



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

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Water quality—pure but not so simple

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

In a state known as much for its picturesque rolling farmlands as its beautiful lakes, Wisconsin struggles to find the answers to keeping them both alive and well.

In the grand scheme of things, both are essential to our way of life, yet the battle to ensure their futures escalates.

There are people who devote a lifetime to finding solutions to these competing visions: meet Jim VandenBrook.



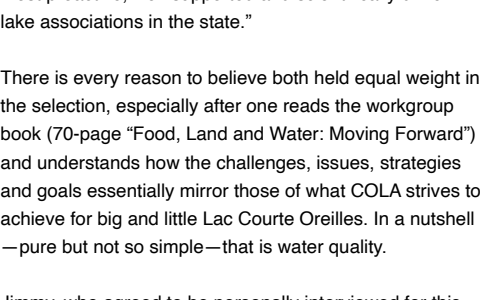
Jimmy VandenBrook, retired Executive Director of Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association. (Photo by Kathy Hanson.)

Jim—or “Jimmy” as he prefers to be called—spent 26 years with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. He was a member of the Wisconsin Land Information Board, and served on the Dane County Regional Planning Commission.

He then went on to become the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association, a nonprofit membership organization with a mission to conserve and maintain the state’s land base and soil productivity, as well as its lakes, streams and groundwater. It’s doubtful there is a person in this state who can talk with more authority—and I might add, ease—on the subject of water and land as Jimmy, who retired just days ago, May 4, 2018.

One of the hallmarks of Jimmy’s career was his [Wisconsin Food, Land and Water Project](#), a two-year effort by representatives from agriculture, business, local communities, civic and environmental groups, government and academia that came together to identify and find solutions to four primary topics related to our food system and environment. They are:

- Surface Water Quality
- Groundwater Quality
- Groundwater Quantity
- Future of Wisconsin’s Working Lands



COLA’s own Jim Coors was asked to join the Surface Water Quality workgroup as a representative of the Courte Oreilles Lake Association.

“We asked him because of his knowledge of water quality,” Jimmy said of Coors, who joined 30 other experts on this workgroup.

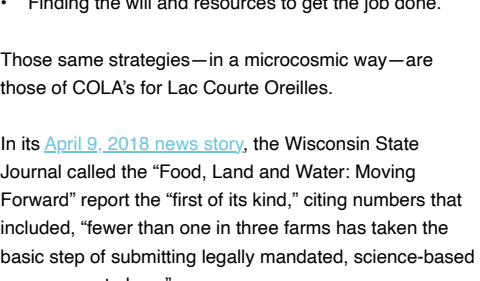
Coors maintains he was asked to come to the table, “Largely because COLA is considered to be one of the most proactive, well-supported and scientifically driven lake associations in the state.”

There is every reason to believe both held equal weight in the selection, especially after one reads the workgroup book (70-page “Food, Land and Water: Moving Forward”) and understands how the challenges, issues, strategies and goals essentially mirror those of what COLA strives to achieve for big and little Lac Courte Oreilles. In a nutshell—pure but not so simple—that is water quality.

Jimmy, who agreed to be personally interviewed for this story, said that big Lac Courte Oreilles is a special lake body, with its rare, two-story coldwater fishery. “And that is what makes it both unique and fragile,” he added.

Just as the workgroup found that Wisconsin’s most critical water quality problem is phosphorous pollution from farms, Jimmy said phosphorous is the primary degrading substance of Lac Courte Oreilles. And phosphorous is food for algae.

“The two, main, readily-controllable causes are septic and cranberry bogs,” Jimmy said of Lac Courte Oreilles. The septic issues have been addressed and largely cleaned up, after the septic code and zoning regulations were updated, he said. That leaves the cranberry bogs.



Jim Coors, COLA board of directors (Photo submitted.)

Coors said there are four bogs, one of which has a newly installed water settlement basin to limit P pollution due to pumping water in and out of LCO.

“COLA has promoted this approach, even to the extent of offering \$100,000 in set-up costs to any of the cranberry growers on the lake,” Coors said, adding that there have been no takers since the offer was made in October 2016.

But COLA persists in their efforts, and Jimmy pointed out that they’ve (COLA) been both active and effective.

“It’s one thing to make a lot of noise, but COLA has put up the money to help the farmers,” he said.

The workgroup’s strategies—summarized briefly here—include:

- Increasing groundwater monitoring and research;
- Meeting the current state nutrient management standards on all Wisconsin farms;
- Addressing acute regional nitrate contamination problems and pathogen contamination problems;
- Expanding assistance to well owners affected by groundwater contamination;
- Understanding the connection between land use practices and groundwater quality; and
- Finding the will and resources to get the job done.

