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## Lakeshore residents organize to nurture Two Sisters Lake

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A perfect Northwoods summer day: a morning kayak paddle through crystal clear water, loons calling across the waves, casting for that elusive trophy walleye, sipping wine on a slow-moving pontoon boat. This is the life cherished by residents of Two Sisters Lake (a.k.a. Black Lake), and something they've banded together to protect and preserve.

As the story goes, about 35 years ago a disagreement escalated among lakeshore owners. Those on the south shore liked the water level to be high, while on the north shore low water was best. At the creek that drains this spring-fed lake, the high-level folks built up stones to block the out-flow. Then the low-water fans would sneak in and remove them.

This battle continued, back and forth, one account stating, "it almost came to blows." Finally, they asked for help. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) established an optimum level, the lake residents worked together to build a small dam on the creek, and the Two Sisters Lake Property Owners Association was born.

Not all agree with this legendary account, however. Longtime resident Dick Holscher remembers that "some people thought it was just kids fooling around at the creek. And there wasn't much opposition to the project. Once we decided to go ahead with it we always found plenty of helpers."

In fact, it was the dedication and talent of the lake residents that made the dam, and the many other efforts over the years, possible. "We've been so lucky to have the people we have," Dick said. "The township took title to the dam and was very cooperative, lending us equipment to deliver the rocks we needed. One association member handled the legal work, one engineer who had experience with the EPA drew up the plans, and another did the welding of the sheet metal. It was all completed in one day."

Two Sisters Lake Property Owners Association, TSLPOA, has been going strong ever since and is proud that the present dues-paying membership of 133 represents 75 percent of residents. And more than 75 percent of the members are seasonal residents, who manage to commit several of their limited summer days to projects like the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program.

Last year AIS logged 650 volunteer hours by association members inspecting the shoreline for Eurasian water-milfoil and purple loosestrife and patrolling the boat landing to ensure all incoming boats – up to 500 each year – are dry and clean, free of contamination.

AIS is one of TSLPOA's priorities. Efforts to keep the lake free from invasive plants and the dreaded zebra mussel, spread primarily by boats and boat trailers, have so far been successful, with just a few purple loosestrife plants found and carefully removed.

For two of the past five years, a DNR grant has helped fund paid boat landing inspectors. Association members pitched in when funding fell through, donating thousands of dollars each year toward the inspections, equipment and training.



This summer's big project at Two Sisters Lake was renovation of the dam, for which dozens of volunteers lent a hand. The goal is to hold back the spring runoff along the creek that drains Two Sisters Lake and flows north into the Wisconsin River.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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"We've spent \$8,000 each year on AIS," said current association president, Chuck Wood. "And we've still managed to set aside funding for maintenance of the dam and other problems that might come up. We also recently spent \$1,000 on new equipment for water quality testing."

### ***A body of water worth preserving***

Two Sisters, located in the Town of Newbold east of Lake Tomahawk, is one of just three lakes in Oneida County designated an Outstanding Water Resource. With a deep bed, going down 65 feet in places, and nine miles of shoreline, it is fed by springs near the northeastern shore which keep the water clean and clear and the lake level fairly consistent, despite the current drought.

Old-timers might still call it Black Lake, named not for the dark depths lurking under incredibly clear water, but for the Black family who logged the forests around the lake in the early 1900s. A real estate developer in the 1940s coined the new "classier" name.

One of the first things the association pushed for in the early years was to change the zoning regulations on Two Sisters. While the state requires 100 feet of lake shoreline per home parcel throughout Wisconsin, thanks to close cooperation with the Town of Newbold, regulations now require Two Sisters homes be built with at least 150 feet of shoreline, further protecting water quality.

A close eye is kept on that quality. Testing began with a weed survey 10 year ago and now includes periodic water sampling to monitor levels of phosphorous and chlorophyll, and tests to help determine the amount of dissolved oxygen, temperature and water clarity.

### ***Clear waters, fewer lawns, more loons***

Association members Paul Kuhn and Bob Nicholson have been testing the lake for years. "Water quality has remained pretty consistent," said Paul. "The thing we really want to watch out for is the phosphorous level. We've tried to discourage people from using phosphorous fertilizer in their property, because even very small amounts can undermine the health of the lake."

"Fortunately, you don't see many lawns around the lakeshore," said Bob. "We have a small drainage area around the lake, so there's not much runoff. That really helps out."

Bob and Paul have been joined during the past two summers by Kent Bradshaw of Rhinelander whose family owns a cabin on the lake. Together the trio manage to complete sampling four times each year, read water clarity using a new Secchi disc, and monitor the zebra mussel "stations." So far none of the pests have been found in the lake.

They also keep an eye out for the local loon family, and along with everyone else on the lake, are admittedly a bit obsessed. TSPLOA newsletter editor Mary Brodhead put it this way, "You can pillage and murder around here.... but don't mess with our loons!"

Two Sisters was a favorite of the deep-diving birds for decades, but they failed to nest successfully for several years in the early 1990s. With help from DNR wildlife expert Ron Eckstein, the association established nesting platforms in a quiet bay and placed SLOW – NO WAKE buoys nearby. They also petitioned the Town of Newbold to pass an ordinance to limit the use of jet skis. One or two loon babies have successfully hatched on Two Sisters nine of the past 10 years.

The loon report is popular at the annual TSLPOA meeting held each year on the fourth of July. It's also a time to catch up with old friends. "There is always a lot of hugging," said Mary. "And after the loons, everyone wants to meet the new people and hear the water quality report."

Business at the meeting, election of board members and reports from officers is usually followed by a speaker. Then comes the news everyone has been waiting for: which direction the annual boat parade will be taking. For 2009, it was counterclockwise around the lake shore, so entrants knew to decorate the starboard side of their vessel.

For the rest of the summer things are pretty quiet on Two Sisters Lake, but association members are working behind the scenes. New projects include raising awareness of "light trespass," a topic that has become

important to Mary and her husband, TSLPOA treasurer Rob Brodhead. "Last year we contacted an organization called the Dark Sky Society and will have an article about the idea in the newsletter," said Rob. "And we'll encourage people to go out on the water at night and look back at their own place to see if the lights are too bright."

Mary is enthusiastic. "Education is the most important thing we can do," she said. "Being a member of this association has made me aware of not just my own property and shoreline, but the health of the entire lake. It's a real legacy for all these people who have organized this group and kept it going. They've worked so hard for all of us."