



# Lakeside Neighbor Handbook

—  
Courte Oreilles Lakes Owners Manual





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This booklet was produced by the Courte Oreilles Lakes Association – COLA.  
We hope you find this helpful and informative, and that you will join us in our mission  
to protect and preserve these lakes that we all love, for now and future generations.  
[www.cola-wi.org](http://www.cola-wi.org)





## Welcome to the Lake!

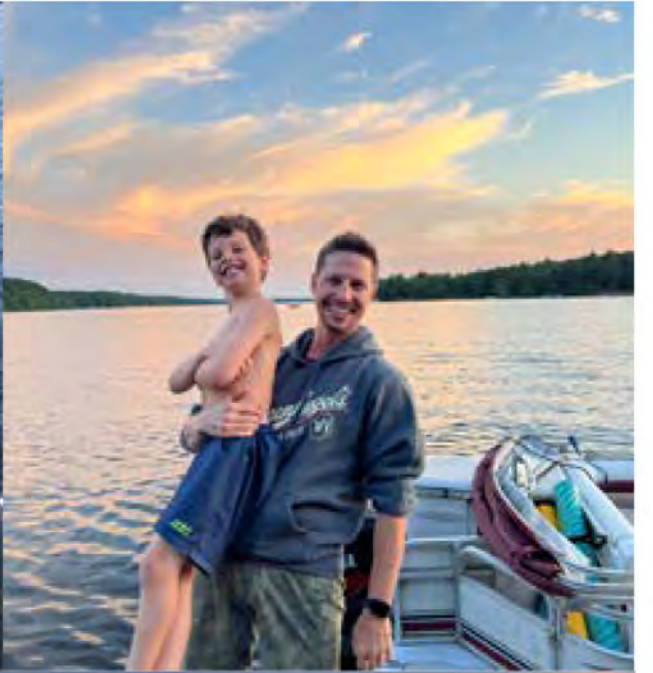
Perhaps your family has had a place on Lac Courte Oreilles or Little Courte Oreilles for generations. Lucky you!

Or maybe you recently joined our lake community. Also, lucky you.

We're all neighbors and intimately connected to the lake and the memories, friends, fun and peace it brings us.

And, we're all stewards of this beautiful and fragile environment.

This "user's manual" is designed to help you learn more about this special ecosystem, enjoy it responsibly and preserve and protect it.



## History of Courte Oreilles

The two Courte Oreilles Lakes were formed 12,000 years ago when the last of the Ice Age glaciers, a mile thick, left the lakes and rivers of Northern Wisconsin.

For thousands of years since, native people, primarily the Sioux, Ottawas and Ojibwa, migrated, settled and fought for this land and lakes. In 1660, two French Canadians, Raddison and Groseilliers, the first white men to explore the area, spent the winter with these native people at what became Courte Oreilles.

The name came from these earliest French explorers who found the Ottawas with a custom peculiar to tribes they had encountered. While neighboring tribes chose to distend their ear lobes by wearing heavy earrings and pendants, the Ottawa actually cut off part of their ears, hence the French name “Courte Oreilles” or short ears.

For several hundred years, the area evolved primarily with the Ojibwa, the fur trade and French, then British, and then American interests. Around the 1880s, expansive logging brought jobs, money and new awareness of the area’s lakes. Individuals and developers began acquiring shoreline properties, building cabins, resorts, lodges and private clubs oriented toward fishing enthusiasts. The Hayden Club, Omaha Club, Wismo Club, Ashland Club, Kentucky Club, Moccasin Lodge, Chicago Club and others spread around LCO.

New settlers from Chicago, Milwaukee and other locations “within range” learned of this pristine lake land. Some of these “pioneers” obtained land directly from tribal members, others



Ojibwe tradition and celebration are the centerpieces of the Honor The Earth Celebration Pow Wow held each summer. Dancing, crafts and food create an authentic tribal experience. *photo: Kelth R. Crowley*

from developers. An Illinois couple, the C.H. Staatses, heard about lake lots available between the two lakes in 1924 through an ad in the Chicago Tribune. When they arrived on Wolf Point, the couple took just one long look at the big lake before signing a contract. Their package deal: \$100 for Lot 1 plus \$400 for a 14 x 20 vertical log cabin with screen porch facing the lake to be built that very summer.

The stories of old and new “settlers” continue to evolve, each creating its own history of family adventure in the LCO woods and water, of fish tales and of wild critters.



The main house of the Lakeshore Fishing Club, now a private residence, remains on the far west end of the lake.



Chief Billy Wolf (fourth from left) and members of the Staats family show off yet another big catch from Lac Courte Oreilles. (Circa 1925)



On July 24, 1949, a new world record Musky was caught by Cal Johnson in a weed bed just south of Angler’s Haven. It weighed in at 67 pounds, 8 ounces. Now proudly displayed at The Moccasin Bar in Hayward.



As recently as 1969, Lac Courte Oreilles supported at least 25 resorts; in 2023, only Trails End, Stone Hill and Angler’s Haven remain.

### Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles

The details and descriptions in this beautiful book will help you feel the history of LCO, as told by people who settled its shores and lived on these lakes for centuries.



## Land Acknowledgment

The Courte Oreilles Lakes Association acknowledges that Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles lakes are on the traditional lands of the Ojibwe and are referred to as one in their traditional languages of ojibwemowin, Odaawaa Zaaga' inganiing (Lake of the Ottawa). Odaawaa Zaaga'iganing is a pristine lake in and along the western edge of the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation. For centuries, this body of water, surrounding reservation lakes and forests sustained the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) with all the resources necessary for subsistence living.

