FRIENDS OF THE
EAU CLAIRE LAKES AREA

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MAY 2026

Our Mission: *To protect, preserve, and improve the environmental and aesthetic qualities of the* ***Eau Claire Lakes Area*** *watershed, including the lakes, rivers, shorelands, wetlands, forests, and attendant wildlife resources.*

BAYFIELD AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES, WI

friendsofeauclairelakesarea.com

WELCOME to LOONS 101

Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area (FOECLA) welcomes Erica LeMoine!

Learn about loons, why they're important, and what you can do to help them on the Eau Claire Lakes in this family friendly presentation. There will also be an update on the new independent nonprofit Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute and LoonWatch, its signature program. We thank member ***Keith Crowley*** *for donating this stunning photo of a loon family in residence near the Middle Eau Claire dam in 2025.*

Please join us!

2026 Annual Meeting

Saturday, July 18th
Barnes Town Hall
9 am - 11:30 am

9:00 - 10:00 Update on FOECLA
10:00 - 10:15 Coffee Break
10:15 - 11:30 **Loons 101**

We are delighted to welcome ***Erica LeMoine,*** who will share her vast knowledge of loons. Erica was the director of LoonWatch at the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College from 2011 to 2024.

Erica is now the philanthropy and membership coordinator for Wisconsin's Green Fire.

... a note from our Board of Directors

Hello neighbors! Even after 52 years we wouldn't change a word of our mission to "Protect, preserve, and improve the environmental and aesthetic qualities of the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed." We live, work, and vacation here in 2026 because generation after generation, our community, our families, and our members have stepped up to safeguard this unique landscape, with its inviting woodlands, clear lakes, and fragile shorelines. This newsletter goes to property owners in the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed - it's part of our effort to provide outreach and education by sharing a variety of topics we hope you'll find interesting. So take a look inside, get to know us, and consider becoming a member.

Today, we're more concerned than ever about the impact of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) on area lakes. And, we're responding by increasing our financial commitment to support AIS mitigation efforts in cooperation with the Town of Barnes AIS Committee. **We contributed $13,000 in 2025 to meet the cash match required for Wisconsin DNR Surface Water Grants, and we have pledged to more than double this contribution in 2026.** ***(More on this inside!)***

We encourage you to ***volunteer*** as Boat Landing Monitors, Shoreline Monitors, and on the BAISS boat. ***Learn*** more about AIS and ***talk*** with your neighbors: **avoid areas of AIS when boating, clean, drain, and dry your boat and all equipment**.

We remind all watercraft users to observe **Slow/No Wake zones within 100 feet of shore (200 feet for personal watercraft)** and we recommend **wakeboats remain 700 feet from shore and in 30 feet of water when operated in wake mode** to limit damage to critical fish habitats and the churning of phosphorus-laden sediment which contributes to algae blooms. Let's work together to promote safe and responsible boating practices for all.

Citizen Scientists Complete 5 Years of Lake Level Monitoring in the Eau Claire Lakes Area: Background and 2025 Update *by Jim Bakken*

Background

The Eau Claire Lakes Area lakes experienced exceptionally high and prolonged lake levels from 2010 through 2020. Precipitation during this 10-year period was well above normal, including two powerful storms in 2016 and 2018 that produced a lot of rain in short periods of time. During this period **drainage lake levels rose quickly before receding slowly.** Drainage lakes have an inlet and an outlet on the ground surface and include Upper, Middle, and Lower Eau Claire Lakes. These lakes have recreational dams on the Eau Claire River that create the lakes. **By contrast, seepage lake levels remained high for a long period of time.** Seepage lakes don't have an inlet or outlet on the ground surface, instead water levels are controlled by groundwater seepage. Since seepage lakes rise and fall with groundwater fluctuations, they change more slowly than do drainage lakes. The high lake levels during this period made all shorelines more vulnerable to damaging erosion and resulted in property damage.

