

THE VERMILION



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*To Protect
and Improve
Lake Vermilion*

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OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings friends and neighbors. At our October Board meeting we elected a new President for the Vermilion Lake Association, Pat Michaelson. Pat has been involved with the board of directors of the Vermilion Lake Association since 2017 as the volunteer program leader. She has worked with resorts, and she has been a leader in coordinating our annual meeting and volunteer events. Pat has over fifty years of experience volunteering and is retired as Vice President & CNO of Patient Care Services for Ridgeview Medical Center. She was also President of the Chanhassen Rotary for two terms. The board and I are confident that Pat's leadership skills will continue to move our many initiatives forward to protect and improve Lake Vermilion.

Pat and her husband Bill live on Deerwood Lane, which is in the Niles Bay area. They both enjoy the beauty of Lake Vermilion and enjoy many activities with their family and friends on the lake. Pat has been successful in recruiting many of our volunteers



Terry Grosshauser
VLA President

and board members, which has been important to our organization's overall success.

It has been a very busy five years for me as President of the Vermilion Lake Association, and it has been my pleasure to meet with many members and lead many changes to the organization. Along with Jeff Lovgren, we have been able to protect the lake from any new AIS entering the lake and developing a program that is second to none in the state. We also have been able to accumulate enough funds through strong donations to add another picnic site, and we have been active in the management plan for the fishery, hopefully guaranteeing a strong fishery going forward. I will remain on the board to work in a couple of areas. I would like to thank the board and the membership for their work on protecting the lake and supporting the Vermilion Lake Association. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to lead this great organization in protecting this beautiful lake.

Terry Grosshauser, Past President

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Cook

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Cover: Great Gray Owl. Photographed near Cook in December by David Colburn, Timberjay Editor

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INCOMING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Lake Friends.....It is quite humbling to assume the president's role....following in Terry's footsteps, which will be very hard to fill. I believe Terry's most visible legacy is the publication you are now reading. It is just one example of his visionary leadership to take the organization "to the next level" over the last five years. While the former multi-page, stapled copy newsletter was very informative, I believe we'd all agree this magazine-style piece that arrives in our mail quarterly absolutely educates and engages each of us in different ways. (We actually receive emails when members have not received their expected copies.)

Terry's role as the board president has been executed in a thoughtful, intelligent, and passionate manner....always with a focus on safeguarding and improving the qualities of the lake. Additionally, he has developed relationships with government officials and business leaders to garner support for the ongoing work of the association. Terry's hard work and dedication to protect and enhance the recreational



Pat Michaelson
VLA President

experience Lake Vermilion provides will be apparent for years to come. We're pleased he'll continue to share his expertise in key areas, including fisheries leadership, newsletter publication team, and as an active board member.

While assuming the role of board president, I am eager to share with you, in upcoming newsletter issues, some brief "bio's" of our board team. This is a group of outstanding volunteer individuals who each bring unique expertise and enthusiasm to their various leadership roles. I look forward to continuing to work with each of them. I am sorry to share that Mary McNellis has resigned from our board. We'll miss her AIS leadership work with our Sentry team....but wish her well in her other state-wide volunteer roles.

In my other VLA role as Volunteer Program leader, I would be remiss not to mention our ongoing need and desire to engage more of you in a volunteer role. As you read the articles in this and upcoming issues, if a particular project or initiative piques your interest and you have some time to share.....please reach out to me. Hopefully in the coming months of 2021, we'll be able to meet for a cup of coffee (or Zoom as an alternative) to talk about your interests and how they might be a good fit on one of our many volunteer teams.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter.....and be well,

Pat Michaelson, VLA President

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.

For more info, contact Sheri Sawatzky at 218-780-8178 or email sherisawatzky@gmail.com.

How to Make the Most of Spring Ice

Tips from the Hanson family at Pehrson Lodge Resort



Here we are, in the midst of another beautiful winter on Lake Vermilion. Each season up here has a lot to offer. Many ice activities in our area are focused on the first half of winter - like the early ice walleye bite and those first opportunities to get the snowmobile out. But today, we hope to inspire you to get out and enjoy the lake in the late winter and early spring - when the days are long and mild and the ice is thick, sturdy and ready for adventures.

We were lucky last spring to enjoy lots of family time

on the lake. It reminded us how much fun there is to be had in March and April on Lake Vermilion.

Long, warm, sunny days are just what people need after a cold winter. Frequently, the spring ice surface is a dense “corn snow”, ideal for skate skiing, walking or snowshoeing. Experienced skiers can glide for miles, and beginners appreciate the absence of hills. We put on our cross country ski gear and skated all around the lake - we even skied to ice fishing spots once or twice. The dogs loved to run along with us and explore. No matter how you choose to get

around, wandering the ice is a fun way to get fresh air and exercise. You can go for miles and miles along the shoreline.

