

## QUIET RETREAT OR RECREATIONAL VENUE Varying Opinions of Lake Property Owners

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### INTRODUCTION

Lake Namakagon is located in the Namakagon Township of Bayfield County in Northern Wisconsin. Situated near the Chequamegon National Forest, the lake has been used as a "get away" for city dwellers and as a permanent place to live since before the days when Al Capone visited the area. More recently, however, the pace of tourism and development has quickened, resulting in an increase in property values and taxation.

In order to keep up with recent changes and to be assured representation in local decision making, area property owners formed the Namakagon Lake Association. Increasingly, concerns have been raised about various specific issues; in general terms these issues may be summarized as expressing the potential for tension between, on the one hand, the lake as an ecosystem and a quiet retreat, and on the other hand, the lake as a recreational venue. It became apparent at the meetings that there were differing opinions about appropriate use of the lake and its future. Desiring a more representative set of opinions in order to decide on policy actions and programs, the association received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to carry out ecosystem monitoring and to survey local opinion on various lake issues and concerns.

Using the grant monies designated by the DNR, a survey instrument was developed and administered to local property owners. This paper reports opinions of property owners about the use of Lake Namakagon and the surrounding area. A wide range of owners' perceptions is represented and expressed. This study allows for a better understanding of what people find desirable about their lakes, and their expectations for maintaining those desirable qualities.

More specifically, the survey allows for a better understanding of conflicting opinions regarding use of the lake for recreational purposes, such as jet-skiing, and for use as a "quiet retreat." What people will tolerate in regards to noise, pollution, over population and development is also addressed here. In addition, we have tried to identify *what* people feel should be done to remedy situations they find inappropriate, and *who* they feel should be actively responsible for action in regards to those situations.

## METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, the sample for this study was the population of taxpayers in Namakagon Township, Bayfield County. A list of the entire population of property owners (N=620) and address labels were generated by the Bayfield County Clerk. All owners appearing on the list received a survey. To insure a good rate of response, return postage was provided with the surveys. The questionnaire itself was adapted from a previous study done in Vilas County. Officers from the Lake Namakagon Lake Association made further suggestions for changes in the original survey instrument.

Bias in return rates for locals versus non-locals was tracked. Local and non-local status was determined by permanent, year-round residency in Namakagon Township. Approximately 74% of the returns came from non-locals and 26% from locals, compared to a 451 (73%) to 169 (27%) non-local to local composition in the population. The rate of response of both locals and non-locals is extremely similar to that of the population, therefore suggesting no bias in return rates between locals and non-locals. Three hundred fifty-seven questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a 58% response rate. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that these results are representative of the population of Namakagon Town.

## FINDINGS

The median length of time that persons in Namakagon Township have owned their homes is sixteen years. Lake frontage owned averages 200 feet. Approximately twenty-six percent of the respondents live in the area year-round, and another forty-eight percent reside there intermittently as a vacation get-away. The remainder of the sample stay at their Namakagon home only during the summer or on vacations and holidays. Wisconsin is home to over forty-four percent of the non-local owners, whereas thirty-seven percent are from other locations in the Midwest. Most of the remaining non-local property owners are from the southeast part of the country (9%), and the west (8%).

As predicted, the average age and educational level of Namakagon homeowners is higher than that of the general United States population. While the average age in the U.S. in 1990 was 38, for our sample the median age is 56. Similarly, the median years of schooling is 16 years, well above the U.S. population median of 13 years. Because of their higher median age and educational status, most Namakagon homeowners enjoy a state of economic security above that of the general populace. This economic stability also stems from work status. About forty percent of Namakagon people surveyed are retired. Seventy-eight percent of those presently and previously employed reported being in white-collar, professional or managerial positions, while another eighteen percent of the sample said they worked in blue-collar fields. Four percent of the surveys were filled out by people reporting their main source of employment as housewife.

While not necessarily directly useful in this study, this demographic data allows us to set the sample into a larger social context. It is important to realize that the property owners in Namakagon Township are not representative of the general population. Therefore, these results should not be generalized to other populations.

When asked why they own lake property, by far the majority of those surveyed responded that they own their property because of the view, peace and tranquility of the area. Fishing and observing wildlife were the second two most popular reasons for owning lake property. Table 1 summarizes the responses to the following question on the survey instrument: "Why do you own property on the lake?" Respondents were allowed to check all that applied. While motorized boating did appear to be somewhat important in owning lake property, it should not be confused with a desire to water-ski and jet-ski, as these are fairly low on the list of reasons for owning lake property.