In response, Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area (FOECLA) suggested a program in which a lake would be declared "no wake" whenever water levels rose high enough to cause shoreline damage, with the restriction remaining in place until levels receded. However, there was little history on lake levels prior to 2020 to be used in establishing "no wake" trigger elevations. In 2021, FOECLA installed lake level gauges on eleven area lakes, supplementing an existing gauge on Lower Eau Claire at Mooney Dam that was included in the records. FOECLA and the Town of Barnes entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in 2021 which defined the responsibilities of each party. Subsequently, five years of data has been collected by a network of volunteers (Citizen Scientists) who read the gauges weekly and enter the data into the Wisconsin DNR SWIMS database. This report summarizes lake levels observed in Summer 2025.

2025 Update

For 2025 lake level readings in our seepage lakes generally show a slow decline in water levels. Rainfall in the Eau Claire Lakes area was below average, however there was one large rainfall on July 15th. ***Jack Gribble*** (River Road, Middle Eau Claire) reported 4.6", the ***CoCoRaHS Gauge WI-DG-37*** (part of the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network and located about 2 miles west of the Middle Dam) reported 5.2" of rain, but the ***Barnes Ranger Station*** only reported 1.32". The storm was centered on a narrow band diagonally across the Eau Claire Lakes. Radar indicated some areas received 9" of precipitation. As a result, the Eau Claire chain responded to the rainfall quickly, and was back to normal levels two weeks later. August and September were unusually dry, so drainage lakes dropped to near minimum levels. We continue to generate a solid historic record of how our lakes react to precipitation, and I believe we will be able to use the data in the future to help manage our lakes. Sample rainfall and lake level gauge reading graphs for 2025 data are shown on Page 3. Figure 1 depicts a drainage lake graph, Lower Eau Claire Lake at Mooney Bay Dam, and Figure 2 depicts a seepage lake graph, Beauregard Lake. **The complete set of graphs is available by scanning the QR code or by visiting: https://tinyurl.com/4pfrjaf4 if using a tablet or laptop.** Rainfall data is compliments of Jack Gribble who provided a very nice record of rainfall. (The Barnes Ranger Station and the CoCoRaHS weather installation WI-DG-37 gauges were referenced for comparison. The Gribble gauge and the CoCoRaHS gauges correlated quite well for summer precipitation, but records at the Barnes Ranger station deviated significantly from the Gribble and CoCoRaHS gauges.)

The gauge data that volunteer citizen scientists entered in the SWIMS database is available to the public via WI DNR's Lakes website: **dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Lakes**. If you go to the website, scroll down to where you find "Lake Levels" and click on it. Then at the drop-down menus on top, select your lake and choose your lake and station if there is more than one station. **Figure 3** is a list of gauges and their station number if you want to search using the station number. A big thank you goes to our gauging Volunteer Citizen Scientists listed in **Figure 4.** *Additional thanks goes to Marty Olson, Craig Willert, Wayne Kolberg, and my grandson Justin Wittwer, who have helped with the biennial surveys of the gauges to maintain accuracy, and to the Eau Claire Conservation Club for installation of the gauges.*

