

Shoreline News

Newsletter of the Big Portage Lake Riparian Owners Association
www.bigportagelake.org

April 2020

Coronavirus/Covid-19 Updates

- The Vilas County Board of Supervisors issued a press release on March 20, 2020, **advising seasonal visitors and second home owners remain in their winter residences and to NOT return to Vilas County due to extremely limited health care resources.** Anyone arriving from outside of the area must self-quarantine for 14 days. The text is available on the Vilas County Government website at the [Vilas County website](#).
- **Wisconsin is under a "Safer-at-Home" order** from the Governor's office until at least April 24, 2020. The order may be extended if conditions require. www.evers.wi.gov/Pages/Home.aspx/. Additional links on this page will lead to other Covid-19 information.
- Due to the ongoing concerns about the spread of coronavirus and state Stay-at-Home orders, a decision was made by the Board to publish this newsletter in downloadable PDF format. Please make sure BPLROA has a correct email address for you.

Dates of planned activities are all are subject to change based on conditions at the time.

- **Boat Landing Monitor Training** will be held on Friday May 15, 2020 at the T-Docks in Eagle River at 653 North Dyer Park Street.
- BPLROA Annual Meeting—July 5, 2020 at 1:00 PM at the Land O' Lakes Fire Barn.
- Board meetings—May 23 and September 5, 2020 at 8:00 AM at the Library.

Local charities

Listed below are a few groups that would benefit from your donations due to the pandemic. Some have additional people to serve or additional demands on their services and others may be unable accept drop-off items or to hold planned fundraisers to raise money needed to maintain their work or accomplish their goals.

- Headwaters Food Pantry: townoflandolakes.com/headwaters-food-pantry
- Land O' lakes Fire and EMS: townoflandolakes.com/fire-department-ems/
- Vilas Humane Society: vilascountypets.org
- Wild Instincts: www.wildinstinctsrehab.com
- Northwoods Wildlife Center: northwoodswildlifecenter.org
- Northwoods Land Trust: northwoodslandtrust.org
- Wildcat Falls: northwoodalliance.org

The President's Pen

John Alt

The 2020 summer season is fast approaching. A short list of upcoming events is at the top of this newsletter. Note that the BPLROA Annual Meeting is scheduled for 1:00 PM Sunday, July 5, 2020 at the Fire Barn. Additional events throughout the year are listed on bigportagelake.org website as well as links to events in the surrounding area.

Also, remember that annual membership renewals are due in January. Now that the Spring/Summer newsletter will be published in April each year, please note that a renewal form will be available in PDF format on the BPL website in January each year. A reminder will be included each year in the April newsletter. The dues for a family are \$35 and for an individual \$20.

Even if the current situation extends into the summer season and you are unable to travel to the lake, please remember that a number of local charities, including the Big Portage Environmental Fund, can always benefit from donations. Please see the list of local organizations you might consider on the first page of this newsletter.

Jill reports that, as measured near town, over 110–120 inches of snow has fallen through April 1, 2020. It appears the lake water level will likely be higher again this year. We will see!

Turtles

Dave Slezewski

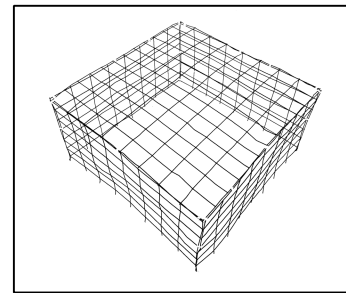
Turtle Crossing Signs

The turtle crossing signs will be back up this spring around Big Portage Lake! They are located around the lake at the intersections of roads and creeks. We ask residents and their guests to be on the lookout for turtles and drive carefully when approaching these crossings, especially in the spring when the turtles are

laying their eggs on land. Also, if you notice any turtle crossing signs that are missing and/or damaged, please contact Dave. We are still looking for the two signs stolen last year at the Portage Creek crossing. No questions asked, we just want the signs back!

Turtle Nest Cages—Volunteers Needed

This spring, we plan to cover turtle nests with wire cages in an effort to limit predation on the eggs and newly hatched turtles. We are in need of a few volunteers to watch for nesting activity and place cages over nest areas as soon as possible after the mother turtle has laid her eggs. Ideally, the volunteer candidates are at their Big Portage Lake homes full-time during the turtle nesting period (May to early July) to monitor the nesting locations. We have the cages—all the volunteer needs to do is place the cage.