Traditional Ojibwe belief is steeped in a way of life that exists today. The cosmology of the Ojibwe is rooted in a deep understanding that everything in creation is interrelated, and that human existence is predicated on the gifts of all other beings. This is the foundation of Anishinaabeg belief, and the prerequisite entrusted to LCO Conservation for stewardship and protectors of life. The Lac Courte Oreilles Conservation Department's mission also correlates with the seventh-generation philosophy, which is the concept that any decisions made today will have an effect seven generations into the future.

COLA has maintained a long-standing partnership with the LCO Conservation Department in protecting the lakes, and works closely with COLA volunteers. We recognize the importance of collaboration and mutual respect as illustrated in our current and past efforts of stocking walleye, erosion control, invasive species mitigation and water quality enhancement.

Since 1996, Lac Courte Oreilles Conservation has collected water



quality data for phosphorus, chlorophyll-a, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, and water clarity. This scientific data documents the long-term trends, guides policy and influences actions in protection of the lakes.

The partnership has successfully requested the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designate all of Lac Courte Oreilles as an impaired water based on low dissolved oxygen in addition to proposing a Site-Specific Criterion for total phosphorus of 10 µg/l as an LCO lake-wide average concentration.

COLA has also partnered with the LCO Tribe in locating, mapping, monitoring, and mitigating aquatic invasive plants. Both parties share expertise and resources to combat two aquatic invasive species: curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil. Both plants threaten fish habitat and recreation on the lakes.

Clean water is fundamental to the health of the Lac Courte Oreilles watershed and the life it supports. Together, COLA and the LCO Tribe will continue to develop sustainable solutions that ensure water quality and availability for the seventh generation.

Additional Resources:

LCO Tribe Conservation Dept:  
[www.lcotribe.com/lco-conservation](http://www.lcotribe.com/lco-conservation)

Woodland Community Radio,  
the LCO Tribe's radio station:  
[www.wojb.org](http://www.wojb.org) and 88.9 FM



## Natural Habitat

If asked what attracts you to northern Wisconsin, you might say “water and forests, of course!” More than 60% of Sawyer County is forested. The County’s 496 lakes and impoundments make this a special place to live, and Lac Courte Oreille and Little Lac Courte Oreilles are gems among them.

Around the lake, the predominant forest type is deciduous, meaning the trees lose their leaves in the fall. Oak, aspen, maple and birch are the dominant trees. Mixed coniferous forests, also found here, include red and white pine.

Common wildflowers in the spring are trilliums, orchids, violets, bloodroot, and jack-in-the-pulpit. Completing this idyllic scene are lush ferns. Many of Wisconsin’s wildflowers are protected and should not be picked or collected. Marshes (look for cattails) and bogs (look for black spruce and tamarack, a spruce-like tree that turns golden in the fall and loses its needles) are found along the lakeshore and help protect water quality.

Undisturbed shorelines contribute to enjoyment of the lake, erosion prevention, to the life cycles of plants and animals, and to maintenance of a healthy fishery.

Everyone benefits when your property’s shoreline is left in its natural state or restored with native plants. Swamp milkweed, red osier dogwood, and joe-pyeweed are just three of many plants that are native to our shores and help bees and other pollinators. Be informed about what shoreline disruptions are legal and any required permits.



**Heads up!** Two plants worth knowing well are poison ivy and water hemlock. Poison ivy is a vine that may climb trees or appear as a ground cover in the woods. Look for shiny leaves in groups of three, and white berries in the fall. You likely know that contact with poison ivy leaves and sap can cause an itchy rash.

Water hemlock is extremely poisonous to people and animals. The plants grow from two to six feet tall. The white flowers are umbrella-shaped and stems are reddish-purple. Water hemlock grows along shores, boggy or marshy areas, and in ditches.

Many kinds of mushrooms are found in the area; never eat wild mushrooms unless certain of the species.



**Poison Ivy:** three smooth leaves with irregular notches.  
**Water Hemlock:** has feather-shaped leaves below the flowers and typically has reddish-purple stems, mostly hairless.

**Mosquitoes and Other Pests** Mosquitoes, everyone’s nemesis, are not attracted to light, so don’t be fooled into purchasing expensive “mosquito killing” devices, which end up harming beneficial insects, including moths. Check out the websites of companies that offer to regularly spray your property for mosquito control, and you’ll read that their products are “extremely toxic” (their words) to fish, aquatic invertebrates, bees, pets, and humans! Rain will wash these toxins into the lake and harm the ecosystem, working their way up the food chain all the way to bald eagles and loons. Wind will blow insecticides into the water and your neighbors’ properties. It’s better to use a safe repellent on your skin and clothing – non-aerosol is best – and accept that the annual crop of mosquitoes comes and goes as part of the “up north” experience. Black flies, with their short season in spring or early summer may be discouraged with repellents as well. What about gnats, those hovering clouds of insects? Gnats are harmless, and do not feed on blood or bite humans; they are an important food for hummingbirds, kinglets, and warblers.

### Additional Resources

Wisconsin’s biodiversity:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/endangeredresources/biodiversity>

Wisconsin wildflowers:

[https://wisconsinpollinators.com/Garden/G\\_WoodlandEphemeralsPlan.aspx](https://wisconsinpollinators.com/Garden/G_WoodlandEphemeralsPlan.aspx)

<https://uswildflowers.com/wfquery.php?State=WI>

Shoreline restoration:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/ShorelandZoning/Care/restoration.html>

Water hemlock:

<https://wisflora.herbarium.wisc.edu/taxa/index.php?taxon=3129>

Poison ivy: <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/poison-ivy/>



## Our Wildlife

As a property owner, you share your big backyard – the lake – with other human residents, sure, but there are wild critters who live here, too, who deserve equal respect and protection.