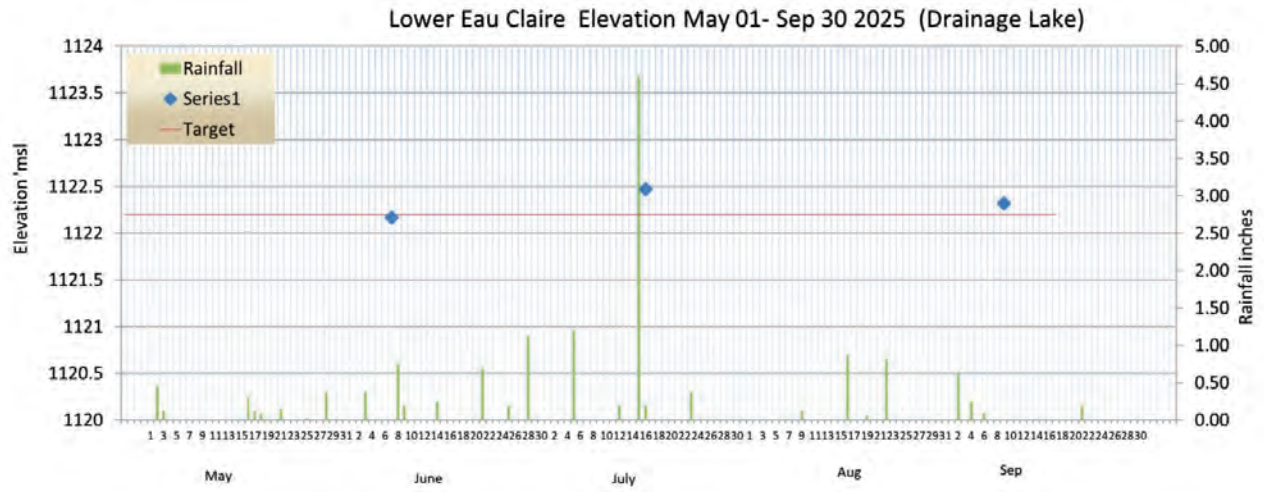


Figure 1 On area **drainage lakes**, lake level is measured in feet above mean sea level: 'msl. The red line on this graph represents the target agreement for lake level. The Mooney Bay Dam is adjusted by Douglas County Forestry to achieve this target.

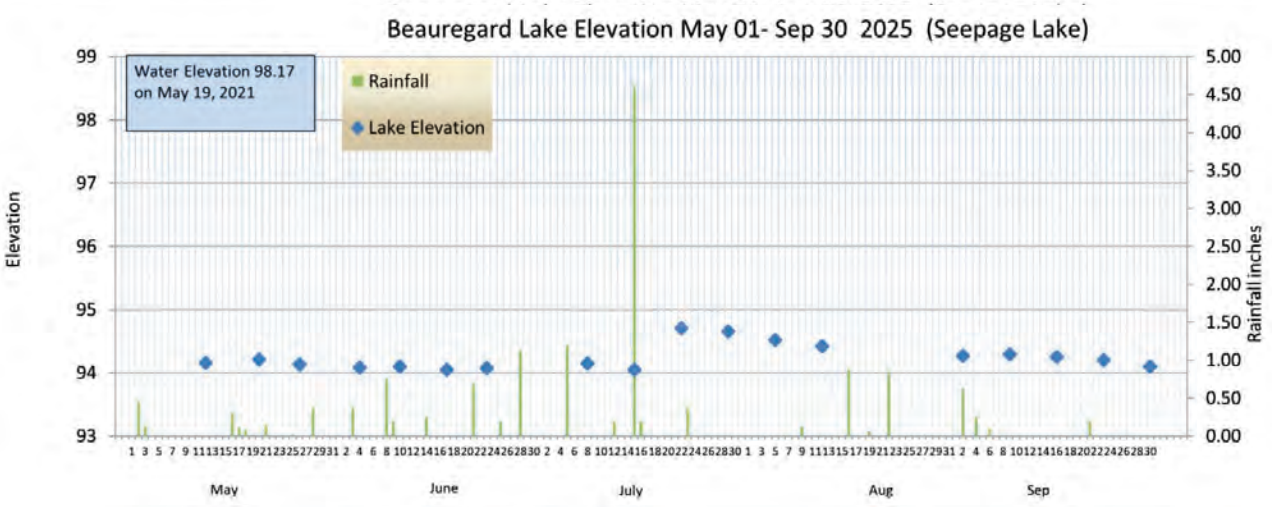


Figure 2 On area **seepage lakes**, lake level is reported relative to a local bench mark set at 100'.

