

The Door County Environmental Council News



September 2022



“Fostering the preservation of Door County’s rich heritage of natural resources for the health, welfare, and spiritual uplift not only of its inhabitants, but of generations to come.”

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After the Drawdown, the Forestville Millpond is a Mess!

On November 1, 2019, despite protests from property owners, your Door County Environmental Council, and other interested parties, Door County opened the sluice valve of the Forestville Dam to begin a drawdown of the Forestville Millpond. According to Door County, the purpose of the drawdown was to “address the shallow water depth, the lack of abundance and diversity of native plants and fish, and the poor water quality within the millpond.”

However, it wasn’t long after the drawdown began that issues emerged, including

rain events that resulted in the millpond overflowing the dam at least a dozen times, releasing thousands of cubic feet of sediment, thus effectively negating the goal of emptying the millpond for two years so the bottom of the millpond could dry out and compact.

On September 1, 2021, the sluice valve of the dam was partially closed to allow the millpond to fill for at least the thirteenth time in two years. Since the closing on October 7, 2021, the millpond has become a morass of cattails and other invasive



Before the Drawdown Photo by Christine Reid



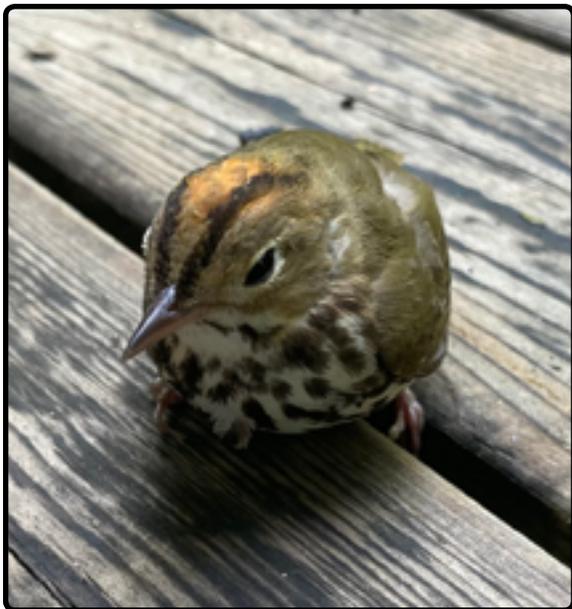
After the Drawdown Photo by Christine Reid

plant species.

A quick comparison of “before drawdown” and “after drawdown” photos clearly reveals the “success” of the drawdown. The before photo was taken on May 20, 2020 during the fifth overflow and the after photo was taken on July 5, 2022. The visible water on the right side of the dock is because the dock owners cut a path through the cattails in an effort to launch their canoe and kayak. The invasive cattails that took root during the drawdown will not “die off” and have landlocked riparian property owners.

Sadly, Door County ignored the advice of experts, environmentalists, and overwhelming opposition from those directly impacted by the drawdown. Rather, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Door County failed to create a comprehensive watershed cleanup program for the Ahnapee watershed that has resulted in the current millpond mess.

*By Christine A. Reid,
Robert Sijgers, and Mike Bahrke*



Ovenbird

Photo by Mike Bahrke

The Blue-green Algae Blues

Loss of energy, loss of appetite, vomiting, stumbling, falling, blistering and foaming at the mouth, diarrhea, convulsions, excessive drooling, tremors, pneumonia, damage to the liver, kidneys, nervous or reproductive systems. These are some of the symptoms that humans display from cyanobacteria poisoning. There are many species of cyanobacteria, more commonly known as blue-green algae. One species, from Oregon, is actually sold as a dietary food supplement, but several species are dangerously toxic.

Some of the toxic cyanobacteria are *Microcystis*, *Dolichospermum (Anabaena)*, and *Planktothrix*. *Microcystis* is the most common form of toxic cyanobacteria. It is a thick green paint-like material that floats and then collects on the shorelines where it can die and release its toxins into the water. *Dolichospermum* is made of microscopic filamentous threads of cells that can grow into an algal bloom very quickly and also looks like green paint floating on the surface. *Planktothrix agardhii* forms long, straight, filaments, visible to the naked eye, that can form dense floating mats on the surface which then release a strong earthy stench. By participating in recreational water activities or by drinking contaminated ground water from a well, these forms of cyanobacteria and their toxins, can enter the human body through the eyes, nose, or mouth.

