

Rock Lake Improvement Association Annual Report 2022-2023

RLIA remains a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of Rock Lake and its watershed. At the August 2022 Annual meeting we added two new energetic and capable Board members, Cynthia Chmell and Danny Durow. In addition, Tom Krejcie was re-elected for another term.

In March, the board had a full day retreat to redefine our vision and mission. Member Keith Clark facilitated the session. The board wanted to reach all the stakeholders in Rock Lake's watershed to create a greater sense of ownership and community. RLIA's new vision for Rock Lake is: Our Rock Lake: Enjoy. Protect. Enhance. From that vision, the board transformed our mission to better reflect what RLIA can actually do to create change. The new mission of RLIA is: 'We will collaborate, educate, and build community engagement to protect and improve Rock Lake and its watershed for today and tomorrow.'

Throughout the year, board members have created goals that are realistic, relevant, and measurable, to support the vision and mission. From these, specific plans of action will be developed and prioritized, to shape our work for 2024.

RLIA Snapshot 2023:

Membership: 200 / Families: 164, Individuals: 30, Affiliates (organizations): 6

→ This is the second highest membership in the 51-year history of the Association.

Membership Breakout (approximately): City: 38%, Town: 54%, Other/out of town: 8%

Riparian Owners represent 50% of RLIA's memberships (101). There are approximately 275 shoreland properties around Rock Lake which means that only about 37% of all riparian owners are members of RLIA. This is a slight increase from 2022 which was 31%.

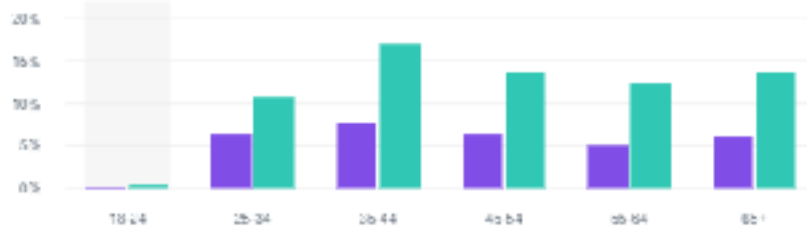
NEW Members in 2023: 21

Memberships are up by 28 this year over 2022 (172); 2021 (161). The mix of members has shifted slightly yet maintains a larger margin to Township members. City membership is up slightly from 35% to 38% from last year while the Town membership is down from 58% to 54%. We have no Lake Mills address for 8% of our members.

Facebook Followers: 833 people liked our page and 921 follow our page. Followers are up again this year, around 8.2%. (Followers in 2022 were 851)

Age and Gender

Men 32.10%
Women 67.90%



Location

Cities Countries

Lake Mills, WI	415
Madison, WI	31
Watertown, WI	26
Fort Atkinson, WI	25
Johnson Creek, WI	22
Jefferson, WI	15
Cambridge, WI	14
Watkins, WI	11
Rockford, IL	9
Sun Prairie, WI	9

Membership Recruitment Summary:

RLIA sent out 925 membership appeals by USPS First-Class mail (we were able to get a bulk mail rate for these letters). We received this list of names and addresses from Jefferson County of property owners with land located within 1,000 feet of the shoreline of Rock Lake. As this list was based on County property taxes, we were confident we had good mailing addresses either in Lake Mills or elsewhere. We had a good return from previous members and added 28 new members. However, we still missed many renewals. Therefore, we sent out a second mailing to 95 addresses of anyone who had paid dues in either 2021 and/or 2022 but had not yet renewed their membership. We received an additional 20 renewals after the reminder. Although Every Door Direct Mailing, used last year, 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, prompting us to go back to first-class postage on personally addressed letters. Something seemed to hit home as we have 200 members to date, the second highest membership in the 51-year history of the Association.

Board members 2022-23: Cynthia Chmell, Jim Colegrove (vice president), Jim Kerler, Mike Nesemann (secretary), Jim Kerler, Tom Krejcie (treasurer), John Thode, Susan Trier (president), Bruce Ward.

