



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Riprap Is Not The Answer

Healthy Shorelines Benefit Everyone

By Allison Slavick

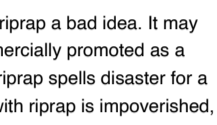
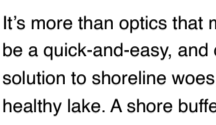
Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.

-Terry Tempest Williams

Riprap. It's a harsh, unpleasant sounding word, not melodious and satisfying like "dragonfly nymph," or "jumping frogs" and "minnows" or "wild iris," words that conjure up a pleasant northern lakeshore. The word riprap originates from both the 1800s nautical term "rip-rap," which referred to a stretch of rippling water, and riprap, a sharp blow, of use in the 1570s. Subsequently, either spelling came to refer to loose stones placed on soft ground or in water, where they can act as a foundation: they break the "rip" current or the rapping of waves.

As large rocks or even chunks of concrete are placed – commonly dumped (there's no mortar to hold things together) – along a stretch of shoreline they are harsh on the eyes, too. Riprap is used as a quick-and-easy method of breaking onshore wave action that might lead to erosion. Waves are energy, and energy can move soil and the natural shorelines that make LCO and Little LCO special.

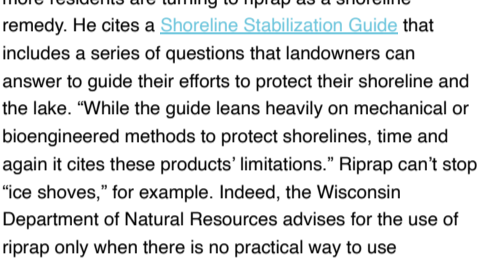
Waves are not the only cause of erosion. Some lake homesites have been denuded of native vegetation through construction or the establishment of a lawn right down to the water's edge, without any thought to what those actions mean for the shoreline or water quality. Docks, piers, and boat lifts may also wreak havoc. The movement of ice, another form of energy, can erode or shove the shoreline.



Examples of the poor use of riprap. Fortunately, these are NOT from Lac Courte Oreilles, but they do illustrate poor landscape and erosion control practices common to riprap installations.

It's more than optics that make riprap a bad idea. It may be a quick-and-easy, and commercially promoted as a solution to shoreline woes, but riprap spells disaster for a healthy lake. A shore buffered with riprap is impoverished, leading to irrevocable changes to the natural environment. It's like a chain reaction. Runoff from fertilized lawns can lead to algal blooms, which lead to oxygen depletion, which can kill fish.

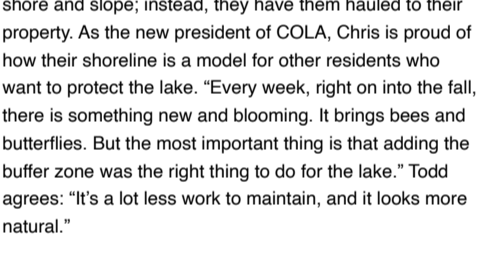
Contrast a riprapped shoreline to a natural shoreline, which filters pollutants and balances water quality, provides habitat for insects, and food sources for birds, amphibians, and reptiles, and fish.



Chris and Todd Bedwell have effectively used natural landscaping to reduce erosion on their sloping Lac Courte Oreilles shoreline. The rocks at lake level are natural and occur on much of Lac Courte Oreilles. Photo provided by Chris Bedwell.

Lake resident Gary Pulford has noticed that more and more residents are turning to riprap as a shoreline remedy. He cites a [Shoreline Stabilization Guide](#) that includes a series of questions that landowners can answer to guide their efforts to protect their shoreline and the lake. "While the guide leans heavily on mechanical or bioengineered methods to protect shorelines, time and again it cites these products' limitations." Riprap can't stop "ice shoves," for example. Indeed, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources advises for the use of riprap only when there is no practical way to use vegetation in designing shoreline protection or restoration. As riprap use increases, shoreline habitat is "homogenized," meaning there is no variety. Science correlates homogenization with detrimental changes in the makeup of a lake's fishery. Like to fish? Stay away from using riprap.