Please contact Dave Slezewski at 608-516-2721 to report missing or damaged signs, to volunteer to watch for and report nesting occurrences, or to obtain nest cages if you wish to place and monitor a nest cage at the crossings or on your property.

From the DNR: "Vilas, Forest and Oneida counties are areas with noticeable turtle populations. If turtles lay eggs on lawns or gravel driveways you can help them avoid predators by making a wire cage."

For more information on turtles:

- <http://wiatri.net/Inventory/WiTurtles/Volunteer/Images/ProtectingTurtleNests.pdf>
- <http://wiatri.net/inventory/witurtles/>
- www.wxpr.org/post/dnr-asks-public-help-record-turtle-crossings#stream/0

Loons

Dave Slezewski

An Artificial Loon Nest Platform on Big Portage Lake!

BPLROA has received a permit from the Wisconsin DNR to place an artificial loon nest platform at the island, a traditional nesting location that has recently become challenging for loons due to high lake water levels. The anchored platform, which will be placed shortly after ice-out, will have nesting material, sand, and other vegetation on its surface. A wire guard over the top will protect eggs and chicks from avian predators, and the platform will be covered with camouflage material in an effort to make it as inconspicuous as possible.

Loons begin nesting in early May and typically lay two eggs. Incubation lasts about 28-30 days, so we hope to see our first hatching by early June. Within 24 hours of hatching, the chicks are in the water with their protective parents and they begin diving in just 2–3 days. The young loons are capable of flight in 10–11 weeks and will migrate south just before our lake freezes over.

We ask that you and your guests be respectful of the nest and stay 200 feet away from the platform—or any other loon nesting site on the lake. Even a well-intentioned desire to view the nest up close could be disastrous. Loons are quick to abandon a location and their chicks if they feel threatened in any way. If you (or potential predators) approach a loon nest, the behavior of the loons will tell you if you are too close.

First, the loon may raise its head in an alerted position to better view the disturbance. If you continue to approach, the loon will put its head down to the water and flatten its body in a hang-over posture to try to hide from view. *This indicates that you are too close!* If the loon perceives that danger continues to approach, it will slip off the nest and into the water. If the

loon is startled, it will flush abruptly and may kick the eggs out of the nest.

A loon that is in the water and near the nest will often remain low in the water with only the head and sometimes part of the back above the water's surface. It is trying to look small and out of view while it keeps an eye on your activities near the nest.

If you approach the nest too closely, a loon in the water may “penguin dance” and try to lead you away from the nest. This is their most extreme reaction to human presence and means you are much too close to the nest (or chicks later on). *This is not the time for taking pictures; you should leave the area immediately.*

Harassment of wildlife is illegal and if you see the nest platform being compromised by individuals, you are encouraged to report the incident to the WI DNR Tip Line by calling or texting 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367). The platform is being watched!

If you see any damage or issues with the platform, please contact Dave Slezewski at 608-516-2721 or any of the BPLROA board members.

A special thanks to Fred and “Loon Ranger” Linda Prehn for constructing an extremely well-made platform of PVC piping following a proven, successful platform design. The platform even has two “chick slides” made of rubber hose material attached to floating wood blocks that enable chicks to slide off, and climb back on, the platform. Well done, Fred and Linda! Thank You!

Bats

Bat patrol events continue this summer. Contact Mark Schermiester at mark1761@gmail.com.

Echolocator [newsletter](#) about bats.

Get the Lead Out!

Dave Slezewski

Did you know that one lead split shot can kill a twelve-pound loon?

We encourage fishermen to remove lead from their tackle box including sinkers and jigs. Lead is poisonous for all fish and animals, but waterfowl such as loons, herons, and ducks and fish-eating raptors such as eagles and ospreys, are particularly vulnerable. A Wisconsin DNR study of dead loons found that 30% of the deaths were attributable to lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning from ingested tackle usually occurs in one of two ways: a lead jig head is swallowed by a fish or lost lead tackle is picked up along with small stones and grit from the bottom of lakes to help digest food. Fish, loons, eagles, trumpeter swans and many other wildlife species are consuming lead in one or both of these ways and the results can be fatal.

Inexpensive and ecologically sound alternatives to lead fishing weights are available. Anglers can use sinkers and jigs made from non-poisonous materials such as tin, bismuth, steel, and tungsten-nickel alloy. The nice folks at The Tackle Box in Land O'Lakes can assist you in finding lead alternative tackle for your fishing needs.