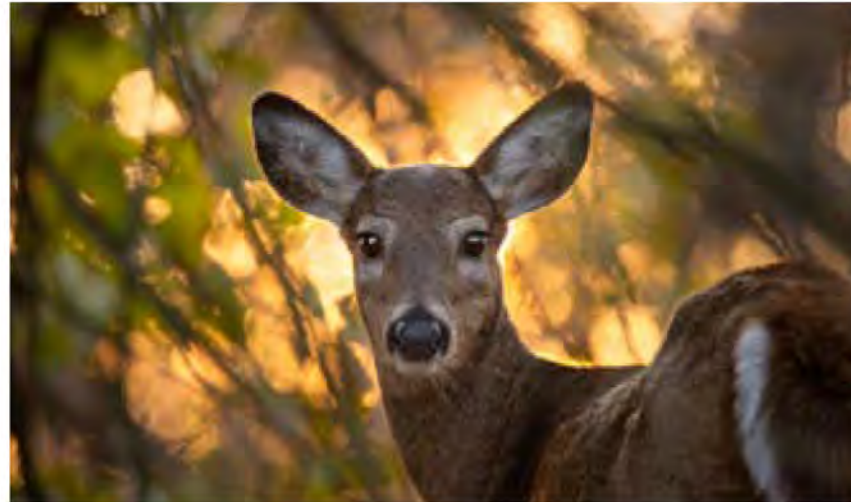
Bears, white-tailed deer, beavers, otters, raccoons, foxes, gray (black) and red squirrels, coyotes, mink, mice and voles, bobcats: these are just some of the mammals you might see on your property or along the shore or nearby forests, fields, and roads.

We're lucky to live in harmony among these animals, and luckier still if we see them. Wild animals want to be left alone and can be observed from a distance; there's no reason for alarm or to harm them. Snakes, frogs, and turtles are important to our complex forest and lake ecosystems.



### Our Most Common Turtles

Snapping turtles and painted turtles live in the lake. Painted turtles bask in the sun on fallen logs; snapping turtles do not bask. Take care when you see turtles on roads in late spring; they are looking to lay their eggs in sandy roadside areas. Snapping turtles have dull greenish gray ridged shells; they look prehistoric, and they may bite. Painted turtles have smooth dark green shells, with reddish-orange undersides. They may be moved off the road safely.



**Bears** Consider yourself fortunate if you see a shiny black bear. Almost always, a bear will hear and smell you and retreat long before you know it's nearby. Never feed bears and keep well away from bears with cubs. To discourage bears from visiting, remove your bird feeders overnight from May to November. Keep garbage cans and bags in a closed building. If there is food in your car, keep the windows closed.



## Who Doesn't Love Seeing Birds?

They are the wildlife we are fortunate to see most often and they are worth knowing. If you feed birds in your yard, you'll be able to enjoy the many species that are summer or year-round residents, or migratory species in the spring and fall.

Chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers (including the large and handsome pileated), and blue jays are common birds you'll see all year. The ruby-throated hummingbird typically returns to the area in mid-May. You can attract this entertaining bird to your yard with a feeder or flowering plants.

On the water or nesting on shore, you will see herons, ducks, swans, bald eagles and – everyone's favorite – the common loon, with its enchanting yodel and haunting wail. Several pairs of loons nest on our lakes.

If you know the location of a shoreline nest for loons or waterfowl, boats should be driven at no-wake speed in that area. Stay away from birds swimming with their chicks, and do not feed ducks on shore or elsewhere as that inadvertently promotes the proliferation of swimmer's itch.

Wisconsin allows hunting for small game, bears, deer, and birds. Become familiar with the seasons for hunting and trapping, especially the gun season for deer in late November. Wear blaze orange and bright colors to protect yourself when outdoors and learn what areas are open and closed to hunters.



Many lakeshore neighbors put out feeders to attract ruby-throated hummingbirds. (Above)

Pileated Woodpeckers are commonly seen – and heard. (Left)

Ruffed grouse. (Below)



### Ticks

There are two common ticks in Wisconsin: the wood tick and the deer tick. These two parasites are not insects – they're related to spiders and scorpions. In general, the wood tick is the larger of the two, and has white markings. The deer tick is smaller (even tiny), darker, and may carry and transmit diseases, including Lyme disease. When walking in the woods or grassy areas, use an insect repellent and tuck your pant legs into socks. Check your skin, clothing and hair after a walk. Learn how to safely remove ticks.



### Additional Resources

COLA's Short Ears Long Tales newsletter (SELT) has an archive of articles devoted to the lakes' natural history and lake issues. <https://www.cola-wi.org>. Click More, and then Publications.

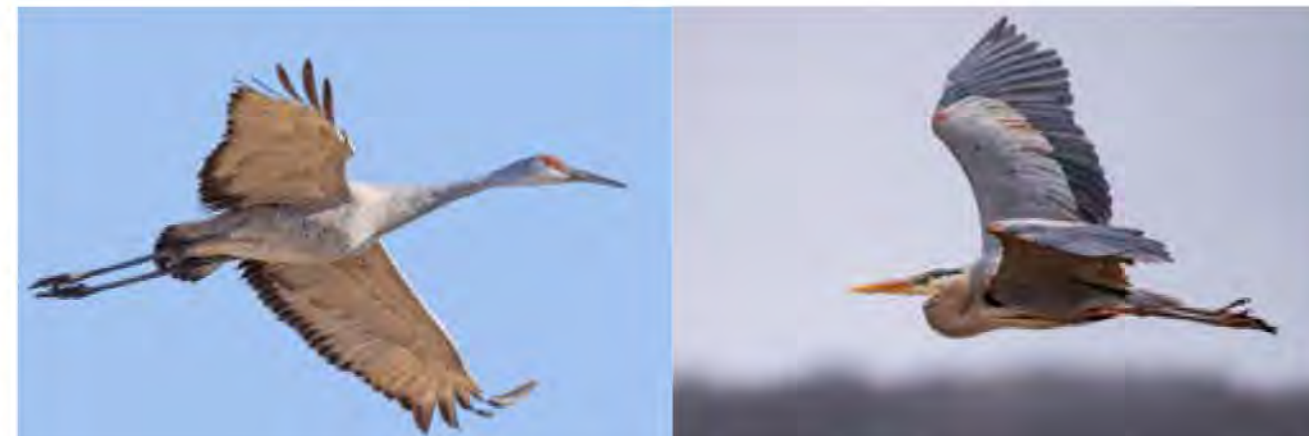
Wild bird information, including identification: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>, <https://wsobirds.org/> (where you'll find a checklist of Wisconsin Birds), and <https://www.audubon.org/news/top-10-foods-winter-bird-feeding>.

