

Rock Lake Improvement Association Annual Report 2021-2022

RLIA remains a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of Rock Lake and its watershed. At the August 2021 Annual meeting we added two new energetic and capable Board members, Candace Diaz and Jim Kerler. In the fall of 2021, 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. While many in-person activities continued to be modified due to the COVID pandemic early in the season, we gathered together for our Legendary Learning program, our summer school program, and our Early Detection Citizen Monitor program for Aquatic Invasive species (AIS).

RLIA Snapshot 2022:

Membership: 168 / Families: 138, Individuals: 26, Affiliates (organizations): 3, Donors: 1

Membership Breakout (approximately): City: 35%, Town: 58%, Other/out of town: 6%

Riparian Owners represent 51% of RLIA's memberships (86). There are approximately 275 shoreland properties around Rock Lake which means that only about 31% of all riparian owners are members of RLIA.

NEW Members in 2022: 29

Memberships are up by 7 this year over 2021 (in 2020, membership was 116) and the mix of members has shifted slightly to give a larger margin to Township members. City membership is down from 40% to 35% from last year while the Town membership is up from 56% to 58%.

Facebook Followers: 761 people liked our page and 851 follow our page. Followers are up again this year, 114 from 2021 or 15% (Followers in 2021 were 737)

Membership Recruitment Summary:

RLIA sent out 1,750 membership "flyers" by USPS Every Door Direct Mailing (EDDM) in March. (Last year, EDDM was used to send out over 5,000 flyers to five postal routes.) The 2022 EDDM focused on three mail routes in Lake Mills encompassing residents around the entire circumference of Rock Lake but may have missed previous members, primarily those residing in the eastern part of the City/Town. This initial mailing resulted in about 80 membership renewals from the flyer or members viewing our website. Historically, most renewals or new memberships occur in the second quarter of the year; returns this year have been slow. To try and increase membership numbers, RLIA sent out (60) first-class letters to the members in our database for which we have out-of-town addresses. We also sent out about (90) additional first-class letters to those previous members, with Lake Mills addresses, who had paid dues in 2019, 2020, or 2021, but had not yet renewed their 2022 membership. This group included the 52 "new" members we gained in 2021 (only 23 of this group has renewed their membership in 2022). Note: These first-class mailings had some duplicates with the EDDM. Although EDDM is priced very reasonably per delivered piece, RLIA was concerned that the flyer might have been mistaken for an unsolicited advertisement and thus went directly into recycling, meriting contacting prior members with a first-class mailing.

Board members 2021-22: Jim Colegrove (treasurer), John Crump (president), Candace Diaz, Jim Kerler, Mike Neemann (secretary), Nathan Pyles, Tom Krejcie, John Thode, Susan Trier (vice president and interim president), Bruce Ward.

Brief Summary of 2021-2022 activities:

Shoreland Initiatives:

- RLIA continues to encourage riparian owners to manage their storm water and modify their shorelines to prevent pesticides, herbicides, and extra nutrients from washing into Rock Lake. The WDNR's program called "Healthy Lakes & Rivers" encourages riparian landowners to implement five best practices through reimbursement grants. The practices include: rain gardens, 350 square feet of native plantings, fish sticks, diversions, and rock infiltration projects. In 2022, two homeowners worked with Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept.(LWCD) to install a practice and four are now in progress. Two additional landowners on Rock Lake have expressed interest in completing healthy lakes projects next year.

- Distributed homeowners' packets with lakeshore related materials to all new homeowners

Water Quality:

- RLIA members and Board members continue to work with County Land & Water Conservation Department (LWCD) to collect water samples and directly measure water quality indicators in the lake and watershed including Miljala Channel, Mud Lake and Rock Creek. Testing for internal loading happened during Spring 2022 and will again in Fall 2022.

- Continued emphasis on reducing agricultural soil erosion and nutrient runoff through Jefferson County's farmer-led group:

Soil Builders:

Erosion and nutrient runoff (especially phosphorus) into the watershed poses a risk to the quality of Rock Lake. State-wide, farmer-led groups have formed that have resulted in the adoption of practices that control erosion and runoff while improving soil health. The RLIA has worked for several years to encourage the formation of a farmer-led group in Jefferson County. The Jefferson County Soil Builders is a group that has formed and received a grant from the State Department of Agriculture to implement activities in 2022. Their activities include incentives for the adoption of cover crops, field days and farmer-to-farmer discussions on soil health and conservation practices. Rock Lake Improvement Association is supporting their work by providing \$1,000 as part of the grant's match requirement and by running the registration table at some of their events. Some Rock Lake watershed farmers have either attended events or received the information about their activities and incentives. The Jefferson County Soil Builders are currently planning for their 2023 grant application and are hoping to partner with the Rock Lake Improvement Association again.

