

WICOLA NEWS

White Iron Chain of
Lakes Association, Inc.

Volume XVII Book III
WINTER 2010

President's Message

Fall—and soon winter—comes and with it many good-bye's—to the loons and other birds migrating south, to the leaves on the trees now turning gold but soon to fall to the ground, to the boats and docks disappearing from the shoreline, and to our “snow birds” leaving us for warmer climates.

This being the last Newsletter of the year, it is also a time when we say good-bye and thank those who have served on the WICOLA Board and are finishing their term of office: **Curt Van Deen** who served as White Iron Representative; **Ray Doran** who has been our Membership Chair and served on the Board since 2000; and **Jim Pinckney** who has been our Newsletter Editor and served on the Board since 2002 and will remain as our Web Master. I especially want to thank **Peter Davis** who serves as Vice President until the end of the year. I literally could not have been gone half the year without his willingness and ability to step in and take over, especially last winter as major work was being done on the work plan for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (CWLLA) grant which, we are excited to announce, was recently awarded to WICOLA. You can find full details regarding the CWLLA grant and an additional grant from the Clean Water Partnership (CWP) on page two of this newsletter.

The good news about winter is that it is followed by new beginnings, usually in the spring, but in our case sooner than that. In the case of your board, **Rob Erickson** has agreed to fill Curt's position for the interim and will continue on

into the term for which he was elected. **Shelley Frederickson** has agreed to become Newsletter Editor, leaving the position of Secretary, which is now filled by **Sarah Kingston**. In addition, **Ken Wichmann** offered to become our Membership Chair and **Mary Ann Jurgens** has volunteered to fill the position of Publicity Chair. With these changes and the elections at our last Annual Meeting, we have a Board with both lots of experience and new ideas.

This is also my last message as President. As I look back over the last four years, I see tremendous change in the Association. Receiving funding necessary to develop a management plan for our watershed has invigorated the work of the Association, and we look forward to an exciting 2011.

And so I say, good bye also—to our place “up north on the lake”, until next summer, and as President, to you, the members of WICOLA. It has been a gift to work with your Board and learning about the talents of each member as we work to maintain the water quality of our chain of lakes.

*Charlene Mason
President*

Editors note: 2011 Board Members are :

Jo Kovach: President
Teresa Sagen: Vice President
Secretary: Sarah Kingston
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Garden Lake Rep: Charlene Mason
White Iron Lake Rep: Ray Theobald
White Iron Lake Rep: Rob Erickson
Membership Chair: Ken Wichman
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Newsletter Editor: Shelley Frederickson
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Inside this issue:

Kawishiwi Watershed Management Plan	2
New Invasive Aquatic Species Committee	3
Gulf Oil Disaster and Loon Migration	4
MN Conservation Magazine & Calendar	4 5
Doug Jensen at Tuesday Noon Group	5
Upcoming Events	5
Statewide AIS Plan	6
Sulfide Mining Update	6

*The WICOLA Board wishes to thank **Charlene Mason** for serving as our President. She has worked tirelessly throughout her tenure on several vital projects for our watershed. We will all benefit from her dedication, passion and hard work for years to come.*



WICOLA's Kawishiwi Watershed Management Plan Gains Momentum

Throughout the past two years, WICOLA has been working diligently to obtain funding to develop a comprehensive and sustainable watershed management plan for the Kawishiwi Watershed. Much of these efforts have been focused on obtaining government grants available through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. **We are extremely excited to announce that our grant applications moved giant steps closer to reality recently, and we're anticipating beginning work very soon.**

A few tasks remain before it's full steam ahead. Our \$225,000 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Act grant has been approved by Lake County with the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District acting as fiscal agent. A work plan for the grant has been completed, and the hiring process for a project coordinator to manage the project's extensive activities has been initiated. The WICOLA Oversight Committee, consisting of WICOLA members, representatives from the MPCA, Lake County SWCD and Stony River Township will oversee the project and work of the coordinator.