All about ticks: <https://tickapp.us/> and <https://mywisconsinwoods.org/> (search for ticks).

To learn more about the area's natural history, including exhibits and programs for children and adults: [www.cablemuseum.org](http://www.cablemuseum.org)

Did you hit a deer? <https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-bus-real-estate/roadsides/deercarcassremoval.aspx>

Hunting regulations, dates, and licenses: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/dates>



Great blue herons and sandhill cranes are two large birds you might see often. How do you tell them apart? A heron flies with its neck pulled in close to its body, in an "S" shape. A crane flies with its neck out straight.





## Our Beautiful, Unique and Fragile Lakes

Big and Little Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) are located in the Couderay River Watershed in Sawyer County in northwestern Wisconsin. Big LCO covers 5,039 acres and is the eighth largest natural drainage lake in Wisconsin. It has a maximum depth of 95 feet, and averages around 35 feet. Some of the more prominent features are Musky Bay, then Stuckey Bay, the West, Central, and Eastern Basins.

About a third of Big LCO and all of Little LCO are on the 69,000 acre reservation of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa.

Big LCO is a special and sensitive lake. It is classified as an oligotrophic Outstanding Resource Water. Of Wisconsin's 15,000 lakes and impoundments, fewer than 1% are so designated. This designation is intended to meet federal Clean Water Act obligations requiring Wisconsin to adopt an "anti-degradation" policy that is designed to prevent any lowering of water quality – especially in those waters having significant ecological or cultural value.

Big LCO is a deep stratified, two-story cold-water fishery – one of only five lakes in Wisconsin with self-sustaining populations of both whitefish and cisco. One of the State's most protective total phosphorus criterion, 15µg/L, has been applied by WDNR.

**Water Level** The LCO lakes lie at the bottom of the 68,990 acre Upper Couderay River Watershed composed of ten lakes



The watershed is 61% forested, 12% agricultural, 9% developed, 5% grassland/pasture/shrubland, and 13% open water or wetlands.

stretching from Round Lake in the north to Sissabagama Lake to the south. All the water from the watershed flows through Big and Little LCO, the Billy Boy Flowage, and into the headwaters of the Couderay River.

How much is "all the water?" If one inch of rainfall falls on the watershed, around 400 million gallons of newly added water starts moving towards the Billy Boy Flowage. On the other hand, over a period of several hot days, a similar amount might be removed by evaporation.

At the end of the Billy Boy Flowage is the Billy Boy dam, which is about 30 feet across and consists of five gates that can be

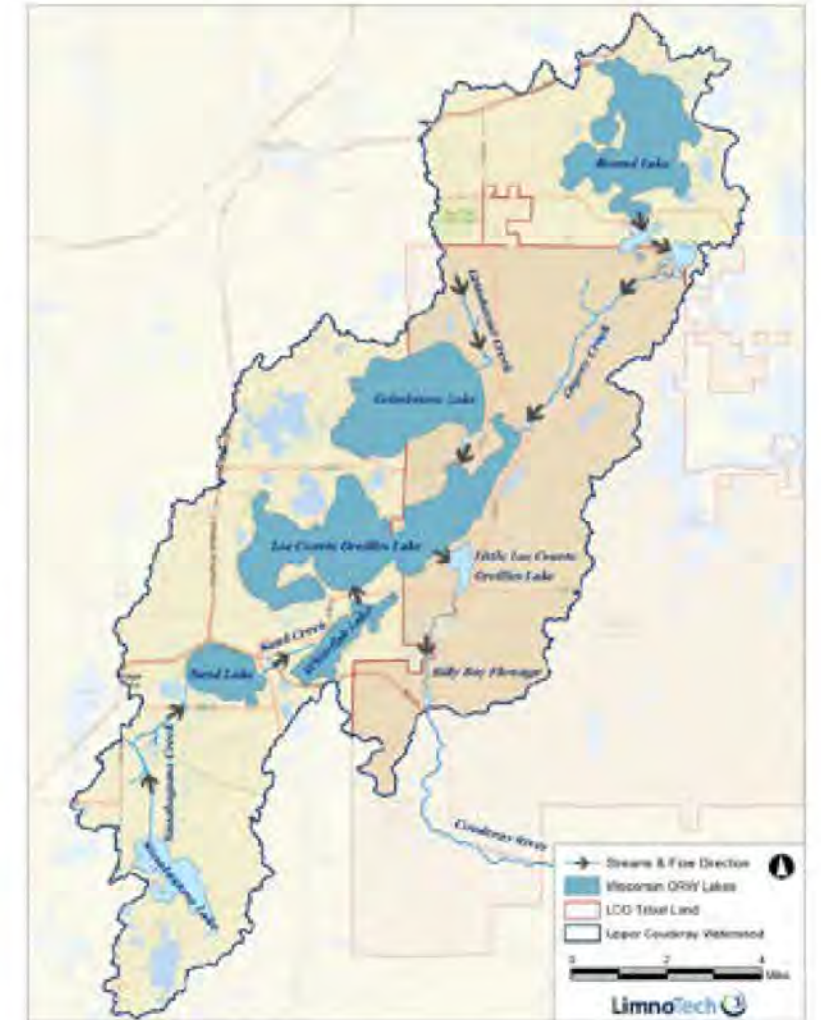
raised and lowered – one is always wide open to provide constant flow into the Couderay River.

