

STARTING A LAKE ASSOCIATION

Congratulations—you've decided to dedicate some time and effort to your lake! If you are part of a lake community, your life encompasses some exceptional advantages. Lake living also comes with some unique responsibilities. Dealing with the broad range of issues and concerns that face our lakes can be an overwhelming task for an individual. Working with an organized group that shares a common interest can make short work out of the most difficult problems. Partners sharing objectives, knowledge, skills and resources can make mole hills out of monumental issues.

WHY HAVE AN ORGANIZATION?

- To develop a partnership with your lake neighbors.
- To gain awareness of your neighbors' lake interests.
- To develop a communications network for sharing lake news.
- To raise awareness of lake issues in the community.
- To launch fund raising events and apply for grants.
- To evolve a wise long-range lake management plan.
- To act as a support group for members.
- To focus the wide range of skills and know-how a lake group possesses.
- To gain strength in numbers. The group's opinions and needs can be constructively represented to local government officials or agencies.
- To gather information and present educational programs for your membership and those living near the lake.
- To conduct data collection on a broad range of lake concerns (water quality, development, lake use conflicts).
- To gain an historical perspective from long-time residents.
- To network with other lake organizations.

THINGS LAKE ASSOCIATIONS CAN DO

- Operate dams
- Maintain lake access
- Contract for aquatic plant removal
- Buy and operate an aquatic plant harvester
- Purchase sensitive areas such as wetlands
- Improve fish habitat * with a permit from DNR
- Stock fish * with a permit from DNR
- Install and operate an aerator * with a permit from DNR
- Apply for and receive planning and protection grants

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Considerations:

- If your lake has more than one land owner or user you will probably find a divergence in philosophy and expectations toward how the lake should be used or managed. If an organization is formed **over only one issue** the prospects for long term **success may be limited**.

An organization with the best chances of success:

- Has an eye toward the future.
- Recognizes a broad range of issues and requirements.
- Anticipates unforeseen occurrences that could change the lake.
- Balances the needs of today's lake community against the possibilities of tomorrow's.
- Collaborates with other lake organizations.

WHERE DO I START?

Your success at organizing your lake neighbors may well depend on your talent as a communicator and negotiator.

Do Your Homework:

Contact your County Community Development Extension Agent, your DNR Lakes Coordinator, and the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) to assist you (*see the Lake List*).

Unearth the history of your lake:

- Are there any existing groups that represent lake interests?
- Have there ever been other lake organizations? If yes, what happened to them? Who were the officers?
- Have there been major management or research projects on the lake (fish stocking, aquatic plant harvesting); who was involved?
- Are there any government agencies or institutions involved in management projects on the lake?
- Are there any groups with a substantial interest in the management of the lake (lodges, marinas, industry, local government, large landowners, boaters, anglers)?
- Are there any political situations or prominent issues (development, use conflicts, plant harvesting)?

Recognizing Differences:

- If you're a "newcomer" (0-10 years of living on a lake), be sensitive to the views of people that have been on the lake for many years.
- Be aware of user groups in your watershed that may impact or benefit from the lake (resorts, industry, agriculture, etc.).
- Be sensitive to the distinctive requirements of year-round and seasonal residents;
- Be sensitive to various user groups and their expectations (boaters, anglers, seasonal users).

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Before the First Informational Meeting:

- Assemble a nucleus of interested people—the more people involved the better. Try for a broad representation (a year-round resident, a long-time resident, special interest groups) of people who live on or near the lake. Include anybody who wants to assist the effort. (*Your County UW-Extension Community Development agent is trained to help with this sort of endeavor.*)
- List the reasons you need a lake organization.
- Consider possible objections to an organization and how you can address them.
- Gather information on issues or problems and potential solutions. This will aid in recruiting additional interested persons.
- Make sure you understand the specifics and ramifications of having a lake organization. Contact a lake professional—your County Extension Community Development Agent, DNR Lakes Coordinator and Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) representative can explain the details.
- Let your town and county officials know what and why you are organizing. They can support your effort.
- You may need some seed money for photo-copying/printing and postage. Look to some interested person or supportive business/ organization (resort, chamber of commerce or local business to donate office support). Prudence is advised if you accept help from a group that may be perceived as having a personal motive.

Preparing for the First Informational Meeting:

Develop a plan for getting the information to the entire lake community. The amount and the expense of effort needed will depend on the size of the lake and the number of people you need to reach.

Three Months or More before the Meeting:

Many beginning groups will invite lake professionals to speak to the group—Extension Lake Specialists, Department of Natural Resources and Wisconsin Association of Lakes representatives. You may also want to invite a representative from a neighboring lake organization. (Allow plenty of lead time—2 months or more—as these people are in constant demand, especially on weekends.)

- Select a time and day that doesn't conflict with other events and provides for good attendance by the people in your lake community.
- In northern Wisconsin summer is the time to reach the highest number of residents
- Reserve a convenient location—a public place is best—like the town hall, a resort or school.
- Invite everyone living at and near your lake.
- Use tax rolls to develop your list; they are open to the public at reasonable times. (The town/county treasurer or clerk may help you get started.)