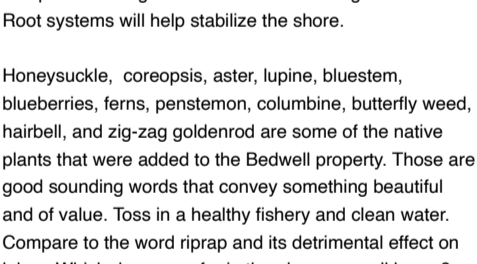
Back in 2014, COLA was fortunate to receive a [Wetland & Shoreline Habitat Restoration Grant](#). The grant provided 75% funding to lake dwellers who, following a site analysis by a professional, could opt to enhance or restore their shoreline with native vegetation. Chris and Todd Bedwell were among the property owners who participated. A few rows of rocks along their shore had landscaping fabric underneath, placed there years ago. A grassy lawn, sloping to the edge of the lake, was difficult to maintain. Following the assessment, instead of adding to the rocks to limit erosion, they chose a native restoration in consultation with Sarah Boles of Northern Native Landscapes. This included removal of the lawn, hostas (a favorite food of deer), and weedy species, and the addition of about 650 native plants, including one tree.



Restoration of native plants will prevent erosion, and a natural landscape is easy to maintain once established. Photo provided by Chris Bedwell.

The Bedwells no longer place their boat lifts along the shore and slope; instead, they have them hauled to their property. As the new president of COLA, Chris is proud of how their shoreline is a model for other residents who want to protect the lake. "Every week, right on into the fall, there is something new and blooming. It brings bees and butterflies. But the most important thing is that adding the buffer zone was the right thing to do for the lake." Todd agrees: "It's a lot less work to maintain, and it looks more natural."

Boles revisited the Bedwell property in 2021 and saw successful plant generation. "There were a few nonnative, weedy species, but otherwise there was a remarkable transformation to a healthy lakeshore," said Boles. She attributes the success of the project to Chris and Todd's eagerness to participate. "Property owners need to get involved and be willing to get dirty," she continued. "It's crucial to learn why certain plants are used and how they benefit the shore and lake." When a property owner realizes a restored shoreline is not going to look like a traditional flower garden, it becomes alive to the owner. It's a place where kids and grandkids can watch dragonflies, butterflies, and frogs. "When you compare this to what you might see on a lawn, "the difference in life is astounding," Boles said.

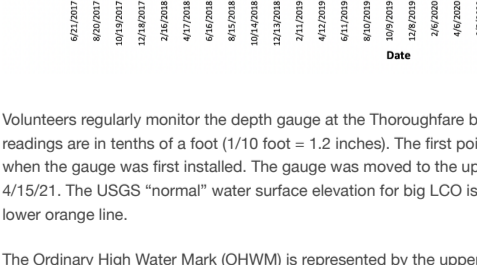


Native plants are attractive habitat for wildlife, easy to maintain, and protect Lac Courte Oreilles. Photo provided by Chris Bedwell.

Boles continued: "It's all about education. Why are we doing this? How will this help the lake?" Boles said that in the early days of the DNR program, a selling point was beautification, and it gave people the impression that their shoreline would be a garden. "It's not a garden. It's habitat." A reality of healthy northern Wisconsin shorelines is that there is a high percentage of trees and shrubs that provide stability to slopes. This conflicts with the desire to see the lake. While people can "edit" their shoreline and create an open viewing corridor, a native plant focus encourages privacy and serves as a buffer to noise as well.

What do you do if your site has old riprap in place, or you want to make amends for a bad decision? If you have a lawn, establish a wide, un-mowed buffer zone between the riprap and the lawn. You can wait to see what native species emerge in the buffer and add others, too. If there's a plastic barrier under the riprap, punch through it and plant native grasses and shrubs among the rocks. Root systems will help stabilize the shore.

