

ITASCA COALITION OF LAKE ASSOCIATIONS

Wednesday, October 16, 2013

7:00 p.m. -- Itasca County Courthouse Boardroom

Attendance:

Tom Nelson, ICOLA President/Deer Lake Association
Stephanie Kessler, ICOLA Vice-President/Johnson Lake
Michelle Brauner, ICOLA Treasurer/Turtle Lake
Jan Sandberg, ICOLA Secretary/ Greater Pokegama Lake Association

Dick Sandberg, Greater Pokegama Lake Association
Catherine McLynn, Ice Lake
Sue Swanson, Johnson Lake
Helen Ahlbrecht, King Lake
Rick Bodin, Shallow Sand Lake
Pat Doherty, Siseebakwet Lake
Bill Grantges, Siseebakwet Lake
Tom and Barb Ryan, Suomi Area Lakes Association
Jim Brauner, Turtle Lake
Jack and Helen Adamson, Upper Prairie River Lake Association
Dave Lick, Wabana Lake
Julie Miedtke, University of Minnesota
Don Simons, Soil and Water Conservation District Board
Fitz Fitzpatrick, Mitchell Lake (south of Ely)

CALL TO ORDER: Stephanie Kessler called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm at the Courthouse. Representatives from 10 Itasca County lakes and associations were in attendance.

1. INTRODUCTIONS: Stephanie led a round of introductions.

2. ADDITIONS TO AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

A draft agenda was distributed at the meeting. Bill Grantges proposed the addition of a discussion item.

Motion to approve the addition to the agenda. Sue Swanson Jim Brauner. M/S/U

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion to approve the minutes of July 17, 2013, as submitted. Bill Grantges, Jack Adamson. M/S/U

4. TREASURER'S REPORT:

Michelle reported dues received from eleven lake associations: Big Whitefish, Caribou, Jessie, Johnson, Sand, Snaptail, Three Island, Trout, Upper Prairie, Wabana and White Swan. Checks totaling \$801.65 were written to cover expenses for the July annual meeting, county fair booth, shoreland stewardship awards and the Envirothon donation. The ending balance is \$3,386.81.

Motion to accept the Treasurer's report. Jack Adamson, Sue Swanson. M/S/U

5. Old Business

I. County Fair Booth Assessment

Members thought that the location is much better, although traffic varied by time and day. There will be a demand for the 2013 spot as next year it is an election year. Another location suggested by Don Simons is the building next door which is nearly empty and would be a good place to house all three groups. Discussion concerning the need for a draw to pull folks into the booth, such as a working decontamination unit. Next year, IWLP will distribute well testing kits. It was noted that there was little

AIS in other places such as DNR. Another idea is to have a small demo area similar to that done this year for the KAXE River Festival of samples of living invertebrates and AIS such as purple loosestrife. We have thought that the DNR would provide a boat for the last five years—if we are to have a boat, we may need to get our own. There was concern that we created unnecessary friction with SWCD with the lack of prior notice of the new booth. One thought is to invite SWCD to our booth next year. It was agreed to continue to partner with IWLP. Volunteers will be a challenge and we may need to be more proactive and call members to volunteer. It was suggested that we put together a small group to do the planning—Bill G will help. It was also suggested that ICOLA get a large banner to use for this sort of event. Dave suggested asking Shirley what she is doing to get one for IWLP. Jan will contact Shirley.

II. Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates (MLR) membership

Tom distributed copies of the MLR newsletter. ICOLA is a member. Tom is recommending that folks consider becoming an individual member. See <http://mnlakesandrivers.org/join-renew>. It was suggested that ICOLA put together an email identifying the MLR website and listing ideas about reasons to join--Michelle will do this with help from Tom Nelson.

MNCOLA report—Tom is president and ICOLA’s designated representative (Bill Grantges is the alternate), and the group works closely with MLR. They requested money from Lessard-Sams for decontamination units (\$25 million requested, received \$3.7 million. This could be a pilot program but tom has concerns about reference to “pilot” as it might be a way to avoid implementing the full program. Questions if there are others we could coordinate with who are already involved.

