gill-net survey was 14.5 inches. An increasing trend in the average length of walleyes has occurred

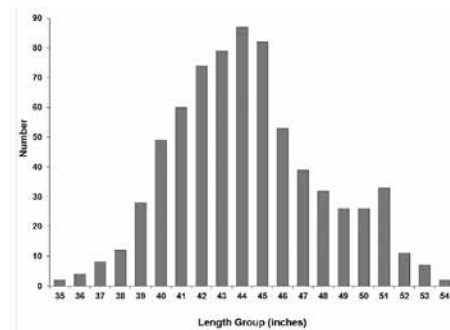


Figure 3. Length frequency distribution of muskellunge (≥35 inches) captured in large-frame trap nets in 2019.

since the protected slot limit was first used in 2006. Historically, fish in East Vermilion have been smaller and their increase in average size over time has not been as noticeable as fish in West Vermilion. Average to below average numbers of walleyes from 7 to 18 inches were sampled lakewide in 2019. However, average to above average numbers of walleyes 19 inches and larger were present throughout the lake. East Vermilion had moderate numbers of fish 12 inches and larger which should provide adequate harvest opportunities along with the chance to catch a larger fish during the 2020 season. West Vermilion had

**Continued on next page**

moderate to low catches of fish from 11 to 19 inches, but high numbers of 9 and 10 inch fish should grow into harvestable fish as summer progresses. Also, considerable numbers of fish 19 inches and larger will provide some harvest and memorable catch opportunities.

Walleyes captured in gill nets in 2019 ranged in age from 0 to 21 years. Catch rates of age-0 (2019 year-class), age-1 (2018 year-class), age-3 (2016 year-class), age-6 (2013 year-class), age-7 (2012 year-class), and ages-8 and older fish were at or above historical averages. For the second consecutive year, catch rates of fish from the 2017 year-class (age-2) were below the 25th percentile indicating a weak year-class. The catch rate of fish ages-8 and older exceeded the 75th percentile following a below average catch in 2018. Following implementation of size protective walleye regulations in 2006, the catch rate of these older fish has significantly increased.

The most recent strong walleye year-class lakewide was produced in 2016. A weak year-class has not occurred lakewide since 2009, however early projections indicate that the 2017 year-class is weak. In East Vermilion, a strong year-class was produced in 2016. The last weak year-class was produced in 2014, however preliminary estimates indicate a weak 2017 year-class in East Vermilion. In West Vermilion, consistent moderate to strong recruitment has occurred annually since the last weak year-class in 2013. Early indications are that the 2018 year-class may be the first strong year-class in West Vermilion since 2014.

Fall electrofishing provides useful information on abundance and growth of young-of-the-year (YOY) walleyes near the end of their first growing season. In Lake Vermilion, both the catch rate of YOY walleyes and average length of fish captured help predict future year-class strength. In 2019, the lakewide catch rate of YOY walleyes was 129.3 fish/hour, which was near the historic average. Above average catches of YOY fish occurred in East Vermilion while catches below the 25th percentile were recorded in West Vermilion. The average length of fish captured lakewide was 6.1 inches which was the third-highest average size dating back to 1988.

## *Muskellunge*

Muskies provide an important catch-and-release sport fishery on Lake Vermilion. The muskie population was established via a stocking program that began in the late 1980s with the goal of providing a low density, high quality fishery. 2019 marked the first year in a two-year effort to get a population estimate of adult muskellunge in Lake Vermilion utilizing mark and recapture techniques. Overall, the effort was successful as a total of 715 muskellunge were captured and inserted with passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags. The fish ranged in length from 24.2 to 54.1 inches with an average length of 44.7 inches. Fish from 39 to 51 inches were well represented and over 10 percent of the fish caught were 50 inches or larger.