Door County, so far, has been spared the extreme consequences of the algae blooms. But not so fortunate are those who live in the southernmost waters of Green Bay. The waters of Lake Winnebago, the Fox River, and the southernmost portion of Green Bay

itself become thick with cyanobacteria. The algae blooms are created as summer's heat warms the waters and heavy rains wash excessive nutrients, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen from lawn fertilizers and animal wastes, into the lakes and rivers that feed into Green Bay. In the heat of the summer, Lake Winnebago, the Fox River, and the waters near the city of Green Bay become toxic enough that it is highly recommended not to swim in or come in contact with these waters.

There also exists a phenomenon in the southern Green Bay region known as a "dead zone." Dead zones are areas with low dissolved oxygen (DO) concentrations that have dropped to below 2 milligrams of oxygen per liter of water (hypoxia). This happens when organisms (particularly cyanobacteria blooms) are over-populating an area so badly that they remove most of the oxygen necessary to sustain life. Dead and dying cyanobacteria cells rupture and release their toxic chemicals into the water. Massive fish die offs have been witnessed in southern Green Bay waters as well as large schools of panicking fish crowding the shoreline with open mouths raised above the waterline gasping for oxygen in the air.

Many researchers fear that this could be the future scenario for the Door County Peninsula if the excessive flow of nutrients, now considered pollutants, is not dealt with and controlled. A large percent of these excessive nutrients come from hundreds of millions of gallons of liquefied cow manure which is spread upon the shallow soil fields of the peninsula, usually unobserved by any regulatory agencies. Industrial dairy farms called CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) use enormous volumes of clean water from high capacity wells simply to flush manure waste from their barns to a

holding pond or lagoon for later release as a fertilizer for crops. This slurry from the lagoons is then pumped into tanker trucks and driven to fields to be spread, and many times has run off into streams and creeks leading into Green Bay or Lake Michigan.

It seems that big farm money has its thumb on the advancement of needed solutions to the growing blooms of hazardous blue-green algae that are killing the bay, affecting human health, and drifting north towards the peninsula of Door County. Already, almost 50% of the private ground water wells in our neighboring Kewaunee County are contaminated with the same liquified manure that is being spread or overspread and washing into the bay's tributaries. These nutrient enriched farmland creeks and streams are a main source of pollution that is creating the hazardous algal blooms which are looming larger every year. Once we start seeing it in our Door County waters, it might be too late to stop it. It is always easier to employ prevention techniques rather than use combatant strategies that don't address the root causes of the problem.

I would venture to say that few tourists would stick a toe into toxic green floating slime if it were in our beautiful harbors along Green Bay. It is going to take a public outcry to change the attitudes and actions of those that have power in the government to do the right thing, which is to regulate and enforce the laws on manure spreading and other toxic material disposal methods to prevent the formation of the hazardous algal blooms on the shorelines of Door County.

By Paul Leline

Sources:

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EPA.gov

Coastalscience.noaa.gov

Save the Bay

Phosphorous contamination is destroying the Bay of Green Bay, and we need to make it stop.

Waves of stinky green slime extend out from our beaches, making them, at times, unpleasant and unusable.

Dead zones caused by harmful algae blooms extend more than 30 miles into the Bay, threatening the habitats of fish and other lake creatures and lasting weeks or months.

And now, toxic blue-green algae blooms have appeared in the Bay and are becoming more frequent. While algae normally occur in Wisconsin waters, this blue-green algae, *Microcystis Cyanobacteria*, can make people and pets very sick. Swallowing blue-green algae can cause flu-like symptoms, skin rashes, and breathing problems. It can also be fatal to dogs if ingested.

I fear places like Sand Bay, Sturgeon Bay, Egg Harbor, Ephraim, and Sister Bay may well experience blue-green algae blooms in the future. I'd like very much to be wrong about this possibility, but respected leading scientists share my concern.

What's causing these algae blooms?
PHOSPHORUS! Phosphorous is essential to our natural ecosystem. It makes everything grow, but too much phosphorous in our waters is producing catastrophic results and threatening the overall health of our cherished waters.

Over 1.2 million pounds of phosphorous flow into the Bay of Green Bay each year, according to Tracy Valenta, a former Water Resource Specialist with New Water. The Fox River's phosphorous load is as high as

3 to 4 milligrams per liter, exceeding the total maximum daily load of 0.1 milligrams per liter set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Where is all this phosphorous coming from? Much of it is coming from unregulated agriculture.

