

# Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation

Protecting Water, Woods, and Wildlife for Future Generations to Enjoy

FALL 2007

## Now Is the Time to Protect Our Natural Resources

By Paula West, Executive Director, Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation

Imagine the sun rising over a fog-shrouded island in Leech Lake or the evening sunset exploding with beautiful hues of red and pink as the sun disappears below the horizon of pine trees across the lake. Blue bills rounding a wind-swept point. Abundant stands of bulrush, the home and birthing place for many species of fish and wildlife. An eagle majestically soaring above with its wings spread wide. And finally, the cry of the loon—a symbol that noted conservationist Sigurd Olson said in *Listening Point* “is the symbol of lake country, the sound that more than any other typifies the rocks and waters and forests of the wilderness.”

These are the images and character, held in our minds from year to year, that draws people to live and recreate in the Leech Lake Watershed, a special region of Minnesota that has been enjoyed by people for many generations who treasure its crystal clear waters, dense forests, and peaceful quiet and starlet skies.

Yet this very character that defines the region is also what beckons an exploding population growth projected at 50 percent or more in the North Central Region of Minnesota, including Cass and Hubbard Counties, where the population already grew by twice the state average between 1990 and 2000. With baby boomers entering and nearing retirement and better telecommunications and roads that make living and working anywhere possible, people are moving to where they want to retire drawn by the lure of the water, woods, and wildlife.

Unfortunately as Will Rogers said, “The trouble with land is, they’re not making it anymore.” Increasing population growth is stimulating renewed pressure to alter the face of the land that remains and, while growth brings economic gain to the region, if development is not done in a planned and sustainable way, the natural heritage and character of our region may be endangered.

The looming question today is: What will the quality of our waters, forests, and wildlife be like 25 years from now? Will our waters still be clean and clear? Will there be abundant fish and wildlife species? Will this region be a peaceful place to recreate and enjoy nature? And, will it still be a treasure that our children, grandchildren, and future generations can enjoy?

It is the individual actions we take and the decisions that are made by our state and local governments that will determine the answers to these questions. We don't have 25 years to decide, probably not even 10 years. The time is now to consider and act on preserving and protecting the natural resources of the Leech Lake Watershed.

### To Build or to Preserve?

Fortunately, we don't have to definitively answer that question. We're not going to stop development; it's inevitable and by itself is not a bad thing. As long as there are humans we will build homes. But answers to the development questions of “Where? How Much? and How?” we develop our region will make the difference between enjoying our natural resources for years to come or not.

Sustaining the quality of the 273 lakes, 120 miles of streams, 70,000 acres of wetlands, and thousands of acres of forests in the Leech Lake Watershed is primarily about what “we” do on the land that will determine their future quality.

The runoff from the land, and the pollution that is carried with it, will determine the future quality of our waters. If shoreland development is improperly done, construction can have a dramatic negative impact on a lake's water quality and the habitat that fish and wildlife depend on. With increasing development and more disturbance of the land comes more runoff and sediments laden with phosphorus and other pollutants that can impair water quality. With many of the new upscale homes and planned unit developments (PUDs) being built on the our shorelands, the amount of impervious surface per lot has dramatically increased creating more opportunity for runoff to the lake. At the same time native vegetation that has the capacity to absorb water runoff is decreasing. The resulting runoff increases the potential for water pollution, shoreline erosion, and loss of fish and wildlife habitat.



With increasing population growth, the private forests of the region are also facing the threat of being subdivided and developed as a patchwork of 40-acre parcels are being bought up for cabins and retirement homes. It's not just about living on the lake anymore that attracts people to move “Up North.” Ecological diversity is being threatened as forest plots get smaller and more fragmented, chipping away at the trees and wetlands that are critical habitat for birds and wildlife and making it harder to manage for threatened species. Fragmentation of our forests also impacts water quality by increasing erosion and runoff.

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# Now Is the Time to Protect Our Natural Resources, Cont.

## Sustaining Healthy Water, Woods, and Wildlife

**Sustaining healthy lakes, forests, and fish and wildlife habitats is about two things: land conservation and land management.**

Land conservation is preserving what land is not already developed. Land management is minimizing human activities on the land that impact natural resources by ensuring that responsible land-use decisions are made by individuals on their own properties, collectively by lake associations, and by local governments.

"We don't manage resources, we manage human behavior. The resources will take care of themselves just fine. It's the human influence that we interject on the resource that causes the problem," said John Sumption, director of Cass County Environmental Services, in the *Minnesota Lakes Association Reporter*, Vol. 4, No. 1. "Take fish management as an example. If there was no fishing pressure on the lakes, would we do a fish management plan? It's the impact people have on the natural system that causes concern."

As individuals, good land management involves practicing stewardship. If you own lakeshore, you can manage your property to protect water quality. Curb pollution with proper lawn care, pet waste disposal, use of non-toxic household products, preventing shoreland erosion, and septic system maintenance. Runoff that can pick up pollution and carry it to the lake can be reduced by minimizing hard surfaces on your property and limiting clearing and grading of native vegetation. Runoff can also be captured and cleansed so it doesn't reach the lake by using shoreland vegetative buffers and by redirecting it to rain barrels and rain gardens. Take time to learn more about responsible stewardship practices.

Land conservation—keeping undeveloped lands undeveloped—is a critical way private landowners have to limit the impact their land has on the environment by protecting it from further development. You can help shape the future quality of the region's natural resources using various land conservation tools.

Putting a conservation easement on your land is a viable option to preserve the land and its resources while still retaining ownership and use of the land. It is a legally recorded agreement by which landowners may voluntarily restrict the use of the land. Its benefits are land protection to preserve wildlife habitat and protect water quality, leaving a living legacy for those who come after you to enjoy, and contributing to the common good of protecting the quality of life that sustains the region.