**Table 1: Reasons for Owning Lake Property, number and percent.**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>percent</b>
Enjoying the view, peace and tranquility	318	89.33%
Fishing	267	75.00
Observing Wildlife	261	73.31
Motorized boating	217	60.96
Entertaining family and friends	206	57.87
Swimming, scuba, snorkeling	158	44.38
Other	60	44.78
As an investment	138	38.76
Non-motorized boating	138	38.76
Family tradition; inheritance	114	32.11
Water skiing, jet skiing	74	20.79

Respondents were also asked to chose activities they liked to do on the lake and then to indicate which of those activities were most important to them. In general, most people chose enjoying the view, peace and tranquility (89%) as the activity they most like to do on the lake. Other popular choices were observing wildlife (76%), working to maintain and improve their property (72%), and fishing (72%).

When asked to rank the three most important activities, the results were slightly different. In descending order, the number of times a given item was selected as one of the three:

Enjoying the view, peace and tranquility	273
Fishing	156
Entertaining friends and relatives	134
Enjoying the outdoors in the area/hiking/exploring	112
Observing wildlife	102
Working to maintain/improve property	102
Motorized boating	73
Water sports (swimming/scuba, etc.)	42
Non-motorized boating	13

As mentioned earlier, people feel that observing wildlife is an activity they are more likely to do than entertaining friends and relatives, but this list shows that the majority of those people do not select it as *more important* than either entertaining friends and relatives or enjoying the outdoors in the area, hiking or exploring.

While only about fourteen percent of respondents said there were activities they would like to do but can't, it is interesting to note what they listed as not being able to do. Eleven (24%) of the total forty-five people answering "yes" stated that they could not fish or swim off the shore. Most of the respondents coded into this category expressed a concern over motorized vehicles going too fast and too close to the shore, which disturbed their ability to participate in these activities. Another 27 people (59%) did not fit into any of our coding categories. The majority of these people also complained of not being able to enjoy the peace and tranquility of the area. Most found the use of jet-skis, high speed boats and snowmobiles a distinct hindrance to their participating and enjoying peaceful outdoor activities.

Even though the majority of respondents continue to find the lake shoreline very attractive (65%) and the quality of the lake water to be pretty clean or pure (89%), there appears to be no consensus about current development in Bayfield County and around the lake (see Table 2). Approximately thirty-three percent find development in the county area to be favorable, while about thirty-two percent find it unfavorable. Another thirty-five percent have no opinion. Feelings about lake development are also split. While a majority (42%) find the present level of development to be unfavorable, others (35%) find it favorable, with twenty-four percent having no opinion.

**Table 2: Assessment of development in county and on lake.**

<b>What is your opinion about current development...</b>	<b>In Bayfield County (# and %)</b>	<b>Around my lake (# and %)</b>
Favorable	113 32.75%	119 34.49%
Unfavorable	110 31.88%	144 41.74%
No Opinion	121 35.07%	82 23.77%
No answer (not included in percent)	13	12

Not surprisingly, those who favor present development in the area do so because it helps the economy and increases property values and the tax base, or because they are satisfied with the appropriateness and quality of present development. This group of people are, for the most part, happy that the area hasn't developed too quickly. Opinions of those unhappy with the current level of development include concern with overpopulation, disruption of the ecosystem, and too much inappropriate development.

When asked what they like or dislike most about current development in Bayfield County and around Lake Namakagon, most replied that they are worried about overpopulation (county=21%, lake=20%). This includes too many houses, cars and people. Other concerns expressed are over too much, inappropriate development (14%, 21%), ecosystem disruption, including water pollution (12%, 14%), and that the level of present development disrupts the north woods atmosphere (7%, 8%). Those who are happy with the present level of development mostly mention that it is good for the economy and tax base (9%, 4%) or in general that present development is appropriate and like that old buildings are being replaced with new, and smaller buildings being replaced with larger (8%, 10%).

We asked people if they have noticed changes in the conditions of Lake Namakagon. The majority of people noted no change in the amount of wildlife (56%), the sense of community (63%), the quality of water (68%), nor the general conditions (58%). Many people found the level of noise to be worse (70%), the amount of boat and water traffic more (76%), and an increase in the number people (74%). A large majority (75%) also answered that there are fewer fish in the lake.

