



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Fire!

Allison Slavick
Contributing Writer

But clouds belled out in the sultry heat, the sky cracked open with a crimson gash, spewed flame – and the ancient forest began to smoke. By morning there was a mass of booming, fiery tongues, a hissing, crashing, howling all around, half the sky black with smoke, and the bloodied sun just barely visible.

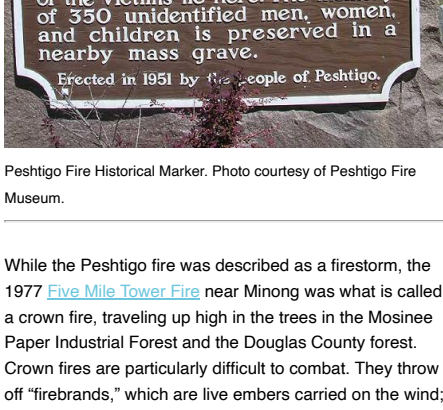
-- Yevgeny Zamyatin, The Dragon: Fifteen Stories

Fire! – now that’s a word no one wants to hear. Frightening as they are, forest fires may be part of the natural ecological cycle of events. After all, lightning has been around since the earth was formed, and naturally occurring fires may be beneficial for encouraging forest regeneration, removing weaker trees, and stimulating seed germination. These are anthropocentric views, however, and there is not much to like about a forest fire. And alarmingly, they are in the news with increasing frequency.

The 2019-20 bushfires – the down under term for a wildfire – in Australia wiped out 46 million acres of land, killed 34 people, and destroyed nearly 6,000 buildings. Started by dry lightning during a long drought, extremely high temperatures brought about by climate change and high winds, the fires killed billions of animals and are believed to have driven some endangered species to extinction. Air quality, health, and economics – just imagine the many repercussions from these devastating fires. In the U.S., fires along the west coast are in the news every day. From Oregon to southern California, homes and lives, livelihoods and pets, family heirlooms and baby birds in nests, are lost to fire. Whether started by accident, carelessness, arson, or lightning, wildfires are here to stay.

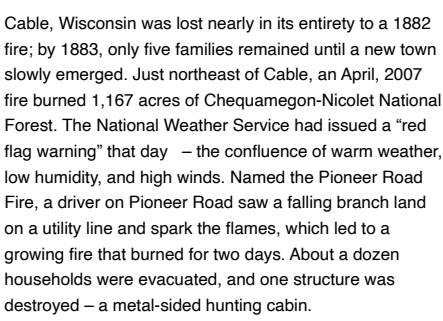
Wisconsin is no stranger to fires, and the [Peshtigo fire of 1871](#) has its own Museum adjacent to burial grounds for some of the estimated 2,500 people who died. So many people in the town of 1,700 perished that few were left behind to identify the dead, and the cemetery includes a mass grave for 350 men, women, and children. The cause of the Peshtigo fire is unknown. With little warning, sheets of flame roared through the town on October 8 and completely destroyed, literally, the town. It was a perfect storm of climate, wind, logging practices, and the nature of the town of Peshtigo itself as described by the Peshtigo Fire Museum:

"Because Peshtigo was surrounded by great forests, wood was plentiful. Most buildings in the community were made of wood, complete with wooden shingles. Wood was stacked next to the houses for winter. Sidewalks were made of boards, and trails between towns were updated to corduroy roads made of split logs. Bridges were made of planks supported by timbers. Household goods included wooden tubs, broom handles, clothespins, barrels, and pails. Sawdust from the woodenware factory covered the streets to keep down dust and mud, and was also used to stuff mattresses; the excess sawdust was piled. When the low river levels from the drought of 1871 prevented timber from being floated, the logs were piled near the riverbanks."



Peshtigo Fire Historical Marker. Photo courtesy of Peshtigo Fire Museum.