Figure 3 - Gauge Station #

Gauge	Station #
Lower Eau Claire	10055138
Middle Eau Claire at Dam	10055139
Middle Eau Claire at River Rd	10055140
Upper Eau Claire at Dam	10055143
Upper Eau Claire at Lake Rd	10055144
Birch Lake	10055145
Beauregard Lake	10055146
Kelly Lake	10055147
Pickerel Lake	10055148
Sand Bar Lake	10055149
Tomahawk Lake	10055152
Simms Lake	10055153

Figure 4 - Citizen Scientists

PaulMcGinley – Lower EC (Dam)
Stephen Wilbers – Middle (Dam)
Jack Gribble – Middle EC (River Road)
Susan Jansen – Upper EC (Dam)
Jim Bakken – Upper EC (Lake Road)
Richard Keifer – Birch Lake
Bill Torguson – Beauregard Lake
Mary LaBadie – Sandbar/Tomahawk Lakes
Kurt Beaver – Pickerel Lake
Susan Diedrich – Kelly Lake
Susan Isernhagen – Simms Lake

Jim's complete report and 2025 graphs for all monitored lakes are available by scanning the QR code below or by visiting:
https://tinyurl.com/4pfrjaf4

What's with the Green Stuff In Our Lakes? *By Lee Wiesner*

In the past few years many of you have been asking about the green stuff on the bottom of our lakes, floating around out in the middle of our lakes, or collecting along the shoreline. Wisconsin has two prevalent forms of algae that are present in lakes. The first one that is very common and noticed more is filamentous algae and the second is not really an algae, but is a bacteria called cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). Both filamentous algae and cyanobacteria thrive in warmer water and increased nutrient load caused by excessive run off from heavy rain events. Longer periods of ice off on lakes can also increase the growth of filamentous algae and cyanobacteria as both require sunlight for their growth. A perfect storm is a summer with hot sunny days and intermittent heavy rain fall events.

Filamentous Algae

Filamentous algae is often more of a nuisance than a threat to wildlife, pets, or humans. Its life cycle starts in the spring on the lake bottom as dense mats, usually bright green, resembling loose cotton candy, see **Figure 1.** The mats trap oxygen formed from photosynthesis and float to the surface by midsummer, see **Figure 2.** These smaller floating mats often concentrate in back bays and form large mats that eventually die off and sink to the bottom to start their life cycle the next spring, see **Figure 3.** Most clear water lakes in our area are likely to have filamentous algae mats in varying densities. Usually filamentous algae does not pose a threat to animals or humans, but it is advised to avoid swimming in heavy mats, wash skin if in contact, and don't allow pets to drink water from heavy mats. The photos of the filamentous algae were taken near the entrance to Hole In the Wall Bay and the large mat of filamentous algae was taken in Hole In the Wall Bay on Middle Eau Claire Lake.