Because so many of the residents choose to live in the lake area for its peace and tranquility, it is not surprising that there is genuine concern with disruption of this atmosphere. Of the 331 people who answered whether or not their use of the lake was ever disturbed, 91 (28%) say their use is disturbed sometimes, and another 48 (15%) say it is disturbed frequently. Another 80 (24%) of the respondents say their use was disturbed occasionally. By far, most people mentioned jet-skiing and sometimes water-skiing what that most frequently disturb their use of the lake. Jet-skiing was chosen more than forty-four percent of the time as what people find

disturbing! As the high percentage shows, it is the use of jet-skis that most perturbs local owners. In fact, many were quite vehement in their comments, some calling for an outright ban on jet-skiing and some even calling for "open hunting season on skiers." Some people did recognize that a few mis-mannered jet-skiers are destroying the reputation of the entire sport, but most of the respondents are beyond politeness in describing their feelings about how jet-skiing is destroying the tranquil north woods atmosphere of the lake.

The second most frequently mentioned item of complaint is larger boats going too fast. It was selected about sixteen percent of the time. The other two things owners feel are most disturbing are the number of people in the area, the noise they create and their general rudeness and lack of manners (13%), as well as snowmobile traffic (10%). Perhaps if the survey would have been taken during peak snowmobile season more respondents would have chosen snowmobile traffic as a reason for disruption. Although not on our list for coding, some people also complained about inappropriate use of ATVs.

In written comments, many of the home owners expressed negative feelings over tourists who visit the area but have no vested interest in its upkeep or in preserving the north woods atmosphere. These owners feel that for the most part everyone has a right to use jet-skies and fast boats, but they need to be respectful of the rights of others to enjoy the peace of the area. Most respondents suggested that boats and jet-skies should not be allowed on the lake during certain hours, should not be allowed to come too close to the shore, and should not be allowed at all on the smaller lakes. Not surprisingly then, in a later question 226 owners (64%) said they strongly favor state regulation of jet-ski use on inland lakes. Owners are also interested in managing and limiting boating on Wisconsin lakes in general (58%) and on Lake Namakagon (52%).

Most people feel a strong or very strong connection to both the Bayfield County area (222 or 64%) and to Lake Namakagon (287 or 82%), so it is not too surprising that more than half of the respondents (53%) state there is no reason that would cause them to sell their property. The other half (47%) however, do express reasons that would cause them to sell, the majority of which have to do with the disruption of the tranquil environment for which they give as their reason for living here in the first place. The concern with overpopulation, noise, jet-skis, and inappropriate use of other motorized vehicles all come into play as reasons people would be willing to sell their local property.

In order to prevent local property owners from selling, it is important that the representatives of Bayfield County understand what these people desire and expect from the area in regards to amenities, and both public and private services. We have compiled various opinions on what property owners want and how they feel about present services in the area.

We asked our sample to rate area services and amenities as either excellent, adequate, more needed, or don't know. Table 3 summarizes the owners' responses to these questions.

**Table 3: Evaluation of business services and amenities on Lake Namakagon and in the area: number and percent.**

Service....	Excellent	Adequate	More Needed	Don't Know
Dining	203 58.17%	130 37.25%	12 3.44%	4 1.15%
Shopping	21 6.27%	216 64.48%	88 26.27%	10 2.99%
Watercraft rental facilities	24 7.82%	178 57.98%	6 1.95%	99 32.25%
Availability of recreational equipment	29 9.39%	177 57.28%	7 2.27%	96 31.07%
Marinas	31 9.72%	206 64.58%	24 7.52%	58 18.18%
Places to socialize	102 30.45%	191 57.01%	19 5.67%	23 6.87%

While in some cases respondents had no opinion or did not know about the amenities we asked about, most said the services were either adequate or excellent. Aside from shopping, most owners do not feel there are more amenities of these types needed in the area. In fact, some respondents wrote that they felt there were too many of some of these services/amenities, such as the availability of watercraft rental facilities and recreational equipment. Their reasons for feeling this way have to do with their opinion on the misuse of such equipment by tourists from outside of the area.

When asked who should be involved in promoting services on the lake, most owners feel the businesses themselves should take care of this (70%). Other choices most selected were the Chamber of Commerce (57%), lake property owners (45%), and the local and county governments (33%). Most respondents did not make suggestions about what the most important actions these entities should take in promoting services. Advertising in magazines, newspaper, etc. were the suggestions most commonly made. Some people wrote that the area did not need anymore promoting, or that it was already overly promoted.