In summertime, cookouts at Lake Vermilion's shore lunch sites are a great adventure to share with family and friends. The thing is, cookouts are fun in the snow, too! We packed up our snowmobiles with firewood, hot dogs and s'mores equipment and made our way to a day use site in Norwegian Bay. This is an adventure that everyone can be involved in. Any fishermen in your group will be happy to set some tip ups or jig. Those who aren't interested in fishing can tend to the fire, roast a marshmallow and enjoy the beauty of the Northwoods. It's a fun way to get some fresh air with family and friends. The next time you need something to do, just bundle up and go!

Spring ice fishing is a blast. Sunshine and



warm temps make it fun for everyone. We've found that although the popular game fish are closed in the spring, there are plenty of hungry panfish to be caught. Crappie and bluegill are hungry on the other side of winter, if you can find them. We've had great luck with a jig and a wax worm. Just don't ask us where! We've also had a lot of fun bringing spring whitefish onto the ice - exciting to catch, and they make a great fish boil with potatoes and carrots.

We have a lot of fun on the ice ahead of us this winter. We encourage everyone to get outside and enjoy this spring on Lake Vermilion!

Featuring Lake Vermilion's "Most Unwanted" Species...the third in a series.

Starry Stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*)

What is it?

Starry stonewort is an invasive green algae, even though it looks like a traditional plant. It forms distinctive star-shaped reproductive bulbils in late summer. Starry can form dense mats all the way to the surface, having an impact on recreational boating and on fisheries in Minnesota lakes. It is native to parts of Europe and Asia.

Is starry stonewort common in Minnesota?

It is not common ... yet. It was first discovered in 2015 and has now been found in 15 lakes in 7 Minnesota counties. Since all starry stonewort plants discovered so far in North America are male, the spread to additional lakes is vegetative. Small fragments can hitchhike from lake to lake on a trailered boat.

Do we have starry at Vermilion?

None has been found. But we are at risk, since 16,000 trailered boats come to Vermilion each year, many from lakes with starry stonewort. The closest infested lake is Lake Winnibigoshish in Itasca County.

Is Vermilion's habitat suitable for starry stonewort?

Researchers don't know for sure, since starry is so new to Minnesota. And it's hard to know where the limits of a plant's habitat tolerance are. Fortunately, the water chemistry at lakes where starry has been found is quite unlike Vermilion's. We are hopeful starry would not do well at Lake Vermilion. But hope alone is not a good prevention plan.

So, what are we doing to protect Vermilion?

Our public access and resort AIS inspectors are carefully examining boats entering our lake for any attached vegetation, including starry. And our early detection sentries are watching for new infestations near our launches.

What can property owners and visitors do?

If you see a suspicious infestation of any vegetation that you don't recall seeing at that location before, call the VLA AIS Hotline 218-288-1080. An AIS Detector will respond to help make an identification.

Is there a good reference book to help identify invasive species at Lake Vermilion?

Indeed, there is! We recommend AIS Identification Guide: A Minnesota Handbook published by the Minnesota AIS Research Center. This reference is available at U of M Bookstores for about \$40.

Link: <https://bookstores.umn.edu/product/book/ais-identification-guide-minnesota-handbook>



Starry Stonewort. Inset: Star-shaped bulbil visible in late summer. Photo credit: MAISRC

New AIS Project to Focus on Boaters at Vermilion's Low-Traffic Accesses

Prevention of AIS infestations via boat inspection, boat decontamination, and boater education remains our first line of defense. However, boat inspections at public accesses are expensive, and efficiency is a must. Our partnership has made great progress on forecasting traffic and risk to position public-access inspectors to intercept the most boats per hour during their shifts.

In 2020, North St Louis SWCD team checked almost 15,000 boats entering and exiting at Vermilion's public accesses, including 8,690 of the estimated 12,000-14,000 boats which launch annually at public accesses. While covering two-thirds of boats launching is a huge accomplishment, we still missed one-third entering at low-traffic accesses and at times of the day when an inspector was not affordable. It's time to find ways to reach those boaters.

We've been discussing possible solutions with AIS teams around the state for a few years. For example, during 2020 North St. Louis SWCD, with Lake SWCD and Sea Grant, completed an inventory of AIS signage at public accesses on Vermilion and the surrounding areas. In 2021, we're going to expand the effort to identify the most effective and affordable ideas to reach boaters at low-traffic accesses. We hope to pilot a few of the best at Vermilion in 2022.