Dispose of your lead tackle properly—do not throw it in the lake or a trash can. Contact your local recycling program to see if they will accept it. If not, take it to your local household hazardous waste collection site or a scrap metal collector/recycler. For additional information including a link to recyclers that take lead, visit the Wisconsin DNR at dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/fishhealth/gettheleadout.html



Clean Boats Clean Waters and Boat Landing Monitoring

Steve Saewert

Our boat landing monitoring is done by two groups, property owners who volunteer and paid UW-Oshkosh students. In 2019, your Board approved an extra 50 hours of monitoring from UW-Oshkosh. These extra hours are needed to make up for the decline in volunteer hours that we have been experiencing. I'm happy to report that we made our quota of volunteer hours and received the State Grant which paid for 75% of cost of the UW-Oshkosh student hours, but our quota was met with far fewer volunteers than in past years. This means that very few volunteers put in most of the monitoring hours. According to the data I get from the County and State, Big Portage is still one of the least infested lakes in the county/state. Thanks to all of you who logged hours—they were all needed and appreciated, and were obviously valuable and effective.

In 2020, BPLROA will continue the same monitoring program as in previous years, including again purchasing 50 additional hours from UW-Oshkosh to help ensure the landing is monitored at least as many hours as in the past. The entire cost of these extra hours comes from our treasury.

In the recent lake resident user survey, eighteen people indicated they would be willing to be boat landing monitors. I currently have a list of only ten active monitors who now carry the volunteer monitoring load. So if you are one of the eighteen who indicated an interest in landing monitoring, please contact me at spsaewert@gmail.com and we can set up training/retraining for you. I'd love to add 50 more hours to the monitoring tally or spread the monitoring load out between more than the ten current monitors.

Boat Landing Monitor training will be held on Friday May 15, 2020 at the T-Docks in Eagle

River at 653 North Dyer Park Street. If I get several new volunteers I will try to get another training session scheduled.

Automated Video Landing Monitoring Update

I applied for a State Grant to help fund the video camera I mentioned in last year's article and at the annual meeting. I just received notice that our application for a State Grant was approved to help fund the video camera! I also did a site visit at our landing with the president of Environmental Sentry, the company that installs and operates the cameras. The site itself proved fine, but the unit requires a good cell phone signal to transmit data and videos to the company for analysis. The signal as of now is not adequate.

However, the Town of Land O Lakes is in the process of analyzing and getting approvals to install a cell tower at the town garage property near the collection site. The current update (as of February 1, 2020, is that they hope to start construction in late spring of this year.

BPLROA also has several key tasks to complete, including securing funding for the camera itself (the State will fund about half of the initial cost), plus funding the annual operating costs, getting in the queue with Environmental Sentry, and ensuring the new cell tower signal is adequate. Given the cell signal issue and tasks BPLROA has to complete, I currently think it is unlikely that we will have a boat landing camera installed in 2020. I am optimistic that we could have a camera operating in 2021.

Big Portage Lake History Project

Dave Leifheit

To add information to the Lake History book, go to BigPortageLake.org, choose Big Portage Lake, and download the questionnaire. When it is completed, send it in with your dues or email directly to daveleifheit@aol.com.

BPLROA Fishing Committee Report

Dave Leifheit and Jules Eberhardt

This information is from Mark Luehring, of GLIFWC (Great Lakes Indian fish and Wildlife Commission). 2019 spring spearing totals were 323. The fall survey (October 3, 2019), boom shocking was done, 149 Walleye measured. Noting young Walleye, 124 were less than 1 year in age, 8 were age 1. Largest was 19.3 inches. They rated Walleye and pan fish as common (found frequently), Northern Pike and Small Mouth Bass were rated as present.

Jules reports that the numbers go up and down year to year. A few years ago a DNR fishery rep told him if they count 30 plus Walleyes per mile in 3-4 years out of 10, that would be considered sufficient natural reproduction. We were above the 30/mile in 2012, 2013, 2016, and 2017, so we are still OK by that criteria.

Vilas County News-Review reported a UW-Madison research project has been looking at possible over-harvesting of Walleyes in the ceded territory. They found that 40% of the lakes are being over-harvested and that fish management techniques need to be revised to consider reduced reproduction levels. Climate change and loss of habitat appear to be factors.

Tree Drops and Fishing Habitat Improvement

During 2019 we dropped 13 trees in the lake. This was done under our DNR general permit for habitat improvement. Our permit is good until July 20, 2020.

Contact daveleifheit@aol.com

Further Reading: [Stoneflies and mayflies are canaries of our streams](#)

Face Book

To be invited to be a member of the BPLROA Connection Face Book page, email mrsleifheit@aol.com and request an invitation. You are eligible to join once your dues are paid.