Other land owners may choose to donate or sell their land to then be placed in public ownership and managed into perpetuity for habitat protection and public enjoyment. Either way, the lands remain "working lands"—working towards the preservation of natural resources.

The Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation is your partner to ensure that population growth in this region is balanced with conservation of natural resources. Working together we can achieve common-sense conservation of the irreplaceable natural resources that underpin the economy, recreational opportunity and quality of life that makes this watershed such a great place to live and play.

We can ensure the enjoyment of the natural resources of the Leech Lake Watershed for generations to come. It's up to all of us.



## What Does the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation Do?

- Identifies and protects sensitive lands and waters in the watershed through land conservation projects, often in partnership with county, state, and federal governments; other non-profits; lake associations and sporting groups.
- Encourages and accepts donations of shoreland and forested property from conservation-minded people who want to leave an undeveloped legacy for public enjoyment.
- Facilitates the establishment of conservation easements with property owners who wish to permanently protect their land and/or lakeshore from future development while still enjoying its natural resources.
- Provides education on individual and community responsibility for stewardship through workshops, publications, and partnerships with lake associations and professional organizations.
- Builds leadership and local responsibility for watershed protection by developing new lake associations and encouraging active land conservation projects within lake associations through the formation of Sustainability Committees.
- Promotes land-use decisions and regulations by local and state governments that will ensure sustainability of the region's natural resources.

## Summary of Accomplishments

28  
completed land conservation projects.

77,563  
feet of shoreline protected.

1,741  
acres preserved.

\$11 million+  
in estimated value of land conservation projects completed, many of which are now part of the DNR, Forest Service or county land base.

1<sup>st</sup>  
shoreland conservation easement in Minnesota (Little Boy Lake Project).

#1  
biggest partnership (22 organizations) to team with the DNR to buy a conservation property (Mule Lake WMA @ \$2.7 million).

700+  
donors of time, expertise, financial resources, and inspiration.

# About the Leech Lake Watershed

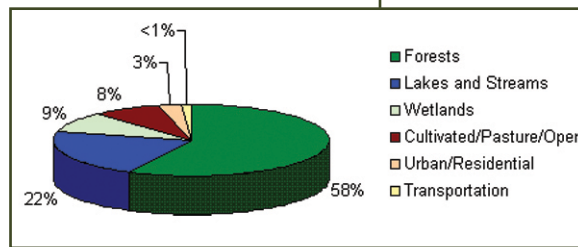
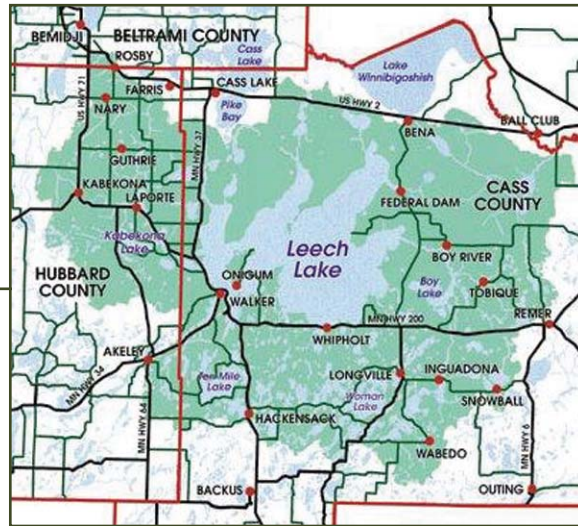
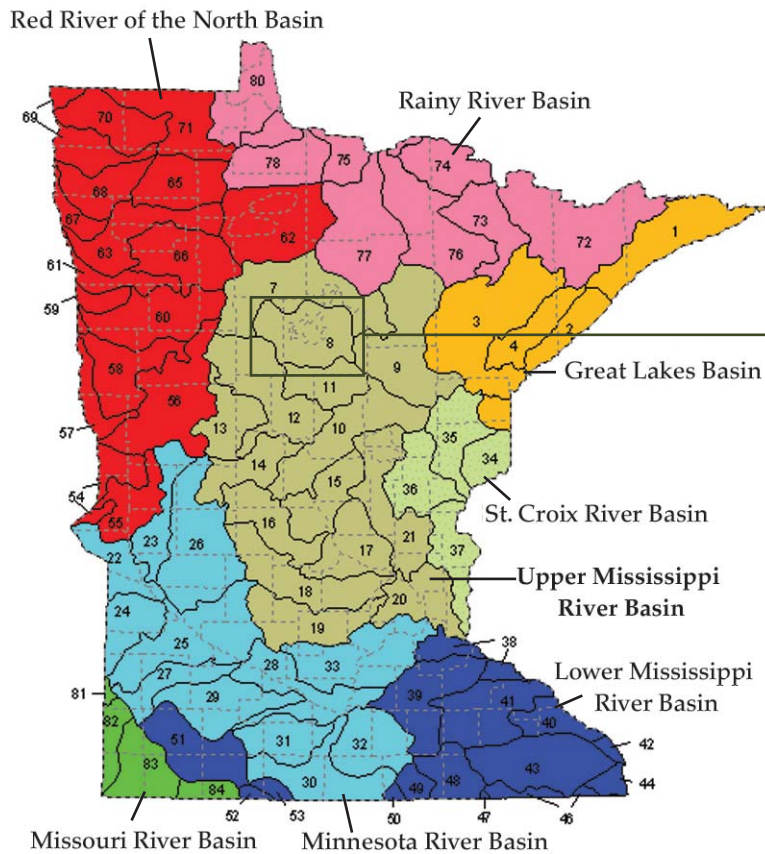
You might be surprised to learn that Minnesota has no incoming sources of water. Water in Minnesota eventually drains north to Hudson Bay, east to the Atlantic, or south to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Leech Lake Watershed is one of 15 subwatersheds located in the Upper Mississippi River Basin, which is one of eight major water basins in Minnesota. Eventually, no matter where you are located in the Leech Lake Watershed, the water

drains to Leech Lake, which drains to the Mississippi River and eventually flows to the Gulf of Mexico. **We are all interconnected by water. It's what we do on the land that impacts the quality of our waters, forests, and fish and wildlife habitat.**

