

Watershed Management Conference Held in Mercer

On Wednesday, Jan. 29, Iron County Lakes and Rivers Alliance and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources hosted a watershed management conference at the Great Northern Hotel in Mercer. Fifty-four people, representatives of ICLRA, WDNR, Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department, Northwest Regional Planning Commission and various lake associations, attended.

The conference topic was discussion of a first-of-its-kind in Wisconsin watershed management plan. For years both the ICLRA and DNR have been considering the upscaling of popular Lake Management Plan grant system to encompass a complete watershed – in this case the Turtle River Watershed. The main advantages of upscaling from individual lake management to watershed management are better science and lower cost.

The keynote speaker was George Meyer, former DNR secretary, who spoke about the history and application of Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine. Attendees learned that this important environmental protection doctrine was originated here by influence of early lumber barons. The point of the doctrine is that the navigable waters of Wisconsin belong to and are held in trust for the citizens of the state. The trustees are the state legislature who can be held liable by individual Wisconsin citizens.

Following Mr. Meyer, Dave Hall, ICLRA president, stated the goals of the watershed management project which, in the beginning will be, establishment of grantee status, collection of baseline water quality data on the watershed lakes, advocate for the ICLRA members, and education projects. He emphasized that the key to success is public involvement and volunteer activity. Typically, DNR project grants require a 33% participation by citizen associations. This cost can be reduced by "in-kind" credits achieved by volunteer participation in activities such as lake testing and educational activities.

Following lunch, served by the Wolf's Den, the DNR staff, headed by DNR director of water programs, Carroll Schaal and supported by water program team manager Alison Mikulyuk and Wisconsin Extension water programs guy Eric Olson made presentations on grant opportunities for the lake study and rules for procuring them.

Finally, statements of position on the project and next steps were made by Zach Wilson of the Iron County Land and Water Conservation department, Zach Lawson DNR fish biologist and area citizen attendees. Discussion of resolution of an aquatic invasive specie, curly leaf pondweed, on Rice Lake ended the conference on a note of cooperation between the DNR and Iron County citizens and government.

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