The CWLLA grant is the first given for protection and enhancement of a Minnesota watershed, rather than restoration of impaired watersheds. Project Manager Joel Peterson of the MPCA said the grant represents the agency's recognition that it's more efficient and cheaper to maintain and protect resources instead of trying to repair them after they have been damaged.

The funds enable WICOLA to greatly expand its testing program begun in 2005. For the past five years, volunteers have been monitoring water clarity, pH and temperature and testing for total phosphorus (TP), chlorophyll-A (Chl-A) and algae growth. From these data, the trophic state index (TSI) was calculated to measure the overall health of the lake water. Even then, the dream was to expand testing throughout the Kawishiwi watershed.

The grant funds make that dream a reality. Extensive water testing will be conducted throughout the entire Kawishiwi watershed, covering a wide range of potential impairments. Data collected will be used to develop a comprehensive management plan to maintain or improve water quality for the watershed and to measure stressors such as the effects of climate change, algae growth, invasive species, and sewage treatment. All tasks are expected to stretch through June of 2013; however, this date may be adjusted when final reports are submitted.

WICOLA will be working directly under the auspices of two governmental entities: Lake County SWCD and the MPCA. Wayne Seidel, Conservation Specialist/Water Plan Administrator, will be the grant administrator, and Peterson will serve as the Project Manager.

"Working together we have an opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past that have caused water quality impairments and other ecosystem damage across the state," Peterson said. "We have many partners in place who can do a great job of working with these special natural resources of the Kawishiwi Watershed. We have the chance to be the stewards that set the examples and paths that will allow the use, maintenance, and enhancement of these resources for the current and future generations of people, wildlife and the other natural resources."

While the grant funds cover hiring a project coordinator, the program will lean heavily on volunteer efforts. **Not only will we need members to help with testing, but also with education and community outreach that is vital to the project's success.** Watch for more information on how you can get involved in the coming months.

(Watershed Mgmt Plan, continued on page 3)



The Kawishiwi Watershed includes the White Iron Chain of Lakes, Birch Lake, and the Isabella, Stony and Kawishiwi Rivers. As described in the grant narrative, the Kawishiwi Watershed covers 1,353 square miles and “is the headwaters of the Rainy River Basin, providing drinking water sources and local recreational facilities. Over one-half of the watershed is in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. All of the waters flowing out of the watershed flow into the BWCAW and ultimately into the international boundary waters between the United States and Canada.”

Funding for the CWLLA grant was made possible by Minnesota voters through the 2008 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to the state constitution. A third of these monies created the Clean Water Fund “to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater.” Find out more at www.pca.state.mn.us and visit the “Clean Water Fund” page.

Recently, the MPCA also approved our Clean Water Partnership grant for an additional \$174,500. Activities in the grant include a geographic information system (GIS) analysis to determine sensitive areas and areas in need of restoration, an inventory of subsurface sewage treatment systems, and a paleolimnology (historical sediment analysis) of selected lakes to build a long-term water quality record. Lake County is the project sponsor for the grant and has delegated the administrative responsibilities to the Lake County SWCD. The grant now begins the review and contract process. WICOLA must match a portion of the grant with in-kind support from WICOLA volunteers and other grants and donations.

Together, the two grants, which total nearly \$400,000, puts WICOLA in a unique and very exciting position. As Seidel notes, “WICOLA is a citizen-led group that is on the cusp of completing a landmark project focused on protection of water quality in the Kawishiwi Watershed. Peterson heartily agrees. “There is no other place similar to the Kawishiwi Watershed, and no other group like WICOLA. Both are what they are—extraordinary!”

For more information, please visit our website, www.wicola.org, to view the complete plan. Click on “project information” and then click again on “project proposal” to view a brief overview. Click once more on “project proposal” and the complete plan appears.