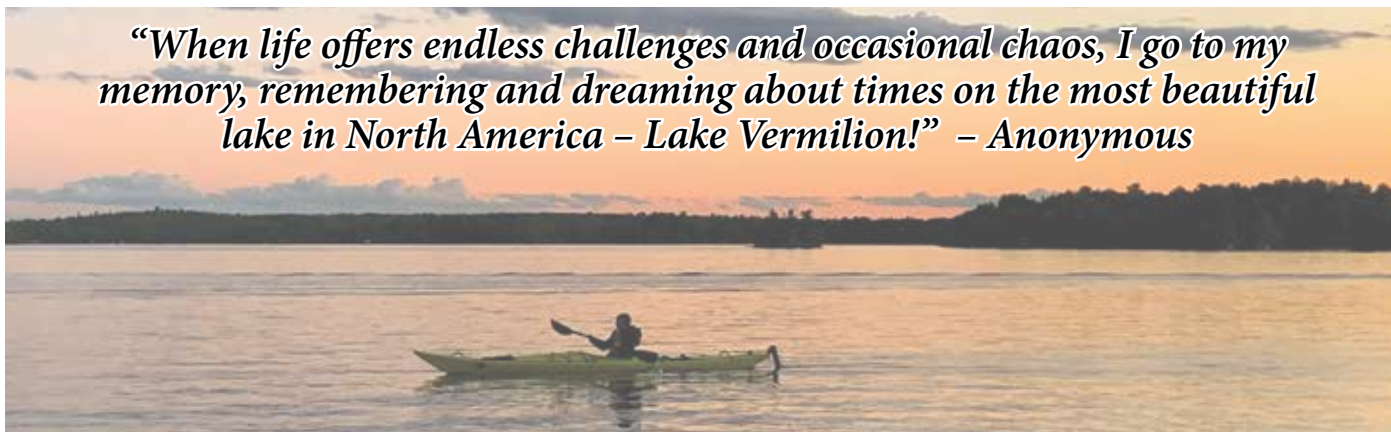


Eurasian Watermilfoil.
Photo credit: MAISRC

What will those solutions look like? We're not sure. But we expect we'll need a variety of ideas that include updated signage, cleaning tools, technology, and education to encourage boaters to self-inspect for AIS hitchhikers even when they are in a hurry at their next launch site.

Have some ideas for us to incorporate? Please contact AIS Program Coordinators Jeff Lovgren (lovgren.jeff@gmail.com) or Natalya Walker (natalya@nslswcd.org).

"When life offers endless challenges and occasional chaos, I go to my memory, remembering and dreaming about times on the most beautiful lake in North America – Lake Vermilion!" – Anonymous



Inspecting Your Boat is YOUR Responsibility

As a Minnesota boater, self-inspection of your boat for aquatic invasive species (AIS) is a personal responsibility. Don't give hitchhikers a ride to the next lake. Set a good example for your kids and your fishing buddies when at the public access.

How often should I inspect my own boat for invasive species?

We recommend you check your boat and trailer carefully before you begin your trip to Lake Vermilion, a second time when you reach your launch site (just to be sure), and again when you exit the lake

for your trip home. One can't be too careful when it comes to inadvertently moving AIS from lake to lake.

How can I learn the best ways to self-inspect my boat and trailer?

Check out online sources – including YouTube videos – especially those produced by the Minnesota DNR. When you arrive at a Lake Vermilion public or private access, ask the inspector or dock attendant to show you what to do and where to look. These folks will be glad to pass on their knowledge.

2021 AIS Program to Focus on Process Improvements

Jeff Lovgren, AIS Program Coordinator

The Vermilion Lake Association's 2021 AIS Prevention Plan will look a lot like the 2020 Plan. That's a good thing. It means our threat environment is stable, our strategy is on track, and we can focus on making our current processes more robust and efficient.

Three areas will get additional focus in 2021:

➤ Along with our resort partners, we will stretch toward our shared goal to inspect 100-percent of arriving boats. Boats belonging to resort guests have an elevated risk, as they are more likely to have just been at a Minnesota or out-of-state lake with game-changing invasive species.

➤ Together with North St. Louis SWCD, we will begin a project to identify the best ways to reach boaters launching at Vermilion's low-traffic public accesses where an inspector is not affordable. (See a related article on low-traffic accesses on page 7.)



Bob and Renee Pearson checked for zebra mussel veligers near the mouth of the East Two River.

➤ We will expand our adult and veliger early detection at East Two River. Currently, no data from Lake of the Woods or research is available to tell us if zebras might get a foothold at that seasonal calcium "hotspot."

For additional info on our threats, our strategy, and our activities in 2021, check out our complete 2021 AIS Prevention Plan on our website at www.VermilionLakeAssociation.org/ais-plan/.

2020 DNR Fall Walleye Netting Results

This article is about the DNR's fall walleye netting results. I know many people were concerned about the walleye population after the 2020 season and the large amount of fishing pressure on Lake Vermilion. I know that fishing pressure was very high throughout the summer with the Canadian border being closed, the resorts were full and many people who own property on the lake spent a lot of time at their property and fishing could be done safely.



Terry Grosshauser
VLA Board Member

The news is very good since the annual DNR netting results were a record over previous history. Since there were a lot of 10- and 11-inch walleyes biting in the fall, there should be a nice population of keeper fish by mid-year in 2021.

The DNR indicated "The 2020 lake-wide fall gill-net catch rate of walleye in Lake Vermilion was the highest ever observed at 20.4 fish/net in MN DNR's annual surveys dating back to 1984. This survey occurred from late August through mid-September after the majority of fishing pressure had occurred on the lake." These are preliminary results and more aging, analysis, and report summary work need to be completed.