*"A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common body of water."*

The Leech Lake Watershed is located primarily in Cass County and parts of Hubbard and Beltrami Counties. It is home to half of Minnesota's natural reproducing Muskie lakes; abundant eagle, loon, and osprey nesting areas; and rare bird, plant, and animal habitats. Its natural resources provide millions of hours of outdoor recreation and sustain an economy primarily based on tourism and timber harvesting.



## About the Leech Lake Watershed

- 750,000 acres

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- 273 lakes

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- Leech Lake is 111,000 acres

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- 120 miles of streams

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- 70,000 acres of wetlands

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- One-third public ownership

## Your Land Conservation Options

*"The trouble with land is, they're not making it anymore" - Will Rogers*

Conserving the sensitive lands and shorelands within the Leech Lake Watershed from future development permanently protects these areas as valuable fish and wildlife habitat and helps to ensure high quality water as a legacy for the continuing enjoyment of the watershed's natural resources.

Is your property a "special place" that you value for its unique water, woods, or wildlife features? Do you want to see it protected for your enjoyment and that of your children, grandchildren, and future generations? As a landowner you have several options to limit development on your property to permanently protect its natural resources.

- Place a conservation easement on your property** that prohibits or limits future development yet you still retain ownership and use of the land. If the land is sold, the easement will pass on to future owners to insure permanent protection of those features that are special to you.
- Donate or sell your private land** to the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation, State of Minnesota, local government, or other qualifying nonprofit conservation organization for the purpose of returning it to public ownership to be managed into perpetuity for wildlife and aquatic habitat protection and public use and enjoyment.

### What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between a qualified entity (government agency or non-profit conservation organization) that allows a landowner to voluntarily limit the use and development of their land in order to perma-

nently preserve the land's natural features. Landowners continue to hold title, pay property taxes, and use the land in any way not prohibited by the terms of the agreement. Landowners can sell or lease the land, or transfer it to their heirs, but future owners will also be bound by the terms of the agreement. This is how the land is forever protected.

Each easement is unique and tailored to the specific property and the landowner's situation. There can be significant tax benefits (income, estate, or property) to landowners, depending on the circumstances and how the easement is defined. The entity that holds the easement inspects the land periodically to ensure that the conditions of the easement are satisfied. The book, *Landowner Protection Options Handbook*, available on the Minnesota Land Trust website ([www.mnland.org](http://www.mnland.org)), is a practical guide for individuals and families interested in preserving their land.

### How Can the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation Help?

Many of the Foundation's completed land conservation projects were possible because of the generosity of conservation-minded landowners who donated land or easements to their property to the Foundation to limit develop and permanently preserve its natural resource value. The Foundation welcomes the donation of land or easements or we can provide you with assistance, resources, and referral to other organizations active in land conservation to help meet your conservation goals. Please contact us for assistance.

## Financial Incentives for Conservation Easements

For a limited time only, several financial incentives are available for motivated landowners who are interested in putting a conservation easement on their property.

**First, Congress has approved an expansion of the federal tax law to provide a significant tax benefit** for making a donation of a conservation easement. These include: 1) raising the maximum deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their adjusted gross income (AGI) to 50%; and 2) increasing the number of years over which a donor can take deductions for conservation easement donations from the current five years to 15 years. These provisions only apply to easements donated before December 31, 2007. Efforts are underway in Congress to extend these provisions.

**Second, financial assistance grants for up to \$5,000 to cover the associated closing costs** of putting a conservation easement on your property are available from Cass County until June 2008. For more information, contact John Sumption, Cass County Environmental Services, at [john.sumption@co.cass.mn.us](mailto:john.sumption@co.cass.mn.us) or 218-547-7241. Similar grants are available in Crow Wing and Aitkin Counties; contact the appropriate County Soil and Water Conservation District.



## Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation

**Mission:** The Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation whose mission is to fund, promote, and enable activities that will protect the natural environment of the Leech Lake Area Watershed, with all its beauty, wealth of natural resources and diversity, for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

### Board of Directors:

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Doug Payne, Secretary  
Jerry Amundson, Treasurer  
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Tom Buss  
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### Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation Board of Directors:



Left to Right: Doug Payne, John Kovar, Bob Gisvold, Pat Larson, Al Griggs, Jack Shaffer, Tom Buss, Ray Payne, Ted Mellby, Jim Bedell. Not pictured: Jerry Amundson, Harvey Nelson, Tom Rogge, Doug Sandstrom.

## Chair's Remarks

*Pat Larson, Chairperson, Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation*

It is a sunny spring day in the year 2000 and somewhere in Indiana a 12 year-old boy is sitting in his classroom day dreaming about his summer vacation trip to Mule Lake near Longville, Minnesota. His family has been vacationing at the North Bay Resort for as long as he can remember, and he loves spending his time fishing, swimming, sitting around the campfire, eating s'mores and going to the turtle races in Longville.

Now picture that summer 2000 is here and the family's two week vacation at the resort is coming to an end. Our young 'tween enters the resort office to say goodbye to the owners and notices a map on the wall with 64 cabin sites overlaying what is now trees, ponds, eagle nests, beaver dams and critical habitat along the east shoreline of Mule Lake. Sitting on the desk below the map is a coffee can with a sign saying "Save the Mule."