Figure 1
Healthy Bright Green Filamentous Algae on Lake Bottom

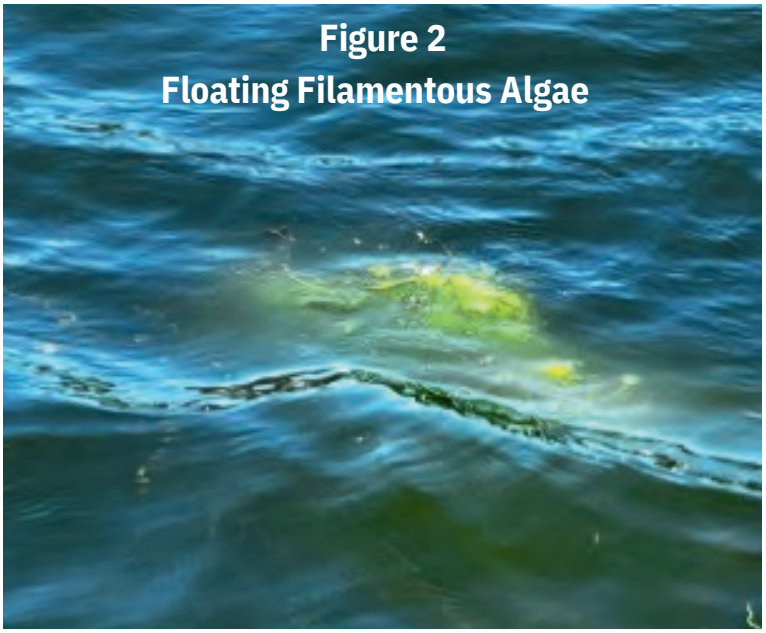


Figure 2
Floating Filamentous Algae

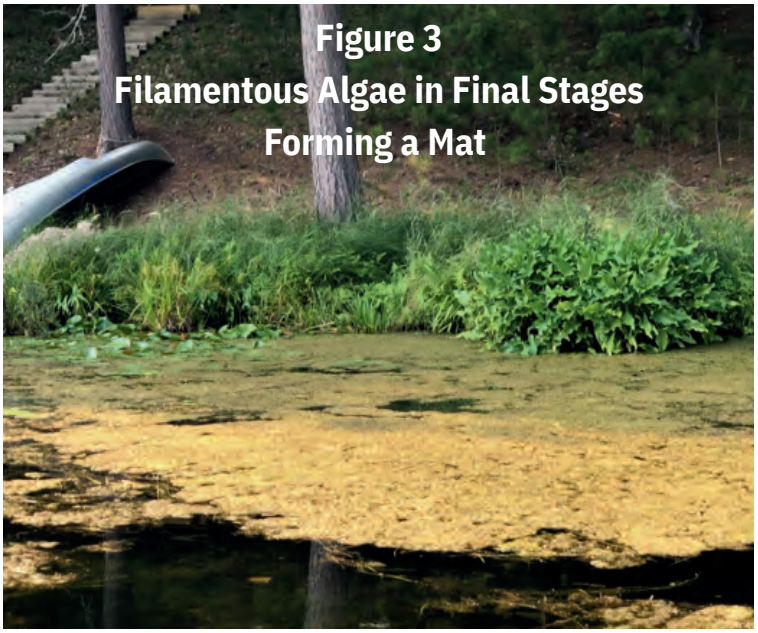


Figure 3
Filamentous Algae in Final Stages Forming a Mat

Green Stuff (continued)

Cyanobacteria (Blue-Green Algae)

Cyanobacteria (called blue-green algae, although it is a bacteria) is far less common in far northern Wisconsin lakes than in the southern three-fourths of the state due to fewer nutrients in the northern lakes. Two summers ago there were reports of cyanobacteria blooms on Lower Eau Claire Lake and last summer a very small bloom, about 10 square feet, was observed on Middle Eau Claire Lake. The smaller seepage lakes in the Barnes area probably experience cyanobacteria blooms from time to time when the conditions are right, but none have been reported to FOECLA. Cyanobacteria have a more complex life cycle than filamentous algae. Their life cycle starts out with vegetative growth, then heterocysts for nitrogen fixation, akinetes for survival and eventual germination, which can at times form dense pea-soup colored mats. Oftentimes it is evenly mixed in the water so the water in the entire lake will be green. When there is a gentle wind consistently from one direction the bloom may pile on the shoreline where it is much more evident, see **Figure 4**.

Figure 4
Cyanobacteria
(Blue-Green Algae)

To distinguish green filamentous algae from cyanobacteria there are two tests that can be used. The stick test is the easiest. Take a stick and poke it into the mat and raise it horizontally. If it is filamentous algae, the stick will have long hair-like algae hanging from it, as in **Figure 5**. If it is cyanobacteria, the stick will look like it was dipped into green paint with no hair-like algae clinging to it. Another method is the jar test. Place the sample in a jar of water. Cyanobacteria will form a film on the surface of the water while filamentous algae will sink to the bottom.