Honeysuckle, coreopsis, aster, lupine, bluestem, blueberries, ferns, penstemon, columbine, butterfly weed, hairbell, and zig-zag goldenrod are some of the native plants that were added to the Bedwell property. Those are good sounding words that convey something beautiful and of value. Toss in a healthy fishery and clean water. Compare to the word riprap and its detrimental effect on lakes. Which do you prefer in the title you call home?

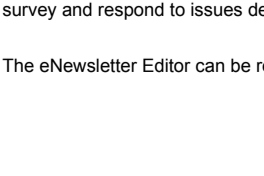


Click [here](#) for the 2021 report.

COLA NEEDS YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Please consider a tax-deductible donation today!

DONATE

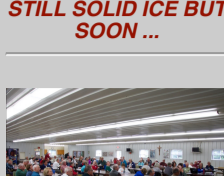


Allison Slavick is a nature lover who bicycles, skis, and picks berries near her home on Crystal Lake in southern Bayfield County.

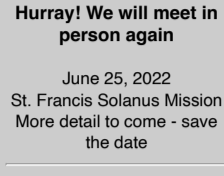
Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles may be sent to her at allison.slavick@gmail.com.

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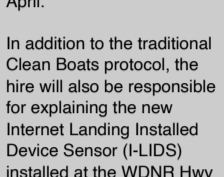
STILL MELDICE BUT SOON ...



2022 COLA ANNUAL MEETING

Hurray! We will meet in person again

June 25, 2022
St. Francis Solanus Mission
More detail to come - save the date



HELP WANTED!

Want to make \$5K this summer and protect LCO?

COLA needs to hire a Clean Boats inspector for the 2022 season on LCO. Must be available for weekend work, Saturdays and Sundays, May through September. A training day will occur sometime in the last half of April.

In addition to the traditional Clean Boats protocol, the hire will also be responsible for explaining the new Internet Landing Installed Device Sensor (I-LIDS) installed at the WDNR Hwy K ramp. We will provide a primer on the instrument.

If interested, contact communications@cola-wi.org.

EVEN MORE HELP WANTED!

COLA needs someone to help with grant administration. Every year COLA applies for and administers grants, mostly from the State of Wisconsin, that deal with water quality and other matters affecting Lac Courtes Oreilles.

COLA is looking for a volunteer to help the board of directors with application procedures, budgets, deadlines, and other details.

This would be an easy and rewarding way to help COLA.

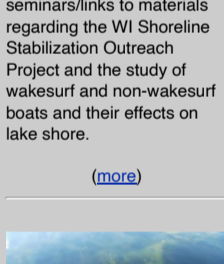
Contact communications@cola-wi.org if interested or you need more information.



2022 NATURAL HISTORY FIELD TRIPS

Here are this year's natural history field trips sponsored by the Extension Program at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College near Hayward, Wisconsin. For more information, contact Cali Quaderer-Cuddy, Extension Program Coordinator, at cquaderer@lco.edu

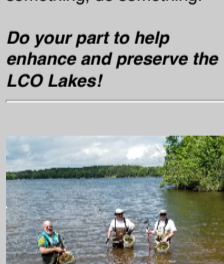
- 5/14 Hardwood Forest Salad Bar
- 5/25 Morgan Falls/St. Peter's Dome
- 6/1 Pipestone Creek/Black Bear
- 6/22 Arnicon Falls/Wisconsin Point
- 7/6 Lost Creek Falls
- 7/20 Little Girl's Point, MI
- 8/17 Brunswiler Canyon
- 9/17 Hawk Ridge, Duluth, MN
- 9/24 Blue Hills Felsenmeer
- 9/8 Juniper Bluff
- 9/15 Morgan Falls/St. Peter's Dome- autumn colors



2022 WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

7:00 - 10:00 pm
April 30, 2022
Park Center, Hayward
Sponsored by Landmark Conservancy

[\(more\)](#)

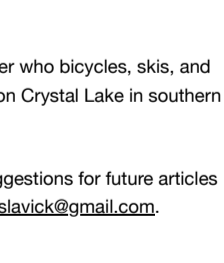


WISCONSIN LAKES AND RIVERS CONVENTION

April 6-8, 2022
Stevens Point, WI

This year's theme is "Protecting What We Love for the Future." The hands-on workshops and engaging presentations during this year's event will be centered around this theme of protecting our water resources.