## *Yellow Perch*

Yellow perch are a primary forage species in Lake Vermilion that also provide some incidental angler harvest. The 2019 lakewide gill-net catch rate of 27.2 fish/net was above the historical average and was the highest catch rate since 2014. However, there was a drastic difference in catch rates between the basins. The East Vermilion catch rate of 10.7 fish/net was the second lowest ever observed. In contrast, the West Vermilion catch rate of 51.9 fish/net was the third highest ever observed in that basin. Overall, East Vermilion yellow perch catch rates have displayed a decreasing trend since the early 1990s which is likely due to a combination of factors including habitat loss and increased predation. West Vermilion yellow perch catch rates have not shown a trend and have continued to fluctuate cyclically typical of perch populations. Large variations in year to year catch rates are not uncommon, but several years of low catch rates may be a sign of potential problems with the yellow perch population in East Vermilion.

The average length of yellow perch captured in 2019 was 6.6 inches, which was the smallest average size ever observed. This was driven by very high numbers of fish between 5 and 7 inches captured primarily in West Vermilion. The catch rate of fish 9 inches and larger, which are typically the size anglers prefer to harvest, declined to the lowest level ever observed.



Fish captured in gill nets ranged from 1 to 8 years old. A high proportion of fish from age-2 to age-4 in the sample indicate consistent moderate to strong recruitment in recent years which may continue to bolster gill-net catch rates in the future.

## *Smallmouth Bass*

Smallmouth bass are found throughout Lake Vermilion and they provide an important fishery. Spring electrofishing targeting smallmouth bass habitat has been conducted almost annually since 1989. Based on survey results, abundance has increased over the last 25 years. Recent surveys indicate increasing numbers specifically in West Vermilion. Abundance and size structure are vastly different between the two basins, as West Vermilion tends to have higher numbers with much smaller fish on average when compared to East Vermilion. During the recent management planning process, it was decided that electrofishing frequency could be reduced to once every three years and still adequately monitor the population. Sampling was not conducted in 2019.

## *Largemouth Bass*

Largemouth bass are a minor component of the Lake Vermilion fishery and are predominantly found in West Vermilion. The current spring electrofishing surveys do not target largemouth bass habitat, therefore information about the population is limited. Creel data indicates the population of largemouth bass has increased since the 1990s and fish over 20 inches are present.

## *Northern Pike*

Northern pike have historically been present in



relatively low numbers in Lake Vermilion but are an important gamefish for some anglers. Ice-out trap-net assessments have been done periodically to obtain size structure information on the northern pike population and additional data is collected during annual fall gill-net assessments. Ice-out trap netting was not conducted in 2019, however 14 northern pike (0.7 fish/net) ranging in length from 19.9 to 39.2 inches were captured in gill nets. The gill-net catch rate was slightly below the historical median. Overall, a declining trend in northern pike abundance has been observed lakewide. At the same time, the size structure has shifted towards larger fish which can partially be attributed to a 24 to 36 inch protected slot limit regulation that was in place from 2003 to 2018. 2020 will mark the second year that the northern pike population will be managed under Minnesota's northeast zone regulations.

## *Bluegill and Black Crappie*

Bluegills provide significant catch and harvest opportunities in Lake Vermilion while black crappies are generally a minor component of the fishery but on occasion produce very good fishing. Trap-net

**Continued on next page**

## *Fisheries...from previous page*

catches and creel data indicate greater abundance of both species in West Vermilion. Summer trap-netting targeting panfish did not occur in 2019 because sampling frequency was reduced in the current management plan. Alternative sampling methods are being evaluated to provide useful data on relative abundance and size structure of panfish populations.

### *Aquatic Invasive Species*



Aquatic invasive species are nonnative animals and plants that do not naturally occur in Minnesota waters and cause varying levels of ecological and economic harm. Lake users should follow

Minnesota's clean,

drain, and dispose laws to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Several invasive species are present in Lake Vermilion including Chinese mystery snails, curly-leaf pondweed, *Heterosporis sutherlandae*, purple loosestrife, rusty crayfish, and spiny waterfleas.

