

Wisconsin's Long History: Manage Lakes with Science

For decades Wisconsin's lakes have been well managed by a partnership of landowners, the Department of Natural Resources, county officials, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, various lake organizations, and private consultants.

This system was based on the best available science and had largely bipartisan support from legislatures and governors. Famous Wisconsin scientists and politicians, along with visionaries like Aldo Leopold, Gaylord Nelson, and John Muir developed this system. It was the envy of lake lovers worldwide for decades. Science-based decision-making guided lake management.

About six years ago, this all changed. The weakening of environmental protection laws could reverse decades of proven lake protection policies. Short-term interests could displace science as a basis for lake management in Wisconsin. State-level changes have taken away local control over critical protections, such as shoreland zoning. Among the possible consequences:

- **The rights of the vast majority who own and use our shorelines might be reduced – over-development by a few endangers the welfare of many.**
- **The economic value of shoreline properties could be threatened if lake water quality is diminished.**
- **The vast majority of lake users who do not own lake property could suffer from declines in lake quality because new laws allow development and maintenance practices that scientific principles say are unwise.**
- **The moral responsibility to care for our aquatic assets may be compromised by political ideology.**
- **New regulations may give waterfront property owners immediate benefits, but also remove long-term lake quality protections, leading to permanent lake damage.**

These new laws are now in place and are affecting our lakes today. Wisconsin's system of science-based lake protection must be restored and strengthened to avoid the risk of irreversible damage to our valuable lake resources. Our responsibility to safeguard our lakes for future generations is too important to ignore.

The northern Wisconsin tourism industry is based on quality lake resources. It is worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

OCLRA

ONEIDA COUNTY
Lakes and Rivers Association

One in a series of articles sponsored by the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association (www.oclra.org). For more information, contact Bob Martini at 715-282-5896 or email to webmaster@oclra.org. OCLRA encourages the use and distribution of this material by lake associations, their members, and other parties concerned about water quality.