WICOLA Board Forms New AIS Committee

As part of the initiative to protect our waters, the WICOLA Board recently formed the **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Committee**. Currently, the committee consists of chair Larry Squillace and members Rob Erickson and Shelley Frederickson. The committee has been working on its agenda with Doug Jensen, AIS specialist. The committee also met with Robert Williams and Mel Hintz from the Sportsmen’s Club of Lake Vermilion in October to learn about their AIS Prevention Program. As the project is hoped to include areas beyond the Kawishiwi Watershed, an initial meeting with attendees from local lake associations and organizations interested in AIS prevention was held to begin brainstorming ideas. Please contact one of the committee members if you have any comments or if you’d like to volunteer to be on the committee or help in the field.



Dangerous Migration?

Reprinted from the *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer* newsletter

Kathleen Wefen, Editor in Chief

Minnesota's loons may soon be heading to the scene of a disaster. In October and November, thousands migrated to coastal waters along the Gulf of Mexico. Between April 20 and July 15, an estimated 200 million gallons of oil poured from a broken well deep in Gulf waters. The spillage has stopped and oil that rose to the surface has dissipated. Yet water birds—particularly deep-diving common loons—risk contact with oil and chemical dispersants that persist below the surface, says DNR Nongame Wildlife Program supervisor Carrol Henderson. So do others Minnesota birds wintering along the Gulf, including ospreys, American white pelicans, spotted sandpipers, western grebes, lesser scaup, and redheads.

Minnesota's migratory bird populations bring the oceanic catastrophe close to home and remind us that natural systems connect in profound and sometimes unfathomable ways. When disaster strikes, concerned citizens have an immediate urge to help. For example, more than 13,000 people signed up to help the National Audubon Society in its coastal bird rescue work. And when a crisis appears to have passed, most Americans want to quickly move on. In this case of environmental contamination, we have reason to stand watch. "We have never had a spill of this magnitude in the deep ocean," said oceanography professor Ian MacDonald in a story published in the *The New York Times*. "These things reverberate throughout the ecosystem. It is an ecological echo chamber, and I think we'll be hearing the echoes of this, ecologically, for the rest of my life."

Henderson suggests some immediate actions Minnesotans can take to help wildlife in the long term. One simple start: Buy federal duck stamps online or at your local post office. This year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a \$25 special edition to raise funds for purchasing wetlands to add to Gulf Coast national wildlife refuges. The DNR's long-term monitoring of the state's loon populations could prove vital to understanding the oil disaster's impact on loons. Volunteers in the Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program annually check 600 lakes. Minnesota Loon Watcher Survey also

relies on volunteers. And everyone can contribute to the DNR Nongame Wildlife Program.

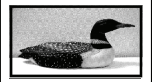
As we continue to monitor birds on both their wintering and breeding grounds, we might keep in mind the slowly realized disaster of DDT use in the 1950s and '60s. The grave effects of DDT on wildlife took a long time to recognize. The painstaking research and courageous reporting of Rachel Carson, a marine biologist and writer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, brought the problem of ubiquitous chemical contamination to the nation's attention in her 1962 best seller, *Silent Spring*.

"The history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings," Carson wrote. She reported case after case of people failing to appreciate the complexity of those interactions. Consider one example: She told of attempts to control gnats on a popular fishing lake in northern California by spraying DDD, a close relative of DDT. "No trace of DDD could be found in the water shortly after the last application of the chemical. But the poison had not really left the lake; it had merely gone into the fabric of the life of the lake supports." Nearly two years after the spraying ended, DDD persisted in plankton, apparently passing from one generation to the next. Thus, the poison entered the food chain, accumulating in the flesh of frogs, fish, and birds to concentrations many times the original in the water.

Oil does not move up the food chain as some compounds do. But the ripple effects of oil and nearly 2 million gallons of dispersants underwater in the Gulf have yet to be discovered. What will happen to the continent's wildlife in the wake of this contamination? As Henderson says, no one wants to imagine Minnesota lakes absent the wild calls of common loons. That would be a silent spring.