Also evaluated were county and township services, such as road maintenance and enforcement of zoning ordinance. The county and township results are summarized in Table 4. Table 5 summarizes opinions regarding state and federal government services and practices as they affect Lake Namakagon and use of property.

**Table 4: Evaluation of services received from Bayfield County and Namakagon Township, number and percent.**

Service...	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know
Road maintenance	118 34.60%	114 33.43%	95 27.86%	14 4.11%
Snow removal	207 60.70%	70 20.53%	7 2.05%	57 16.72%
Police and fire protection	138 40.71%	110 32.45%	20 5.90%	71 20.94%
Conservation practices	98 29.43%	128 38.44%	33 9.91%	73 21.92%
Enforcement of zoning	74 22.36%	118 35.65%	48 14.50%	91 27.49%
Enforcmnt. of traffic/trespass laws	87 26.28%	107 32.33%	38 11.48%	99 29.91%
Official responsiveness	103 31.40%	118 35.98%	23 7.01%	84 25.61%

Most of the county and township services listed on our questionnaire were rated as good or fair. Apparently many of the owners are unfamiliar with the services listed or have no opinion regarding them, as at least twenty percent in almost every category answered "don't know." There appears to be some concern regarding road maintenance, enforcement of zoning, as well as traffic and trespass laws. Written comments shed further light on the situation, as many owners wrote that they had witnessed inappropriate lake front development by local people. Such development included building too close to the waterfront and destruction or inappropriate landscaping of waterfront property. Furthermore, many complained about snowmobilers trespassing on their property. Property owners appear most satisfied with county and township snow removal, as well as police and fire protection.

**Table 5: Evaluation of state and federal services as they affect use of Lake Namakagon, number and percent.**

Service...	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know
Enforcement of game laws	133 39.58%	81 24.11%	25 7.44%	97 28.87%
Protection of water quality	89 26.10%	124 36.36%	35 10.26%	93 27.27%
Forest management	106 31.27%	99 29.20%	33 9.73%	149 44.35%
Land use planning	55 16.37%	99 29.46%	33 9.82%	149 44.35%
Agriculture practices	43 13.11%	72 21.95%	13 3.96%	200 60.98%
General responsiveness	66 20.18%	97 29.66%	33 10.09%	131 40.06%

As with county and township services, property owners generally find the level of state and federal services to be good or fair. Those services ranked highest are the enforcement of game laws, forest management, and protection of water quality. However, protection of water quality also received the highest percentage of people designating it as poor. General responsiveness and land use planning also appear to be of slight concern. It is important to note, however, that most respondents do not appear confident or knowledgeable enough on these subjects to rank them.

We asked our sample what actions are appropriately taken to protect Wisconsin lakes and which actions are not being adequately met on Lake Namakagon:

**Table 6: Actions appropriate to Wisconsin Lake Protection and Need for Action on Owner's Lake, number and percent.**

Action...	Is <i>appropriate</i> to protect Wisconsin Lakes		Is <i>not</i> being adequately met on the owner's lake	
Improve lake habitat/stock fish	313	91.79%	229	71.79%
Managing aquatic plants	192	58.72%	119	38.76%
Improving water quality	290	87.35%	176	56.96%
Enforcing zoning codes	252	77.30%	136	44.30%
Encouraging development	50	15.20%	33	11.04%
Restricting development	216	65.26%	144	47.84%
Managing land for deer hunting	169	52.32%	83	27.57%
Managing land for biodiversity	250	76.45%	139	46.18%
Enforcing environmental laws	272	83.95%	147	49.33%
Restore shoreline vegetation	203	61.33%	122	40.67%
Managing/limiting boating	196	58.33%	157	51.58%
Managing/limiting snowmobiling	189	56.93%	140	45.02%
Educating owners and users about lake protection	299	89.79%	208	68.42%

Owners feel that most of the resource practices are appropriate, especially attention to improving lake habitat and stocking fish, educating owners and users about lake protection, and enforcing environmental laws. Encouraging development is one of the only things this sample considers inappropriate for the area. This coincides with written comments about a desire for less development and decreased population and density in and around the lake.

Finally, we asked people who should play a role in managing the lake and of these, who should have the most responsibility. Local government, both county and town as well as property owners on the lake were selected most often as who should play a role in lake management. In descending order of importance, the state government, general public and federal government were also selected. The local government was chosen as the entity that should have the most responsibility in managing the lake, followed second by lake property owners. The final results of these questions is displayed in Table 7.