He leaves for a moment and returns with a \$20 bill and places it in the can telling Ron and Terre that this is more important than anything else he could think of to spend his money on. He believed in the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation's and Mule Lake Association's dream of preserving the shoreline of Mule Lake so he and others could continue to enjoy it for years to come.

Many gave more as sporting groups, individuals, private foundations, county and state government joined to "Save the Mule", 362 acres and 15,400 feet of shoreline now permanently protected, but no one gave more than that one young man with a \$20 bill.

Today there are 28 stories to be told about 28 land conservation projects completed by the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation. Each project is unique and important in protecting the natural resources of our region from the first project, a peninsula on Lost Lake purchased in 1997 for \$1111.11 because one of our directors mentioned that her lucky number was 11, to the latest conservation easement being worked on today on Kabekona Lake in Hubbard County.

When listing the accomplishments of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation it is important to note that all the members of the board are volunteers giving freely of their time and talents to preserve the natural environment of the Watershed for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Join us as we continue to protect the opportunity for all residents and visitors to enjoy our beautiful waters, woods, and wildlife through contributions of your time, talent and gifts. We'd love to hear from you.

## West Joins Foundation as Executive Director

In March, Paula West joined the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation as their new executive director. Paula is the former executive director of the Minnesota Lakes Association and communications director of Minnesota Waters, both organizations dedicated to lake and water resource protection statewide. She has worked in both non-profit and corporate settings as an advocate for water resource protection and conservation for over 25 years.

"We are excited about Paula's addition to the Foundation and the opportunity to utilize her experience and expertise in natural resources conservation to help the Foundation broaden its work in protecting the woods, water, and wildlife of the Leech Lake Watershed," said Pat Larson, Foundation Chairperson.



*Pat Larson (left) welcomes Paula West (right) as the new executive director of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation.*

Paula has a B.S. in biology from Iowa State University and has been an active volunteer with federal, state, and local lake management agencies. She served on the editorial board for the North American Lake Management Society and on the pesticide management committee for the Council of State Governments. She's currently a member of the Minnesota DNR Game and Fish Budget Oversight Committee, is vice-chair of the Crow Wing County Water Plan Advisory Committee, and an active member of the Mission Lakes Association. In 2002, Paula received the statewide award "Friend of Local Water Management" by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources and the state's local water planners.

"Having worked on natural resource protection on a statewide scale for a number of years, I'm excited about focusing regionally on the protection of some of Minnesota's most valued resources," said Paula West, new executive director of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation. "With state demographic projections of growth approaching 50 percent in Cass County by the year 2030, protecting the 273 lakes in the Leech Lake Watershed, its 100 miles of streams, healthy forests, and critical habitat for fish, loons, bald eagles, and other wildlife will be extremely important to ensure that future generations can also enjoy these resources."

# DNR Habitat Partners Award Presented

Governor Tim Pawlenty presented the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation with a Habitat Partners award during the May 2007 Fishing Opener festivities on Leech Lake. The Foundation received the award for its dedication to preserving the natural resources, and their associated recreational benefits, in the Leech Lake Watershed. "Through its decade-long existence, the Foundation has partnered with countless lake associations, individuals, and government units to protect more than 77,000 feet of lakeshore in Leech Lake's massive 750,000 acre watershed. This protection of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat benefits citizens throughout the watershed and visitors from around the state and helps to ensure the enjoyment of these resources for future generations to come," said Henry Drewes, DNR Region 1 Fisheries Manager, in presenting the award.

Several projects were highlighted as examples of the Foundation's success in rallying collaboration among non-profits, state agencies, citizens, and federal resources to protect the woods, water, and wildlife of the region. Most noted was the Mule Lake Project where the Foundation coordinated 21 partners, including the Mule Lake Association, DNR, Cass County, sporting groups, and private corporations, to purchase and preserve 363 acres and 15,400 feet of wild shoreline on Donkey and Mule Lakes in Wabedo Township. This project was the largest single investment of the conservation license plate (Reinvest in Minnesota Program) funds and the largest partnership to ever work with the DNR on land conservation. Today the



Henry Drewes, Regional Fisheries Manager, presents the Habitat Partners Award to Leech Lake Board members. (from left to right): DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten, Foundation Directors Ted Mellby, Tom Buss, Doug Payne, John Kovar, Pat Larson, Bob Gisvold, and Governor Tim Pawlenty.

protected property is managed by the DNR as a Wildlife Management Area and Waterfowl Resting Area. "By protecting this beautiful property, almost half the shoreline of Mule Lake, the public can enjoy the use of the resources forever" said Pat Larson, chairperson of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation.

Also noted was the Foundation's partnership with Muskies, Inc. and the DNR to protect 30 acres and 1,150 feet of shoreline on Leech Lake's Five Mile Point when the potential development of a boat harbor threatened to impact one of the lake's seven known muskie spawning areas. Muskies, Inc. chapters across the Midwest raised over \$24,500 and the Foundation contributed \$150,000 in shoreland parcels it owned, both triggering a match from the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program, partially supported by conservation license plates, to complete the project.

## Be Proactive Towards Land Conservation

### Lake Associations Can Form a Sustainability Committee

As development pressures are increasing, lake associations are becoming more involved in protecting shorelands from overdevelopment that can lead to loss and fragmentation of fish and wildlife habitat and diminishing water quality. Forming a Sustainability Committee is one way they can be proactive towards potential development by conserving and protecting shorelands and water quality.

A Sustainability Committee is an active group of people within a lake association that is responsible for evaluating the development and preservation potential of all properties within the lake's watershed. The committee collects publicly accessible land ownership data, determines environmentally sensitive areas on the lake and in the watershed, prioritizes projects for preservation, contacts the landowners of sensitive parcels and alerts them of concerns, and develops a proactive plan with strategies to address future land-use changes that could negatively impact their lake (and their property values).

