

Rock Lake Improvement Association  
Annual Report 2020-2021

RLIA remains a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of Rock Lake and its watershed. At the August 2020 Annual meeting we added 2 new energetic and capable Board members, Bruce Ward and Sharron Webster. In the fall of 2020, in addition to our annual fall activities, each Board member reviewed and updated their committee goals and plans for the year culminating in a retreat-like double meeting in January at which time we laid out detailed plans for the spring and summer activities based on our 2018-2028 Lake Management Plan. Unfortunately, in-person activities had to be abandoned or modified due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Board meetings for the 2020-21 year were held via zoom until our first in-person meeting in July 2021.

### **RLIA Snapshot 2021:**

#### **Membership: 153**

Families: 120 Individuals: 26 Affiliates (organizations): 3 Donors: 4

#### **Membership Breakout** (approximately):

City: 40% Town: 56% Other/out of town: 2%

Riparian 45% of memberships

52 new members in 2021 / Did large membership mailing

**Facebook Followers:** 661 people liked our page and 737 follow our page. Followers are up 163 from 2020 or 28% (Followers in 2020 were 574)

**Board members 2020-21:** Jim Colegrove (treasurer), John Crump (president), Ralph DePasquale, Mike Nesemann (secretary), Nathan Pyles, Stan Smoniewski (webpage), John Thode, Susan Trier (vice president and Facebook page), Bruce Ward, Sharron Webster

#### **The following is a brief summary of 2020-2021 activities:**

- Continued emphasis on agricultural soil erosion and nutrient runoff (see Jefferson County Soil Builders initiative below)
- Continued working with City for fall Leaf-free Streets for Clean Waters campaign including educational pamphlet, marking storm sewers, etc.
- Continuing to formulate plans to readdress erosion and nutrient runoff into the Miljala ditch upstream of the Miljala Channel. Communicating with key stake-holders including neighbors, DNR and County officials
- Continued work with Joint Rock Lake Committee (JRLC), Town, City and County on the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Clean Boats/Clean Waters program to support and maintain the cleaning stations and tools at all 5 boat launches
- Organized annual Spring Environmental Clean-up for removing trash and invasive Mustard Weed from parks, roadsides and yards (see below)
- RLIA Facebook page remained very active. A new initiative "Homegrown National Park" was aimed at encouraging all residents to make conservation related changes to their property. There were 23 posts running in April and May 2021. Posts reached 1300-4000 people, averaging around 2000. The most active post was on reducing lawn size. Interestingly, we ran our spring cleanup during this time and we had much more social media activity with the event than the year before.

- Several Board members worked closely with JRLC over a period of many months to develop a high-quality comprehensive Waterfront Landowner Reference Guide which summarizes in plain English the complex lakeshore zoning regulations and ordinances of the City, Town, DNR and County which protect the Lake and after appropriate vetting with multiple governmental bodies mailed these to all lakeshore owners and posted it on the RLIA website
- Community riparian owners were encouraged via emails and our Facebook page to contact County officials if they were interested in applying for a “Healthy Lakes” DNR grant: 8 community members expressed interest in the grant and are currently taking steps to implement practices that would make them eligible for the grant in the spring and summer of 2022.
- Distributed homeowners’ packets with lakeshore related materials to all new homeowners and to realtors that sell lakeshore property
- Annually update RLIA Dashboard to keep us focused on our *2018-2028 Lake Management Plan* goals
- In-person educational events geared toward Riparian owners canceled due to Covid-19
- Road Salt initiative—webinar and Leader article (see below)
- Books, videos, webinars, Wisconsin Lakes annual meetings and other educational links and materials posted on website and Facebook page.
- RLIA members and Board members are working with County Land & Water Conservation Department to collect water samples and directly measure water quality indicators in the Lake and watershed including Miljala Channel, Mud Lake and Rock Creek; and members have assisted with lakeshore survey which is ongoing
- Bob and Sue Volenec led and trained other members to continue to survey bat and frog populations around Rock Lake and the surrounding region
- Communicated with DNR regarding state of Rock Lake fisheries and assessed needs to augment and support fish populations including potential need for additional “fish sticks,” additional stocking and/or other interventions—the DNR did not feel that additional interventions are currently required. Leader article written by RLIA member Cory Nelson and Board member Bruce Ward described the DNR’s opinion regarding the excellent state of Rock Lake’s fisheries and the general health of the Lake
- Closely followed riparian zoning ordinance issues including City and County responses to variance requests to tailor ongoing needs for additional public education efforts and met with City and County leadership to better understand their policies and to advocate for clear and consistent policies for protecting the lake
- Met with City regarding storm sewer plans associated with the Lake Street reconstruction project—found favorable plans in place
- July 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 weekend boat trailer count completed to compare with past counts and help formulate recommendations regarding holiday boat traffic which has been an ongoing concern
- Requested position statements regarding Lake-related issues from Town Chair candidates for the April 2021 election and coordinated with the Leader to publish these in the weeks leading up the election
- RLIA Board sent a letter to the Town Board in support of the JRLC recommendation to consider change in Slow-No-Wake zone to a single 200-ft standard
- This year’s turtle awareness program included purchasing additional temporary residential turtle crossing road signs which members put up; paid for County to replace a permanent sign on Co Hwy B which had been stolen; purchased and placed protective turtle cages to

