

People of the Lakes

A Guide for Wisconsin Lake Organizations



Lake Associations
& Lake Districts

12th Edition - 2018



Wisconsin
Lakes
Partnership





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12th Edition - 2018

by

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Preface

Welcome to the 12th edition of the lake organizations guide. For over 40 years, UW-Extension has published a guide book that has served as a fundamental tool for people creating a lake organization. Previous editions have been called *A Guide to Wisconsin Lake Management Law*.

The 11th edition represented major changes to the guide, and the continuing popularity of lake associations and lake districts in Wisconsin suggests that those changes were well received. This 12th edition is updated largely to reflect specific changes to the lake district law (Chapter 33 of Wisconsin Statutes) that affect the composition of the lake district board. These changes are reflected in Chapters 4 and 5.

Because new technologies and the growth of the web are changing the ways we get our information, online versions of the guide will be offered. You will be able to find the very latest version of this guide, laws, regulations, forms and contact information on the Internet (www.uwsp.edu/cnr/uwexplakes).

The guide is designed for those who would like to play a positive role in the fate of their lakes. It discusses the two major types of lake organizations operating in Wisconsin: Lake Associations (about 550) and Lake Districts (about 240). *A Guide for Wisconsin Lake Organizations* includes chapters on formation, operation, planning and insurance that may pertain to both types of organizations as well as chapters with information unique to each type.



This guide, *The People of The Lakes: A Guide for Wisconsin Lake Organizations*, can be freely downloaded at the UW-Extension Lakes website at www.uwsp.edu/cnr/uwexplakes.

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Introduction



A Legacy of Lakes

Protecting in Partnership

Volunteer organizations have been a part of the lake scene in Wisconsin for over a hundred years. By the turn of the 19th century, declining water quality and other human impacts on lakes were becoming apparent. People on Lake Geneva and the Lauderdale Lakes formed the first lake organizations in 1898 and 1902, respectively, to deal with the issues. The number of voluntary organizations concerned with the health of lakes continued to grow slowly over the years, but the issues facing lakes grew faster.

A growing sense of urgency caused more and more lake area residents to band together. They formed organizations aimed at finding solutions, but in some cases their success was limited by their lack of authority to deal with the issues at hand. Part of the problem was that lakes are round and governments are square. Some of the biggest challenges with lake management are that lakes do not fit neatly within the boundaries of local governments and governments often have other priorities.

*Lakes are round
and governments
are square.*

Before 1974, Wisconsin did not have local public institutions designed to manage lakes. The first attempts at publicly administered lake management took place in the early 1930s. Several Wisconsin lake communities formed sanitary districts to focus on lake problems. These governmental bodies could be established with boundaries following the shape of the lake. As government bodies, they could levy taxes to spread the cost of operations equitably. However, there were shortcomings with sanitary districts. Their primary purpose was to provide sewer and water service for urbanizing areas, but in those early days they lacked the comprehensive power needed to address the complex problems involved in lake management.

In 1959, many of the lake associations in the state joined together to form the Wisconsin Federation of Lakes. Lake water quality was still declining and by the mid-1960s our nation saw environmental deterioration of lakes and rivers becoming commonplace. Polluted water caused algae blooms, excessive aquatic plant growth, and in some cases toxic contamination. In 1972, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio actually caught fire. Many lakes and rivers were unfit for swimming or fishing. The 1972 Federal Clean Water Act and other environmental laws set the stage for major cleanups of many sources of pollution. But these laws did little to address the unique challenges of managing inland lakes.

In response to a growing awareness of the harmful effects of pollution and the decline of the quality of Wisconsin lakes, a major six-year demonstration project was conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). In reply to the project's recommendations, the Legislature enacted a 1974 law aimed at solving lake issues. Chapter 33 of the Wisconsin Statutes was created to provide for the formation of a new kind of lake management organization - the public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district. Over the last thirty years, over 200 lake districts have been formed in Wisconsin. A state organization representing lake districts, the Wisconsin Association of Lake Districts, was formed in 1981.

The 1974 law also established a state educational assistance and cost-sharing program for lake management organizations. Over the years, program details and funding levels have changed, but this state/local partnership has continued to mature. In the 1990s, voluntary lake associations meeting certain standards (qualified lake associations) were added to the list of eligible lake grant participants.

In 1992, the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) was created through the merger of the Wisconsin Federation of Lakes and the Wisconsin Association of Lake Districts. The Wisconsin Association of Lakes, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, calling themselves the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership, has continued to follow the mission of preserving and protecting our legacy of lakes to this day.

The Wisconsin Lakes Partnership is proud to bring you this guide.



Lakes are an indispensable thread woven into the tapestry of land and water that makes Wisconsin an exceptional place to live. Our history of oblivious abuse and overuse of Wisconsin's lakes is a flaw in that tapestry. Our growing awareness, our capacity to weave partnerships and our collective wisdom will help remove past imperfections.