Those same strategies—in a microcosmic way—are those of COLA’s for Lac Courte Oreilles.

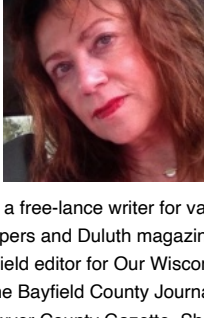
In its [April 9, 2018 news story](#), the Wisconsin State Journal called the “Food, Land and Water: Moving Forward” report the “first of its kind,” citing numbers that included, “fewer than one in three farms has taken the basic step of submitting legally mandated, science-based management plans.”

Yet Jimmy is more optimistic in his assessment of Lac Courte Oreilles, pointing out that the “biggest solution is to work with lakeshore owners,” and signaling, “You can repair and improve LCO because the sources (of phosphorous) are not so massive and the number of landowners is not hundreds, nor are they as ag-rich with farmers with a whole pile of dairy cows.”

He said it is important to note that the book is a separate but related story. “The issues are the same but the particulars are different,” he said, adding that the challenges in other parts of the state are different.

For his part, Coors hopes the book, with its “broad-based evaluation of water quality issues throughout the state, will finally motivate them (Wisconsin DNR and the Natural Resources Board) to take the serious steps needed to protect water resources.”

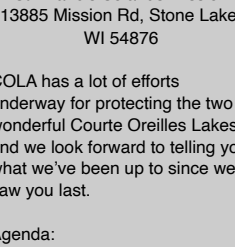
Meanwhile, COLA’s intrepid work to clean up, restore and maintain the water quality of Lac Courte Oreilles goes on. What Jimmy wants COLA and lake lovers to know is this: “You have a reasonable chance. This can be done.”



Kathy Hanson is a free-lance writer for several local and regional newspapers and Duluth magazines. She is the Sawyer County field editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, copy editor for the Bayfield County Journal, and feature writer for the Sawyer County Gazette. She was previously a staff reporter, business writer, columnist and copy editor for the Sawyer County Record.

[View this email in your browser](#)

DATES TO REMEMBER



COLA ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 16, 2018
St. Francis Solanus Mission
13885 Mission Rd, Stone Lake,
WI 54876

COLA has a lot of efforts underway for protecting the two wonderful Courte Oreilles Lakes, and we look forward to telling you what we’ve been up to since we saw you last.

Agenda:
8:30 Coffee and Rolls
9:00-9:30 COLA Business Mtg.
9:30-9:45 Break
9:45-11:30 COLA Informational Mtg.

COLA MEMBERS’ PICNIC

Saturday, July 14, 2018
Trails End Resort

LCO BOAT PARADE

July 4th weekend

Last year’s July 4th boat parade was a big success, and we’d like to support Elaine Pardi organize this year’s event. Let us know if you’d be able to help Elaine this year.

Contact communications@cola-wi.org

2018 NORTHWEST WISCONSIN LAKES CONFERENCE

Friday, June 22
Spooner High School
[\(more information\)](#)

THANKS FOR USING COLA’S LAKE OBSERVATION FORMS

In response to a recent report of a panfish die-off by an LCO resident, COLA has received the following explanation of the probable cause from Max Wolter, WDNR Regional fishery biologist.

“This is a time of year when some amount of panfish die-off is expected. 10 fish doesn’t worry me at all (I was out this weekend and saw a few dead panfish in Stukey as well, along with lots of live ones and 3 muskies!).

As far as causes, the general answer is stress. With the water warming up quickly and fish trying to transition from winter mode to spawning mode, they can become more susceptible to succumbing to several viral and fungal infections that are always present in the lake but only cause issues during times when fish are stressed. Good chance if it stays hot we will see a few more dead panfish. If people start seeing other species (walleye, musky, pike, smallmouth, cisco, whitefish, suckers, etc.) showing up dead then we would want to do more investigating.”

If you observe dead fish in the LCO Lakes, please report your observation using the [forms provided on COLA’s website](#).

2018 LCO INVASIVE AQUATIC PLANTS PRE-TREATMENT SURVEY

Some good news, some not so good news. But, with a lot of help, COLA is keeping both curly leaf pondweed and Eurasian milfoil under control. See the [preliminary report](#) from James Scharl Senior Biologist - Lake Services Manager for Wisconsin Lake and Pond Resource, LLC.