[\(more\)](#)



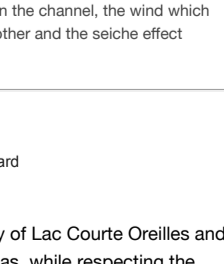
MIDWEST GLACIAL LAKES PARTNERSHIP

2022 WEBINARS

The Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership (MGLP) brings together resource agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to protect, rehabilitate, and enhance sustainable fish habitats in naturally formed lakes of the Midwest.

Note, in particular, the seminars/links to materials regarding the WI Shoreline Stabilization Outreach Project and the study of wakesurf and non-wakesurf boats and their effects on lake shore.

[\(more\)](#)



LAKE OBSERVATION FORMS

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.

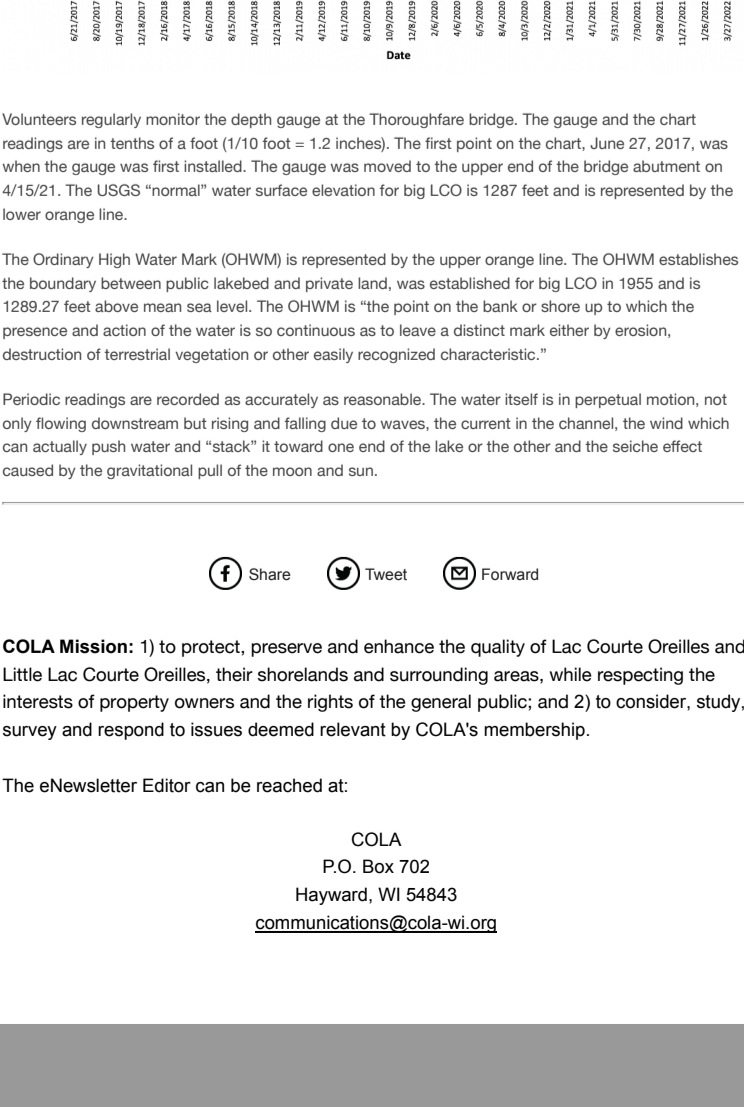
Do your part to help enhance and preserve the LCO Lakes!

LCO NEEDS YOUR HELP

COLA is a **volunteer organization**. That means essential jobs don't get done unless someone steps up to help out. Contact communications@cola-wi.org if interested or you need more information.

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[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES](#)



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 gauge was moved to the upper end of the bridge abutment on 4/15/21. 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.

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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 rights 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:

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