

FINAL REPORT

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

For

Lake Planning Project SPL-198-09

TOWN OF MINONG LAKE FAIR

Anthony Tubbs, Project Manager

Report Prepared By
John J. Ney

On Behalf of
The Town of Minong

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Background

Minong township, in northern Washburn County, contains 20 lakes which receive heavy recreational use and host high-valued lakeshore real estate. The Minong lakes face numerous challenges to their integrity. These include shoreline development, water quality degradation, multi-use conflicts, and aquatic invasive species (AIS), most notably Eurasian watermilfoil. Lake users are very often poorly informed concerning these threats to the health of our lakes. Perhaps even more frequently, they are unaware of options and laws to ensure lake health and the sustainability of their fish and wildlife as well as their own safe use of these waters.

The Minong Town Lake Fair was conceived as a means to begin to rectify these deficiencies. Its goal was to inform and educate our citizens to be stewards of our aquatic natural resources. Objectives to achieve that goal included: 1) raising public awareness of lake issues; 2) disseminating practical information for lake protection; 3) developing appreciation of lakes as ecosystems; and 4) fostering social interactions leading to collaboration to address lake, riparian, and watershed needs.

The Lake Fair was sponsored by Town of Minong Board of Supervisors and was conducted by the Minong Town Lake Committee. The MTLC consisted of two members from each of the town's six lake associations. Pamela Toshner, DNR Lakes Coordinator, and Lisa Gabriel, Washburn County AIS Coordinator, served as advisors.

The MTLC formed five subcommittees to plan and conduct the lake fair, which was scheduled for Saturday, July 25, 2009 at the Minong town hall and grounds. Planning for the fair began in Fall 2008 and intensified through Spring 2009.

Preparations for the Fair

Committee actions and activities included:

Program - The final program was summarized in the advertising brochure (figures 1A and 1B) and consisted of five components:

a. presentations – Six speakers from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on lake issues, policies, and biota. In addition the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) held a “listening session” hosted by its president and executive director

b. exhibits – on a variety of subjects, from AIS to canoe making. Each of the six town lake associations had its own booth featuring lake history.

c. vendors – six business displayed their wares, renting exhibit space from the MTLC.

d. free lunch – featuring a pig roast by L.H. “Skip” Fiedler, town chairman.

e. hands-on activities – primarily for kids, and all with an aquatic theme, from fish printing to letterboxing for endangered species, fly fishing, and bait casting. Activities were supervised by educators assisted by the Northwoods H.S. National Honor Society and Girl Scout Troop 4525.

Advertising – The primary commercial vehicle for advertising was the weekly *Northwoods Shopper*, which is distributed free and widely in the region. Small “save the date” ads ran for 8 weeks followed by detailed quarter-page ads for two weeks (Figure 2)

and a thank-you ad (also Figure 2) after the fair took place. The *Spooner Advocate* also ran a story on the upcoming fair.

Much advertising exposure was achieved via a tri-fold color brochure (Figure 1A and B) that listed fair events. Almost 1,000 brochures were distributed to individuals and posted at area businesses and other public places. Finally, four large signs announcing the Lake Fair date and location were placed at strategic, high-traffic locations around the township.

Logistics and Design- Two 20'x40' tents and three portable toilets were rented and installed on town hall grounds on Friday July 24. Approximately 40 tables and 200 chairs were borrowed from a local church, village of Minong, and town of Wascott. The ASV system was provided by UWEX (John Haack) and Washburn County (Lisa Gabriel). Larry Damman, DNR fisheries biologist, brought and stocked a mobile aquarium. A watchman was hired to guard the premises Friday night. Following the end of the Fair at 3 p.m. Saturday, all tents, booths, tables, chairs, etc were taken down and returned by 6 p.m. Trash was deposited in a Town truck for disposal the following Monday.

Food – The free (but donations accepted) lunch was provided cafeteria-style in the town hall by a team of 20 volunteers. The meal included sliced pork, buns, beans, potato salad, chips, desert and bottled water. Coffee and donuts were also provided gratis in the morning.

Finances- The DNR Lake Planning grant was the primary source of funds for the Lake Fair. Other sources included contributions solicited from local merchants and vendors, lunch cash donations, and proceeds from a 50:50 raffle. We also received a small-grant from WAL for educational activities for children.

Response

Attendance and Effort – We anticipated total attendance of 400- 500 individuals. However, 626 people were served the noon lunch, and attendance was strong all day. Each of the six presenters had a full house in the tents. The hands-on activities had 150 child participants accompanied by a like number of adults. Given that people came and went all day, total attendance was close to 1,000. Most attendees were from the local area or summer visitors. More than 65 volunteers contributed ~700 hours to make the Minong Town Lake Fair an outstanding success.

Evaluation and Feedback – We had no formal means (e.g., questionnaire) to evaluate the actual experience and perception of attendees. However, our volunteers received many compliments but virtually no complaints. The most frequent question was “When will you have another Fair?” followed by “I learned so much!” Many of the folks who visited the lake booths and other exhibits expressed a desire to get more involved in lake stewardship. Overall, the Fair’s objectives of raising public awareness, providing practical information, and enhancing appreciation and collaboration in lake stewardship were clearly met.

Recommendations

The Minong Town Lake Committee met on Tuesday July 28 to assess its performance in planning and conducting the Lake Fair. Committee members unanimously agreed that the success of the fair was due primarily to careful planning and the fact that every volunteer did exactly what he/she committed to. Chairman Sam Lewis deserves much credit for his attention to detail and keeping each subcommittee focused on its tasks.

However, there are always aspects that can be improved. The MTLC offers the following advice to any organization contemplating a similar event:

- 1, Start planning early, especially the program.
2. Enlist the counsel of people with experience in such events.
3. Delegate responsibilities to key people who are committed to the effort.
4. Estimate financial requirements and develop a plan to obtain necessary funds from diverse sources.
5. Solicit support (financial, expertise, volunteers, etc) from all potential sources: state and federal agencies, NGOs, talented individuals, lake associations.
6. Develop an advertising plan that will reach your target audience early, often, and in multiple ways.
7. Provide something for everyone – speakers, exhibitors, kids’ activities. Maybe even a free lunch.
8. Formally and publicly thank all parties who contributed to the event’s success.

Acknowledgements

The total number of volunteers and contributors to the Minong Town Lake Fair is too large to thank here (but see Figure 2). However, we are especially grateful to our speakers who gave of their time and expertise: John Godzialski, Dave Swanson, Larry Damman, and Chris Cold of the DNR, John Haack of UWEX, and Lorna and Roger Wilson of Loon Watch. Special thanks to the Fiedler brothers for the pig roast.