Volunteers for 2023:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Project</u>
Steve Bower	Water Quality Monitoring
Wes Dawson	Water Quality Monitoring
Lee Gatzke	Water Quality Monitoring
Carl Glassford	Water Quality Monitoring
Jim Kerler	Water Quality Monitoring
Sue & Mike Nesemann	Water Quality Monitoring
Steve Oostdik	Water Quality Monitoring
Bob & Sue Volenec	Water Quality Monitoring
Nancy Lange	Frogs
Barb Smith	Frogs
Anne Taylor	Frogs
Elaine Thousand	Frogs
Bob & Sue Volenec	Bats
Mike Chmell	Turtles
Jim Kerler	Turtles
Sue & Mike Nesemann	Turtles
Stan Smoniewski	Turtles
Susan Trier	Turtles
Keith Clark	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Cynthia Chmell	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Jean Schoeni	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Stan & Cecelia Smoniewski	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Susan Trier	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Bruce Ward	Early Detection AIS Monitoring
Stan & Cecelia Smoniewski	Invasive Species along shoreland
Susan Trier	Invasive Species along shoreland
Cynthia Chmell	Oversee our efforts on education
Cory Nelson	Legendary Learning Nights
Susan Trier	Legendary Learning Nights
Julie & Scott Eklund	Environmental Cleanup
Cory Nelson	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Mike Nesemann	Environmental Cleanup
Stan Smoniewski	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Bruce Ward	Environmental Cleanup Organization
Vicki Wickliffe	Environmental Cleanup

Tom Krejcie	Data Analysis and graphing on Rock Lake water level
Don Pieronek	Data Analysis and graphing on Rock Lake water level
Mary Schmoeger	Data Analysis and graphing on Rock Lake water level
Susan Trier	Data Analysis and graphing on Rock Lake water level
Margy Krueger	Municipal collaboration
Mike Nesemann	Municipal collaboration
John Thode	Municipal collaboration
Susan Trier	Municipal collaboration
Keith Clark	Strategic Planning Facilitation
Danny Durow	Website, driving our strategic planning process forward
Karen Etter Hale	Facebook
Susan Trier	Facebook, Digital Communication
Stan Smoniewski	Website

Brief Summary of 2022-2023 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. So far in 2023, one homeowner worked with Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Dept (LWCD) to install a practice and two are now in progress. Six additional landowners on Rock Lake have expressed interest in completing healthy lakes projects next year. Since the program started in 2017, there have been 7 projects installed within Rock Lake's watershed.

- Last year, the LWCD finished analyzing their Shoreland & Shallows Survey. The survey assessed 7.3 miles (over 38,000 feet) of Rock Lake shoreline, including the Miljala channel, the Elm Point channel, and the Mill Pond. Marsh Lake was not included. During that survey, the LWCD noted 23 properties with increased erosion due to slumping banks. RLIA supported LWCD in contacting those landowners, offering support and resources for remediating shoreland damage. By August 2023, four property owners responded with three properties signing a pledge to participate in a Healthy Lakes & Rivers project for this upcoming year.

-RLIA is looking to host a boat tour in collaboration with LWCD for the City's Plan Commission, the City's Building Inspector, the City's Grounds & Facilities Director, and the City Manager. The purpose of the tour is to: let participants view city shorelands from Rock Lake's perspective; discuss shoreland zoning impacts; be able to visually identify when a shoreland is in compliance with the City's zoning ordinance or whether a zoning variances was issued; and understand what shorelands meet the "state standards" for a healthy shoreland.

Water Quality:

- This year, RLIA expanded our water quality testing efforts to include: another inlet to Rock Lake, an unnamed stream; the outlet to Rock Lake, Millpond just below the dam; as well as the inlet to Marsh Lake, Rock Creek, south of Hwy A access via parking lot. With these additions, we now test all Rock Lake's inlets and outlets. Testing for internal loading happened during: turnover Fall 2021 / Spring 2022 and turnover Fall 2022. We missed the spring 2023 test.