III. Shoreland Stewardship Awards

The shoreland stewardship awards, through ICOLA and the Itasca SWCD, recognize residents who are making concerted efforts at protecting our waters.

Recipients of the 2013 awards were Aaron and Theresa Alto, Mishawaka Shores and Mike and Mary Ruprecht, all on Pokegama Lake—see http://www.grandrapidsmn.com/news/article_5c7ed9f8-2066-11e3-a1c5-0019bb2963f4.html

Dave noted that this is a program that works and it is good PR. We need an additional person on the committee to work with Tom and Andy Ahrens.

IV. CISMA Report

Julie Miedtke-Extension reported on the development of the Itasca County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ICCISMA). Significant steps have been taken with partners signing statements of agreements to participate including: US Forest Service-Chippewa National Forest, MN-Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Itasca County, Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, City of Grand Rapids, Itasca Water Legacy Partnership and University of Minnesota Extension. Grant dollars through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are being pursued to support development of a database, website, and education. In December, a draft strategic plan will be reviewed, and the partners will identified and priorities projects and activities.

As background, Dave Lick reported that IWLP would like to see an aggressive program in the county. In August, Dave (who has been working with Garrett Ous) went to the Board to speak about the Cass Lake management plan. Dave told them that if the Board is not supportive of working on invasives, then there is no need for a citizen group. Dave recognized that there is no one answer about how to deal with invasives. IWLP was invited to request money from the Environmental Trust Fund/County to address invasive species. IWLP had 10 minutes but did not prepare a project plan which is what the Board wanted. They discussed that stoppage was unrealistic, but slowing things down is a goal. Dave thinks they need to pull in county ideas, specifically a county representative, to put together a project plan. There might be monies available next spring. Julie will invite the County Board to the December CISMA meeting.

V. MN COLA Report

Covered earlier.

6. New Business

I. Conservation Easements—Fitz Fitzgerald, Minnesota Land Trust

ICOLA members should consider how to incorporate this information in newsletters and at association meetings. Please request a speaker well in advance.

Fitz quickly reviewed a presentation on the basics which are many. The Minnesota Land Trust is a private nonprofit designed to preserve state lands. A land trust works to conserve land by helping with direct land acquisitions, mostly through easements. They operate statewide which is unusual compared to other states, with three regional offices.

There are several options for land acquisition—purchase (highest level of protection but very expensive), donation, deed restriction (expire after some years, can be executed unilaterally), retirement program (CRP or WRP) and conservation easements. Conservation easements are legal restrictions on the use of property that preserve the conservation value of the property by restricting its use and development. Their easements are voluntary, perpetual (attached to deed), specific to a property, and held/monitored/enforced by MN Land Trust forever. Conservation easements may also be held by counties, BWSR and others.

When a conservation easement is the right tool depends on the goal such as natural habitat, working forests and farms, water quality, scenic landscapes and recreation/parks. The Trust needs to determine why the property is worth protecting, what threatens it and how imminent are those threats. Most of their easements involve some type of shoreland property to protect fish and wildlife habitat. Restrictions might include buildings/structures, roads/trails, industrial/commercial/ag use (the IRS requires limits on such uses); subdivision; altering habitat and water bodies and extracting minerals (they must be sure that the possibility of mineral rights being exercised is remote). There can be reserved rights that sunset at a particular time or when the grantor dies—e.g. may build a bunkhouse but if not built can never be built.

Landowner responsibilities include: no change in fee ownership, still pay property taxes, allow the Trust to monitor the easement, and notify the Trust before transferring the land. There used to be a property tax break for granting easement, but this was removed, although it is likely to be restored.

Program goal is to encourage voluntary compliance and maintain positive relationship with a focus on stewardship—regular monitoring, keep records, enforce as necessary, and maintain adequate funding. According to the slide, they have 449 easements (43,000 acres) including 550,000 feet of shoreline that a staff of 13 and volunteers (lake associations are good source) help monitor. There is no minimum size for an easement although the average is just over 100 acres.

Easements are real estate transactions: whether donated or purchased the easement needs a title review, environmental assessment, mortgage consent (may depend on amount of mortgage), mineral evaluation, and appraisal.