The 20.4 walleye per net in 2020 compares to a lake-wide walleye catch rate of 12.2 fish/net in 2019

and a lake-wide walleye catch rate of 11.6 fish/net in 2018. It is great to see a substantial walleye increase across the lake after two weak years. The 2018 catch rate was the third lowest catch rate observed in the previous 25 years.

There will be more details on the walleye population and other fish in the fishery in the May newsletter.



A nice walleye netted by the DNR in the spring at the hatchery.

In Memoriam....Remembering Ray Harris

Sadly, we recall the passing of a longtime resident on Lake Vermilion and dear friend, Ray Harris. Ray was a real pioneer, coming to the Oak Narrows area of the lake long before a real road went all the way to Timbuktu. He first built two different non-road access summer cabins in the Narrows and then built a large permanent home on the mainland where the Harris family lived for over 40 years.



He was a caretaker for many area residents and could fix just about anything! This ability was a real asset when he became a charter member of the Sportsmen's Club of Lake Vermilion (now known as the Vermilion Lake Association). He was a longtime board member and was president of the club from 2001 - 2003. He worked on many projects including installing and maintaining navigation lights (pre-solar days),

Continued on next page

North St. Louis SWCD Announces Annual Tree Sale Information and New Forester

Hello, my name is Lauren Soergel and I am the new Forester for North St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). I was born and raised in Wisconsin and earned my Bachelor's degree in Botany from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. I am an avid outdoors sportswoman in that I enjoy hunting, fishing, kayaking, snowshoeing, backpacking, camping, and biking. I look forward to my position with North St. Louis SWCD and opportunities to work with local landowners, organizations, and community members.



Lauren Soergel
North St. Louis SWCD

I am also your contact for inquiries in our Annual Tree sale! We have a variety of coniferous and deciduous trees, as well as some fruit-bearing shrubs to improve your landscape aesthetic and wildlife habitat. For those looking to improve pollinator habitat, shoreline vegetation, or find something native to grow in a shady area while adding some color to their landscape, we have native plant kits available that include 36 plugs of 5 forbs and 1 grass species.



New this year is a seed mix designed for septic mounds composed of native forbs and grasses. All of these products are available on our website along with online ordering capabilities www.nslswcd.org. If you prefer paper order forms, those are also available on the website and can be mailed to our office at 505 3rd St. N, Ste A., Virginia, MN 55792. You may also call the office and order over the phone (218-749-2000); however, we are not accepting walk-ins. Inventory is limited, ordering plant kits and seeds ends April 30 and tree sale orders are due by May 10. Pick up dates are Thursday, May 13 from 9AM-3:30PM and Friday, May 14 from 9AM-6PM. Visit our website for more information.

Ray Harris...continued from page 9

working on shore lunch sites, the loon count, or any special project such as the Governor's Opener in 2005. Ray, along with other prominent Cook men, was a charter member of the Cook Lions Club, and a Melvin Jones Award recipient. He was a longtime member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Cook and served in many leadership positions. He always wore a suit and tie to services.

Ray was a devoted family man. He and his late wife, Vi, loved camping, fishing, blueberry picking, hunting or any outdoor activity with their children and

grandchildren. He taught by example and mentored many by his gentle way, wonderful smile, and spontaneous laugh. His tales of "the good ol' times" were fascinating and educational. He recalled that a lake lot on the sand beach was selling for \$50.

Ray was the REAL DEAL, a friend to anyone he met and always loved a hot sauna, a good happy hour, and a long visit. His heartwarming smile will long be remembered.

submitted by John and Claire Zwiag



The Importance of Fungi in Terrestrial and Aquatic Systems

When you think of fungi it's most likely images of toadstools and morels that pop into your head. Those mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of fungi that emerge from the soil to spread their spores, but what is happening under the soil and the workings of filamentous fungi is really where the magic happens.

Fungi play a critical role in nutrient cycling, meaning they make great decomposers. They are champions at breaking down lignin, structural material produced by woody plants, which bacteria and invertebrates cannot. This allows for easier access to nitrogen and carbon for those other decomposers to then come in and finish the job. These other decomposers are an important food source for insects and other invertebrates, which are a food source for birds and small mammals, and so on. Tree diseases such as Dutch Elm Disease and Oak Wilt are caused by parasitic fungi that has led to significant individual tree mortality. Other parasitic fungi may cause tree mortality at a manageable rate. These trees may die and stay standing as snags or fall to the forest floor; both are important for wildlife habitat. This will also allow opening in the canopy for sunlight to reach the forest floor and free up nutrients for forbs, shrubs, and seedlings to grow and increase forest diversity.

While fungi have this special relationship with wood as decomposers, fungi are also significant in tree survival. Many conifer trees and oak, hickory, alder, and beech trees have symbiotic relationships with fungi that grow around the outside of their roots. These fungi are called ectomycorrhiza and they are symbiotic in that they assist plant roots in absorbing water and nutrients, and in return the fungus absorbs car-

bon from the plant. Scientists have discovered that this relationship also aids trees in tolerating drought conditions and supporting seedling establishment. Fungi are being closely studied by climate change scientists to reveal how they may assist in species survival and adaptation to warmer temperatures. Areas heavily disturbed by agriculture or pesticide application tend to have poor, nutrient-lacking soils that cannot support these fungal communities.