Volunteer	Location	Test	Frequency	Sponsor
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Miljala tributary / 100 feet west of Cedar Lane INLET to Rock Lake	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Unnamed stream / north of Miljala Shores INLET to Rock Lake	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A access via parking lot INLET to Marsh Lake	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA
Steve Bower, Carl Glassford, Jim Kerler	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A access via parking lot	Flow, temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Monthly Apr-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV) state program
Steve Bower, Carl Glassford, Jim Kerler	Rock Creek / south of Hwy A access via parking lot	Macroinvertebrate sampling Biotic Index*: 2.47 (Average since 2010) Biotic Index*: 2.20 (2023)	2x per year Apr and Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV) state program
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Rock Creek / south side of bridge/ culvert on Hope Road INLET to Mud Lake	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA
Mike and Susan Nesemann	Millpond / just below the dam OUTLET	Total phosphorus sampling	Monthly May-Oct	RLIA

Wes Dawson, Lee Gatzke	Rock Creek at Stony Rd / just downstream of wastewater treatment plant	Flow, temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Monthly May-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV) state program
Wes Dawson, Lee Gatzke	Rock Creek at Stony Rd / just downstream of wastewater treatment plant	Macroinvertebrate sampling Biotic Index*: Is very similar to that of Rock Creek / south of Hwy A access via parking lot	Monthly May-Oct	Water Action Volunteers (WAV) state program
Steve Oostdik, Bob Volenec, Keith Clark, Jean Schoeni, LWCD	Rock Lake / Deep Hole	Temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen, Total phosphorus, chlorophyll-a	Monthly Apr-Oct	Citizen Lake Monitoring Network (CLMN)
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	Temp, clarity, dissolved oxygen	Spring turnover, June, July, August	Citizen Lake Monitoring Network (CLMN)
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	Total phosphorus	Spring turnover, June, July, August	RLIA
Bob and Sue Volenec	Mud Lake	chlorophyll-a	Spring turnover, June, July, August	RLIA

Internal Loading

Testing was done: During turnover Fall 2021 / Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 / Spring 2023
(Not done)

* Biotic Index: A biotic index is a scale for showing the quality of an environment by indicating the types and abundances of organisms present in a representative sample of the environment. It is often used to assess the quality of water in freshwater ecosystems. The scale is 4 (very healthy) to 0. According to our volunteers, Rock Creek average is 2.47 since 2010, and 2.20 for 2023.

- We also continued our emphasis on reducing agricultural soil erosion and nutrient runoff through supporting Jefferson County's farmer-led group, the **Soil Builders**. This year, RLIA gave a letter of support for their grant application and helped with publicity on their Rain & Runoff Simulation event that was held in Korth Park in June.

Habitat:

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

- Last year, we reported that the DNR estimated an increase in Walleye per acre up from .2 in 2014 to 1 per acre in 2022. 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 doing electrofishing to look for young walleye and will be doing some DNA testing to try to answer that question. At this point, there appears to be minimal natural reproduction. The DNR also tagged 527 walleye last year to gain additional information on growth rates. Analysis on this project continues. More great news on the walleye front! The DNR is planning to release 20,000 walleye fingerlings this fall.

-RLIA has been interested in improving fish habitat along Rock Lake's southern shore through adding another Fish Sticks practice. This project will be re-visited once the Glacial Drumlin Trail Bridge is repaired. Currently, construction on the bridge is targeted to start this fall and run through the winter months.