Minnesota Conservation Volunteer

Did you find the article above regarding the problems loons may face this year in their migration to the Gulf of Mexico of interest? Would you like to know more about the natural heritage of Minnesota? Then your answer is a subscription to the [Minnesota Conservation](#) (*MN Conservation, continued on page 7*)



(MN Conservation, continued from page 6)

Volunteer, a bimonthly publication of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Minnesota Conservation Volunteer is sent free upon request, but relies entirely upon donations from its readers. Send your subscription request, along with your mailing address and your option donation, to Minnesota Conservation Volunteer, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4046

New for 2011: The Minnesota Conservation Volunteer Calendar

The Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine, published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, is celebrating its 70th anniversary with a 2011 Wild Minnesota calendar. This beautifully produced, full-color calendar (13.75 x 10.75 inches) features 12 stunning images by Minnesota's best-loved nature photographers. Perfect for home and office, 2011 Wild Minnesota is a great gift for family, friends, and colleagues to enjoy throughout the year. Calendar pages include additional photos, seasonal information, important dates, and space for notation. Proceeds benefit Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine. The cost is \$16 for each calendar plus shipping (\$6 for orders between \$15-\$25) and tax (\$1.10 for Ely orders; may vary depending upon where you live). You can order from Minnesota's Bookstore by calling 651-297-3000 (Twin Cities) or toll-free at 800-657-3757 or online at <http://www.mnbookstore.com>

2011 WICOLA Dues

You may have already received (or will receive shortly) a reminder letter for 2011 dues. Dues for this next year remain the same at \$20.00 per calendar year and are due in January. Your prompt renewal payment will be appreciated. Want to get it out of the way now? Just send your check to:

WICOLA
P.O Box 483
Ely, MN 55731

Mark your check "Dues 2011" and our Treasurer will do the rest. As usual, your fellow members appreciate your association support and participation. We have an exciting year coming up and think you will be pleased with your WICOLA work and direction.

Doug Jensen to speak at Tuesday Noon Group

Doug Jensen, a national expert on AIS, will be speaking at the Ely Tuesday Noon Group meeting at the Grand Ely Lodge on **June 14, 2011**. Doug has been with the University of Minnesota's Sea Grant Program for over 17 years. His efforts have been hailed at the highest levels of government. In 2004, the Bush Administration recognized *Habitatude*TM, a campaign which he helped create, as an innovative partnership between business, government, and academia addressing national policy objectives. Doug has spoken in the former Soviet Union, the Netherlands, Canada, and Ireland. He has published scientific papers and produced fact sheets and videos such as the award-winning *Stop Exotics, Clean Your Boat*, featuring John Ratzenberger, better know as Cliff Claven on *Cheers*. In 2008, Jensen co-chaired the first statewide *Minnesota Invasive Species Conference* in Duluth which drew nearly 450 people. Doug will be bringing samples of the critters we don't want in our lakes. Please plan on attending this wonderful program to hear the latest on AIS and what we can do to protect our lakes.

Mark your calendar for the following Upcoming Events

June 11, 2011: WICOLA Annual Meeting

WICOLA's 2011 Annual Meeting will take place on **Saturday, June 11** at the Vermilion Community College. Social hour begins at 9:00 a.m., and the meeting will run from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

July 2, 2011: Never on the 4th Boat Parade

WICOLA's 7th annual "Never on the 4th Boat Parade" has been scheduled for **Saturday, July 2**. Whether you decorate your boat or not, it's always a fun time to get together for a pleasant ride. Details, including what time and where we'll meet will be included in our Spring 2011 Newsletter.