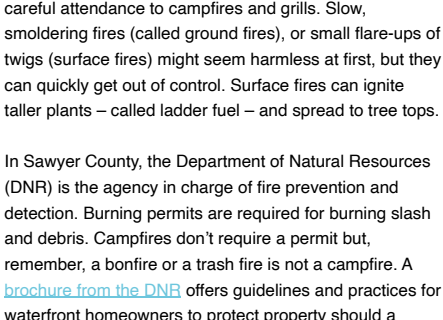
While the Peshtigo fire was described as a firestorm, the 1977 [Five Mile Tower Fire](#) near Minong was what is called a crown fire, traveling up high in the trees in the Mosinee Paper Industrial Forest and the Douglas County forest. Crown fires are particularly difficult to combat. They throw off "firebrands," which are live embers carried on the wind; they spread fire. The Five Mile Tower Fire stretched for 15 miles and called forth 1,600 firefighters. Sixty-three buildings were lost. The result of an unattended campfire and burning 13,000 acres, an interesting outcome was the destination of the standing dead timber once the fire was extinguished. Mosinee Paper pulverized the trunks, branches, and cones and sold the chips to turkey farmers for pine-chip turkey bedding. The charcoal in the chips helped control odors.



The Five Mile Tower Fire near Minong burned 13,000 acres. Photo: Wisconsin DNR.

Cable, Wisconsin was lost nearly in its entirety to a 1882 fire; by 1883, only five families remained until a new town slowly emerged. Just northeast of Cable, an April, 2007 fire burned 1,167 acres of Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. The National Weather Service had issued a "red flag warning" that day – the confluence of warm weather, low humidity, and high winds. Named the Pioneer Road Fire, a driver on Pioneer Road saw a falling branch land on a utility line and spark the flames, which led to a growing fire that burned for two days. About a dozen households were evacuated, and one structure was destroyed – a metal-sided hunting cabin.

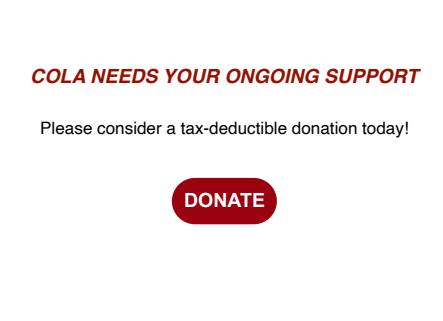
Minnesota is no stranger to forest fires: the Turtle Lake Fire of 2006 in the Boundary Waters – 2,085 acres burned due to a lightning strike. The [Ham Lake Fire](#) of 2007 – 75,000 acres of Superior National Forest on the Gunflint Trail, lost to an unattended campfire, with \$11 million spent to fight it. The 2011 [Pagami Creek Fire](#) in the Boundary Waters – 92,682 acres lost to a lightning strike and \$21.6 million to fight it. And back in Wisconsin – the 2013 Douglas County, [Germann Road Fire](#), started by a spark from a logging operation, near Gordon – 7,500 acres and 23 lost homes.



The Ham Lake Fire burned 75,000 acres along the Gunflint Trail in Minnesota. Photo: USDA Forest Service.

Are you scared yet? The horror of a fire – to people who live nearby and to the animals that live there – is apparent. All too often, in modern times, forest fires are caused by humans, yet who doesn't know Smokey Bear's admonishment? Most everyone can name the steps that should be taken to minimize the risk of fire, beginning with careful attendance to campfires and grills. Slow, smoldering fires (called ground fires), or small flare-ups of twigs (surface fires) might seem harmless at first, but they can quickly get out of control. Surface fires can ignite taller plants – called ladder fuel – and spread to tree tops.

In Sawyer County, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the agency in charge of fire prevention and detection. Burning permits are required for burning slash and debris. Campfires don't require a permit but, remember, a campfire or a trash fire is not a campfire. A [brochure from the DNR](#) offers guidelines and practices for waterfront homeowners to protect property should a wildfire occur. A [home assessment](#) and [checklist](#) provide further guidance. These resources provide information about simple steps such as keeping gutters clean of plant debris and removing dead, overhanging tree limbs to prepare your "home ignition zone." In areas of extreme danger, a [water pumping and sprinkler system](#) might be installed.