Sustainability Committees have many tools at their disposal. First, they can encourage landowners to place a conservation easement on their property, which voluntarily places limits on development of that land in order to preserve the land's natural features and resources. Margaret Lumborg Larson, whose family has owned land on Middle and Upper Cullen Lakes in Crow Wing County since 1908, is a good example of the conservation ethic that influences individuals to place an easement on their property. At 87 years of age,

Margaret said "I was sick of being approached by lawyers and developers who wanted to buy up my land and develop every square inch. I wanted to permanently protect an important piece of our family's history." The easement placed on her property prohibited development of any kind on her property on Upper Cullen Lake and limited development on the property on Middle Cullen Lake.

Another tool used by Sustainability Committees is to ask landowners to choose an environmentally responsible developer if they ever decide to sell to a developer. If the property is considered environmentally sensitive and is a high priority for protection, the Sustainability Committee can also try to put together a purchase offer of its own. This works best if the landowner has not yet approached or been approached by a developer. Many lake associations have found that the price for a piece of land already bid on by a developer is three to five times more expensive than what it would be without a developer's bid.

The Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation provides direct assistance to lake associations interested in forming a Sustainability Committee, including presentations to lake association boards and interested members, template materials, training workshops, and networking with other lake associations with active Sustainability Committees. Contact the Foundation for more information.

Excerpts from "Citizens Guide To Influencing Local Land-Use Decisions."

### New Website Launched

Please take a moment to learn more about the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation and its accomplishments at the newly released website at [www.leechlakewatershed.org](http://www.leechlakewatershed.org). The 28 conservation projects completed in the past 10 years are highlighted and more information on conservation options for landowners is available along with tips on individual and community stewardship. After viewing the gallery of beautiful photos of the watershed, no doubt will remain about why this special region of Minnesota should be protected.

### Volunteer Opportunities

The Foundation is seeking individuals interested in volunteering their time and talents towards the protection of the region's natural resources. The following volunteers are needed:

- Gentleman farmers for maintenance on the Foundation's properties;
- Paralegal and lawyers for land acquisition assistance;
- Fundraising professionals;
- Writers to document conservation stories;
- Liaisons between sporting groups and the Foundation; and
- Communications, Local Government Relations, and Land Conservation Committee members.

Contact Paula West, 218-838-5010, or Pat Larson, 218-682-2383, if you are interested.

### Your Support Is Requested

In addition to volunteering your time to the Foundation, you can help protect the water, woods, and wildlife of the Leech Lake Watershed by supporting the Foundation in the following ways:

- **Purchase Critical Habitat License Plates** for your vehicle. The proceeds of these plates go to the DNR's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program to assist in buying and managing important natural habitats as public lands open to public use. Many of the Foundation's projects have been assisted by the RIM Program.
- **Donate Land or Conservation Easements.** Without the generosity of conservation-minded landowners who donated land or conservation easements to their land, many of the Foundation's land conservation projects would not have been possible.
- **Donate money.** Your monetary donations help support specific conservation projects, delivery of stewardship education, and development of partnerships with other organizations and state and local governments for projects to protect the natural resources of the watershed. Use your company's Matching Gift Program to double your contribution. For your convenience, use the form on page eight to send your contribution.
- **Give tax free donations from your IRA.** If you are 70 and one-half years old, you can donate up to \$100,000 from an IRA directly to the Foundation without paying income tax on the withdrawal or having it count towards adjusted gross income. Plus, it can be used to satisfy the yearly minimum distribution requirements.
- **Learn more about special support options,** including donations of securities or adding the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation in your estate plans.



Contact the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation directly for more information on these support opportunities: 218-675-5773 or [info@leechlakewatershed.org](mailto:info@leechlakewatershed.org).