These ecosystem roles can also be found in freshwater aquatic systems. There have been several species of aquatic fungi discovered in the Great Lakes and surrounding waterbodies. These fungi are also great decomposers that induce nutrient cycling and food source for other aquatic animals. In addition to being excellent wood decomposers, aquatic fungi break down scales, hair, and exoskeletons that accumulate on the lake bottom. Researchers have found these species can tolerate lower temperatures than the terrestrial fungal variety, thus they are significant when the lakes are frozen over, to free nutrients to invertebrates and fish throughout the winter. The plant parts that fall into lake systems are not very nutritious on their own, but as fungi invade their cells, animals feeding upon this vegetation are gaining energy from consuming the fungus.

There is so much more to learn about how these fungi have shaped the terrestrial and aquatic landscapes we see today. For now, we can acknowledge them as crucial members of the ecosystem that keep the gears turning.

Story by Lauren Soergel

Camp Vermilion - Their History, Mission, and Forest Management Plan

Camp Vermilion, a treasure that sits on 355 acres on Wakemup Bay, on the south shore of Lake Vermilion. The Deubendorf Family started the camp in the 1920's when Frank Deubendorf purchased the property from Chief WakemUp (WagiMaWub). It operated for any years as a private boys camp. The Bible camp started when many Lutherans of the Lake Superior and Range Conference of the American Lutheran Church began to sense the need for a Bible camp in the area. In 1959 negotiations were completed and a purchase made. Melvin Bakk was hired as a part time manager, and pastors provided the program leadership. Originally the camp was named Lake Vermilion Lutheran Bible Camp. The name was changed to Camp Vermilion

round opportunities that are offered at the camp. There are many summer camp programs to choose from, as well as workshops, special events, work days for volunteering, and retreats. Camp Vermilion offers meeting spaces, overnight accommodations, and food service. This allows people to focus on the work at hand - be it a continuing education gathering, business meeting, crafting getaway, wedding, family reunion, or fishing weekend.



Jill Korpela-Bontems, VLA Board Member

There is a variety of meeting and housing options, and their staff will take care of the details.

The folks at Camp Vermilion believe that we are all called to care for God's great north-woods. Part of that responsibility is to make sure the forest where they worship, play, and sing is safe and will be here for generations. From the 1920s through today there have always been woodland management efforts, be it logging, and replanting and thinning as needed. The Sentinel Tall Pines on the drive into the camp were planted by the Bakk family and volunteers in the '70s to help reestablish a healthy forest at camp. Since the mid 1990s, VLM has been working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) to manage the 355 acres at Camp Vermilion. Over the years, the constant monitoring, clearing, thinning, planting, and management of the forest have played

an important role in the efforts to maintain a healthy and regenerative forest. They are also working hard to maintain safe access and evacuation (if needed) to the expansive and wondrous property. There have been two recent major logging periods---the first in the late 1990s. There was a major clear cut of 36 acres to the south of the entry road to deal with fire danger and encourage regrowth. This was followed in the autumn of 2000, by the development of a "Woodland



in 1969. Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry (VLM) was formed when Camp Vermilion of Cook. and Camp Hiawatha of Deer River merged. The date of this merger was January 2, 1991.

From its beginning the mission has been the same. "Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry provides opportunities for Christ-centered spiritual growth, leadership development, and outreach in God's great north-woods." This is accomplished through many year-



Stewardship Plan” by Julie Miedkte, a University of Minnesota Extension Educator out of Grand Rapids and in conjunction with Marge Sella, District Conservationist for NRCS. A part of that plan was addressed in March of 2008 with the removal of balsam trees that had contracted “Bud Worm”, an infestation that eats the tree from the inside out.

Removing the trees eliminated some major fire risk and replanting with stronger pines provided for the future health of the trees. Battle Creek Middle School from St. Paul, Rural Living Environments in Babbitt, and plenty of volunteers and staff, spent from 2007-2009 planting 9,000 red and white pine trees. The trees were “bud-capped” (a method developed by the Rajala family) every winter over the next decade to keep the deer off the top (terminal) bud. The bud caps are put on in late fall and removed in early spring. Now, the once 8-inch seedlings are 8 feet tall and safe from browse. Because of these efforts, there has been a 90-percent survival rate of these trees and within the next decade, they will have tall healthy stands of the next generation of God’s great northwoods.

In the autumn of 2019, after the success of the first stages of thinning and replanting, and after a plan

revision that was developed by Beth Kleinke, District Forester with St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation and Kyle Asplund, NRCS Conservation Technician, and the approval from the VLM Board of Directors, they have begun to move forward with the next steps in managing the forest. One of the plans in the works is an aspen grove being established to the south of the entry drive. This is for habitat for the Golden-Winged Warbler which has suffered a 66 -percent population decline since the 1960s. Golden-Winged Warblers need three stages of aspen growth to breed, nest, and feed. They need both young trees and mature trees for their mating and nesting habits.

