

# WHAT IS A LAKE ASSOCIATION?

*The oldest organizations interested in lake management in Wisconsin are its lake associations.*

*The following are their main features.*

## **WHAT IS A LAKE ASSOCIATION?**

The first association in Wisconsin was organized about 1898. Today, nearly 400 lake associations are in existence. Usually, lake associations are voluntary organizations with members who own land on or near a lake. They can be involved in various levels of lake management activities and vary from well-run lake management groups to loose-knit social groups.

## **WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?**

Lake associations may operate under diverse titles, but the purpose is normally the same. In most, it is to maintain, protect, and improve the quality of a lake, its fisheries, and its watershed.

## **HOW IS IT FORMED?**

A lake association can be formed when any number of individuals concerned with lake issues decides to deal with them in an organized manner. Many associations opt to incorporate under Chapter 181 Wisconsin Statutes (available at your library).

## **WHO IS INCLUDED IN IT?**

Associations can be comprised of all or a few of the people living on a lake and may have members not living on the lake. Membership in associations is rarely mandatory; people may or may not decide to participate. The one exception to this is mandatory lake associations, which are normally formed by developers as part of a deed restriction.

## **HOW IS IT RUN?**

Roberts Rules of Order are commonly used when conducting meetings. Many associations have adopted by-laws to guide the direction of their organizations.

## **HOW IS IT FINANCED?**

Associations use various fund-raising activities and voluntary dues to raise capital for their activities. Certain qualified associations are eligible for limited state moneys through specific grant programs.

### **WHO RUNS THE ASSOCIATION?**

Lake associations are normally run by officers elected by the membership. The offices may include president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Many times these offices are combined. Length of terms vary greatly. A lake association's day-to-day activities can be carried out by its officers or by committees assigned to various tasks.

### **WHAT CAN IT DO?**

A lake association's power comes from its numbers. Lake associations can help build a sense of community and create an information network for that group. They may work with state and local government agencies (including lake districts if they exist) to effect ordinances and lake management practices and, with the proper permits, they can implement lake projects. These projects may include aquatic plant management, fish stocking, boating safety, and educational programs. They can also lobby state and local government to act on issues affecting their interests.

### **CAN IT BE DISSOLVED?.**

There is no legal statute requiring a voluntary lake association to continue to exist (mandatory associations may have deed restrictions requiring them to exist). Otherwise, associations may be dissolved by the membership or just fade away from lack of participation. Associations organized under Wisconsin Statutes 181 must comply with the law to dissolve.



For more information, contact the  
UW-Extension Lakes Management Program,  
College of Natural Resources, University of  
Wisconsin, Stevens Point WI 54481  
715/346-2116

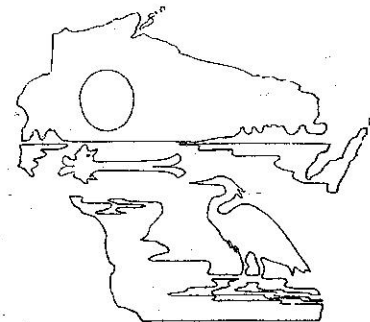
# WHAT IS A QUALIFIED LAKE ASSOCIATION?

The nineties have seen an expansion of concern in the preservation and safeguarding of Wisconsin lakes. For the first time lake associations are able to join the ranks of organizations receiving government funding to assist them in the stewardship of their local lakes.