# Completed Land Conservation Projects Since 1997

| Conservation Project                                  | Completed | LLAWF Role  | County    | Township        | Acres | Shoreline Feet | Estimated Value at Sale         | Management Type |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|-----------------|-------|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1) Lost Lake - peninsula                              | 1997      | Purchaser   | Cass      | Woodrow         | 19    | 3,000 ft.      | \$1,111.11                      |                 |
| 2) Long Lake - Baird - Harlow Wildlife Preserve       | 1998      | Donee   | Cass      | Shingobee       | 19    | 300 ft.        | \$135,000                       |                 |
| 3) Ten Mile Lake Kenfield Bay                         | 1998      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Hiram           | 14    | 1,087 ft.      | \$170,000                       |                 |
| 4) Woman Lake Broadwater Bay                          | 1999      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 2     | 750 ft.        | \$100,000                       |                 |
| 5) Woman Lake Hunters Bay                             | 1999      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 10    | 3,540 ft.      | \$149,500                       |                 |
| 6) Benedict Lake White Knight                         | 1999      | Facilitator   | Hubbard   | Steamboat River | 35    | 150 ft.        | \$75,000                        |                 |
| 7) Little Boy Lake - Camp Olson                       | 1999      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 195*  | 4,160 ft.      | \$242,500 conservation easement |                 |
| 8) Cooper Lake - Camp Olson                           | 2000      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 20    | 4,000 ft.      | \$7,000 conservation easement   |                 |
| 9) Birds Eye & Sand Lakes                             | 2000/2007 | Facilitator in 2000 for private purchase; Donee of 160 acres in 2006 from new landowner | Itasca    | Sand Lake       | 180   | 7,656 ft.      | \$347,500                       |                 |
| 10) Leech Lake - Cedar Springs                        | 2000      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Pine Lake       | 146   | 6,600 ft.      | \$735,000                       |                 |
| 11) Mule Lake   | 2001      | Donor/Partner   | Cass      | Woodrow/Wabedo  | 362   | 15,400 ft.     | \$2.7 million                   |                 |
| 12) Longville - gift                                  | 2001      | Donee   | Cass      | Kego            | 2     | Wet lands      | \$2,000                         |                 |
| 13) Blackwater Lake                                   | 2001      | Purchaser/Partner   | Cass      | Woodrow         | 42    | 2,486 ft.      | \$173,000                       |                 |
| 14) Ten Mile Lake - Kenfield Bay-Pierron              | 2001      | Donee   | Cass      | Hiram           | 4     | 150 ft.        | \$75,000*                       |                 |
| 15) Lower Trelipe Lake                                | 2002      | Facilitator   | Cass      | Inguadona       | 35    | 500 ft.        | \$50,000*                       |                 |
| 16) Deep Portage, Elbow, Rice, Portage Lakes          | 2002      | Donee   | Cass      | Ponto           | 203   | 2,000 ft.      | \$700,000                       |                 |
| 17) Mann Lake Jack & Betty Thomas                     | 2002      | Donee   | Cass      | Pine Lake       | 13.8  | 454 ft.        | \$311,000                       |                 |
| 18) Sorrells Family Conservation Easement             | 2002      | Donee   | Cass      | Woodrow         | 46    | 1,000 ft.      | \$51,750                        |                 |
| 19) Leech Lake - Five Mile Point                      | 2003      | Partner   | Cass      | Gould           | 30    | 1,150 ft.      | \$965,000                       |                 |
| 20) Leech Lake - Pump House & Shingobee Bays Peterson | 2003      | Donee   | Cass      | Shingobee       | 6     | 800 ft.        | \$10,000                        |                 |
| 21) Big Deep Lake                                     | 2004      | Partner   | Cass      | Ponto           | 39    | 5,100 ft.      | \$371,500                       |                 |
| 22) Hwy 200 Game Lake                                 | 2004      | Purchaser   | Cass      | Turtle Lake     | 20    | 2,500 ft.      | \$20,000*                       |                 |
| 23) Clearwater Lake                                   | 2004      | Facilitator   | Crow Wing |                 | 148   | 5,280 ft.      | \$1.23 million                  |                 |
| 24) Lake Louise                                       | 2004      | Purchaser   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 7     | 800 ft.        | \$99,000                        |                 |
| 25) Ten Mile Lake Kolderie                            | 2004      | Donee   | Cass      | Shingobee       | 18    | 1,000 ft.      | \$1 million                     |                 |
| 26) Sand Lake Big Island                              | 2005      | Facilitator   | Itasca    | Sand Lake       | 78    | 7,000 ft.      | \$457,500                       |                 |
| 27) Woman Lake-Lantern Bay #1-Dennie-Gilderhus        | 2006      | Purchaser/Donee   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 37    | 1,400 ft.      | \$691,000                       |                 |
| 28) Woman Lake-Lantern Bay #2-Olson                   | 2006      | Purchaser/Donee   | Cass      | Wabedo          | 10    | 300 ft.        | \$351,300                       |                 |
| PROJECT GRAND TOTALS                                  |           |   |           |                 | 1,741 | 77,563 ft.     | \$11,220,661.11                 |                 |

## Key

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  |   |  |
| Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation Holding                   | Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Management Area | Conservation Easement/Deed Restriction                             |
|  |   |  |
| Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District/County Lands  | United States Forest Service Management                           | Private Owner  |
|  |   |  |
| Minnesota Department of Natural Resources State Administration | Lake Association Holding  | Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Management Area |
|  |   |  |
|  |   | Minnesota Department of Natural Resources State School Trust       |

# A Wild Shore Saved

By Erika R. L. Rivers

*Fast action by citizen conservationists preserved a backcountry lake.*

Two rugged dirt roads and a rock-strewn stretch of creek lead to Bird's Eye Lake, a natural oasis for local paddlers and anglers in the rapidly developing lake country of Itasca County. This small lake has no cabins or other buildings on its shores. The shallow creek connects it to nearby Sand Lake, which has several houses on its shoreline. The popular walleye waters of Lake Winnibigoshish lie 10 miles to the southwest.

In 1998 a wave of development almost reached Bird's Eye Lake. A housing developer laid plans to build a subdivision on 180 acres that included northern hardwoods, white cedar, aspen, and balsam fir and nearly three-quarters of a mile of shoreline. When the Steward brothers caught wind of the plan in the winter of 1998, the developer had already secured a purchase agreement for one lot and put in an access road.

The four brothers, who had vacationed at their family cabin on Sand Lake since the 1960s, knew Bird's Eye well. In pursuit of bass at sunrise, they had often rowed their 16-foot cedar-strip boat through the creek to the small lake. Dan Steward, who works for the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, and John Steward, an acquisition and development coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources, unofficially carried news of the proposed subdivision to the Sand Lake Association. In turn, that group called an emergency meeting with the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation—a much larger group with an impressive record of successful shoreline conservation.

“Each project has its own unique story,” says Ted Mellby, co-founder and past chair of the nonprofit foundation. Mellby, a retired attorney and long-time lake-property owner, started the group in 1997 with other local conservationists who saw the need for a foundation that could protect wild shorelines from the rampant lakeshore development occurring in the Leech Lake watershed during the 1990s.

Bird's Eye Lake actually sits just beyond the Leech Lake watershed boundary. But Mellby says the case for its conservation was so compelling the foundation couldn't help but get involved. “Often it takes years for government transactions to close, and private landowners just can't wait that long,” says Mellby, now chair of the foundation's Land Conservation Committee.