Spiny waterfleas are an invasive zooplankton first discovered in East Vermilion in 2015. They were sampled for the first time in West Vermilion in 2018, but were not found west of Niles Bay. In 2019, spiny waterfleas were sampled in Wakemup Bay for the first time indicating potential lakewide distribution. No significant change in total zooplankton densities have occurred lakewide, however total zooplankton biomass, including native species, continues to decline. This is likely due to the increasing abundance of spiny waterfleas in East Vermilion as similar severe declines in native zooplankton communities have been observed in Rainy and Kabetogama lakes following spiny waterflea invasion. The changes to the zooplankton community may reduce the growth of young-of-the-year fish, including walleye and yellow perch, which rely on zooplankton as a food source.

Rusty crayfish are invasive crustaceans that have inhabited Lake Vermilion for several decades. They

have significantly reduced aquatic plant beds in certain areas and have displaced native crayfish. Catches of rusty crayfish in the annual gill-net survey tend to fluctuate and display a slightly increasing trend since the early 1990s. They tend to be found predominately in East Vermilion with the highest numbers typically occurring in Big Bay.

### *Double-crested Cormorants*

In 2019, double-crested cormorant (DCCO) nest counts totaled 308 on Potato Island in Big Bay of East Vermilion, which was a slight decline for the third consecutive year. Nest counts from 2013 to 2019 have stabilized around 330 nests following the peak of 434 in 2012. No new nesting colonies have been established outside of Potato Island. Population control was conducted from 2013 to 2015; however, cormorant control efforts were suspended in 2016 and remain suspended due to a U.S. District Court decision to vacate a Public Resource Depredation Order by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the absence of control, no significant changes in the number of nests has occurred, but DCCO foraging has undoubtedly increased compared to control years. In 2020, DNR will not conduct DCCO control on Lake Vermilion due to the court decision. However, the cormorant colony will continue to be monitored and the data collected will be reported.

### *Fishing Tournaments*

Historically there have been relatively few permitted fishing tournaments on Lake Vermilion when compared to other popular Minnesota lakes. Recently, between five and nine permitted tournaments have occurred each year. The DNR is responsible for regulating fishing tournaments and manages them in a manner that will protect fish populations and minimize conflict with other lake users. DNR permits are required for fishing tournaments that meet certain conditions and permits have been issued for the following tournaments in 2020:

May 16: City Auto Glass Walleye Classic

May 17: Minnesota Bass Federation

July 18: Up North Bass Team Series

July 31: Champions Tour

August 26-28: B.A.S.S. Nation Central Regionals.



# Volunteers needed for water testing on Vermilion



REGIONAL— Lake Vermilion needs you, or at least your help in monitoring lake water quality.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is looking for volunteers to serve as part of their Citizen Lake Monitoring Program, and they need volunteers specifically on Lake Vermilion.

Volunteers use what's known as a

Secchi disk to determine the clarity of lake water. From a boat or canoe, volunteers lower the black and white disk into the water to record water clarity. That reading can tell scientists a lot about a lake's water quality. It provides a measure of the amount of suspended material in

the water, including algae.

Secchi disk readings, when done consistently over a long period of time, provide a valuable means of detecting trends in water quality. Generally, the sooner water quality problems are detected, the easier and less expensive it is to restore the lake to its previous state.

Volunteers typically take Secchi

disk readings during daylight hours when the weather is calm. For consistency, taking readings from generally the same location is helpful. Taking readings at the same time of year during the open water season also helps to make any data gathered more useful in detecting long-term trends in water quality.

Volunteers to the program will be provided with instructions on how to take a Secchi disk reading. Lake monitor volunteers in our area include Bob McNamara, Steven Lotz, and Robert and Liz Dahl.

Anyone interested in taking part as a lake monitoring volunteer should contact Wayne Suoja at 218-753-2162 or the MPCA at 651-757-2874. You can find out more at [www.pca.state.mn.us/cmp](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/cmp).