Dr. Val Klump, Dean of The School of Fresh Water Science at UW-Milwaukee, has been studying the Bay for years. He now estimates that 50% of the phosphorus entering the Bay is coming from agriculture, and that seems to be increasing.

I believe most of that agricultural-related phosphorus entering the Bay is now coming from manure produced by Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in the dairy industry. CAFOs spread over 700 million gallons of liquified cow manure on the area's shallow soil each year, and that's in Kewaunee County alone.

Several years ago, Professor Maureen Muldoon and Dr. Mark Borchardt's comprehensive well water study documented the disastrous impact of this practice on Kewaunee County's residential drinking water.

What will be the long-term consequences for the Bay? More importantly, what can be done?

The Federal Clean Water Act limits municipal pollutants that cities can discharge into the Bay. This law has been very effective in reducing municipal phosphorus pollution.

However, no such limits have been set for agricultural runoff. Why aren't the DNR, EPA, and Door County Soil and Water

Department setting and enforcing stricter regulations, or at least, enforcing all existing regulations?

I believe it's all about the money. In the short-term, CAFOs are making millions while cutting corners with our environment. It's just easier and cheaper to spread liquified manure over Wisconsin's thin soils and allow it to end up in the aquifer or the Bay. And, if it's about the money, what about the long-term recreational value of the Bay? Polluting the Bay could cost billions or even trillions of dollars of lost future revenues!

If we effectively lose the recreational value of these waters, what will happen to the environment, the economy, property values, tourism, and the overall quality of life in Door County?

I support the dairy industry and its importance to Wisconsin's economy, but we must think long-term. We can't allow CAFOs to destroy the Bay. We need a new waste treatment system, or perhaps a new use for cow manure.

We need to speak up and demand that our governing agencies set and enforce stricter regulations on polluters. We need to join together to demonstrate that the people of Wisconsin will not sit idly by while our magnificent waters are destroyed in the name of short-term profit.

By Steve Eatough

Big Plant 2022

The 2022 Door County Big Plant is a multi-partner effort to plant thousands of trees across Door County. The Door County Environmental Council, the Climate Change Coalition, and a Sturgeon Bay Elementary class planted 40 conifer seedlings at Little Creek on April 29. The Door County Environmental Council also planted more seedling trees on June 11 in Sunset Park.

By Renee McAllister



*Tree plant at Little Creek
Photo by Renee McAllister*



Twelve-spotted skimmer Photo by Mike Bahrke

Green Tier Communities

In 2050, more than 7.1 million outdoor workers in the US will see 10% or more of their earnings at risk annually due to extreme heat. – Wisconsin Clean Energy Plan

There is no denying it, our climate is changing dramatically. Shifts in weather patterns, temperatures, and rainfall amounts during the past ten years have resulted in drought, flooding, and power outages. There is an increasing need to stabilize our environment in order to bring a balance between human life and nature.

Green Tier certifications benefit communities by providing resources and education needed to become resilient and more economically sound municipalities. Clean energy actions that Green Tier certification encourages will reduce CO₂ emissions, amounts of fine particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, and sulfur oxide emissions. These must be addressed for future generations.

Local government leaders, the Department of Natural Resources, and community leaders work with Green Tier communities to increase revenue for businesses and residents while minimizing environmental risk. Many Green Tier communities address the basic areas of habitat protection, including forests and wetlands, energy efficiency, water conservation, and business profitability. It all begins by completing an application that is available at <https://greentier.wi.gov>. The site provides a working, in-depth scoresheet to help establish a base of how green a municipality is and where the village, town, or city would like to be by setting goals and prioritizing areas such as transportation management in business and residential areas, zoning and development laws, natural resource management, municipal energy use,

and healthy community planning.

Each of the following categories is given a ranking on a scale for immediate action, high impact actions, or future strategies:

- Zoning and development strategies resulting in walkable neighborhoods and the repurposing of existing structures rather than demolition.
- Implementing natural resource management strategies that preserve, protect, and promote green space.
- Incorporating impervious surfaces and adequate setbacks in neighborhoods.
- Water conservation that avoids shortages during peak usage times.
- Businesses that decrease the greenhouse gas emissions in municipal facilities, services, and vehicle fleets.
- Improving waste management by diverting organics and recyclables from landfills and properly disposing of hazardous materials.
- Healthy community planning policies and projects that incorporate healthy living to combat poor nutrition, inactive lifestyles, and chronic disease.

