

January 2016

At this time of year we share with you the activities that the **Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area** has been involved with during the past year and ask you for your continuing support both in terms of renewing your membership and volunteering time towards our efforts.

During 2015 our focus has been on:

- Providing education
- Being an active voice in public policy as it affects the environmental and esthetic quality of the Eau Claire Lakes area
- Participating in and sharing the results of monitoring activities
- Community Involvement

Education:

The Lake Ecology Education Program (LEEP) curriculum continues to be a vital environmental education program. This is a collaborative endeavor with the Drummond Public School that we organize and carry out for the future stewards of our lakes and watershed. Each year the curriculum includes classroom study and lake field trips for 30-36 students with a faculty of 22-24 professional and volunteer community educators.

Our annual Community Educational Event this year centered on the status of the Walleye population and Fly-fishing on our lakes and streams. DNR Fisheries Biologist, Scott Toshner, presented data showing declining walleye populations across the Upper Midwest. The mechanism of change is unknown but likely involves several variables. The DNR is in the process of gathering more data and Upper and Lower Eau Claire Lakes have been designated as Bass/Walleye study lakes. Scott also stressed the importance of habitat improvement efforts such as the Conservation Club's Fish Sticks project. Over 500 trees have been placed in the water along the shores of the Eau Claire Lakes since 2008. We are exploring becoming a sponsor for a Healthy Lake Grant, which is a shoreline restoration opportunity.

The program on Fly-fishing was led by John Kudlas and Carl Heltne. They shared basic information about the many facets of this sport and the opportunities we have in our local area to participate in this activity.

Active Voice in Public Policy:

We are actively participating in the discussion centered on a permit to operate a CAFO (concentrated animal feedlot operation) for a large number of hogs in the Fish Creek Watershed, less than 8 miles upstream from Lake Superior. Currently the DNR is doing an Environmental Impact Study.

A second important focus has been on Act 55 of the Wisconsin legislature, which moved many of the zoning regulations away from the local county level to the state. We joined in an effort to return control of the shoreland zoning to the county level where it belongs. It is our understanding that legislation will be introduced in this coming legislative session to restore shoreland zoning authority to local governments.

Participation in Monitoring the Status of our Lakes and Streams:

Our membership remains an active participant in monitoring the quality of our lakes and streams via Shoreline Monitoring to assess the status of aquatic invasive species (AIS). We have provided financial assistance for training Shore Line Monitors and both volunteers and funding for the Clean Boats Clean Waters (CBCW) initiative. In 2015 CBCW volunteers inspected 3,766 boats and educated 8,573 people, the most in Bayfield County.

A summary of the last three years of Secchi Disc monitoring suggests a modest decrease in water clarity. Further monitoring will help us understand if this is a trend or an anomaly. This is a call for us to be diligent with reference to our shoreland environment and phosphorus contributions to our lakes.

There are continued populations of Curly-leaf Pondweed and Eurasian Water-milfoil in our lakes as well as a recurrence in Tomahawk Lake, which had been treated chemically. The Barnes AIS committee has therefore voted to build and operate a diver assisted suction harvester (DASH). This pontoon boat mounted device vacuums up AIS, which have been hand pulled by divers thus reducing their population and limiting their spread. This method avoids the need for chemical treatment and is more selective.

Community Involvement:

We continue our liaisons with the Town of Barnes AIS committee, the Eau Claire Lakes Conservation Club and the St. Croix Headwaters. Board members have volunteered to attend the Town of Barnes and the Town of Gordon meetings.

Ted Eastlund, a board member, was active in monitoring the repair of the dams on Lower and Middle Eau Claire lakes. This was an important undertaking and the maintenance of these structures is of utmost importance to the quality of our lakes. Ted has compiled a detailed summary of the work done on these structures which will be posted on our website.

The **Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area** were actively involved in the Vatten Paddlar event as course markers and monitors. This re-emergence of a past canoe and kayak race was a successful community event that we are pledged to support this coming year. We also contributed to the Bayfield county bicycle map, which featured a loop around the Upper and Middle Eau Claire Lakes.

We had our first annual Beer Tasting Social. This event was an informal activity to share information with both residents and visitors about our organization and the beautiful area that we call our home.

Your continued support and participation makes all of this possible. Your tax-deductible membership contributions provide funding for our activities and the support we provide through community involvement. Your participation and input gives validity to our voice in public policy. Your willingness to volunteer time and effort is the fuel needed to preserve the qualities we treasure in life in the Eau Claire Lakes Area.

Please take a moment to submit the enclosed form to renew your membership or go online to www.friendsofeauclairelakesarea.com. As the year progresses we will use this website and e-mails to solicit your input and keep you posted on ongoing activity.

Carl E. Heltne, President of the **Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area**