Information courtesy MN DNR

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## VLA Caps make a great present!



They're here! Wear your new caps proudly to show your support for your lake association. The price is right: \$15, plus \$3 shipping for any number of caps to one address. Free local pickup. Check out the three style choices at our website [VermilionLakeAssociation.org/caps](http://VermilionLakeAssociation.org/caps).

For more info, contact Sheri Sawatzky at 218-780-8178 or email [sherisawatzky@gmail.com](mailto:sherisawatzky@gmail.com).

## Help protect Lake Vermilion by using Amazon Smile, Part II



Jerry Lepper  
VLA Treasurer

Since we asked our membership to participate in Amazon Smile and to designate the Vermilion Lake Association as their selected charity, participation has increased over 400 percent— we have gone from six to 29 members using the program. With over 1,300 members, imagine the potential!

When you shop at Amazon go to the Smile.Amazon.com website, designating The Vermilion Lake Association as your charity.

If you have started to shop at Amazon.com and then



remember you want to use Smile, leave everything in your shopping cart, log off Amazon and then log back in using Smile. Amazon.com. Your

purchases will still be in your shopping cart and Vermilion Lake Association will receive the Amazon 0.5-percent donation on qualifying purchases.

Thank you for helping the Vermilion Lake Association protect and improve Lake Vermilion.

## 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/>



# Spring 2020

**I**t is a cold winter day as I write these words...and I wonder...What comes with our spring days ahead?

Meanwhile, somewhere below the Mason-Dixon Line, the Robins, the Loons, the Ducks....they are meeting. Discussing their plans for the flight north.

Awaiting that silent starting gun that will send them off.

Back home, marked by nature's clock, our days on Daisy Bay grow longer.

No more dark morning awakenings....no more dark night skies before dinner.

Days of sunshine on the march, the ice will lose its grip, sky blue waters coming soon.

The stage being set for all the wonders nature brings...once again.

Our feathered friends will be a welcome sight....Their long flight home soon complete.

Nests to be built....new housing developments for the squawking next generation.

And the forests, quietly but spectacularly, will announce their spring.

Birch and Red Maple and Aspen buds soon to bloom. Greenery following the birds.

Candles on the pines to begin their annual reach for the heavens.

Pulling the trees along with them to ever greater heights.



Tom Aro  
VLA member

All so predictable, nature's annual resurrection, precise as ever, nary a beat missed.

As nature's comforting spring repeats.... We know what is coming.... What we'll embrace.

But what of us? We too belong to this spring ritual.

A few early-warning signs have been given,

Seems the creator has other plans in mind for our 2020 Vermilion spring.

Pages from our long book of memories torn out....New memories? Challenging to make.

Faces fading.....Caution, steep hill ahead!

Act one of our spring? We see the hints of "coming attractions".

Details however?....To be played-out in real time.

But yet....Come what may.... We still are the lucky ones.

Living out a great life....on our great lake.... with her great people....what a great gift!

So, to you "Spring of 2020", from all who share this boat,

In unison we shout, "BRING IT ON!!"

We'll embrace all that comes....and gladly count our blessings!

# Fishing for Smallmouth Bass around Man-made Structures

Most of the time when we humans enter an unspoiled habitat and start building, it is not helpful to the native plant and animal species; however, on Lake Vermilion, the proliferation of docks has created an incredible habitat for smallmouth bass. This article will focus on fishing for smallmouth under and around docks on our lake.



Most docks on the lake have smallmouth living underneath. Rock bass, though far less numerous than smallmouth, are also found around docks in certain areas. I've caught several rock bass around my dock on Daisy Bay in the two years I've lived there, but never once caught a rock bass in 37 years off my dock

when I lived on the Big Bay side of Birch Point. Docks in shallow, weedy bays like Greenwood, Everett and Stuntz will also hold largemouth, though they are not nearly as numerous as smallmouth. Under and around the boathouses on Stuntz Bay is legendary for catching both largemouth and smallmouth.