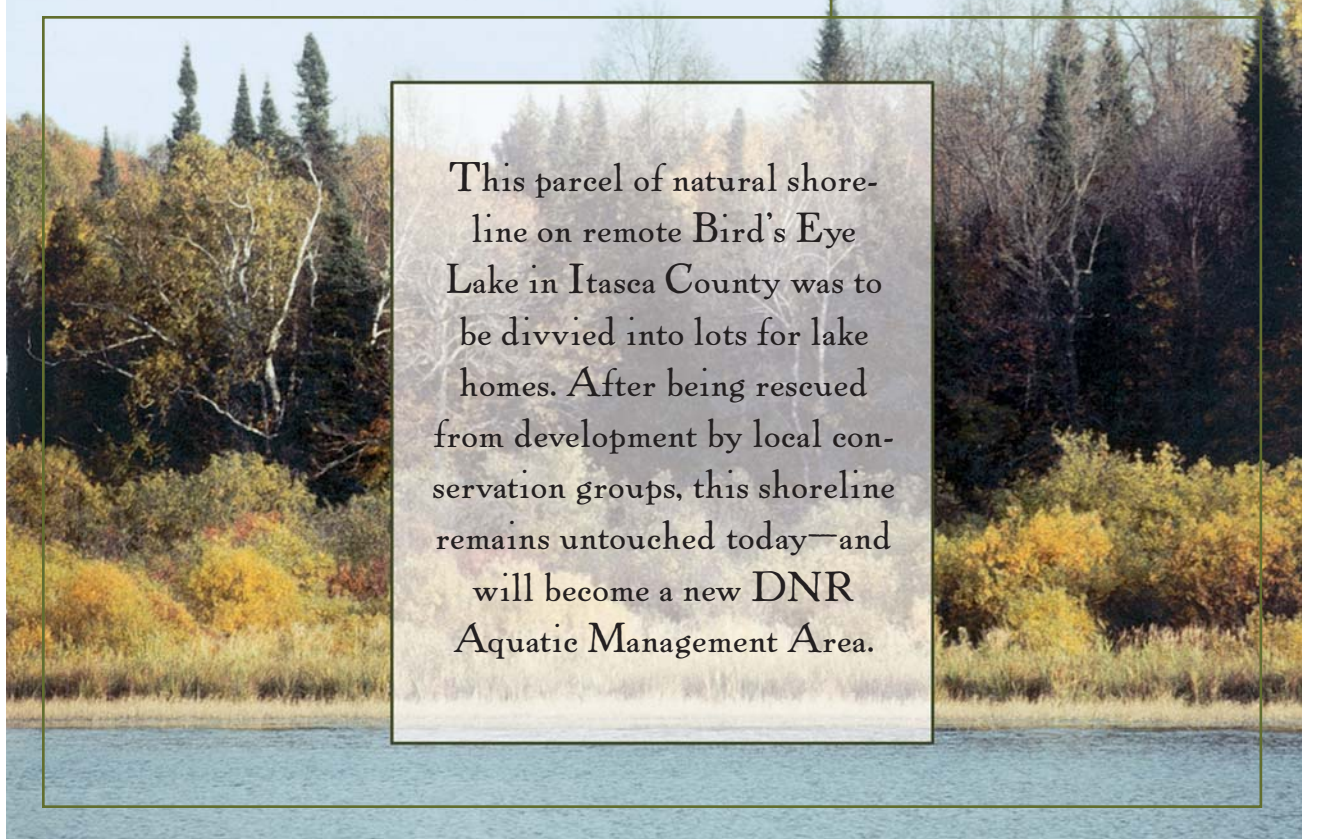
The Foundation used its expertise to help facilitate the sale of the entire parcel to local environmental philanthropists Carl and Elizabeth Bergquist. The couple reached a verbal agreement with the developer on the sale within six months.

The Bergquists donated a conservation easement on the property to the Minnesota Land Trust in 2003. The easement limits development, management, and recreational activities to protect the land and water from erosion, to preserve fish and wildlife habitat, and to maintain the scenic characteristics of the site in perpetuity.

In 2006 the Bergquists donated the property to the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation. Now the DNR is negotiating with the foundation to purchase and manage it as an aquatic management area. Just as wildlife management areas protect critical habitat for wildlife, AMAs protect critical shoreland habitat and provide a nonmotorized area for anglers and paddlers. Since the state Legislature created the AMA program in 1992, more than 477 miles of shoreland have been protected as AMAs across Minnesota. The DNR has set a goal in its Strategic Conservation Agenda for preserving an additional five miles of lakeshore habitat in AMAs each year for the next six years.

The foundation will use money from the sale of the Bird's Eye shoreland to fund future conservation projects. As shoreline development marches north, Minnesota has fewer lakes with undeveloped shorelines, according to Chris Kavanaugh, the DNR Fisheries supervisor overseeing the establishment of an AMA on Bird's Eye Lake. “Protecting this land and shoreline as an AMA will guarantee future generations can enjoy the quality resources in and around Bird's Eye Lake,” he says. “Without the Bergquists' generosity, this treasure could have been lost forever.”

*Reprinted from the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine, July/August 2007, bimonthly magazine of the Department of Natural Resources. Used with permission.*



This parcel of natural shoreline on remote Bird's Eye Lake in Itasca County was to be divided into lots for lake homes. After being rescued from development by local conservation groups, this shoreline remains untouched today—and will become a new DNR Aquatic Management Area.

*Photos courtesy of Dan Steward*

# Lakeshore: an endangered habitat

One of the most endangered natural habitats in Minnesota is our native lakeshore. People typically buy lakeshore lots because they love the lake country and they love the outdoors. However, there is a terrible stereotype of what the "perfect" lakeshore lot should look like when developed. It includes an open manicured bluegrass lawn right down to the water's edge. All the aquatic plants are removed and a sand blanket is put in to create a swimming beach. These landowners have perfectly good intentions not to damage the environment. However, what they have really done is to eliminate the natural diversity of their lakeshore habitat and replace it with a boring labor intensive backyard "just like the city one they left behind."