AIS Lake Monitoring

Daniel Johns

The AIS Lake Monitoring Program continued during the 2019 open water season. No new invasives were detected. As previously reported, we have Reed Canary Grass growing at waters edge and extending into very shallow water at numerous locations around the lake. However, the level of growth is not assessed as being problematic at this time. We have not found any evidence of the presence of Eurasian Water Milfoil or Curly-leaf Pondweed which are the invasives of principal concern in northern Wisconsin at this time.

The monitoring program will continue for the 2020 season. The volunteer monitors with assigned inspections zones include: Dave Leifeit, Tom Gratz, Bob Wannemaker, Jules Eberhardt, Dave Slezewski, Lee Nielson, and Dan Johns. Thanks go to all of them for their work to help maintain the lake quality.

An effective monitoring program requires, in addition to periodic area sweeps by assigned monitors, attention to changes in lake plant life by everyone (residents and visitors). Everyone should pay particular attention to plant debris that you find on boat anchors, lower motor units, and piers. When out on your pier, check the surrounding water for plant growth. Note any plants you have not noticed before. Look for any significantly greater size or spread of previously observed plants. If you observe any plant growth that you suspect may be an invasive, please promptly report it to Dan Johns (at 309-657-8646) or one of the assigned monitors. The monitors will follow up by assessing the potential invasive and having it identified by the Wisconsin DNR if needed. Let's all work together to keep our lake invasives free.

Read the Plum Lake newsletter article on the discovery of Spiny Water Flea in Plum Lake: [The Mystery of Spiny Water Flea \(pdf\)](#).

Big Portage Lake Stewardship Program

Susan Johns

In February 2018, The Big Portage Lake Riparian Owners Association (BPLROA) was awarded a Lake Management Planning Grant by the state of Wisconsin. The grant program was used to update information about the lake and its watershed area. We have been working with White Water Associates from Amasa, Michigan on this project. A draft report is under review and the final report on the grant will be submitted to the granting agency by June 2020.

A lot of volunteer hours have contributed to the generation of this report which will be available on-line once approved. Thank you to all who have worked to make this possible.

Spotlight on Wildcat Falls

A local non-profit conservation group is hard at work to protect an ecologically diverse 160-acre property near Watersmeet for future generations to enjoy. Titled the Wildcat Falls Community Forest project, intact features display an incredible synergy of nature. A 25-foot waterfall, outstanding rock mounds, bluffs and canyon, 80-acres of old growth forest, a mile of trout stream, riparian features with ponds and vernal pools, unusual plant diversity, and threatened wildlife habitat are all important in this effort. Northwoods Alliance Inc. has secured a USFS Community Forest grant designed to be matched by conservation groups, foundation and local funds.

Your contributions would be much appreciated in our efforts to protect this special property. More information is available at [Wildcat Falls](#).

BPL Logo Clothing

You can order BPL logo items from fuzzyantler.com

In Memoriam

Big Portage lost three long-time members last year.

Dawn Eckstein was a long time board member and the editor of the *Shoreline News* for many years.

Gordy Falk and his family have been fixtures on BPL for decades. He was known for his creative pumpkin carving.

Forrest Muehlethaler spent decades of summers on the lake with his wife Alice and extended family and performed our lake water quality readings for many years.

Wisconsin Shoreland Initiative is now Wisconsin Shoreland Alliance

We are expanding our efforts to explore solutions to mitigating the threats to our lakes. For example:

- Our efforts to reverse the loss of county control over shoreland zoning will continue when the legislative climate permits, hopefully later this year.
- We have joined with Wisconsin Lakes to find better prevention solutions to the threats posed by dirty boats carrying invasive species into our clean lakes
- Our concern for water diversion from our lakes has drawn us close to the Carlin Lake group as they battle an effort to extract and bottle water from their small lake.

We appreciate the support of Big Portage in our infancy as Wisconsin Shoreland Initiative. Our successes with the state in modifying the language and direction of the new law are due to the support of our neighboring lake associations and we are grateful for that. More needs to be done and we stand ready for that opportunity. Wisconsin Shoreland Alliance is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Is my campfire really a campfire?

Quoted from Wisconsin DNR Forestry News

Note: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the DNR has suspended burning permits until further notice.

“The first step in campfire safety is to understand the difference between a campfire and a fire to dispose of debris. Campfires, solely for warming or cooking purposes, are smaller in size and comprised of clean and dry wood, contained within a designated fire ring or surrounded by rocks. Campfires are allowed anytime, except when Emergency Burning Restrictions are in effect.