There is a federal tax reduction and the easement may have value for estate planning. To take advantage of federal tax reduction they will need an appraisal that is very detailed and expensive and includes surrounding area, natural features, history, land use, location of roads and buildings. Fitz presented a flow chart of the process, which may take more than six-eight months. Easements cost about \$300 an acre vs. much higher cost of purchasing.

Easements can be amended BUT only to make it stronger. For example, the owner may give up a reserved right but cannot act to weaken the easement.

Benefits to the landowner (in addition to a possible tax benefit) include keeping private land in private ownership (and on the tax role), personal participation, legacy of conservation.

The Trust has worked with lake associations who help the Trust identify properties. They have to work to educate people about easements (which can have a negative connotation, e.g. utility easement). They have 15 easements in Itasca County, and are working on four more. Easements can be done on a part of a piece of property. In response to a question about developing an easement from a conditional use permit request, Fitz said that there is a case in western Minnesota, about converting a resort to a common interest community, where the county required a conservation easement but the property did not qualify.

7. MEMBER ASSOCIATION REPORTS/ICOLA UPDATES

I. Lake Association updates

Deer Lake Association

They are also interested in geocaching. Still waiting for Living Word Bible Camp to finalize their application, due in August, which is still incomplete.

Greater Pokegama Lake Association

At our last meeting: Board positions remain the same this year. Briefly discussed the upcoming report release meeting. Members voiced concerns about float plane noise and jet boat noise, particularly over the 4th of July weekend. The loon population looks healthy on the lake. The eagle population appears healthy, too. Guest speaker Rich Rezanka reported on the zebra mussel in northern Minnesota.

Johnson Lake

Met in August, they are now an official Firewise community. They began a geocaching project with Mary Blickenderfer, which is AIS based.

King Lake

Nothing special.

Shallow Lake

Approved a public dock--lobbied for a gate but voted down. The issue was very contentious, including safety issues, handicapped accessibility, exacerbate because there had never a dock before. DNR will put it in. Announced that recent Secchi disk readings of 19.5 feet.

Siseebakwet Lake Association

Had their fall meeting, electing new officers. The biggest issue is the re-working of the dam into Sugar Brook. It is going well but there are many folks to contact. They will try to contact everyone and even have a signature from the county. Their plan is to get very aggressive next year with AIS.

Suomi Area Lakes Association

They are putting up signage to explain the need to put fish back to allow grandchildren to have something nice to catch--bring a camera. Signage also highlights negative impact of invasive species such as the need to wear shoes if you have zebra mussels. They obtained the information from DNR but built the sign themselves.

Turtle Lake Association

Things are quiet now; fish stocking (100 pounds from DNR) is coming soon.

Upper Prairie River Lakes

Annual picnic was held in August, they are now waiting for spring.

II. COUNTY ISSUES

None mentioned

III. Zoning Ordinance Revisions Upcoming

This winter, once the LWBC project is underway, Environmental Services will start working on ordinances. There are several big issues. Things will probably hot heat up until after the start of the year. Don Dewey will retire this spring.

IV. IWLP Water Summits: Adult and Youth

Tom got email from Dale Christy that Dave Lick wants to focus on an adult summit and they need a coordinator for the youth summit. A coordinator needs to be identified soon and any suggestions are welcome. Jan said there is an outline of tasks and timing although it needs to be updated.

V. Bill's Ideas

Wants to go beyond table tents and have an ongoing project committee. Ideas: polar bear plunge; DNR watercraft invasive species volunteer (ICOLA could sponsor the meeting space); table tents 2.0; stencil AIS warnings onto public landings; encourage lake associations to include AIS articles in every newsletter; focus activities on the fishing opener May 10; identify Sand Lake lessons learned. Bill will draft an email to send to lake associations.

8. ADJOURN

8:55 pm

Future meetings:

February 19, 2014, 7pm, County Courthouse ITV Conference Room

April 16, 2014, 7pm, County Courthouse ITV Conference Room

June 18, 2014, 7pm County Courthouse ITV Conference Room

July 16, 2014, Annual Meeting

October 15, 2014, County Courthouse ITV Conference Room

Respectfully submitted,
Jan Sandberg, Secretary