A 2007 fire in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest destroyed a hunting cabin. Photo by Allison Slavick.

Regardless of a fire's origin, fuel source, and method of spreading, no one wants an out-of-control and unplanned fire nearby. Keep your fire extinguishers charged. Be sure emergency vehicles have [good access to your driveway](#). How often have you heard someone at a campfire, as they are retiring for the night, say "it will burn itself out"? Use more caution than that with campfires. Take care of your property and show concern for your neighbors, and the plants and animals that live in our beautiful forests. They are what make northwest Wisconsin a special place in which to live.

COLA NEEDS YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Please consider a tax-deductible donation today!



Issue #44 October 12, 2020

[View this email in your browser](#)

HAVE A GREAT WINTER!

This is the last issue of Short Ears, Long Tales for 2020

We'll be back next Spring.

COLA NEEDS YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Please consider a tax-deductible donation today!



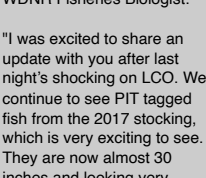
COLA'S VIEW FROM THE DOCK SURVEY

If you haven't already, please take a few minutes to complete this [survey](#) and COLA. If you are a resident, own, or rent property on or near Lac Courte Oreilles – or if you just care a lot – your feedback and observations are important.



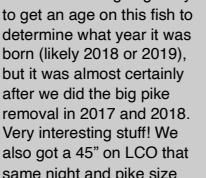
WHAT DO BEAVERS HAVE TO DO WITH WILDFIRE?

A nice "elevator video" by Dr. Emily Fairfax, California State University - Channel Islands.



LCO CONSERVATION STOCKS AREA LAKES WITH WALLEYE FINGERLINGS

We put a bunch of nice fat extended growth walleye from our new hatchery into Big LCO last Friday ([more](#)).



A NATURAL-BORN MUSKY IN MUSKY BAY!

A note from Max Wolter, WDNR Fisheries Biologist:

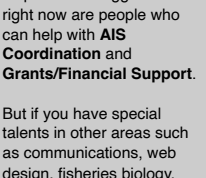
"I was excited to share an update with you after last night's shocking on LCO. We continue to see PIT tagged fish from the 2017 stocking, which is very exciting to see. They are now almost 30 inches and looking very "safe" from all predators except for people.

"But here's the even more exciting piece of news: we found what I have to conclude is a natural born musky. It was 10 inches shorter than the stocked 2017 fish and did not have a PIT tag. We caught it in some of the reed beds on the south side of the lake west of Musky Bay. This is a very notable fish. From what I can tell, it is the first natural born fish that we have captured out there since the 1970's. We are going to try to get an age on this fish to determine what year it was born (likely 2018 or 2019), but it was almost certainly after we did the big pike removal in 2017 and 2018. Very interesting stuff! We also got a 45" on LCO that same night and pike size continues to be pretty good, though a few smaller ones starting to show up.

"We spent two nights on the Chip and the results there were also encouraging. We got PIT tagged fish from our fall 2019 stocking (now in the upper teens) and some from the 2016 stocking, which at a 2 years old are now in the 31-36" range. Pretty nice growth. At some point this fall I will update the map of where we caught them all and what stocking location they came from.

"Biggest musky we shocked this fall happened to be on the smallest lake we stocked. A 46" fat fish from little Island Lake in Winter. Three lakes left, but wanted to update you all on the LCO news."

P Max H. Wolter
Fisheries Biologist
Hayward Service Center
Bureau of Fisheries
Management
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
(715) 634-7429
Max.wolter@wisconsin.gov

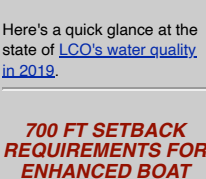


SEE ANYTHING WEIRD?

If you observe green water, algal mats on the surface or floating or dying fish anything out of the ordinary - please take pictures and report this using COLA's [observation forms](#) immediately! COLA will alert the WDNR, the LCO Tribe, collect water samples, etc., to follow up.