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One Month Before the meeting:

- Prepare an agenda noting time, place, date and subject to be discussed.
- The meeting should be well-publicized in advance.
- Prepare a news release for your local newspaper and buyers guide. Most papers are happy to print such notices. Send it out early (a month before the meeting is typical).
- Try a Public Service Announcement (PSA) on local radio or TV.
- Put posters at local grocery stores, community centers, sport stores, etc.
- You may want to send personal invitations to certain potential members.

The first informational meeting:

One hour before the meeting:

Inspect the logistics (chairs, AV equipment, food, drinks, lights, paper, pencils, parking, etc.).

- Have extra copies of the agenda.
- Have a sign-in sheet for names and addresses.
- Start on time and stay on schedule.
- Introduce yourself, your committee and any guest speakers.
- Explain why you feel there is a need for an organization.
- Allow plenty of time for questions, answers and get feedback.

Confirmation:

After all the information has been provided and all questions have been satisfactorily answered, you will need to confirm the desires of the group to move forward on the formation of an association.

You may want to take a straw vote. If the group decides to form an association, elect temporary officers and agree on a date for a first annual meeting.

If the group is not sold on the idea, you may choose to form an Ad-Hoc committee to explore the idea further or set up another informational meeting, you could also opt to form an association among those who agree with the idea, or drop the idea entirely.

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AT THE FIRST ASSOCIATION MEETING:

- Nominate and elect officers.
- Agree on the general approach and purpose of the association, and collect first dues/contributions.
- Agree on a general plan of action for the association, including any regular business and social meetings, fund-raising events, etc.
- Develop a plan to recruit more members.
- Adopt bylaws which establish the formal structure and procedures of the association. Included should be the stated purpose of the association, the date of the annual meeting, the officers and directors, election procedures, the formal committee structure, etc. (Obtain a copy of "Model By-Laws for Voluntary Lake Associations" from UWEX Lakes Program, UW Stevens Point, your county Community Development Extension Agent, or from your area WAL representative.)
- Consider incorporating as a Wisconsin non-profit, non-stock corporation under Chapter 181, Wis. Stats. It is not expensive nor is it difficult to do. A lawyer is not usually necessary. The cost is normally less than \$50, excluding any unusual legal fees. The incorporation form, which includes instructions and the fees required, can be obtained from the Corporations Division, Office of the Secretary of State, PO Box 7846, Madison, WI 53707 (608/266-3590) at no cost. (The Wisconsin Association of Lakes or your county Community Development Extension Agent can provide a model Articles of Incorporation.)
- Consider applying to the IRS for tax exempt status: WAL or your county Community Development Extension Agent can assist you.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Lake organizations and agencies struggle with many issues in their continuing pursuit to safeguard lakes. Today's issues can be complex, crossing political and natural boundaries. Increasingly complicated concerns require the involvement of those affected as well as the organizations and agencies appointed to deal with the issues. Your organization can play a vital role in defining the future of your lake.

Some Ideas:

- Develop a lake newsletter to keep your members informed on local and state lake news.
- Delegate people to speak for the group on common issues.
- Delegate people to discover issues that may impact your lake and report them to the group.
- Survey your membership on the lake concerns and the lake use requirements.
- Design education programs for your members and those that impact the lake.
- Help membership deal with individual concerns.
- Consider joining the Self-Help Lake Monitoring program. Equipment is free and instruction is available. Contact your DNR district Self-Help Lake Monitoring coordinator or call 608-266-8117.

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- Explore a lake management planning study. State matching grants are available to qualified lake associations to pay for up to 75% of the cost. Contact your district DNR Lakes Coordinator or your county Community Development Extension agent for details.
- Explore a lake protection grant. State matching grants are available to qualified lake associations to pay for up to 50% of the cost. Contact your district DNR Lakes Coordinator or your county Community Development Extension Agent for details.
- Communicate your concerns to your town and county officials. Work with your local government whenever possible.
- Get involved in lake issues on a state and national level. Join the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL): 1-800-542-LAKE (5253).
- Take direct action. Develop a lake management plan with help from the DNR and implement it.

FOR MORE HELP:

- Attend the annual Wisconsin Lakes Convention in early spring, and/or attend one of the numerous regional Wisconsin lake education events sponsored by area lake organizations. Agenda items and displays usually include a lot of "how-to-do-its" and "how-they-did-its" on various lake issues. Most importantly, you get to meet and talk with others who share common lake interests.
- Contact your county UWEX Community Resource Development agent for materials on lake problems and solutions. And/or contact the state UW-Extension Lake Management Specialists at the College of Natural Resources, UW-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715-346-2116).
- Contact your DNR District Lake Coordinator, or the DNR State Lake Section at PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 (608-265-0502).
- Contact your district Wisconsin Association of Lakes team representative. Call 1-800-542-LAKE(5253) to find out who is your representative.
- Get on the mailing list of [Lake Tides](#), the free quarterly newsletter published by UW-Extension Lake Program, College of Natural Resources, UW-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715-346-2116).
- Consider joining the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL), and subscribe to their newsletter, [The Lake Connection](#). Members of lake organizations belonging to WAL receive free copies.
- Subscribe to the bimonthly DNR magazine, [Wisconsin Natural Resources](#), at PO Box 7191, Madison, WI 53707.
- See the Fact Sheets: "[What is a Lake Association](#)" and "[What is a qualified Lake Association](#)"