Habitat:

- Volunteers continue to survey bat and frog populations around Rock Lake and the surrounding region.

- Rock Lake seems to be doing very well when it comes to the fisheries. The WDNR does a fish survey every six years that includes electroshock and fyke netting. The last survey was done in 2014. Due to COVID, surveys were held off until this year. The Walleye appears to be making a comeback. This year electroshocking the 8 miles of shoreline, 94 Walleye were caught versus 16 walleye in 2014. The WDNR estimates 1 Walleye per acre this year up from .2 per acre in 2014. The big question is whether walleye is reproducing in the lake or if the population is strictly from stocking efforts. This Fall, the WDNR will be looking for young walleye and will be doing some DNA testing to try to answer that question. The WDNR also floy tagged about 500 Walleyes with green tags near the dorsal fins. They were all legal sized fish. Fisherman that catch a tagged fish are encouraged to report the catch and location of it. There are tag drop boxes with instructions located at the boat launches. Other sport fish studied by the WDNR included bass and panfish. Both Largemouth and smallmouth bass are up with largemouth caught at the rate of 23.4 per mile this year and 13.5 in 2014. Smallmouth bass were caught at the rate of 10 per mile this year and 4.8 in 2014. Bluegill numbers stayed about the same this year as in 2014 with about 168 per mile. Lastly, RLIA is still in the process of working with the DNR to place fish sticks at the south end of the lake. We hope to continue talking to set a date of completion.

- This year's turtle awareness program included helping Lake Mills Junior Girl Scout Troop 7468 achieve their Bronze Award, the highest achievement for the girls of their age group. The girls sought to educate the public about the turtles within our watershed. RLIA helped to advise the girls, used our Facebook page as their platform for their social media campaign, and gave them turtle nesting cages to decorate, alerting people to the cages' purpose and thus reducing theft of the nesting cages. The troop also donated \$100 to RLIA to help support our turtle program. This extremely generous donation was the same as selling 133 boxes of Girl Scout cookies!! RLIA also purchased additional temporary residential turtle crossing road signs which were placed at 12 locations in around the lake. Volunteers made an additional 10 protective turtle cages to allow safe turtle nesting. With the help of residents on Cty B along the north shore of the lake, RLIA salvaged 15 spiny softshell turtle eggs and brought them to Dane County Humane Wildlife Center for incubation. The turtles should hatch this fall and will be returned to our area to overwinter in Rock Lake. A portion of the Lake Mills Junior Girl Scout Troop 7468 funds were given as a donation to the Center to help defray expenses. Lastly, RLIA was able to locate two local centers who can help rehab injured turtles:

Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center
5132 Voges Rd., Madison
608-287-3235 / wildlife@giveshelter.org

Wildlife in Need Center
W349 S1480 S. Waterville Road, Suite B, Oconomowoc
262-965-3090 / 262-965-3067

Residents were alerted to these resources and RLIA brought one badly injured painted turtle to a center.

- After the recommendation of the JRLC, RLIA created an Early Detection Aquatic Invasive Species Monitoring group. This group will look for aquatic invasive species which are not yet within the Rock Lake watershed. Of greatest concern are Starry Stonewort (found in Waukesha & Walworth county), Spiny Waterflea (found in Dane county), Asiatic Clam (found in Walworth, Waukesha, & Rock county) and New Zealand Mudsnail (found in Dane county). The LWCD trained the volunteers in June. The

volunteers have surveyed the lake in late June, late July and will do it one more time in September. The sample rake was generously crafted by a RLIA member. The WDNR will pay for presence/no presence of spiny waterflea this Fall.

Community Service:

- Organized annual Spring Environmental Clean-up for removing trash and invasive Mustard Weed from parks, roadsides and yards. 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 a flyer placed within residents' utility bills, emails to members, our Facebook page and website. Unfortunately, the Town Board voiced concerns about the clean-up on township property and RLIA subsequently encouraged participants **not** to extend their clean-up efforts to township property. 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.