After the scoresheet is completed and submitted, then the base is established. Each year the scoresheet can be assessed for improvement. Connecting to other Green Tier municipalities and sharing stories can also help to obtain additional resources and recognize community threats to air quality, technology, and social behaviors.

The Green Tier program is detailed and is intended to have every aspect of the community thinking about green practices. It creates long-term goals and helps to provide new jobs and grow businesses. Even educating restaurants on the many options in composting and recycling helps. It also

keeps the food supply local and lowers fuel bills and carbon emissions.

Currently, only three Wisconsin cities embrace Green Tier certification and the long-term goal of preserving quality of life. Bayfield County in northwestern Wisconsin, as well as villages such as Egg Harbor and Sister Bay are Green Tier certified. Yet Door County alone has eleven cities and villages. With more Green Tier certifications in Door County and Wisconsin, our state will be more attractive to outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers.

What are the long-term goals for quality of life and resources in Door County?

Tourism in Door County is affected by climate change. High humidity in the summer means more people seek water activities and run air conditioners. During winter we are seeing reduced snowfall cover or, conversely, large amounts of snow in one storm that actually disrupt snow activities. Door County is a place where we can have fun outside and see natural beauty almost anytime we want. Door County should work on carbon reduction, green residential landscaping, agricultural practices that require less fossil fuel use, reduction of resource use, more repurposing, better water management, public health, and social equality.

Let's become a state known for being proactive about our resources and environment. Wisconsin is already known for several famous people connected to environmentalism: Gaylord Nelson, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Frank Lloyd Wright, to name a few. Our Wisconsin cities should continue the legacy via Green Tier certification, and the state should become a Green Tier State.

Locally, all of Door County should become a Green Tier community by working on better energy efficiency and community health. Using tourism tax dollars, not just for bringing more visitors, but for allowing us to maintain our beauty for the long-term should be the goal. Let's transition to more Green Tier communities!

By Renee McAllister

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Temptation

Photo by Mike Bahrke

With More Cruise Ships on the Great Lakes Comes More Environmental Concern

While commercial cruising has been gradually increasing on the Great Lakes for the past 10 years, 2022 may be a record-setting year, with nine cruise ships sailing this season, four of them new ships making their initial trips through the locks and into the lakes. Each ship will make numerous calls at the ports that surround the lakes, including Sturgeon Bay, where the *Ocean Navigator*, part of the American Queen Voyages cruise line, docked on July 1. Port Milwaukee, on the other hand, is anticipating 33 port calls this year compared with the 10 stops made in 2019, the year before cruises were halted due to Covid.

Meanwhile, other cities and ports scattered around the lakes are taking the lead, investing millions in this developing source of tourism (hoping to grab a slice of tourism dollars), whether that means increasing the docking capacity of ports or building new customs facilities to accommodate passengers as they traverse back and forth across the Canadian border.

However, with this increased traffic, many are also hoping the environmental impact of cruising, which has a poor reputation for stewardship in other regions, is limited.

The Environmental Impact

With more cruise ships, some over 650 feet long, scheduled to travel through the Great Lakes region in 2022, it may be great news for tourism, but some say not so much for the environment. It's because large ships usually operate on heavy fuel oil and emit

harmful exhaust gas. However, since these vessels are heavily regulated on the Great Lakes, there are others who believe the environmental impact of these ships will be low. Fortunately, at least for now, the vessels set to sail the Great Lakes will be much smaller (200 to 400 passengers each) than the much larger European and ocean cruise ships.

Invasive Species Impact

It's the responsibility of the U.S. Coast Guard to oversee enforcement of safety and environmental regulations on the Great Lakes. However, as more ports attract cruise lines, environmental advocates wonder about the safety practices in place needed to protect the single largest freshwater system in the world.

A ship that passes through the St. Lawrence Seaway, which connects the ocean to the Great Lakes, will cross the U.S.-Canada border 27 times. Therefore, ships must meet numerous safety and environmental requirements to traverse the lakes and must be able to navigate the seaway's 15-lock system to get to Lake Erie.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes five streams of potentially hazardous waste and discharge produced by cruise ships: bilge water, which collects in the lowest part of the ship's hull and may contain oil, grease and other contaminants; graywater, from showers, laundries and kitchens; ballast water, taken in or discharged to maintain stability; and solid waste, including food and garbage; and sewage.