Feature	Filamentous Algae	Cyanobacteria
Appearance	Long strands/filaments, mats	Pea-soup or spilled-paint appearance, surface scums
Stick Test	Drapes or hangs from stick in strands	Stick passes through or comes out coated like paint
Jar Test	Settles to the bottom of jar	Floats and forms a ring or scum at the top
Toxicity	Generally harmless nuisance	Some species can produce toxins
Odor	May smell grassy or sewage-like	Often swampy, septic, or musty

Figure 5
Stringy Filamentous Algae

Finally, yellow-greenish pollen build up along shorelines may be seen in June and can be confused with cyanobacteria, see **Figure 6** .

Figure 6 Pollen

Lee recommends visiting Wisconsin DNR to learn more about blue-green algae and steps to report a suspected bloom by scanning the QR code.

Catching Up with Scholarship Winner Sam Tuttle *by Ted Urban*

I had the opportunity to visit with Sam Tuttle, one of our 2024 scholarship winners. Sam is a sophomore at Iowa State University and also received a second-year scholarship in 2025.

Sam's major is horticulture with a turfgrass studies emphasis. When Sam was a junior in high school he spent a year in Madrid, Spain. Madrid is a very large city with very little green space. He played soccer and rugby on artificial turf and came to realize how important real grass is. After his year in Spain, he researched schools and areas of study relating to natural grass. Sam chose Iowa State for their excellent program and quoted one of his professors "Why go to a university where they teach the book, when you can go to a university where they wrote the book?"

As we all know college is expensive and even more so attending as an out-of-state student. The scholarship awards Sam received went directly to tuition and helped him a lot.

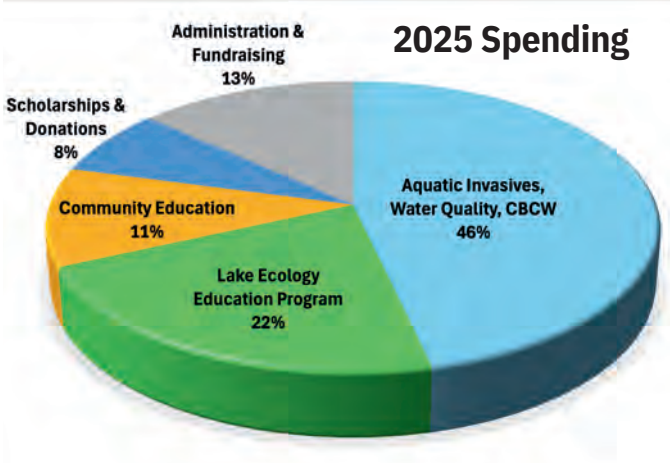
When asked where he saw himself in 5 years Sam stated he hoped to graduate and be employed by a professional sports team working with their turfgrass. Last summer he worked with Minneapolis's MLS team, the Loons, and this coming summer Sam has an internship in Houston, TX with the Texans, Astros, and the University of Houston.

One of Sam's proudest accomplishments this year was to be selected to represent the Turf Club on the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Leadership Council. The Turf Club has approximately 25 active members, and one of Sam's goals is to work with other agricultural majors to get more members in the Turf Club.

I really enjoyed my conversation with Sam, feel our scholarship money was well spent, and wish Sam all the best in the future.

We're Stepping up to Fight AIS

by Katherine Stewart



In 2025, Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area members provided $13,000, or 46% of our total spending, for Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) remediation and the Clean Boats/Clean Waters program, which supports boat landing monitors who help prevent the spread of invasives. ***On average that's $37 per membership.*** For 2026, we have more than ***doubled*** that commitment, in order to meet **shortfalls in Wisconsin DNR Surface Water grant funding.**

We're asking new and renewing members to step up and help fulfill this pledge. It's an investment in the health of our lakes and in maintaining the outstanding water quality we enjoy in the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed. Please **join us, renew your membership, or donate** to our AIS Remediation fund using the enclosed envelope.