New Statewide Invasive Species Plan: Looking Forward

By Doug Jensen, U of M Sea Grant Program
Reprinted from the University of Minnesota Extension From Shore to Shore newsletter (Issue 99 http://www.shorelandmanagement.org/shore_shore)

"Good things often come to those who wait..." and, though it's been in development for five years, Minnesota's new comprehensive statewide plan to prevent, reduce spread, and promote management of invasive species is indeed a good thing. While state, federal, tribal, and local governments and businesses have been working to address invasive species for nearly two decades, this plan coordinates and guides those efforts over the long-term. It is one of the first in the country to cover the full range of species—aquatic *and* terrestrial plants and animals and pathogens.

Developed by a workgroup of the Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Council, *A Minnesota State Management Plan for Invasive Species* was approved by the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force late last year. It is regarded as a forward-looking effort to prevent, detect, respond to, and manage invasive species. Some funding for the plan to address aquatic invaders could come from a federal grant through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Timing for funding couldn't be better. Unfortunately, aquatic invaders like zebra mussels, spiny waterfleas, and Eurasian watermilfoil spread to a couple of new lakes and rivers each year, each slipping through the cracks despite aggressive efforts to prevent that from happening. With more resources and people working on these and other invasive species threats, Minnesota can get ahead of the curve in avoiding the devastating impacts of invasive species on our waters and shorelands.

For a copy of the plan, visit: http://www.anstaskforce.gov/Meetings/2009_November/MN_ANSTF_Draft_10-20.pdf

Update On Metallic Sulfide Mining

By WICOLA member Brad Sagen from a report published in the Newsletter of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness; submitted by the WICOLA Environmental Issues Committee

Much has occurred in the past few months in Northeastern Minnesota metallic sulfide mining. As most are aware, the NorthMet mine project near Babbitt, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement submitted by PolyMet and the two lead agencies, the US Army Corp of Engineers and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources were evaluated as required by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA awarded both the project in its current form and the DEIS the lowest possible evaluations, awarded to less than one percent of similar proposals.

The alternatives available to PolyMet and the agencies were to either proceed to an Environment Impact Statement (EIS) and address issues identified in the DEIS, or to submit a supplementary or revised DEIS addressing the issues raised by the EPA and others. The USACE has now filed a federal Notice of Intent to issue a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) in the summer of 2011. The SEIS will contain the responses to comments submitted on the original DEIS.

Expanded Roles for EPA and USFS. The SEIS will include additional roles for the EPA and USFS. Both become cooperating agencies and will be consulted in early stages of planning and development rather than commenting at later stages. As the EPA must approve wetlands discharge permits, involving them early in the process makes sense. In addition, because the EPA stated in its February 2010 comments letter on the initial DEIS that it "believes" wetlands in the area to be an Aquatic Resource of National Importance (ARNI), it can take a more active role in project development to make certain the resource is not diminished.

EPA contacts indicate that maintenance of water quality and mitigation of potential wetlands impacts are the two issues of primary concern to the agency. EPA staff believe they have the political backing to enforce existing law, and the agency is currently reviewing its policies on financial assurance for mining projects. The implication is that environmental interests cannot expect much sup (Mining Update, continued on page 7)



(Mining Update, continued from page 6)

-port in this area since strong financial assurance is not part of “existing law.”

NorthMet Land Exchange Report Open for Public Comment. Because it was agreed that the land exchange (required if PolyMet is to develop the open pit mine it desires) will become part of the SEIS rather than a separate DEIS as originally envisioned, the USFS has now entered the DEIS process. Under the federal lease on NorthMet lands, open pit mining is not allowed (per the Weeks Act). Sale of the lands to private interests would void the lease. The USFS recently released for public comment a scoping document which states what is proposed to be done for the exchange. The land exchange itself will become part of the larger SEIS.