Burning in a fire ring with the intent to eliminate debris is NOT a campfire and does require a burning permit in DNR protection areas.

No matter what type of outdoor fire you have, check the daily burning restrictions for your area before ignition and never leave a fire unattended. Remember, you may be held responsible for all suppression costs and potentially any damages associated.”

Fireworks Law in Wisconsin

Remember: Fireworks that explode or leave the ground are illegal in Wisconsin

Quoted From Wisconsin Fireworks Law 2014

“Illegal Without A Permit”

“Possessing or using any other fireworks, including, for example, firecrackers, roman candles, bottle rockets and mortars, in Wisconsin without a valid permit is illegal. Wis. Stat. § 167.10(3).

“A commonly used rule of thumb is that a permit is required if the device explodes or leaves the ground. The sale of these restricted fireworks to a resident of this state without a valid permit is also illegal. Wis. Stat. § 167.10(2).”

BPLROA Financial Report, March 9, 2020		
Assets		
Checking Account		\$ 6,274.04
Savings Account		18,416.59
CBCW Grant Account		4,840.82
Lake Management Grant Account		621.95
Fidelity Portfolio March 8, 2020		
Charitable Trust	\$7,464.04	
Environmental Fund	1,860.01	
Working Capital	5,688.11	
		\$15,012.16
Total Assets		\$ 45,165.66
Liabilities		
Lake Management Grant		\$ 9,511.00
CBCW Grant		1,645.00
Total Liabilities		\$ 11,156.00
Net Worth		\$ 34,009.66

Shoreline News is the newsletter of the Big Portage Lake Riparian Owners Association (BPLROA) and will be published twice a year in April and October as of 2020.

Association Officers

President: John Alt

Vice President: Adam Fahl

Secretary:

Treasurer:

Alice Muehlethaler

Directors:

Jill Edwards

Dave Leifheit

Suzanne McCartin

Lee Nielsen

Steve Saewert

Mark Schermeister

Dave Slezewski

[Contact BLPROA](#)

Webmaster and Newsletter Editor: Jill Edwards

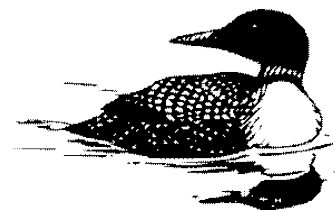
Lake Management Update Grant:

Susan Johns

Fishery Committee: Dave Leifheit

You may contact these individuals using information in the BPL Directory or via the Contact Us link on the BPL website at

www.bigportagelake.org



Common Loon drawing by Bob Hines for the US Fish and Wildlife Service

2020 BPLROA Membership Renewal Form

Please fill in the following information and return this completed form and your dues check to:

Big Portage Lake Riparian Owners Association, PO Box 629, Land O Lakes, WI 54540-0629

Or visit www.bigportagelake.org for our online Membership Form. Please mail your check to the above address.

2020 Annual Membership begins Jan 1, 2020 and expires Dec. 31, 2020

- Family Membership* Individual Membership Environmental Fund Donation
\$35.00 per year \$20.00 per year \$ _____

*Those who own property, or who are residents for at least one month a year, within one mile of the lake shore are eligible to join BPLROA. **Family** memberships allow immediate family members who are non-owners to be included in the membership of the individual who meets the criteria for membership eligibility. An **Individual** membership is for a single individual who meets the membership criteria.

(Please Print)

Name(s) _____
(Last, First, Spouse)

Home/Mailing Address _____
(Number, Street,)

(Town, State, Zip)

Lake Address _____
(Fire No., Road, and PO Box if used)

Phone Numbers (All year/home) _____ (Lake) _____

E-mail

- I agree to allow my email address to be published in the lake directory.
 I choose to receive a link sent to my email to download the newsletter instead of a mailed printed copy.
In 2020, The Shoreline News will be available online in April 2020. The October issue will be mailed if circumstances permit. Please make sure we always have a current email address for you.
 Please mail my newsletter to my home/winter address.

*Additional names of immediate family members included in your Family Membership:

Volunteer Opportunities:

- I will help monitor the public boat landing (Clean Boats Clean Waters)
 I will help with shoreline monitoring, or frog and toad study, or Lake Grant projects
 I will help by offering to be a board member
 I will help with a social event (e.g., annual picnic, 4th of July parade float)

Comments, Compliments, Complaints, Suggestions:

Thank You!