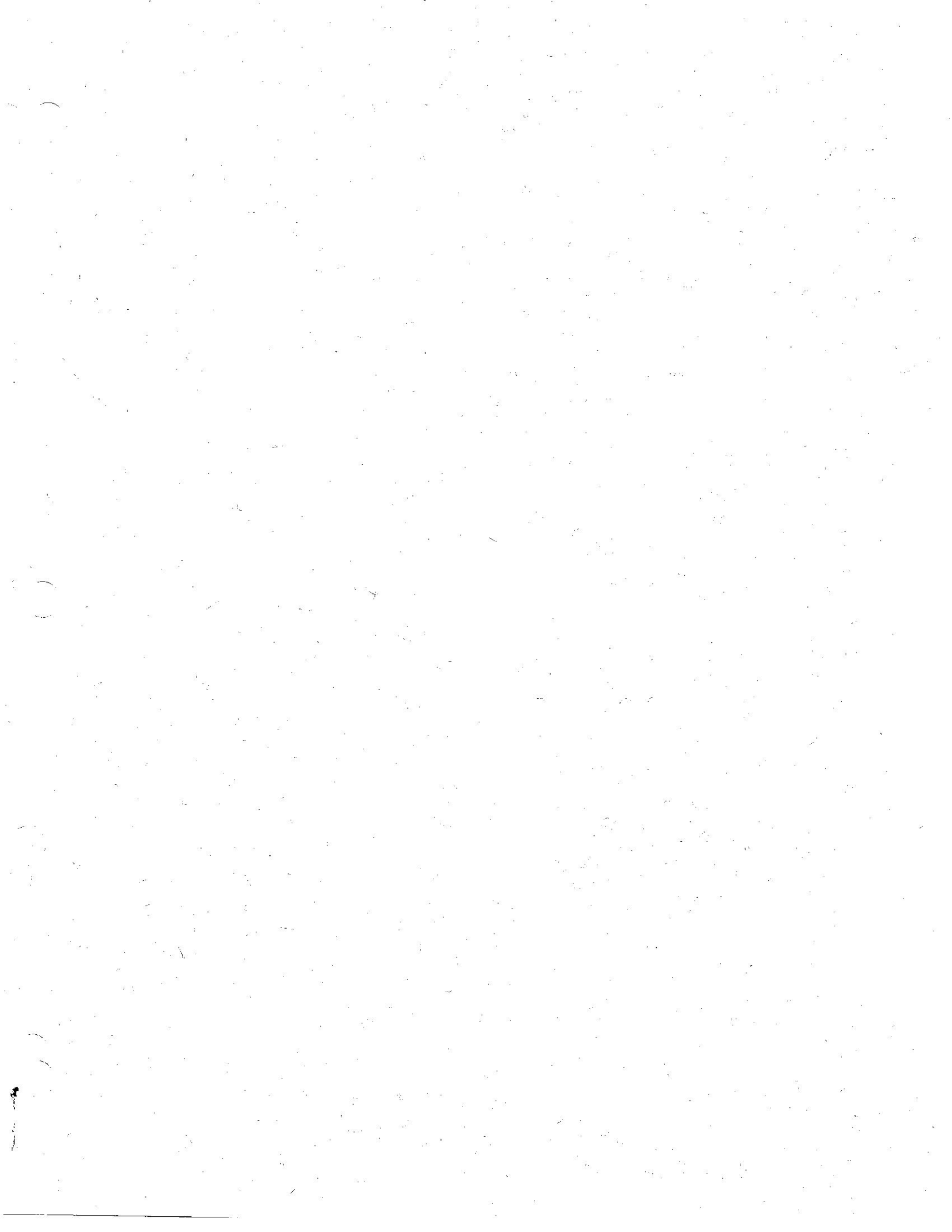
To be eligible for these various grants and funding, a lake association must meet certain standards set out in Section 144.253(1), Wisconsin Statutes.

*The following is an overview of these requirements:*

- The association must be incorporated under Chapter 181 Wisconsin Statutes (This is a good idea for other reasons including the liability of the association and its officers).
- Declare in its Articles of Incorporation or By-laws that the substantial purpose for being incorporated is to support the protection or improvement of one or more inland lakes for the benefit of the general public.
- Demonstrate that a substantial purpose of its past actions was to support the protection or improvement of one or more inland lakes for the benefit of the general public.
- Allow any individual to be a member who resides within one mile of the lake at least one month each year.
- Allow any individual to be a member who owns real estate within one mile of the lake.
- Does not limit or deny the right of any member or class of members to vote (Section 181.16(1), Wisconsin Statutes).
- Has been in existence for at least one year.
- Has at least 25 members.
- Require annual membership fees of not less than \$10 nor more than \$25.



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# 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.

## 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

## 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.

## 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.

### 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 sensitive to the distinctive requirements of year-round and seasonal residents;
- Be sensitive to various user groups and their expectations (boaters, anglers, seasonal users).

### 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 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 photocopying/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 expanse 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—University Extension, 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 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 such as the town hall, resort, school or other public place.
- 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.)

### **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, light switches, paper, pencils, parking, etc.).

- Have extra agendas.
- 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 form 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, or you could also opt to form an association among those who agree with the idea.

### **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-Lake Management 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 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 lake self-help coordinator.

- 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 North American Lake Management Society (NALMS) 906-462-2554 or 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.
- Become a DNR Self Help Monitoring Volunteer (608-266-8117).

### **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 natural resource agent for materials on lake problems and solutions. And/or contact the state UWEX lake management specialists, **Mike Dresen** or **Robert Korth**, at the College of Natural Resources, UW-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715-346-2116).
- Contact your DNR district lake management coordinator, or the DNR state lake management section, Jeff Bode, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 (608-267-7513).
- Contact your district WAL lake team representative. Call 1-800-542-LAKE(5253) to determine your representative.
- Get on the mailing list of Lake Tides, published by the UW Extension. The newsletter is free. Contact Dorothy Snyder, College of Natural Resources, UW-SP, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715-346-2116).
- Subscribe to the WAL newsletter, The Lake Connection. Members of organizations belonging to WAL receive free copies. Consider joining the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL).
- 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" & "What is a qualified Lake Association"

For more information, contact the UW-Extension Lakes Management Program, College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point WI 54481 [PH: 715-346-2116]