*FOECLA is a Section 501(c)(3) organization, which means **donations and memberships are tax deductible**, subject to IRS rules.*

Our EIN is : 03-0389664, Property Owners Association, Inc., Barnes/Eau Claire Lakes Area.

Christine Neff Wins International Award for Lake Ecology Education Program (LEEP) and Lake Management Efforts *by Craig Tanner*

Please join us in congratulating Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area (FOECLA) Board Member Christine Neff, a resident and dedicated lake steward advocate from Barnes, Wisconsin! Christine traveled to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in November to accept an award from the North American Lake Management Society at their 2025 International Symposium. She accepted the ***Lake Management Success Stories*** award for herself and on behalf of FOECLA, for their Lake Ecology Education Program (LEEP), and the Town of Barnes, for their Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) remediation and water quality efforts.

Christine played a pivotal role in launching LEEP in 2009. Designed to engage Drummond Area School District 7th grade science students in lake stewardship and to meet Wisconsin educational standards, LEEP was developed by FOECLA's Education Team, comprised of conservation professionals, teachers, and other enthusiastic lake stewards. The LEEP curriculum offers modules that introduce key concepts in the classroom, followed by immersive fall and spring "LEEP Day" field trips to local lakes and rivers. The modules cover a broad range of topics including aquatic plants, water quality, fisheries, plankton, critical habitat, canoeing, shoreline restoration, tree identification, macroinvertebrates, and food energy cycles.

Beyond their work in the science classroom, students apply their LEEP experiences to create diverse projects - slide shows, poems, posters, games, and research - as part of their ELA middle school curriculum. Since 2009, FOECLA memberships have funded the LEEP program, with FOECLA members, area conservation professionals, and community volunteers coming together to deliver the classroom and field modules.

LEEP's classroom and field experiences combine to expand knowledge and develop practical skills, preparing students for meaningful volunteer roles. LEEP Alumni often return to assist with teaching, they participate in invasive species removal, and they volunteer as shoreline and boat landing monitors. They are becoming the lake stewards of today and inspiring the stewards of tomorrow.

Here are some tax-savvy ways to support FOECLA:

- In 2026, if you claim the standard deduction on your income tax return, you can still deduct charitable donations of up to $1,000 ($2,000 if you file jointly).
- For those who itemize deductions on their taxes, you may be able to maximize the tax benefit of your gifts by making several years' worth of donations in a single tax year.
- If you are 70 ½, you can make a gift - a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) - directly from your IRA to FOECLA or another eligible nonprofit. And, if you are 73, these QCDs can be used to fulfill the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) you must take each year.
- A donor-advised fund (DAF) may be another tax-smart way to give to FOECLA or another eligible non-profit.

Many FOECLA members take advantage of these tax strategies to generously support FOECLA's work, while minimizing their income taxes. ***We call that a win-win!***

Got 2 minutes? Scan to take our survey!

or visit https://tinyurl.com/52dkjzay

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Welcome to Loons 101
at the Annual Meeting!
Saturday, July 18th, 9-11:30
Barnes Town Hall

Last June FOECLA launched its **HELLO FRIENDS Pontoon Tour** event to great success. The event's purpose is to provide increased social engagement for our members. In 2025, the tour launched on Middle Eau Claire Lake and in 2026 we will cruise Lower Eau Claire Lake.

Attendees enjoy a happy hour cruise on host pontoons complete with a guide on each boat who will point out the lake's historical, environmental, geographic, and recreational highlights. Light snacks are provided and you bring your own beverage of choice. Tours are designed to last approximately 1½-2 hours.

This is a great way to learn about an area lake that is new to you, as well as to get to know your neighbors and other members. Complete details will be forthcoming in early May via email, Facebook, and at ***friendsofeauclairelakesarea.com***.

Mark your calendar for Friday, June 19th and plan to join us!