The narrow channel from Big to Little LCO that goes under the Thoroughfare bridge is the choke point that has the greatest effect on water level in Big LCO, not the Billy Boy dam. The channel has less flowage capacity than the Billy Boy dam when the dam's gates are open. Manipulating the gates at the dam has the most effect on Little LCO and the Billy Boy Flowage, and relatively little near-term effect on Big LCO.

When you fill a bathtub, there are two ways to control water level – adjust the drain to let water out or turn the faucet to alter the flow in. *The LCO lakes should not be considered bathtubs*, but



LCO buoy locations



the analogy still applies. The combination of a small drain and an immense, uncontrollable faucet means the water level in the LCO lakes fluctuates widely from month to month, season to season, year to year.

## Responsible Recreation

LCO is 5,000 acres of great water to explore, fish, water ski, sail, jet ski, paddle board, kayak, pleasure cruise, or just sit and enjoy the view. In all of these activities, leaving no trace and respecting the lake and lakeshore, your neighbors and everyone on the lake is critical to all of our continued enjoyment of LCO.

Being the boat driver carries responsibility to keep everyone safe and happy. **Powered boats** need to travel at no wake speed when within 100 feet of another boat, dock, or water skier. A distance of 200 feet is to be maintained from the shoreline.

In recent years, “wake boats” have become popular. A recent ordinance requires boats with enhanced wake to stay 700 feet from shore or docks. These are boating regulations but, in some cases, common sense and good etiquette may dictate more conservative driving.

Powered boats 16 feet or larger are required to have a life jacket for each person on board, a throwable life cushion, and a fire extinguisher.

Six buoys mark shallow spots on LCO (see page 17). The shallow areas vary in size and in several cases extend to the nearby shoreline. Give these areas a wide berth to avoid damaging your boat.

State regulations govern docks, boat lifts, and swim rafts. A basic review is: docks may be six feet wide and extend out 100 feet; swim rafts can be up to 200 square feet, 15 feet in diameter, and



no further than 200 feet from the shoreline. Two boat lifts and two personal watercraft lifts may be placed in the first 50 feet with one more for each additional 50 feet. No permits are needed if you are within the regulations. Please visit the DNR website and review this information annually for any changes.

**Recreational boating has an etiquette** – Boating etiquette is about safe behavior, as well as respecting other boaters. Here are some of the basics:

**Respect the ramp.** Prepare your boat and equipment before getting into position to launch.

**Own your wake.** The fastest way to make the wrong kinds of waves is to throw a big, obtrusive wave at another boat, swimmer, angler or shoreline owner. Stay at least 200 feet from the shoreline and other boaters.

**Keep the tunes in check.** Sound is amplified over the water, so keep the music at a respectful level.

**Pack in. Pack out.** Take care of the body of water you love and dispose of any trash you have when you’re back home. Duh.

**Slow your roll.** Respect speed limit or slow-no-wake restrictions.

**Anchoring and mooring.** Enter an anchorage or mooring area slowly, with a wake that will not disrupt other anchored boats.

**Be polite.** Give a wave. When passing another boat, give a little wave hello. Boating is all about having fun and being part of the boating community. Embrace it, enjoy it, and share it.

**Fishing.** LCO has a variety of fish species including northern pike, walleye, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, musky and panfish such as perch, crappie and bluegill. The lake is managed as a trophy musky fishery. General gamefish season is from the first Saturday in May through the first Sunday in March. Bag limits and other regulations can be found at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fishing/regulations>.

**Sailing.** Watching sails gliding across the lake in the summer is always a beautiful sight. The Courte Oreilles Sailing Club has been around since 1969. Races are generally held each Saturday from mid-June to the first weekend in September.

**Kayaking, canoeing and standup paddleboarding** are perfect ways to explore the lakeshore. Always wear a lifejacket and be aware of motorized watercraft around you.

In the winter, **cross country skiing** is enjoyed on LCO or the many miles of groomed trails as part of the world-famous Birkie Trail or many other trail systems. Snowshoe tracks crisscross the frozen, snowy lake.

**Ice Fishing.** Most winters, you’ll see many ice shacks scattered around Courte Oreilles. *Walleyes for Northwest Wisconsin* holds an annual ice fishing event in February on LCO. The deadline to remove permanent ice shanties is March 19th.

Portable ice shanties can still be used after this date, so long as they are removed from the ice each day.

**Snowmobiling.** Sawyer County and the surrounding area are known for some of the best snowmobiling trails in the country – over 600 miles of groomed trails! Trail maps and trail conditions are available at [www.haywardlakes.com/trails/snowmobile](http://www.haywardlakes.com/trails/snowmobile), [www.sawyercountyalliance.com/trail-conditions/](http://www.sawyercountyalliance.com/trail-conditions/) and others.

All snowmobiles operating on a Wisconsin snowmobile trail or corridor must display a valid snowmobile trail pass along with a valid registration. Trails passes can be purchased online at <https://gowild.wi.gov/>. Any person who is at least 12 years old and born on or after January 1, 1985 must have a Snowmobile Safety Certificate to operate a snowmobile in most areas. Check WDNR for exceptions.

Do not ride on lakes that are not staked. The club members who stake Sawyer County lakes are extremely knowledgeable and check ice depths regularly to ensure they are safe before they are staked for riding. Always ride safely and respect other snowmobilers, ice fisherman, skiers and anyone out on the lake and trails.