Education:

- RLIA member Cory Nelson led the effort to offer in-person educational events hosted with the Jefferson County Parks Department called "Legendary Learning". These were family friendly events where experts discussed different lake related topics each night. In early July, the WDNR fisheries management team talked about their efforts of tracking game fish within Rock Lake. Forty three residents participated. Late July, a Professor at UW-Whitewater and Certified Wildlife Biologist spoke about turtles within our watershed. Forty four residents attended. The last session was held mid-August by the LWCD and spoke about aquatic plants and insects. This session had hands-on examples of aquatic plants and animals and twenty one people joined us.

- RLIA Board Member, Candace Diaz, worked with RLIA members to bring educational content on Rock Lake to Lake Mills Summer School Students. Over 30 students from Mr. Gwin's fishing class participated. Presentations were given during the weeks of June 13, June 27 and July 11, 2022. Input from the students and Mr. Gwin was very positive. In fact, he would like to include both presenters again next summer. RLIA member Sue and Bob Volenec's class learned about the food chain in Rock Lake that affects the fish population and worked hands on identifying different types of macroinvertebrates found in the lake. RLIA member Valerie Krejcie's class learned about the Rock Creek watershed and lake health. They also learned about the formation of the lake, regional geography and completed a hands-on map making session together. Candace would like to expand the summer school program for next year to include presentations in the elementary school. She will research potential topics and continue to network within the RLIA membership and community at large to compile a list of prospective instructors. Another potential education avenue is to partner with all three schools to offer presentations that would highlight what the students are learning in their classes during the school year.

Miljala Tributary Restoration Project:

- We received two WDNR Surface Water grants for the Miljala Tributary Restoration project. One grant seeks to solidify the solution into **one** detailed, recommended best practice. The second grant sought to

quantify that solution with a detailed construction plan set, bidding documents, drafted permits applications and maintenance requirements for a “shovel ready” project for the November grant cycle. This project has always been dependent on private landowner participation. Unfortunately, in July, RLIA heard from one of the landowners that someone outside of the project team inappropriately contacted them which resulted in the landowner no longer wanting to participate. Therefore, the scope of the project had to be revised. RLIA was required to return the funds to the WDNR for the second grant. We will continue working with the remaining landowners to determine the best practice for resolving the issues facing the tributary and fulfilling the obligations of the first grant. Further progress, however, is off the table at this point.

Lake Recreation:

RLIA worked closely with JRLC to define and develop the recommendation to increase the Slow No Wake speed buffer to 200' for all motorized watercraft. Our full position is outlined on our website along with an informative graphic: <https://rocklake.org/slow-no-wake-shoreline-buffer/>

Here is a summary:

Expanding the Slow No Wake speed buffer to 200 feet from shore would:

- Establish the same buffer zone for both motorboats and PWCs. This single regulation would be easier to understand and to enforce.
- Provide a safety buffer for swimmers and dogs, especially at Tyranena Park.
- Provide, in essence, an expanded “Bike Lane” for distance swimmers and paddle sports enthusiasts.
- Move wake-producing motorboats farther from shore resulting in less disturbance to lake-bottom ecology and less shoreline erosion.

The impact of this change on lost acreage for unrestricted powerboating is estimated to be 22 acres, or less than 2.5% of the current unrestricted water surface. Much of the shoreline not already protected by a Slow No Wake speed buffer is riparian shoreline with piers. Motorboats currently should maintain Slow No Wake speeds 100 feet from the ends of those piers, or at least 140 feet from the shoreline. Therefore, a uniform 200-foot Slow No Wake ordinance would restrict less “open water” than one might think.

Why change now?

- The number of Rock Lake users continues to increase. Many have called for improved safety measures to protect all types of watercraft, fishing boats, swimmers, even active use by dog owners.
- Overlapping statewide restrictions for personal watercraft (i.e., jet skis) already require SNW speed within 200 feet of shore.
- Special protections require SNW speeds near Bartels, Woodland, Sandy, and Ferry Park Beaches, along Elm Point, the north Boat Launch, and in Korth & Schultz Bays.
 - The Sensitive Areas outlined in the Town of Lake Mills Ordinance reduce the surface area of Rock Lake from 1365 acres to 1043 acres, or a 23.5 percent reduction.
 - The current State Regulation of 100 feet from shore, pier, raft or swim buoy adds an additional 34 acres of SNW (1009 unrestricted acres).
 - Limited expansion and simplification of the SNW buffer responds to these concerns. Increasing the SNW zone to a uniform 200 feet from shore would only restrict an additional 22 acres or 1.6 percent of the current unrestricted surface area of Rock Lake.