A few years ago, I was fishing with my wife's cousins and we pulled into the docks at Moccasin Point for a restroom break. While the adults trotted off toward the porta-potties, young Cal Scott jumped out with his rod and reel and began working a crankbait around and under the docks. On his second cast, he was calling for his dad to grab the net because he had a fish on,

which turned out to be a typical-sized smallmouth. A few minutes later, Cal caught a trophy-sized smallmouth.

More than once, I've been slip bobber fishing for walleye off my dock in May or June, and I've pulled my line in to get out a tangle while keeping the bait in the water just off the edge of the dock, and a smallmouth has taken it. Sometimes when the water is clear, one can see them swimming under docks. Smallmouth favor the shelter and structure that a dock provides. Spawning bass like to spawn next to the poles. When the fry hatch, the dock provides them cover where they can hide from predators. Out in the main lake, smallmouth tend to congregate around rock piles, but their fry are much more exposed to predators there.

There is an excellent five-minute video on YouTube that shows how to fish for smallmouth on Lake Vermilion.

**Continued on next page**



**Cal Scott shows the trophy-sized smallmouth he caught at Moccasin Point landing.**

## Quality Bluegill Initiative

by Terry Grosshauser

Brad Parsons, DNR Fisheries Chief, indicated that the DNR is considering a plan called the Quality Bluegill Initiative. The key to increasing the size of bluegills in a lake is to keep a good population of larger bluegills in the 9 to 10 inch size. Studies have proved that it is necessary to have the larger bluegills in the population in order for the population to stay healthy with mature bluegills. In Vermilion, we used to have larger bluegills on the west end and the over harvest has resulted in generally smaller bluegills from what I have heard from anglers and some of my own experience.

The plan is that DNR fisheries managers will meet with local angling groups to determine support to reduce bag limits. The number of lakes with special bag limits for bluegills will increase from 60 lakes to over 200 lakes or

more by 2023. Where there is support, bag limits would be reduced to either 10 fish or 5 fish. On lakes where a 10 fish bag is proposed, the objective would be to maintain a population of large bluegills and on lakes where a 5 bag limit is proposed, it would be to re-establish a quality bluegill population where the population had been excessively exploited.

I would guess that Lake Vermilion would lean more towards the 10 fish bag limit, but I am not sure how the DNR would evaluate Vermilion. I would be interested in your opinion on this initiative since we may be asked to voice our opinion on this topic. Please leave me an email at [terrygrosshauser@gmail.com](mailto:terrygrosshauser@gmail.com) with your opinion so we can provide a recommendation that is consistent with what our membership thinks.



# 56-inch Muskie Caught in Smarts Bay

By Rick Bohlen, VLA Member

It was a beautiful tranquil evening on “The Lake of The Blazing Sunsets” on September 20, 2019. Rick Bohlen and his wife Mary, on a whim, decided to jump in their boat for a quick chance to try their luck at catching a walleye. Armed with an ultra-lite pole strung with 6# test line and a hook and worm for bait, the couple settled in to watch the beautiful sunset. Within a few minutes, Rick announced that he had a snag and Mary began to reel in, getting only half her line in when Rick shouted he had a big fish on! With drag zinging, Rick kept tension on the line and gently kept reeling in. It seemed like 10 minutes before the big fish surfaced and even then, Rick wasn't quite sure what it was. He hollered for Mary to get the net realizing it would be a miracle if this fish made it into the boat as they only had a walleye net. She did try with all her might---four times-- but wasn't strong enough to lift the fish over the Alumacraft's side. Plan B—Mary held the line tight and Rick, with all his might, luckily scooped the fish into the boat. With eyes like dinner plates, they couldn't believe what was flopping around in the boat. When Rick turned to look at Mary, she was up on the seat. Being a Wound Care Nurse, she was afraid if those teeth came in contact with an ankle, there would be a problem! There was a moment of uncontrollable laughing and high fiving and then Rick sprang into action trying to measure the fish with his walleye board. He thought to ask for a picture and had to shout for Mary to hurry up and take it because it was so heavy to hold! Getting the fish back into the water was a challenge too. They both had to hoist it up and over into the water where it laid there stunned. It took several minutes for the big boy to get water going through his gills with the