- RLIA continued to be active generating awareness on Rock Lake's turtle population. Temporary residential turtle crossing road signs and protective nesting cages were deployed again this year. Last year, 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. In October, six turtles hatched and were released back into Rock Lake, very close to where the eggs were originally laid. Lastly, RLIA was able to locate two local centers who can help rehab injured turtles. If you find an injured turtle, put the turtle in a container to help prevent it from moving around. Do not manipulate any of the shell's pieces or try to fix/clean anything yourself. Call these local centers and explain the situation. They can often repair the shells, rehabilitate the turtle, and ultimately set it free. If the turtle cannot be saved, they will humanely euthanize the turtle, rescue her eggs, hatch them and then return the hatchlings to the wild. Hit turtles can linger for days---so do bring them in.

Members are encouraged to add these contacts to their phones so that they can be found easily:

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

Aquatic Invasive Species:

-Excellent news!! The testing for spiny water flea came up negative. Honestly, this test doesn't ensure that there's NO spiny water fleas in our waters, but reassuringly, if there are, the numbers are not significant. Still great news. A particular threat to spreading spiny water flea into Rock Lake is the ballast tanks of wake boats. These ballast tanks cannot be completely emptied so that a boat running on any of Madison's Chain of Lakes could bring it back to Rock Lake once they launch here.

A member of our AIS Early Detection Monitoring group developed an excellent reporting tool for the group. Many thanks! Routes are set up for both monitoring from a boat and monitoring from the shore from April-October. If you're interested in participating, please let us know at mail@rocklake.org.

-Last Fall, a handful of RLIA volunteers and Jefferson County Land & Water Conservation Department spent an afternoon digging invasive yellow iris from the Millpond, near the boat landing. This Spring, a volunteer cut the seedheads off of all the yellow iris in Tyrannena Park, the Millpond Launch, and dam area. Inroads were made into the Millpond cattail area as well. Cutting the seed heads helps prevent

the spread of this invasive species. RLIA also alerted the American Legion to a stand of yellow iris on their shoreland as well. The Legion did not give RLIA permission to cut the seed heads from that stand.

Community Service:

- Board member Bruce Ward organized our annual Spring Environmental Clean-up for removing trash and invasive Mustard Weed from parks, roadsides and yards. This was the first year since CoVid that it was done in person. Volunteers worked at Bartels beach and fire station area, Tyranena Park, and Korth Park. Pizza was shared afterwards. We hope that you will be able to join us next year.

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 are family friendly events where experts discuss different lake related topics each night. At the end of June, Jennifer Redell, DNR Conservation Biologist/Cave & Mine Specialist for WI Bat Program spoke. She brought a bat house, the equipment used to monitor bats, a fossil, a skeleton, and real bat mounts of all eight Wisconsin species. In addition, we had six Rock Lake bat survey maps available which were collected by Bob & Sue Volenec. Bats have been surveyed on Rock Lake since 2010. Fifty residents participated. Late July, Drew Harry, Land Steward at Madison Audubon's Faville Grove Sanctuary, and Lisa Gaumnitz from SOS Save Our Songbirds spoke. Lisa brought native plants for all participants donated by Johnson Nursery. We also had a song ID contest. 50 residents attended as well. Our last session will be held August 30th, 6pm, at the Korth Park Upper Pavilion, and will feature Robert Bohanan from the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association. He will be speaking about citizen science in the realm of dragonflies.

- As a follow-up to our Legendary Learning Bird evening, RLIA hosted a workshop to prevent bird collisions with windows in late August. This workshop was offered in collaboration with Madison Audubon Bird Collision Corps and SOS Save our Songbirds. SOS donated window kits to participants.

Lake Recreation:

- The City of Lake Mills decided to make two changes to their beach safety protocol which RLIA has repeatedly advocated for over multiple seasons:

- 1) If the Environmental Public Health Consortium testing determines that a swim advisory is warranted, the City **will** post that advisory at their beaches. In the past, the City did NOT post advisories.
- 2) The City will use the same signage as the Town when posting beach advisories or closures.