allow safe turtle nesting; and public education via Leader article and Facebook postings and links

- Bylaws update: The Bylaws Committee (Treasurer, Secretary & President) reviewed the Bylaws from April-June and in June presented recommendations to the Board who discussed and passed these recommendations after making revisions. Best practice recommendations for nonprofits suggest review and update of bylaws at least every 5 years (we were overdue). These Bylaws recommendations will be presented at the Annual Meeting for discussion and ratification by the members. As part of this process the committee attended a webinar focusing on Lake Associations legal and insurance issues. Thereafter, the committee made recommendations on updating our “conflict of interest” policy and also recommended that RLIA purchase general liability insurance to protect the RLIA financial assets. The Board passed these recommendations after thorough discussion.
- Annual Meeting, Stewardship Award Presentation & 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 8/21/2021

### **Drilling down on several initiatives:**

**Soil Builders:** Agricultural erosion and nutrient runoff (especially phosphorus) into the watershed poses the greatest risk to the health of Rock Lake and most lakes in the southern half of Wisconsin. Nathan Pyles has quietly worked for a number of years to encourage the establishment of a Jefferson County farmers-led organization for soil conservation primarily based on the practices of using cover crops and no-till or minimal-till farming which can result in marked improvement of these threats and concurrently results in improving water infiltration into the soil and improved soil health. There have been a small but growing number of farmers in the county who have been using these practices successfully for up to 10-20 years. The state of Wisconsin has encouraged this practice by allocating DNR grant funds for groups of farmers to work together to qualify for this funding. We are very excited that this year a group of local farmers have established one of these groups—the Jefferson County Soil Builders. RLIA Board members and Lake Ripley Lake District Board members met with the Soil Builders for a “meet and greet” at the July 22<sup>nd</sup> “Brew with a View” at Korth Park. This was arranged by Patricia Cicero of the Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Department who has been working closely with the Soil Builders and has been coordinating with Nathan. The meeting was an exciting opportunity for our Board members to hear and learn from these bright and committed farmers. We are optimistic about the future direction of farming practices and hopeful for a long-term favorable impact on Rock Lake and its associated watershed and ecosystem.

**Road Salt Initiative:** In February and March we arranged an initiative to address optimal use of road salt. The Town of Lake Mills was getting ready to put out a request for bids for a 3-year contract for our winter road maintenance work. The City of Lake Mills has brining equipment, but has not used it due to lack of training for the “road crew.” We contacted Allison Madison of Wisconsin Salt Wise asking for a webinar workshop to address these issues in time-sensitive manner. She put together and presented an outstanding program geared toward smaller communities that she called “Road Salt 101 for WI Towns and Villages”. Community leaders attended as did local contractors, members of RLIA and other interested community members. We had 98 total participants from our community and around the state. It was an excellent program. Many engaged in the lively and practical Q/A session for the last 30 minutes of the workshop. Ms. Madison also spoke to the City Director of Public Works and arranged for the road crew to attend a free training course on use of the equipment that the City already had and the City plans to begin using its brining equipment next winter. In addition, we worked with the

Lake Mills Leader who published an informative and prominent article about our road salt initiative and workshop.

**Annual Spring Environmental Clean-up and Garlic Mustard Pull:** Due to Covid-19, this year the event was held over a period of one week in late April rather than the one day in-person format we had done prior to the pandemic. This was coordinated by Bruce Ward and member Cory Nelson. Community members were encouraged to do these activities on their own. The event was publicized by emails to members and our Facebook page and website. Volunteers were advised on how to identify garlic mustard and a dumpster was placed at Bartels Beach. It appeared that we had a favorable response from our members and the general public, for which we are grateful.

In closing, I would like to thank all of our members, volunteers, dedicated County representatives and outstanding Board members! RLIA will continue to work energetically to protect Rock Lake and its watershed.

Sincerely,

John Crump, RLIA Board President