The work is ongoing, and the long-range commitment is steadfast. VLM believes “The land we work with and on is a gift and we use our resources to the best of our ability to maintain it. We also know that place is important and each one of us connects with our camps in unique ways.”

If you would like more information about the camp, ongoing projects, or would like to volunteer to be part of the work, the website is www.VLMcamps.org.

Lake Vermilion “Lake Steward” Program

In the past, I have encouraged lakeshore owners to restore their shoreline to protect water quality and provide critical habitat for birds, fish, bees and other critters. Now, the Vermilion Lake Association with assistance from Jeff Forester- Executive Director of MN Lakes and Rivers and from Becca Reiss-Community Conservationist of North St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will be starting a Vermilion Lake Steward Program.



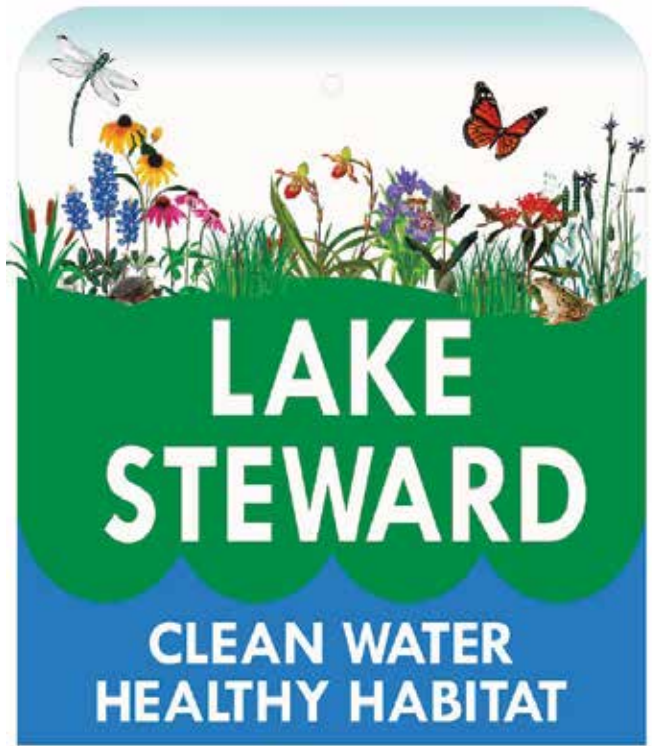
Wayne Suoja
VLA Board Member

This past spring, Dorothy Whitmer from Gull Lake took a quiz on “Rate Your Shoreline”, and she tanked the quiz even though her property on Gull Lake was neat and tidy. So, Dorothy took action and worked with the Gull Lake Chain of Lakes Association to help others restore their shorelines to protect water quality, ecological systems, and by extension, property values. To learn more, contact Dorothy Whitmer at Whitmer@me.com.

“This program is effective at educating shoreland owners on how to best manage their land for water quality benefits, and why that is so critically important,” said Jeff Forester. “It is easy to do, inexpensive and remarkably effective.”

Becca Reiss from the SWCD has applied for assistance from the Conservation Corps to pilot a shoreline planting program. If awarded, a few selected landowners would be able to purchase plants for a native shoreline planting with planning assistance from the SWCD as well as Conservation Corps Crew members to help with the labor of planting. This will be a valuable pilot program with the opportunity for growth. We will keep you informed as to the status of the grants.

This program uses a simple “Score Your Shore” tool so property owners can see how well they are managing their property for water quality. Then we can



work with the property owner to raise their score. Once they raise a certain score, they officially become a “Lake Steward” and receive a sign that they can put on their shoreline so that others can learn of the program and see what a healthy water shoreline looks

like. The quiz is coming soon, and all members will have updates in the spring newsletter, and on the website.

For more information, and if you want to participate, please contact board member Wayne Suoja at wsuoja@frontiernet.net or 218-753-2162, or contact Jeff Forester from MN Lakes and Rivers at jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org.



*Support the Vermilion Lake Association
Help Us Make a Beautiful Lake Even Better!*

In Memory...

The Vermilion Lake Association regularly receives donations in memory of loved ones or friends. These gifts were received between June 24, 2020 and Jan. 4, 2021. We are grateful for these gifts and also wish to honor those who have passed away.