help of Rick moving it back and forth alongside the boat. The muskie slowly started to move and then, like an old submarine, began his gradual descent to deeper waters. They stayed in the area for half an hour, partly because Rick was shaking so much and they also wanted to make sure the fish stayed down. It was so much fun sending texts to friends and family while watching the sun fade behind the shoreline. Rick says “Lake Vermilion fills our hearts with awe and gratitude again and again.”

## *Smallmouth...from previous page*

It is called Smallmouth Bass Fishing on Lake Vermilion with There you go fishing. In the first half of the video, the hosts are fishing around rock piles in open water, but the second half is fully devoted to fishing around docks. This video can also be found in the Fishing News and Videos section of the Vermilion Lake Association's website. Another video I really like, although not specific to Lake Vermilion, is called Dock Fishing: How To Catch Bass Around Docks. In this 8-minute

video, the host shows how to use multiple presentations including poppers, structure jigs and plastics. I found many other videos on this topic (of varying quality) by googling “smallmouth bass docks.”

Next time you're out bass fishing, try using your favorite crankbaits, spinnerbaits, jigs and plastics under and around docks.

# Black Bay Peninsula: The West End's Hidden Gem

When it comes to getting outside for some fresh air with family and friends, it's hard to beat the Black Bay Peninsula picnic area and hiking trail. Every summer, when we invite our extended family up to the lake, we make a point of bringing them on an outing to Black Bay for fishing, a cook-out, a hike and even some waterski runs. While it tends to fly beneath the radar, this shore lunch site is one of the most beautiful and accessible day-use sites on the lake. The site offers a fire ring and picnic table, set away from the water to provide a stunning view of the bay through the pines. The site's dock makes parking easy, and also provides the perfect spot for children to cast their bobbers for panfish. Black Bay is a well-known fishing spot, but you may be surprised at the action you can get from shore.



Eric Hanson  
VLA Board Member



While we love the many activities of Black Bay's shore lunch site, we are especially appreciative of the site's beautiful hiking trail. Few are familiar with the lightly used Black Bay Peninsula Hiking Trail. The trail is currently a two-mile loop beginning at the shore lunch site on the south shore of Black Bay. The scenic route follows the lakeshore in places, then traverses a variety of highland and lowland habitat types, rich in natural beauty. As one of Minnesota's few water-access-only hiking trails, this is a truly unique Lake Vermilion experience, for locals and visitors alike.

One point of interest is a meadow, which was a large beaver pond for years. When the beaver pond was active, this spot provided a wonderful opportunity to witness some of northern Minnesota's wildlife, including the occasional moose. While all that currently remains of the pond is one small pool, the water, meadow plants and numerous dead standing trees appeal to a variety of unique birds and wildlife. Be sure to bring your binoculars on this hike!

A peaceful bench overlooking the meadow is a nice reminder of Michelle Triska's Girl Scout Gold Project contribution to the trail, and a great place to wait for

wildlife to show themselves. As you carry on, there is a section of wet trail that is traversed via an elevated split log walkway, which requires some balance. The trail is a narrow forest route with some uneven, rocky and wet areas, but the effort required makes it more of an adventure. Please note: early season hikers often face blown down trees and missing trail markers.

While the Black Bay Peninsula Hiking Trail is already a wonderful asset to our area, there is an opportunity to improve it further. The original vision of the trail included a spur or loop to the North Norwegian Bay shore lunch site, providing additional access to docking and hiking. Completing this portion of the trail is a priority, and we are optimistic that Norwegian Bay access can become a reality.