What's wrong with this picture? Bluegrass lawns require constant treatment with fertilizers and herbicides that can wash directly into the lake. This can accelerate aging of the lake from increased algal blooms and aquatic plant growth and possibly kill aquatic plants and organisms, including fish, from oxygen depletion.

The water "weeds" that were ripped out to make the swimming beach were actually native aquatic plants that help prevent shoreline erosion. They helped purify the water and they created oxygen. They provided habitat for hundreds of aquatic organisms, game fish, forage fish, and nesting sites for water birds like loons, grebes, redwinged blackbirds and ducks. All those species go homeless without aquatic vegetation.

The native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and moist soil plants along lake shorelines provide one of Minnesota's richest wildlife habitats-it is our "rain forest" in terms of biological diversity. When these

are removed to make way for bluegrass, the habitat value is destroyed. In fact, the open lawn down to the water's edge is an invitation for nuisance wildlife problems to occur. The deep roots of these plants stabilized the shoreline banks; now they are replaced by shallow-rooted sod.

Many lakeshore owners are now starting to realize that something is amiss on their lake. The fish populations are declining. They see fewer wildlife and birds along the shore. They complain about nuisance Canada Geese feeding on the lawn. They see more erosion and spend more time mowing the lawn than fishing. The lake is green with algae. This "perfect" lakeshore has actually become a lakeshore environment that is ecologically dysfunctional. Natural lakeshore has consequently become an endangered habitat.

## Lakescaping for Wildlife and Water Quality

The solution to these problems is a fresh, ecological, holistic look at lakeshore lot management and habitat preservation. It's a way to have a neat attractive lakeshore lot that is more in balance with nature and that actually requires less lawn maintenance and very little use of herbicides or fertilizers. It's called "Lakescaping" for wildlife and water quality.

At the heart of the lakescaping concept is the creation of a buffer zone along the shoreline. A buffer zone is a natural strip of vegetation along at least 75 percent of a property's frontage. It extends both onto the land and into the water to a distance at least 25 to 50 feet, where possible. The goal of creating a buffer zone is to restore the shoreline-both on shore and in the water-with the vegetation that occurred there in the first place, while still providing for reasonable lake access and recreational opportunities for your family. For example, if you own 100 feet of lakeshore frontage, think in terms of naturalizing about 75 feet of shoreline and using 25 feet for lake access, a boat dock, and/or a swimming area.

## A Different Type of Landscaping

Lakescaping includes planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, grasses and sedges on land, and emergent, floating, and submergent aquatic plants in the water. It differs from a typical home landscaping approach where favorite plants are selected, then to get the plantings to survive, the landowner alters the growing environment. This



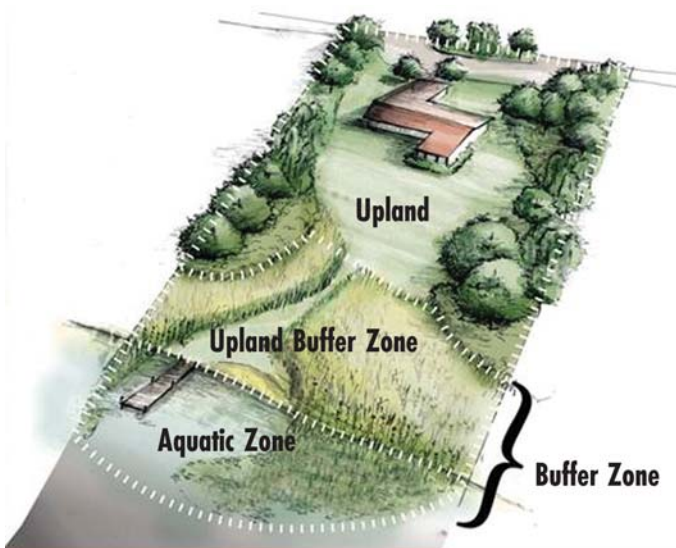
results in the need to provide plants with fertilizer, pesticides, and water. It also adds labor.

In the lakescaping approach, the landowner first assesses the growing environment...fertility, soil, drainage, moisture level...and then selects plants that will grow naturally under these conditions. With this approach, supplemental water, fertilizers, pesticides, or excessive labor won't be necessary because the site provides all the right growing conditions and increases the chances of lakescaping success.

## There is Not a Perfect Lake Lot

A main point to keep in mind is that there is no one stereotype of the perfect lake lot. For a given lake area, study the natural shorelines to learn what the natural conditions are like. What emergent plants are present? What type of wildflowers and shrubs do best in the shoreline setting? Every lake will be unique in regard to soil and bottom conditions, pH, and growing conditions. Talk to other shoreland owners who maintain or who have reestablished natural habitat. Find out what strategies and plants have worked well for them. One simple, no-cost way to get started in restoring your shoreland is to stop mowing the width of the desired buffer strip. Seeds in the soil will germinate and valuable native plants will begin to appear.

The buffer zone restores ecological functions that are reduced or eliminated by traditional lawns planted to the water's edge. Lakescaping for wildlife and water quality will allow you to live at peace with a more natural lakeshore, instead of trying to make it conform to a traditional landscape ideal that throws the lake ecosystem out of balance. Try it. You will enjoy this new dimension in lakeshore living.



Source: Lakescaping for Wildlife & Water Quality.

Please help preserve the sensitive lands and natural resources of the Leech Lake Watershed. All donations to the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF) are fully tax deductible.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Address #2 (Seasonal) \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

If you own lakeshore, which lake? \_\_\_\_\_ County? \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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