In the oceans, cruise ships are legally allowed to dump much of this waste, treated or not, within certain parameters. But there are more regulations governing the Great

Lakes, and regulators and environmental groups want the water and biodiversity of the lakes protected as the industry grows.

Large parts of the U.S. portions of Lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron, and Ontario are classified as “no-discharge zones.” In these zones, no effluent-like sewage or waste can be discharged. Ballast water treated in an approved water treatment system, however, can be released in these zones. The discharge allowed outside these zones, when properly treated, is physically and biologically similar to that of water treatment facilities along the shore. The Coast Guard has regulations that require different classes of vessels to have filtration systems on board.

Ballast water is notorious for carrying pollutants and invasive species as it is water carried from place to place to stabilize ships with light loads. The water is typically released once the ship reaches its destination and takes on cargo or passengers, releasing any species that traveled inside. Ballast water has introduced highly invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels and the round goby to the Great Lakes, which have caused massive upheaval to the native ecosystem. Scientists, politicians, and advocates are trying to prevent the introduction of yet more invasive species to the lake system. The job now is to make sure that we prevent any more new species from getting in.



Ocean Navigator
Courtesy of Great Lakes Cruises

The Economic Impact

In addition to environmental concerns, the economic benefits of cruise ship tourism often touted by companies don't always add up either. Experts say large cruise ships raise environmental concerns with little economic impact.

Citing economic data gathered from European ports like Venice, Italy, Dubrovnik, Croatia, Hamburg, Germany and Bergen, Norway, economists have found that cruise tourists don't actually spend much money when their ships reach port. They are usually all-inclusive vacations, so tourists

have paid already. They don't need accommodations, they don't need breakfast or lunch, and therefore they spend relatively little money in the region. Even when factoring in the revenue generated from contractors and subcontractors responsible for maintaining upkeep, evidence shows that contracts are not designed to bring wealth to anybody other than the cruise industry.

Conversely, cruising proponents often extoll the ancillary benefits of cruising. Adam Tindall-Schlicht, Port Milwaukee Director, said the city is expecting 10,000 tourists from cruises this year. Since Milwaukee is a turnaround city, he's hoping some might arrive a day early or stay a day later after they disembark, meaning a higher economic impact.

Passengers on Great Lakes cruises pay a hefty premium for cruising experience. But the revenue to the ports themselves is

minimal, said Port of Cleveland CCO Dave Gutheil. However, according to Gutheil, the real value is to the extended Cleveland area and tourism industry, as he hopes each passenger will spend \$150 on average while on shore. With 36 stops planned in Cleveland this year, and each ship holding roughly 200 to 400 people, it could add up to a significant sum of money.

Elected and government agency officials, as well cruise line operators and the general public, MUST pay attention to the research examining the environmental impact of ships cruising the Great Lakes and ENSURE that environmental regulations are in place and enforced. Without these efforts, the Great Lakes environment and regional economy will be negatively impacted.

By Mike Bahrke

This article has been adapted from the following publications:

Goodman, S. and Turner T. "After pandemic shutdown, the cruise ship industry is booming on the Great Lakes." Chicago Tribune, July 17, 2022.

"More cruise ships on the Great Lakes spurs environmental unease. European expert says large liners raise environmental concerns with little economic impact." CBC News, February 12, 2020.



Yellow swallowtail

Photo by Mike Bahrke



Bart De Stasio

Photo by Mike Bahrke

“Warmer, Wetter, and Wilder” with Bart De Stasio

On Friday, June 24, 2022, in partnership with the Climate Change Coalition, the Clean Water Action Council, and Lawrence University, your Door County Environmental Council co-sponsored the program “Warmer, Wetter, and Wilder” featuring Bart De Stasio, professor of biology and environmental studies at Lawrence University.

Hosted by Crossroads at Big Creek, De Stasio explained projections for climate change in Door County and discussed the effects on the county’s ecology and surrounding waters in Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Projections include more intense rainfall, more and larger algae blooms, an expanded “dead zone” in Green Bay, and consequences for fish and other aquatic life. De Stasio also explained how resilience and adaptability strategies can make a difference for our future. The program was free, open to the public, with about 35 people attending.

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