**Continued on next page**



# "Wonders of Nature" 2020 Photo Contest

**T**he Vermilion Lake Association invites you to participate in sharing the beauty of Lake Vermilion by submitting your photos in the 2020 "Wonders of Nature" Photo Contest! We are looking for photos of land/sky/water-scapes, people on or near the lake enjoying nature, and/or animals (wild/pets). Beginning sometime in May, entries will be able to be submitted via our website ([vermilionlakeassociation.org](http://vermilionlakeassociation.org)). Watch for future announcements there and on Facebook for contest details. Entries will be judged by members of the VLA via our website with the

top three recognized (prizes to be determined) and published in the next newsletter and/or social media.

By entering, you represent that your entry is your own original work and that you own or have the rights to the submitted photo. By entering, you also grant permission to the Vermilion Lake Association to republish your submission, along with your name in any and all media without further permission, notice or compensation including print publications, online and social media.

## *Black Bay...from previous page*

We encourage you all to spend an afternoon exploring the Black Bay Peninsula Hiking Trail. Walking through the woods, surrounded by peace and quiet, disturbed only by the occasional stir of an animal, is an incredible way to experience nature. This is our backyard, and we are truly lucky to have such a special and unique adventure opportunity at our fingertips.

The initial trail was built as a response to the need for a hiking trail to access some of the vast acres of land that make up the peninsula in between Black and Norwegian Bays on the north shore of Lake Vermilion. I applied for a St. Louis County recreation grant to initiate the process. The county approved the proposal to fund docks with in-kind and paid support to create and maintain the trail and docks. Additional financial support was provided by Frankie Longfellow.

The trail was routed by Mike Hanson, Terry Bergstrom and Al Mitchell from the Cook DNR office. DNR firefighters roughed the trail in 1999. Now it is designated as a Minnesota DNR hunter walking trail. Maintenance has been an ongoing project with significant

contributions by Michelle Triska and Sarah Gilson (Girl Scout Gold Project), Christian Alarcon

(Boy Scout Eagle Scout Project), Tower DNR Wildlife, and Pehrson Lodge staff. Future maintenance and improvement is an ongoing effort with plenty of room for new participants! As the summer progresses, we plan to schedule a trail maintenance day if COVID-19 restrictions allow.



# A Loon Nest Story

**R**uss Hyppa has been observing loons nesting on a man-made platform for many years near his home/cabin on Frazer Bay. The platform, originally built by Mal and Dawn Berg, is very stable. Russ was given custody of the nest when the Bergs moved off the lake. Since then, he has added a second anchor to help stabilize it in big waves. To provide overhead protection from harassment by eagles, hawks, and owl, Russ added brush on two sides and tied them together teepee style.

In the six or seven years that Russ has been watching, it has always had loons nesting. His informal observations seem to see two eggs laid and chicks hatched as the norm, but about half the time one of the two disappears during the summer. He has been able to “catch” them in the act of breeding three or four times in the past. The loons typically circle the nest making cooing noises for about 10 minutes, with the female getting on the nest and the male following a minute or two later. Once the eggs are laid, the female is on the nest pretty much full time, with the male coming and going and giving her a short reprieve. She sometimes leaves the nest unattended for a few minutes. There have been a few years where Russ hasn’t seen her on the eggs for days at a time. “I’ve figured she has abandoned them, but she has always returned and they always have hatched.”

Russ observes that when the little one hatches, they are typically off the nest within an hour or two and they never get up on it again. It is not uncommon for the female to leave the bay once they hatch and only return once a week or so. In 2017 when she hatched two eggs they heard noise during the night. When Russ went down in the morning and saw that one was on the nest with her and about an hour later the second hatched. Within twenty minutes or so she had them on her back and in the lake.