Biggest safety concerns:

- Use of the lake has changed. There are more users of all kinds: increase in paddle sports; popularity of distance swimming
- More and faster pontoon boats with many towing tubes or skiers
- Increased popularity of wake/surf boats which create large wakes that stir up lake bottoms and erode shorelines

Of particular concern: *Tyranena Park swimmers are allowed to swim 150 feet from shore yet power boats, at speed, are allowed to operate up to 100 feet from shore, unless the swimmers or dogs are easily seen.*

Municipal Initiatives:

- Continued working with City for Fall “Leaf-free Streets” for Clean Waters campaign including educational flyer in the utility bills. Will update the flyer with Town information.

- 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. To reduce inadvertent theft, RLIA tagged all the City AIS tools with “Property of City of Lake Mills. Please return tools to cleaning station.” RLIA offered the same support for the Town stations but the Town refused the offer.

Land Acquisition:

Jefferson County and Groundswell Conservancy are working to acquire 42 acres on Marsh Lake, off County A and adjacent to the Lake Mills Wildlife Area. Members might know this property as the Trieloff property. Marsh Lake is critical to the health of Rock Lake because it acts as a buffer to the incoming excess nutrients (phosphorus) flowing from Mud Lake and Rock Creek. Mud Lake and Rock Creek are both considered impaired for phosphorus by the WDNR. These excess nutrients can fuel excess algal growth and lead to lower oxygen levels within Rock Lake. Preserving this section of shoreline along Marsh Lake is an excellent opportunity to help protect Rock Lake. After purchasing the property, the County will need to develop a recreational plan for the property. Currently, they are strongly considering a paddle sport launching area which would also include an accessible kayak launch.

The County is about \$45,000 short of the \$185,000 needed to acquire the Trieloff property. Our board has sent a letter of support to the County as well as a \$5,000 donation. In addition, the County has received funding from: Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program Grants, the Wisconservation Club, the Lake Mills Community Foundation, Delta Waterfowl Foundation and raffle proceeds from the popular Brew With A View 2022 season.

If members would like to contribute to this project, donations can be accepted by check to the Jefferson County Parks Department sent or delivered to the address below. Please make sure the check notes the purpose of the donations as “Trieloff Acquisition” to ensure they are collected to the appropriate location. All donations for this project are 100% tax deductible.

Jefferson County Parks Department, Rm 204
311 South Center Ave
Jefferson, WI 53549

Social Media:

- RLIA Facebook page continues to be a critical link to our community. According to a recent survey by Mead & Hunt for the City, 68% of residents use social media to learn about what is going on within the community. **If any member would like to step into the role of social media for RLIA, we would greatly appreciate it.** Please contact a board member with your interest! I believe that RLIA could be using this platform more effectively. This year our posts could be split into the following categories: general environmental education, publicizing our local events, communicating municipal news which we thought our base would be interested in, and highlighting on-going campaigns. By far our best results are in continued awareness of on-going campaigns. This year we sponsored the Girl Scout educational turtle awareness program with seven separate posts ranging from 1,360-2,843 people reached. Our post on the recovery of turtle eggs garnered 4,243 and our appeal to alert residents to opportunities for turtle rehab gathered an eye popping 48,318 views. The next best category of engagement is publicizing local events with Legendary Learning and our Environmental Cleanup (1,801-2,900). This year we tried publicizing efforts within the City including their city planning, their decision to test for PFAS, and the need to hire for Clean Boats Clean Water (CBCW) Inspectors. PFAS generated 2,255 (more than the city page), CBCW (1,140-2,700) but the plan only 88. General environmental education is important aspect but it appears that material must be written specifically to Rock Lake or our area vs just posting informative material: Swimmers Itch (2,997), Aquatic Invasive Species (1,333), Dark Sky initiative (270), Cleaning Salt off sidewalks (1,652), Protecting Oak trees from wilt (1,732), supporting birds (256) or the importance of native plants (384).

Sincerely, Susan Trier, RLIA Interim Board President