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Volunteers Dive Into Lake Issues

Volunteers dive into water issues in Maple Grove.



The Fahrenbruchs-Trinity, Jeff Becky and Peyton, tended a drain last summer.

Photo by: Photo courtesy of Karen Karbo

Minnesotans love their lakes, and Maple Grove residents are no exception. Lakes offer four seasons of outdoor activities and boatloads of fun. Maple Grove has a chain of lakes embedded in the city's identity and way of life. What most people don't know is that, to a certain extent, every lake is impaired.

These days trouble can loom beneath sky-blue waters. The laundry list includes zebra mussels, curly-leaf pondweed, Eurasian milfoil, pollution and litter—just to name a few. Some impairments come from within and others from the outside. Nature can be complicated and hard to control. Lake water management is a delicate science, full of nuances that vary from lake to lake, season to season and even year to year.

Some Maple Grove residents take notice and take action. A group of dedicated volunteers works tirelessly to protect and improve our beloved lakes through local lake associations.

Over at Fish Lake, **David Haas** is worried that a little bilge water can harbor something bigger, like invasive zebra mussels. “It only takes one boat to infest a lake with an aquatic invasive species,” Haas says. “It’s only a matter of time.”

Through his work with the Fish Lake Area Residents Association, Haas knows how easy it is for water quality to be compromised. He watches for changes in the lake and advocates for change. The total maximum daily load (TMDL) is one benchmark measurement that reveals the maximum amount of a given pollutant that a lake can hold and still meet water quality standards, as determined by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The state of a lake can even be visible to the naked eye. “Phosphorus in the water encourages algae growth, even though it’s not as bad as many lakes. It’s still not as clear as it should be,” Haas says. “When the water warms up and you stand knee deep, you can’t see your toes. This makes the lake less attractive. Water clarity has a huge impact on property values.”

Nearby at Rice Lake, the nutrient contribution from non-native plants is a concern. “We all focus on the lake and water quality,” says Bill Kidder, Rice Lake Area Association board member.

Lake association members work diligently as resource stewards. In late 2012 and early 2013, the Fish Lake association conducted a survey. The results were used to establish goals for the lake, like preventing invasive species, improving water clarity, encouraging wildlife (especially waterfowl like geese and loons) and other lake improvements.

Other lakes have active associations too. “I’m a homeowner on Eagle Lake,” says Kyle Simonson, Eagle Lake Preservation Association board member. “All of us want a safe and clean recreational lake to enjoy, plus it makes sense for residents to protect their real estate investment.” The group has goals that include everything from an aquatic plant survey to an overall lake management plan and much more.



A desire to understand lake issues and solve problems drives dedicated volunteers. These lake enthusiasts attend meetings, undergo training, contact government officials and strive to educate the public. Fully half of the effort involves public education, according to Travis Theiss, Eagle Lake Preservation Association board member. "What people do affects the lakes more than they think," he says.

Talk to Theiss about Eagle Lake and you can only be impressed with his in-depth knowledge. Extensive training gives him a broad understanding of lake issues, especially as they pertain to Eagle Lake.

"Our lake is impaired because of external load," Theiss says. Grass clippings, fallen leaves, lawn treatment chemicals, trash, branches; just about everything outside ends up in a lake, according

to Theiss.

Debris can harm water quality and storm sewers are a gateway to the lakes. To keep storm drains clear, the city of Maple Grove has an “adopt a storm drain” program. Caretakers receive a medallion to mark their storm drains and volunteer year-round to keep drains clear.

Everyone can make a difference. Theiss would like to see other Maple Grove residents get more involved. The Eagle Lake Preservation Association could use more volunteers and as a 501(c)(3) organization, is grateful for monetary donations too.

Compared to other parts of the United States, especially the West, Maple Grove’s water concerns are manageable. “We’re blessed here in Minnesota with not having a water [quantity] issue, and I would like to keep it that way,” Theiss says.

How You Can Make a Difference:

- Volunteer at a local lake association
- Educate yourself on lake care and the environment
- Be aware of how your actions affect lakes
- Adopt a storm drain
- Consider a monetary donation to a lake group

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