In 2018 the loons showed up on May 10 but since there was still ice on Frazer Bay, the nest didn’t get out until the morning of May 13. She laid the egg(s) on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend. Russ paddled over by the nest on June 4 and noted there was only one egg. Early on the morning of Satur-



day June 7 he heard them making noise which they usually do when the hatch takes place. However, that morning he noticed the mother wasn’t on the nest and the egg was gone. Usually there are pieces of egg in the nest after the hatch but he saw nothing. Since eggs normally take 28 days to hatch, it is safe to say something happened to the egg. Loons may renest if first eggs are lost.

Russ thinks he may be seeing the same loons every year at this nest. This particular loon is very tolerant of noise and nearby activities, probably since she’s been exposed to it for so long. “She really won’t leave the nest unless something comes literally within a couple feet of it.”

Thanks to Russ for his story and for his continued effort to protect and increase Lake Vermilion’s loon population.

**by Lori Ptak, VLA Board Member**



# Wake Board Boats

**T**his is a new topic for Lake Vermilion, but it is a very large topic for most Minnesota lakes.

What are wake board boats? The newer boats for this sport include ballast tank(s) on the back end of a speedboat. The ballast tanks can be filled with water to increase the weight of the back end of the boat so that the boat pushes more water and creates a very large wake when driven at even low speeds. The sport is all about using a small board, like a surfboard and riding the huge waves very close to the boat where the largest waves exist. The mode of operation can be wake surfing, wake boarding or cruising. Regular motorboats can be used to provide similar wakes as well.



Wake boats are getting more powerful every year with manufacturers boasting of bigger and stronger wakes than before. These boats are allowed on all sizes and shapes of water bodies with no regard given to the effects of these wakes on shorelines and lakes and no regard to the dangers they present to others.



What are the issues? These boats can create waves that are four feet or even five feet in size. People are injured by enhanced wakes including canoers, kayakers, swimmers, and paddle boarders. There are documented stories of children and adults who were

knocked down on beaches, in boats, and on docks when these enhanced waves hit. Also, the large waves are especially damaging to shorelines when waves that are larger than in any storm hit a shoreline. In water less than 12 feet, the waves are also forced downward and can tear up vegetation and stir up the bottom. In addition, the ballast tanks provide a good incubator enabling AIS to remain viable when these boats travel from lake to lake.

While there are no new regulations by the DNR related to creating these large wakes, there is an organization (Safewakes.org) raising these issues with the DNR to get them to evaluate the situation and indicate the need for regulation. The DNR does have a voluntary program "Own Your Wake" and a campaign by the Water Sports Industry Association reminding people to be courteous to others and to be responsible for their wakes. The Safewakes group would say these voluntary programs are not working.

So, what is the situation on Lake Vermilion? Recently we have seen some boats creating these large waves on the lake and in areas where they can have a negative impact, especially on shorelines and vegetation. Vermilion has a lot of fragile shoreline along with a lot of rocky shoreline and, as we all know, we have lost a lot of vegetation to rusty crawfish, so remaining vegetation is very important to our fishery. PLEASE, if you want to enjoy this sport, make sure you are in a bay large enough that you can be 1,000 feet or farther from shore and avoid areas with vegetation. Also be respectful of the large number of small personal watercraft so people are not injured. We all should be able to enjoy the lake as well as protect the lake and the water quality.

## *VLA Volunteer Opportunity: AIS Sentries Needed*

**T**hrowing a rake can be loads of FUN....and helps protect Lake Vermilion. AIS Sentries are needed on both East and West ends.

Sentries are trained in Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) identification. Then, working with our Sentry Leader, they monitor specified boat launches 3-4

times per season, gathering weed samples for visual inspection and reporting. Contact Pat Michaelson, VLA Volunteer Leader, if you have an interest in learning more about this boater-friendly opportunity at [plmichaelson@gmail.com](mailto:plmichaelson@gmail.com).



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](mailto:plmichaelson@gmail.com).

### Vermilion Lake Association

Sheri Sawatzky, Member Records • P.O. Box 696 • Tower MN 55790  
[sherisawatzky@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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.