MPCA Issues Compliance Agreement on Proposed NorthMet Processing Site and Closed Dunka Mine Site. The abandoned taconite processing facility and tailings basin near Hoyt Lakes has been proposed as the site for NorthMet minerals processing and waste disposal. The permit holder currently responsible for compliance at the facilities and site, Cleveland Cliffs (not the current owner), has been out of compliance for over ten years with MPCA regulations and an agreement with the corporation. No effort had been made by the MPCA to enforce regulations until three organizations led by the Center for Biological Diversity filed a Notice of Intent to sue the agency and require enforcement. At that point the agency and Cleveland Cliffs entered into a compliance agreement to abide by MPCA regulations and site requirements. The agreement also covers the closed Dunka (taconite) Mine site near Babbitt in which surface overburden was found to contain sulfuric laden waste rock which was leaching into nearby wetlands and waters.

Other Potential Projects: In response to a recent inquiry, the USFS has indicated that it will release its Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Federal Hardrock Mineral Project for Superior National Forest in December. The Project seeks to create guidance for USFS actions regarding the pending 42 and all subsequent proposals for mine test drilling and other exploration involving SNF lands. More information regarding the DEIS is available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/project_content.php?project=18155

In addition to the PolyMet NorthMet Project, other min-

ing proposals are moving forward. The most visible of these currently is Duluth Metals which recently announced an initial plan for an underground mine at the Nokomis site. Duluth Metals also announced acquisition of a 40 percent stake in their joint venture company (Twin Metals) by a Chilean firm, Antofagasta.

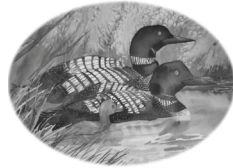
As described by Duluth Metals, the potential underground mine would be 4 to 5 miles in length and reach a depth of 3,000 feet. The Duluth Complex ore of interest is near the surface at the NorthMet site but slopes eastward so that it would be (presumably) 3,000 feet below the surface at the Boundary Waters boundary. A map on the Duluth Metals Website shows the mine entrance to be on the site of USFS Kawishiwi Research Station on the Kawishiwi River, just west of Hwy 1, and the northeast property boundary virtually at the BWCAW. The necessary tailings basin is not shown.

From an environmental perspective, an underground mine is considered preferable because most, but not all, waste rock can be maintained underground. Some initial on-site processing is proposed with tailings stored in an above ground pond. Noise, air, and water pollution will occur at the mouth and along the transportation route to a processing facility.

An underground mine also carries its own risks such as what would happen to the area if the mine (walls and crown pillars) should collapse. This issue is especially important in the *Franconia Corporation* plan to establish a mine tunnel and underground mine beneath Birch Lake, also near Babbitt.

Several other mining interests have announced plans and initial projects for the Duluth Complex. The USFS has released a scoping document for two exploratory drilling projects by **Encampment Minerals** southeast of Hoyt Lakes. These would be the most southern and western exploratory drilling in recent years. **Franconia Minerals** has announced that it is preparing a feasibility study for its proposed underground mine beneath Birch Lake near Babbitt. Finally, a Minneapolis Star-Tribune article (10/1/10) identified acid mine drainage from a 1974 **International Nickel** test mine just off the Spruce Road south of Ely. The drainage is to nearby wetlands three miles from the BWCAW. An MPCA official said that the drainage did not reach the threshold for monitoring.

WICOLA NEWS



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We're on the Web!
wicola.org

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* Incoming 2011 Garden Lake Rep ** Incoming 2011 Vice President

Feel free to contact any board member at the addresses above or at the Association address. We welcome and encourage your comments and suggestions. Our Association is dedicated to continuing and improving the quality environment of our chain of lakes. Please join us in this endeavor **VOLUNTEER!**

WICOLA NEWS is published three times a year and mailed to members of
WHITE IRON CHAIN of LAKES ASSOCIATION, INC.

If you are interested in improving the water quality, fishing, and recreational opportunities on White Iron, Farm, Garden and South Farm Lakes, **JOIN WICOLA TODAY.** Annual Membership is still just \$20.00 per year. Send a check to our address above for all the benefits of membership.