Please, if you see something, do something.

Do your part to help enhance and preserve the LCO Lakes!

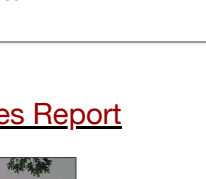


LCO NEEDS YOUR HELP

COLA is a **volunteer organization**. That means essential jobs don't get done unless someone steps up to help out. The biggest needs right now are people who can help with **AIS Coordination and Grants/Financial Support**.

But if you have special talents in other areas such as communications, web design, fisheries biology, recreation, water quality, environmental mitigation, social services, NGO operations, ... or even something we haven't thought of yet but you think we should be doing, please step up.

COLA can provide all training and support to do these essential jobs. Contact communications@cola-wi.org if interested or you need more information.



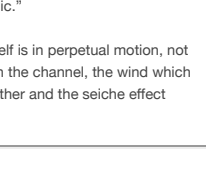
LCO WATER QUALITY SUMMARY FOR 2019

Here's a quick glance at the state of [LCO's water quality in 2019](#).



700 FT SETBACK REQUIREMENTS FOR ENHANCED BOAT WAKES

A enhanced boat wake ordinance became effective on November 12, 2018. To view the ordinance [click here](#).



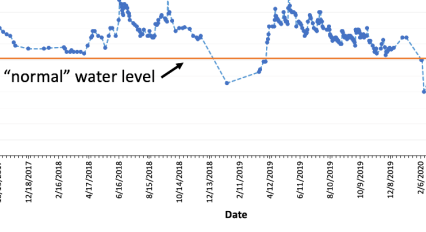
ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES



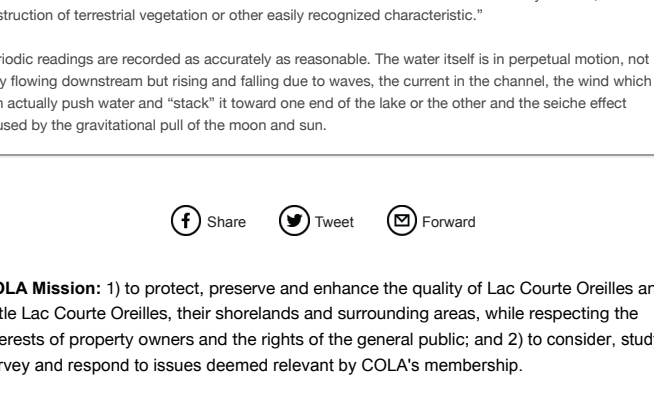
Allison Slavick works as a consultant to nonprofits all over the country, especially museums. For fifteen years she directed the Cable Natural History Museum, and previously worked as a scientist at the New York Botanical Garden and the Smithsonian Institution. She mountain bikes, skis, and picks berries near her home on Crystal Lake in southern Bayfield County. Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles may be sent to her at allison.slavick@gmail.com.

Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles maybe sent to communications@cola-wi.org.

COLA's 2020 State of the Lakes Report



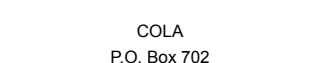
STATE OF THE LAKES
KEVIN HORROCKS, COLA PRESIDENT



Volunteers regularly monitor the depth gauge at the Thoroughfare bridge. The gauge and the chart readings are in tenths of a foot (1/10 foot = 1.2 inches). The first point on the chart, June 27, 2017, was when the gauge was first installed. The USGS "normal" water surface elevation for big LCO is 1287 feet and is represented by the lower orange line.

The Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) is represented by the upper orange line. The OHWM establishes the boundary between public lakebed and private land, was established for big LCO in 1955 and is 1289.27 feet above mean sea level. The OHWM is "the point on the bank or shore up to which the presence and action of the water is so continuous as to leave a distinct mark either by erosion, destruction of terrestrial vegetation or other easily recognized characteristic."

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.



COLA Mission: 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.

The eNewsletter Editor can be reached at:

COLA
P.O. Box 702
Hayward, WI 54843
communications@cola-wi.org