## Protecting our Lakes

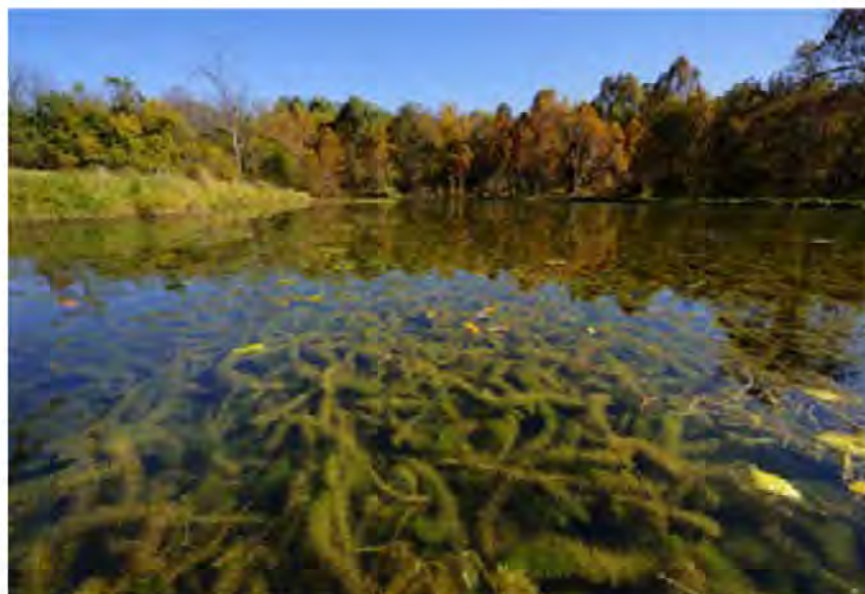
We all have a hand in protecting Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, so you can enjoy them every day and for generations to come. Without lake owners' involvement, our enjoyment of the lakes will be seriously impaired. Invasive species, excessive phosphorous levels, impaired water quality and shoreline development all threaten the beauty, recreational activities, and property values.

COLA works closely with the LCO Tribal Government and Conservation Department, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help protect Courte Oreilles.

### Invasive species

**Two invasive aquatic plant species (AIS)** are now firmly established in the LCO lakes, curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil. Likely brought to LCO by boats from infested lakes, their exuberant growth has been fueled by excessive phosphorus concentrations in LCO's water. Unfortunately, both invasive species are easily distributed throughout the LCO lakes by plant fragments scattered by boat traffic. These invasives grow rapidly to form large mats that limit boat navigation and alter the fishery habitat. Late in the season, the invasive plants die back, settle to the lake bottom and decompose, adding phosphorus and depresses dissolved oxygen concentrations, further harming the fishery.

Of the two invasives, Eurasian watermilfoil is the real beast. It increased rapidly since 2015 and is now found throughout both lakes. Despite COLA's best efforts, its spread is accelerating.



Eurasian watermilfoil can make boat navigation difficult and harm fishing. Below: curly-leaf pondweed / Eurasian watermilfoil



**What COLA is doing about it.** COLA's updated LCO Aquatic Plant Management Plan identifies the issues and need for management, reviews past management aquatic plant activities and presents a sound strategy for the management of aquatic plants in the lakes

including the following goals:

- 1) control existing populations of AIS
- 2) prevent the introduction and spread of new aquatic invasive species
- 3) map and remove invasive aquatic plants
- 4) apply safe, effective, well-targeted herbicides
- 5) eliminate excessive nutrients in LCO's water.

Read more at [www.cola-wi.org/invasive-species](http://www.cola-wi.org/invasive-species)

COLA has spent a great deal of time mapping all the known infestations of both EWM and curly-leaf pondweed (CLP) to convince the DNR that our AIS challenge warrants significant financial support from the State. The AIS maps can be seen at [www.cola-wi.org/ais-maps-2022](http://www.cola-wi.org/ais-maps-2022). A conservative estimate is that AIS are now spread over about 50 acres on both LCO lakes - an increase from 15 acres in 2021.

**What YOU can do about it.** First of all, always make sure your boat and trailer are free of AIS, weeds or plants when putting them into the lake and taking them out.

Avoid areas of known AIS and thick floating weed masses; driving through these spots chops up the weeds and can cause them to spread.

Do not fertilize lawns that drain to the lake and practice responsible shoreline management.

You can also join COLA's AIS or Eco-Harvester work groups to help identify and remove AIS. Find out more at [www.cola-wi.org/invasive-species](http://www.cola-wi.org/invasive-species).

Of the three public boat landings on LCO, Victory Heights and Anchor Bay ramps are primarily used by the local residents, while the WDNR Chicago Bay ramp is used by lake visitors – so COLA has long employed boat monitors to inspect boats for invasive species. In 2022, COLA installed an Internet Landing Installed Device Sensor. The I-LIDS senses when a boater has entered the launch area. Video monitoring of the bottom of the boat identifies the presence of aquatics on the trailer or boat. It also captures clean-off activity.



The Eco-Beast harvesting invasive species in 2022. Starting in mid-June, the first stop was Musky Bay for curly-leaf pondweed, then on to those sites with the most Eurasian watermilfoil – Chicago Bay, Anchor Bay, and finally Little LCO. Multiple trailer loads (nearly 20 tons) of plants were hauled away from the lakes. The volunteer effort was outstanding.

## Phosphorus and water-quality impairment

Nearly all the challenges facing the LCO lakes relate directly to deteriorating water quality caused by excessive nutrients, especially phosphorus, which has increased dramatically over the last several decades. All parts of the 73,000+ acre Upper Couderay River watershed, including agriculture, forestry, and private and public lands, contribute to the problem through uncontrolled drainage, runoff, and erosion. Lac Courte Oreilles is at the base of the watershed, so it bears the burden of all the mismanagement upstream as well as that on its own shores. Of particular concern are the cranberry operations on LCO's shores that are responsible for a significant proportion of the readily-controllable phosphorus flowing into LCO, the vast majority of which could be corrected by installing closed systems to recycle their phosphorus loaded water within their operations rather than discharging it into LCO.