Unfortunately, it is **not** clear that the City will use the EPA and WDNR recommended practice of using E.coli testing when determining whether a beach advisory or closure can be removed. Last year, the City remained with its fecal coliform testing protocol which was the norm prior to the late 70's but has been proven to be less reliable, often giving false readings. RLIA strongly advocates for the City to abandon this protocol and use the EPA and WDNR recommended testing protocol testing instead.

- Several board members continue to educate themselves about the impact of enhanced wakes in Wisconsin's lakes. Many lakes are wrestling with this issue. Lake Ripley is working on an ordinance to limit wake enhanced boats on their waters.

Municipal Collaboration:

- Presented to the City's Public Works Board in February encouraging additional stormwater management practices to be incorporated into the College St renovation. We researched initiatives that are utilized in Madison on both public right of way and private property. For right of way projects, Madison implemented: terrace rain gardens, pervious pavement, rock cribs. On private properties, they offered incentives for: rain gardens, rain barrels, soil amendments. We also researched funding opportunities for the City of Lake Mills to use in implementing similar projects. The City of Lake Mills indicated that they would be open to including some of these practices in upcoming street renovations but that the timeline for College St was too short. They were, however, willing to pilot framed inlets. These are bags that are installed into the stormwater drain to capture debris and stop it from coming into the lake.

- Provided public comment as well as written input to the City's Plan Commission to advocate to changes in the City's Comprehensive Plan concerning Natural Resources. RLIA was looking to strengthen the City's commitment to Rock Lake. Our comments are posted on our website (https://rocklake.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2023/04/RLIA_CityRecommendCompPlan.pdf).

-Met with Lake Mills City Manager (Drake Daily), Grounds & Facilities Director (Eric Schreinder), City's engineering consultant (Duane Vandermaus), Jefferson Land & Water Conservation Dept, and a consultant who worked on the re-design of Ripley Beach in Cambridge (Jay Settersten, Setter Tech Natural Environment Technologies) to discuss and advocate for using Green Infrastructure during the Sandy Beach renovation. Currently, Sandy Beach West is considered by the EPA as impaired for E.coli. Ripley Beach also received this designation and they have taken action to reduce runoff and discourage geese through utilizing native plantings.

- Advocated to Town Board during public comments at their May meeting in support of a joint yard waste facility with the City. These comments were based on input that was provided during the Town's annual meeting that a number of Town residents supported some collective method of dealing with yard waste. A joint facility is also an action item on the Rock Lake Management Plan 2018-2028. Unfortunately, the Town Chair was dismissive of any efforts to work with the City on this issue.

- 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. RLIA volunteers replaced identification tags for stolen tools at both City launches. Our role at the Town launches is limited to emailing the board when tools are missing.

-During the City Council campaign season, RLIA distributed District 2 candidates' written positions on a variety of lake issues to membership through an email, and to the community, through Facebook. It is important to remember that RLIA is a 501c3 organization and that we are nonpartisan. Given the importance of Rock Lake to our community, we believe that it's valuable to inform residents of candidates' perspectives before they vote.

-Provided extensive information to JRLC in July on the issues surrounding Rock Lake's water levels including: where Rock Lake gets its waters; impact of water levels both high and low;

precipitation and ice off trends; a historical timeline of the dam operating orders; graphing of water levels (2018-2023) from March-June; the process for moving forward with a change to the dam operating orders; and recommended next steps.

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 help RLIA with its use of social media, we would greatly appreciate it.** Please contact a board member with your interest! I believe that RLIA could be using this platform more effectively.

-RLIA would like to expand into Instagram in an effort to reach younger residents. We could focus on pictures of Rock Lake and its watershed. **Are there any members interested in helping us with this effort?**

Building our organization:

Every organization needs to understand how to recruit new board members, how to develop those members and then ultimately how to retain board members. RLIA is no exception. Our board hopes to work on this foundational aspect of organizational health during the winter months. **If any members have experience guiding an organization in this process, please let us know!** We could use the help. RLIA's board members did a comprehensive audit of our website in March.

Sincerely, Susan Trier, RLIA Board President