William C Allen M.D.	Steve Holter	Norman Miller
John Bemiss	Anne Joki	Earl Nielsen
Fabian Blonigan	Bob Junnila	Kim Wilson O'Brien
Gordon Bockus	Jerry & Rebecca Ketola	Edgar Peterson
Bob & Laurie Boerem	Shirley Korpela	Elio Pietrini
Bob Budolfson & Officer Bill Mathers	William A Lanigan	Jim Postudensek
Bud & Betty Bystrom	Joe Larson	Trevor Reichel
Leo DuCharm	Jack & Jane Lawson	Dick Schultz
Annie Duren	Keith Loken	Rudy Schutte
Rick Dyer	Vern & Elinor Lundberg	Becky Skubic
Penny Ender	Dale Lundblad	Robert E Smith
Army Engman	Jay A Magnuson	Dr. Martin Stuck
Tim Flanagan	George McCall	Murline Tahija
Ken & Marie Grosshauser	Jim McKinney	Roy & Vi Westman
Ray Harris	Rod McPeak	William Wiehle
Mel Hintz	Beverly Meyer	Frank & Nancy Wilson
	D. M. Mihelich	Ed Woolverton



**Above: Photo by Penny Jackson, VLA member.
Below: Photo by Terry Grosshauser, VLA Board Member.**



Help protect Lake Vermilion by using Amazon Smile, Part IV



Jerry Lepper
VLA Treasurer

I would like to thank all of those who used Amazon Smile during this past Holiday Season. I especially enjoyed reading your notes sent in with Membership Renewals stating how you were using Amazon Smile as much as possible when shopping.

When you shop at Amazon, go to the [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) website, designating The Vermilion Lake Association as your charity.

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

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The Scourge of Lake Vermilion?

We're gonna talk about catching and eating a functionally unlimited resource – the rusty crayfish.

I'm a "back in the day" guy - been coming to Vermilion since 1963, when I was 10 years old. There have been changes for sure, but nothing like the eco-threat called the Rusty Crayfish.

As a kid, we of course would spend countless hours turning over rocks to catch the little green and brown native crayfish, which had mostly tiny claws, were afraid of sunlight, and afraid of you. And we would catch countless northern pike from extensive cabbage weed beds in most every bay – you might be surprised to know there were good cabbage beds even



on the bay side of Gold Island, the whole north shore of Niles Bay off "the sandy beach" and even several beds off my current cabin on the south shore of Niles Bay, when I bought it in '96. Non-fishermen may not distinguish different "weeds", but for fishing cabbage is in a class of its own. My "always a northern" spots are now just a memory. Large parts of the lake have a barren bottom now, fish populations have changed, and I have not seen a native crayfish in years. What I do see is Rusty Crayfish – a literal invasion of them.

Rusties are ubiquitous throughout the Midwest now, and Vermilion is no exception. Native to the Ohio River basin, and transported as bait, they have spread rapidly. Technically *Orconectes rusticus*, to me they're just Ornery. They're omnivores, eat anything plant or animal they can get their claws into. They have ravaged the lake's cabbage weed beds by snipping the stems at the base, then again each time they re-sprout, until.....the cabbage is dead. They are out and about all day, and are aggressive with very large claws. I tell visitors to wear water shoes in the lake to avoid the inevitable nips, but I've even had them crawl over my shoes and up my ankles to bite my legs – and they hurt! Their bites can draw blood.

How to identify them: They have a rusty colored patch on either side of their shell (technically their



My grandson Will Forsman from Duluth, pondering a snack.

thorax or carapace).

Regarding worrying about taking native crayfish inadvertently, I honestly don't know if there are any native crayfish surviving in the lake. I have caught many hundreds in recent years and don't recall seeing even one native. Likely any crayfish you catch is a rusty.

There's no easy solution to them, no chemical answer, maybe no solution at all. I've done some online research, seeing some modest experimental success in a smaller lake with limiting bag limits and size limits on their best predators, the largemouth and smallmouth bass. But if we can't win, we can seek revenge! We can join the army of bass, herons, mink, otters and even loons: we can eat the little buggers!

OK, cutting to the chase, we all know that down south "crawdads" (or mudbugs, or to some there just "bugs") are a hot item – many tons of them are eaten steamed, buttered, in jambalaya, in chowder, in

crawfish etouffee – great stuff. But our favorite is a feast for a whole family – a shrimp and crawfish boil! More on that.

But WE ALSO have TONS of crayfish. Truth be told, their tails have somewhat less meat than their southern cousins, but they are very tasty, and indeed the claws are big enough to hold morsels, too. Like little lobsters. And eating them will bring you good karma.



A note about shrimp/crayfish boils

This is a celebration and family feast, a social event and entire meal in one pot. You will cook it in your biggest pot, over your range or outside on your grill (or on your turkey fryer base!). We eat outside at the patio /picnic table when weather permits so nobody worries about being messy. You will cook as described below, spill out the feast on newspapers or large trays, and everyone digs in! It's a blast! Have cold beverages of your choice ready! I like gin and tonic, or beer, and watermelon with it, BTW. In case you invite me.

Preparing them

It is important to "purge" them to get the nastiness out of their gut prior to cooking. The salt is not used for seasoning, but it helps empty their gut.

Put the crayfish in a big bucket, cover liberally with handfuls of table salt, coating them, then cover with water. After 10 minutes stir, then spill out the salt water (not on your lawn), cover again with fresh water, stir to dislodge any impurities, throw out any crayfish that float (dead). Spill out your rinse water,

then repeat the process. You're ready.