**What COLA is doing about it.** COLA has partnered with independent experts in the fields of limnology, water conservation, and land and soil resource management. Examples include:

- **water quality studies** determined that cranberry marshes are the single largest readily controllable source of phosphorus pollution to LCO.
- **lake septic surveys** brought nearly all septic systems on LCO into compliance.
- COLA and the LCO Tribe have been working with the WDNR since 2016 to establish a **lower phosphorus standard**, termed a "Site Specific Criterion" for the LCO lakes. After a protracted struggle, the proposed SSC of 10 µg/L should be approved in mid 2023. Read more at [www.cola-wi.org/water-quality](http://www.cola-wi.org/water-quality)



Excessive nutrients draining from cranberry operation into West Basin. Based on DNR's SWIMS database, the phosphorus concentration in the discharged water on the date this photo was taken was 200 ug/L, 20 times the concentration thought appropriate to protect LCO.

## Shoreland development

The health of the LCO lakes depends on careful management of the surrounding landscape. To that end, COLA provides guidance and promotes sustainable practices. Native shrubs and other native shoreline and forest vegetation hold the upland soil in place and prevent runoff. Though most property owners care about and are protective of the LCO lakes, in many areas, LCO's shoreline has been eroded by irresponsible boating practices and poor shoreland management such as manicured and fertilized lawns that extend to the water's edge. Sawyer County zoning regulations on building setbacks, impervious surfaces, and shoreline access are often ignored.



Restoration of native plants will prevent erosion, and a natural landscape is easy to maintain once established. 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 this property.

**What COLA is doing about it.** COLA has provided information and tools so that property owners, agricultural and forestry operations, and Sawyer County can practice and promote the best management of shoreline. Examples include: Shoreline Buffer program, Shoreline Restoration and Assessment Survey, assist Sawyer County and local townships with responsible zoning, waterlevel monitoring, and monthly newsletters and eBlasts that examine issues like boat wake regulations, impervious surfaces, bad use of riprap, and invasive and native shoreland vegetation. Find out what you can do about it at [www.cola-wi.org/shoreland-development](http://www.cola-wi.org/shoreland-development).

## LCO's two-story, cold-water fishery is in trouble

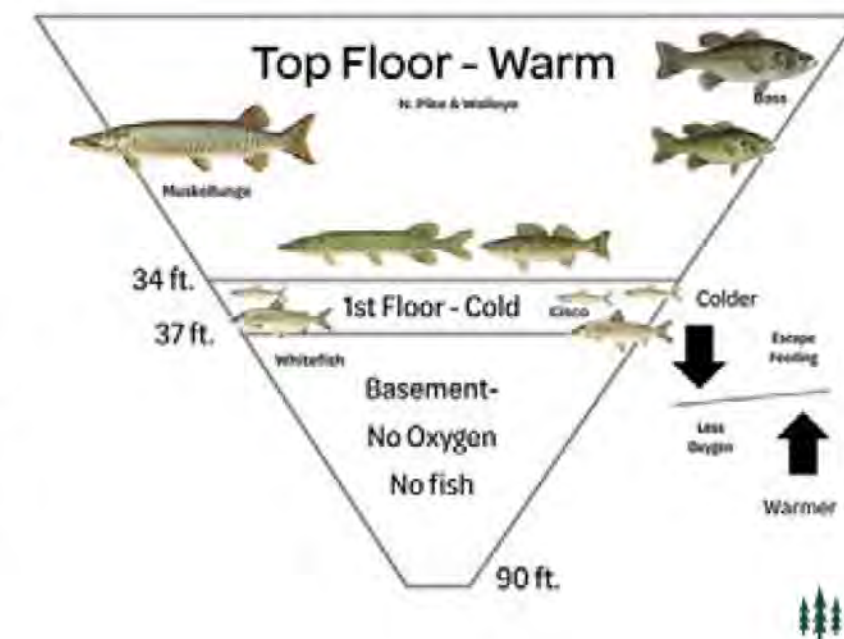
Musky habitat is much reduced and threatened. Since 2013, perhaps earlier, there has not been season-long suitable habitat for cisco and lake whitefish. Water temperatures have been too high and dissolved oxygen concentrations too low to sustain

these species, which are part of the ecosystem that once supported a renowned and sustainable musky population.

**What COLA is doing about it.** It is upsetting to look out over what seems to be the clear, pristine waters of the LCO lakes but know that what's happening beneath the surface is devastating to the lakes' aquatic ecosystem. COLA is trying to first reveal and then reverse the fishery's decline by the following actions:

- Water-quality monitoring
- WDNR'S Fish Management Plan
- ESX Recovery Plan
- Musky Bay Spawning Habitat Restoration

Get the details of these and other actions COLA is doing about it at [www.cola-wi.org/lco-fishery](http://www.cola-wi.org/lco-fishery).



## View from Your Dock

In 2020, COLA sent out a [View from Your Dock Survey](#) to lake-shore owners on LCO and Little LCO. Respondents are well distributed across all parts of the lakes. One third of lakeshore properties have been passed down from previous generations, and many families (23%) have owned the same property for fifty years or more. Family time, recreation, peace and quiet are the most emphasized reasons for being at the lakes.

We enjoy many recreational pursuits. Fishing, along with swimming and all such activities involving children and family (pontooning, towing inflatables, playing with kids in water) are the most popular. A significant number also enjoy cross country skiing, snow shoeing, ice-fishing and snowmobiling. The higher-impact motorized water activities such as wake boating, speedboating, and PWC-jet skiing are less popular.