**Table 7: Who should play a role in lake management? Number and percent agreeing.**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Should have a role...</b>		<b>Has most responsibility...</b>	
Federal government	82	30.26%	22	3.62%
State government	194	66.21%	99	16.31%
Local government (county/town)	303	92.10%	241	39.70%
Property owners on the lake	303	91.82%	223	36.74%
General public	91	33.70%	12	1.98%

The two most frequently mentioned items that should be taken care of regarding lake management are Indian spear fishing and regulation of jet-skiing. Many people are upset about the amount of fish taken from the lake via spear fishing. They also express concern with the lake becoming a Muskie and Northern fish lake, as these larger fish tend to eat up the smaller fish. Earlier it was mentioned that most owners in the area felt the fish population has decreased since they purchased their land; since many owners purchased their land to enjoy fishing, this is an issue of particular concern. The desire to regulate jet-skis also comes up time after time in survey responses.

Most of the respondents are aware of the Lake Association on Lake Namakagon (89%), but most are not aware of its effectiveness. Some people point out that it is too early in the association's history to make an accurate judgement regarding its success. Even with such a high percentage of people being aware of the organization, only fifty-four percent of respondents are members. A greater amount have attended at least one meeting (74%). One of the reasons commonly given for not attending meetings is the time of day/week that they are held. Furthermore, more than half of the local owners (56%) feel that there is a need for a citizens' organization that would encompass a broader region, such as the whole watershed, or all of Bayfield County.

## CONCLUSION

This report has provided a summary of opinions regarding appropriate use of Lake Namakagon and the surrounding area. The primary concern of property owners is the misuse of the lake and other lakes in the area for recreational purposes. Inappropriate use of jet-skis and high speed boats is an example. Also apparent is a genuine concern with overpopulation of the area and overdevelopment. Most respondents wrote that there are too many cars, people and houses in the area, as well as inappropriate development along lake shores. Another issue central to homeowners is amount and type of fish available in the lakes. There is a perception that depletion of the fish population has occurred because of Indian spearing and also because of DNR policy of stocking larger game fish such as Muskie and Northern. Whether these perceptions have any basis in fact does not diminish their effect in organizing some resident's opinions of policy actions that might be taken. The expressed concerns of the respondents correspond with the fact that most of them own their property on or near the lake in order to enjoy the view, peace and tranquility as well as for fishing.

While the majority of local business amenities and services were ranked as either excellent or adequate, there appears to be a desire for "fewer" of some types of services. Due to the concern with misuse of recreational vehicles, many respondents said they thought there should be fewer watercraft rental facilities and availability of recreational equipment in general. The only amenity that there appeared to be a need for more of was shopping. It is felt that business owners should be the most responsible for promoting services on the lake via advertising; however, because owners feel the area is already over promoted, many discourage this type of advertising.

Regarding county and township services, there is a general satisfaction with the performance of government officials at all levels and most concerns are mild. At the local level, there appears to be room for improvement in road maintenance, and enforcement of zoning, traffic and trespass laws. State and federal services were also ranked highly, with only slight concern regarding the protection of water quality and general responsiveness. Most of the respondents, however, did not feel they had enough knowledge regarding these services to rank them.

Actions ranked most appropriate to Wisconsin lake protection were improvement of lake habitat and stocking fish, educating owners and users about lake protection, improving water quality, and enforcement of environmental laws. Those actions viewed as not being adequately met on owners' lakes are care of lake habitat and stocking fish, educating owners and users about lake protection, and improving water quality. Some people felt that the misuse of recreational vehicles is damaging the water quality of the lakes. This is another reason owners feel these vehicles should be regulated.

In order to address the needs and concerns of local property owners it is important that both public and private institutions come together to assure appropriate development and regulation in the Namakagon and Bayfield County area. While there are many groups who can play a role in management of the lakes, our sample believes that both property owners on the lake and local government, such as the county and township, should take on the biggest management roles. Naturalness and aesthetics are what attract both tourists and property owners to the Namakagon area. In order to preserve the beauty and peacefulness of the region, it is necessary to control those things that directly threaten the natural ecosystem. Local property owners feel that while everyone has a right to use the natural resources on and around Lake Namakagon, they also have a responsibility to preserve what is there for others to also enjoy. Because there are so many varying uses for the lake, it is necessary to balance them in order to maximize the enjoyment of everyone who wants to be part of the lake and its environment. This balance will require cooperation and communication from all affected groups.

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