Cooking them

Now, I cook my crayfish a longer time and the shrimp a short time, so I do them separately.

Put your bunch of crayfish in boiling salted water. Online sources recommend boiling 5-7 minutes, but I do it at least 10 minutes to be safe, because we do have Giardia in the lake. Set aside.

The rest of this recipe is taken from Pinterest, called "Sheet Pan Clam Bake", but we boil it. You can add or subtract ingredients to your taste, or ingredient availability (can be hard to get fresh mussels & clams in Cook/Tower). Feeds about 4: we will double or triple the amounts to feed our family!

Ingredients:

- 1 Lb new potatoes (small yellow if available).
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp fresh cracked black pepper
- 2 Tbsp Old Bay seasoning (at least!)
- 1 Lb jumbo shrimp (we get unpeeled)
- 1 Lb mussels (if available)
- 1 Lb little neck clams (if available)
- 2 sweet corn cobs, cut into 2" pieces
- 1 Lb smoked kielbasa (Polish sausage)
cut into 2" pieces
- ¼ cup unsalted butter cut into pats

Put all ingredients in large pot, just cover with water, boil until potatoes are tender. Add shrimp and cooked crayfish (as many as you have!) and boil for 3-4 minutes.

Pour out water, spill contents onto trays or newspapers, and dig in.

To eat the crayfish, tear off the tail, crack it open and pick out the meat with your fingers or a pick. May want to have shell crackers to get at the bigger claws. Some people suck the "tamale" out of the head. I'm not there yet.

Crusty bread and lemon wedges on table if desired.

Consider yourself enlisted in this effort to eat well, and do good!

A Guide's Favorite Ways to Prepare Fish

After a great day on the water, a nice follow-up meal to reap the benefits of your catch is always enjoyed! There are many ways to prepare your catch, but most of us get locked in with our “normal recipe” and forget to try something new. Here are a few staples/recommendations:

The Basic: Roll the fish in flour, dip in egg wash, roll in cracker crumbs, season to taste, fry in Crisco butter or peanut oil... or I like to use Zataran's fish batter as a base.... Then add a box of cracker meal, just a little bit of corn meal, and then add “Everglade Seasoning” and “Uncle Chris's Steak Seasoning” fried in peanut oil.

Walleye Chowder: Basic but TASTY!!

Ingredients: 2 filets of cubed up walleye...or more, “Bear Creek Clam Chowder Soup Mix”, Montreal Steak Seasoning

- Bring soup to boil with added Montreal seasoning, add fish, reduce heat, ready to eat in 10-15 minutes

Fish Tacos: Probably my new favorite way to eat fish lately!!

- Fried or blackened fish...prefer strips or cubes
- 6” corn tortillas...warmed up in a pan
- Diced up cilantro
- Dry coleslaw dressed in “Yum Yum Sauce”
***KEY INGREDIENT
- Fresh squeezed lime
- Sriracha Sauce... just a few drops does the trick, or you can use a mild salsa for preferred heat

Poor Man's Lobster (Pike):

Ingredients: Pike, 2 Liters Sprite, 2 sticks butter, garlic powder, Uncle Chris's Steak Seasoning

- Cubed up/bite size chunks of pike....Make sure to



Happy Retirement Tom Kelly...may there be many fish dinners in your near future!

get all the bones and “y bones” out

- Bring a saucepan full of “Sprite” to a boil with the pike chunks added to it...once the fillets turn white...drain the Sprite..and put in a bowl
- Melt the butter and stir in a little garlic powder and Uncle Chris's Steak Seasoning
- Dip your pike in the buttery concoction

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

Snow Flakes

Winter's own quiet beauty is once again upon us.... time to slow down, time to reflect.

Thoughts trail to snow flakes, beautiful, intricate, original and oh so fragile.

On a cold winter night they come. Filling the sky. Laying a soft blanket o'er the hard as iron frozen land.

Like the countless stars hiding behind the clouds....they sparkle as they fill the sky.

Billions of these wonderful delicate creations; building their landscapes.

Cold winds push them along, into finely sculpted drifts.

Or precarious cornices, daring us to fly from their edges.

Only to be blown again, resculpted, again and again.

This ballet of nature continues to spring.

The winds warm..... the delicate little flakes?
They return to their maker.

Tiny drops, nourishing new wild flowers;
the cycle of life moves on.



Tom Aro
VLA member

But what of our human snow flake story?

Like nature's, a beautiful and unique beginning for all.

Following our own winds,

Left to sculpt, or drift or make sharp edges or maybe soft ones.

But alas..... our time too will end.

Souls? Left to be blowin' in the winter wind?

In search of some forever home?

Who will answer when we come "knock-knock-knockin' on Heaven's door"?

And so it goes, winter thoughts....with a sigh, not an end in sight.

Spring! Oh spring.....Wherefore art thou spring?

Tom Aro
Winter 2021



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

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Membership year runs from Jan 1 through Dec 31

☐ 2021 New Member ☐ 2021 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.