It's also very clear from the comments that we care deeply for the LCO lakes. Many cite family ties and memories. Others extol the peaceful setting and beautiful scenery. Still others celebrate the recreational opportunities. We received hundreds of heart-felt comments to this question: [Please sum up your feelings for the LCO lakes and what they mean to you.](#) Here are just a few:

- A part of our family history • A beautiful escape from the metro life. The Northwoods feel makes you relaxed and close to nature. It's therapy. • It is the place where our entire family can meet and spend meaningful time together. Our children have many wonderful memories of time spent at the lake. • It



is where my roots are. It is such a beautiful lake. • LCO is an important presence in my past, present, and future. I go there to recreate, relax, and enjoy nature. I love sharing it with others and hope that by collective action, we can preserve the quality of the water and the related environment for future generations. • LCO is family legacy and we are grateful to have LCO in our lives! • LCO is where our souls are. • Life • Love it. My happy place. • Have built so many great memories with friends and family. Many of my kids' best memories center around growing up at the cabin. • Our little piece of heaven • Our Zen place • The lake has been a very special place for my family for about 100 years, and we spend time there every year. This lake and the area are very important to our family. They are the touchstone of our lives: as we and our family members move around the country for school and work, we can always come back to LCO to engage in outdoor activities and strengthen family ties. • We have loved being on LCO! Buying a cabin on this lake was the best thing we have ever done for our family.

**What are your views about the LCO lakes?** Nearly all (96%) state that water quality is “very important.” Most characterize poor water quality in terms of increased phosphorus, reduced clarity, increased algae growth, excessive “weeds” and “muck,” swimmer’s itch, increased silt and unproductive fishing. AIS in Musky Bay, Stuckey Bay, the West Basin, and Barber Town Bay are of particular concern.

There were a number of negative comments highlighting such things as unsafe boaters, disregard of the 700’ elevated wake limit, noise/loud music, degraded shorelines, excessive fireworks – basically inconsiderate and irresponsible behaviors of all types. Unfortunately, this is part of living on a large and attractive lake. The vast majority of us act responsibly, treat each other with respect, and promote all that’s good for the LCO lakes.

The question, **“What do you think lake property owners should be doing as part of their responsibility in preserving the lakes and lake property?”** provoked interesting responses. It was clear that poor management of shoreline property – lack of buffer zones, fertilizer use, impervious surfaces, paved lake access, etc., was foremost on people’s minds. It’s great to see this. We’ve come a long way in the last several years, but it’s also apparent that we still have a long way to go.

COLA is very grateful to all who responded and the hundreds of comments you’ve provided. It’s obvious that so many care about the LCO lakes, and the lakes will be better off because of it.

Dive into the survey results on your own at <https://www.cola-wi.org/view-from-your-dock-2020-survey>.



**Light Pollution** The first time I took my young nephews from Chicago down to the dock on a July night, they were literally dumbfounded by the Milky Way stretching down the still lake. The night sky over the lake is a wonderful asset that we need to protect by including best practices for light pollution here. The International Dark-Sky Association promotes preserving the night sky so people can view the universe without light pollution. They have extensive information on ways to curb light pollution on your property including certified light fixtures that mitigate spilling of light pollution. ([www.darksky.org/](http://www.darksky.org/)) Few people realize that a light fixture on your property that spills over to your neighbors property is called “Light Trespass.” Many places have adopted lighting codes that save energy, are healthier and decrease global warming and benefit our ability to enjoy viewing the night sky. Just east of our lake there is a large dark area rated by IDSA as one of the top five areas in the United States for viewing the Milky Way. This area is just east of the Chippewa Flowage.

## Local Resources

**Donate it** Please donate unwanted clothes, toys and furniture at the Salvation Army Donation Center, Goodwill, Northwoods Humane Society, Restore of Sawyer County, and others. Thanks!

**Recycling** Please recycle and reduce waste. There are a number of nearby places to drop your recycling. Most do not require sorting cans, plastics, and paper. Some accept things like electronics, tires, old batteries, oil-based paint cans, sheet metal, etc. for a fee. Best to check ahead of time.

[Town of Bass Lake Transfer Station](#) is conveniently located on the North side of LCO off of Hwy K on Highline Rd. Open Wed/Sat/Sun 9-5 (free recycling, garbage or junk for a small fee).

[Lac Courte Oreilles Public Works Department/Recycling Center](#) (free normal recycling, also accepts electronics, tires, etc.).

There are several places located in Hayward including [Hayward Recycling Inc](#) (free drop off of normal recycling), [Roy's Enterprises Recycling Services](#) (scrap metal and other recycling), [Republic Services of Wisconsin Transfer Station](#) (garbage and recycling collection) and [Best Choice Recycling](#) (scrap metal and recycling services).

The [Town of Hayward Transfer Site](#) is east of town behind the Sawyer County fairgrounds takes recyclings and junk items.

**Septic** A host of local companies provide septic inspection, testing, pumping, and installation. You know, Google it.

## Notes/numbers/names/memories

*- Become a member of the Courte Oreilles Lakes Association  
and sign up for the newsletter at [www.cola-wi.org](http://www.cola-wi.org).*





The magic of our beautiful Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Courte Oreilles isn't clear, beautiful water. Or towering pine trees, miles of Northwoods shoreline or that bald eagle floating overhead.

It's memories.

Memories of all those spectacular natural wonders, and unforgettable experiences shared with family and friends. Kids growing up with memories of floating on the infamous USS Mudpuppy - circa 1950 above. Or skipping across the water on the wet'n wild tube in the summer of 2007. Catching frogs, hide-and-seek at the cabin. Water balloon fights. Big family meals with friends. S'mores. And always wet dogs shaking water off next to us on the dock.

Whether your family has been up here for generations, or you are recent lakeside neighbors, may the memories you make here be as precious and unique as these lakes themselves.

- COLA