CONTRIBUTE TO A LARGE-SCALE RESEARCH PROJECT ON SWIMMER’S ITCH

Dr. Patrick Hanington (University of Alberta) and Freshwater Solutions, LLC are embarking on a large, cross-continent research initiative focused on parasites (schistosomes) that cause swimmer’s itch. They need your help [\(more information\)](#).

If you are interested, use the [Swimmer’s Itch Report Card](#) to contribute your observations to this study.

LAC COURTE OREILLES INCLUDED ON WDNR’S FINAL LIST OF IMPAIRED WATERS

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LAC COURTE OREILLES INCLUDED ON WDNR’S FINAL LIST OF IMPAIRED WATERS

The WDNR has posted the [final 2018 impaired water list](#), and LCO is included based on its low dissolved oxygen concentration. Of the **153 comments received from the entire State, 132 related to LCO!**

Of the 132 LCO comments, 130 supported the listing of LCO, and two opposed. The Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association was one of the two.

Excessive phosphorous is the probable cause of the low dissolved oxygen, but the WDNR still maintains that the cause is unknown.

Thanks to all who submitted comments to the WNDNR in support of the listing. WDNR will soon submit this final list to EPA for approval. Stay tuned for future developments.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR INSTALLING SHORELINE BUFFERS

COLA will assist property owners with shoreland restoration plans including design, bulk plant purchases, and arrangements for construction and installation services from area landscapers. **For those looking to restore or enhance their shoreline... but don’t want to go the full blown WDNR 35 foot route...try the new “COLA Lite” approach.**

Operating on the theory that “something is... better than nothing”...COLA has budgeted \$20K to assist property owners on the LCO Lakes to establish or enhance their shoreline buffer with native plants, with the size of the buffer pretty much to their choosing. So don’t miss this one of a kind offer....sign up today....first come, first served.

COLA will also help provide continuing education and a hands-on buffer zone training in partnership with the Sawyer County Lakes Forum and other local groups. The primary intended audience for education efforts extends to the Upper Couderay River Watershed lakes including Whitefish, Sand, Grindstone, Windigo, Sissabagama, Osprey, Round and Little Round.

For questions and details, email Kris Sivertson (krisw3690@gmail.com) or call 715-210-0818.

DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

COLA NEEDS YOUR HELP

COLA is recruiting new members for its Board of Directors. Please [let us know](#) if you can lend a hand - it’s fun and rewarding work.

THE LAC COURTE OREILLES LEGACY FUND

Many families have enjoyed LCO’s pristine beauty for generations. Your generous donations over the past eight years have helped preserve the lake and remain the essential funding for current activities. But now we have another opportunity to protect the lake far into the future by putting the Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation into your estate plans.

The LCO Foundation teamed up with the Eau Claire Community Foundation to create the [Lac Courte Oreilles Legacy Fund](#). Endowment gifts include: pledged gifts such as a bequest in a will, charitable remainder trust, or outright gifts, such as of cash, or stock.

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears, Long Tales, [let us know](#).

Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR COLA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2018!

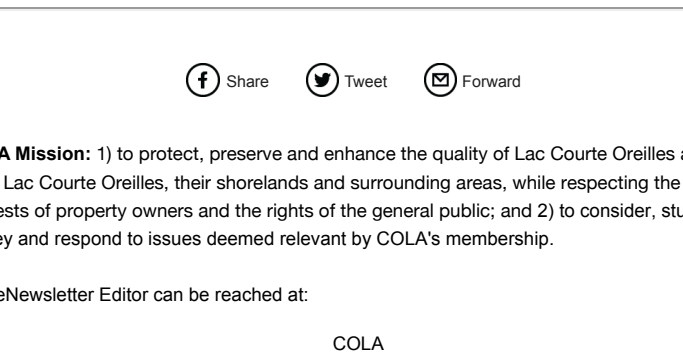
COLA membership is a pretty good deal. For only 25\$/year, you help COLA protect LCO, and you get a picnic in return!

[Renew your membership](#) today in support of Wisconsin’s most active and respected lake associations.

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES

LCO Water Depth Recorded at Thoroughfare Bridge Gauge



The first point on the chart, June 27, 2017, was when the gauge was first installed. Periodic readings are recorded as accurately as reasonable. The water itself is in perpetual motion, not only flowing downstream but rising and falling due to waves, the current in the channel, the wind which can actually push water and “stack” it toward one end of the lake or the other and the seiche effect caused by the gravitational pull of the moon and sun.

Share Tweet Forward

COLA (1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA’s membership.

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