Pearl Lake

Summary Report 2013

University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point
and
Waushara County Staff and Citizens
To protect the lake we must protect the “watershed,” the land that drains or sheds its water into the lake.
Pearl Lake

East of Wautoma
North of Highway 21
West of County Highway EE
Township of Leon

Surface Area: 101 acres
Maximum Depth: 50 feet

Water Flow
- Pearl Lake is a seepage lake; most water enters via groundwater. Surface water runoff and direct precipitation also contribute water to lesser extents.
- Most water exits Pearl Lake via groundwater.
Land uses and land management practices occurring in a watershed can affect the water quality in a lake.

Land uses and land management also play major roles in how water moves across the landscape and how much water soaks into the ground (for long-term storage) or quickly runs off the land.

The surface watershed of Pearl Lake is 1,308 acres.

Forests and developed areas comprise the primary land use in the watershed.

Forests, wetlands, and developed land comprise the boundary around Pearl Lake. Generally, the land closest to the lake will have the greatest immediate impact on its water quality.

Surface Watershed: The area where water runs off the surface of the land and drains toward the lake.
Groundwater provides water to lakes in Waushara County throughout the entire year. Hard surfaces on the landscape prevent water from soaking into the ground and becoming groundwater. This results in less water flowing to the lake during the winter and between rains. Groundwater pumping can also reduce the amount of water entering lakes.

The quality of groundwater reflects what is happening on the land surface. Precipitation falling on forested land produces clean groundwater, whereas precipitation falling on lands that have chemical use can leach contaminants to groundwater. Groundwater contamination in central Wisconsin may include nitrogen, pesticides, herbicides and other soluble chemicals originating from septic systems, crops, barnyards, road maintenance, etc. Once in the groundwater, these chemicals slowly move towards a lake or river.

On the map below, arrows indicate the direction of groundwater flow to and from the lake. Groundwater flows towards Pearl Lake from the north and northwest.
Shoreland vegetation is critical to a healthy lake’s ecosystem. It provides habitat for many aquatic and terrestrial animals including birds, frogs, turtles, and many small and large mammals. It also helps to improve the quality of the runoff that is flowing across the landscape towards the lake. Healthy shoreland vegetation includes a mix of tall grasses/flowers, shrubs and trees.

Many stretches of the shoreland around Pearl Lake have healthy shoreland vegetation (displayed in green); however, some stretches could benefit the lake by being restored.
The aquatic plant community in Pearl Lake is characterized by a slightly below-average diversity of plant species when compared to other lakes in the Waushara County Lakes Study, with a total of 16 species documented in the 2011 survey. The aquatic plant community is impacted by development on its shores.

- Several species found in Pearl Lake are sensitive to disturbance.
- Much of the diversity observed in Pearl Lake was located in the shallow areas on the southern side of the lake.
During the 2011 aquatic plant survey of Pearl Lake, 83 percent of the sites sampled had vegetative growth. The average depth of sampled sites was 15 feet, and the maximum depth was 35 feet.

The most frequently encountered plant species were Chara spp., slender naiad and Illinois pondweed. All three are common native species in Wisconsin lakes.

Curly-leaf pondweed, an invasive species in Wisconsin, was found in a single location in Pearl Lake, but not in dense patches. It does not currently show any invasive tendencies, but it should be monitored to ensure that it is not spreading.

Species Richness is a count of the number of plant species found at a survey point. A greater number of species in a lake helps to make the aquatic plant community more resilient to year-to-year changes and aquatic invasive species. More plant species means more diverse habitat and food sources are available.

Illinois pondweed provides forage and cover for aquatic animals. The tuber is also an important source of food for waterfowl.

Chara is a form of algae which resembles higher plants. It often grows in low, dense mats and is identified by its musky odor and rough texture. The water is often clear where chara grows densely because of its ability to filter nutrients from water.
Lakes go through a natural aging process that results in increased aquatic plant growth, fish, and wildlife over time. Within a lake’s watershed, human activity on the land, in a wetland, or in the lake can dramatically accelerate this process. Depending on land management practices, changes in a lake that may have normally taken centuries to occur may take place in decades or even years. The amounts of nutrients, algal growth, and water clarity measurements help to define the age of a lake. Based on these measures, lakes can be classified for comparison to one another.

**Oligotrophic Lakes**

*Common uses:*
- Swimming
- Skiing
- Boating

*Vegetation of oligotrophic lakes:*
- Very little vegetation

**Mesotrophic Lakes**

*Common uses:*
- Boating
- Fishing

*Vegetation of mesotrophic lakes:*
- Increased vegetation
- Occasional algal blooms

**Eutrophic Lakes**

*Common uses:*
- Fishing
- Wildlife watching

*Vegetation of eutrophic lakes:*
- Lots of aquatic plants
- Frequent algal blooms

Winter fish kills can occur in shallow lakes due to low oxygen levels.
Phosphorus is a major nutrient that can lead to excessive algae and rooted aquatic plant growth in lakes. In fact, one pound of phosphorus entering a lake can result in 500 pounds of algal growth. All Waushara County lakes have either sufficient or excessive nutrients for aquatic plant growth, so these lakes will benefit from limiting the addition of more nutrients. Sources of phosphorus include septic systems, animal waste, storm water runoff, soil erosion, and fertilizers for lawns, gardens and agriculture.

Water clarity is a measure of how deep light can penetrate (secchi depth). Clarity is affected by water color, turbidity (suspended sediment), and algae. Water clarity helps determine where rooted aquatic plants can grow.

The graph to the left shows water clarity measurements taken between March and October. It is typical for water clarity to vary throughout the year.

During the summers of 2011 and 2012, on average, the poorest water clarity in Pearl Lake was 4.5 feet in August and the best was 19 feet in July. In comparison to measurements prior to 2011, water clarity has decreased during most of the summer.
Pearl Lake – What can you do to help?

Lake Users:
- Run boat engines efficiently
- Observe no/low wake zones
- Refuel away from water
- Dispose of trash properly
- Remove all aquatic plants from boats and trailers
- Respect wildlife and other lake users

Land Owners:
- Control soil erosion
- Keep livestock out of lakes and streams
- Control manure runoff
- Carefully manage nutrients and pesticides
- Leave natural shoreland vegetation in place or restore if it has been removed
- Learn to identify and look for invasive species

Home Owners:
- Leave natural shoreland vegetation in place or restore if it has been removed
- Leave woody habitat for young fish, turtles and frogs
- Eliminate the use of fertilizer or use no phosphorus fertilizer
- Eliminate or minimize use of pesticides
- Control soil erosion
- Control runoff from rooftops and hard surfaces
- Clean up after pets
- Learn to identify and look for invasive species

Stop the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species!

Wetlands and Shorelands:
- LEARN how to identify invasive plants and animals, and know who to contact if found.
- DO NOT PURCHASE prohibited and restricted species! Whenever possible purchase native plants.
- NEVER transplant water garden plants or aquarium plants into lakes, streams, wetlands, or storm water ponds. Properly dispose of unwanted plants and animals!
- REMOVE invasive exotic plants from your landscape and replace them with native plants or non-invasive exotic plants. Scout annually for new invasive plants.
- AVOID using garden plants from other regions whose invasive potential is poorly understood.

Lakes and Rivers:
- LEARN what Wisconsin invasive plants and animals look like and who to contact if seen in a lake or river.
- INSPECT your boat, trailer and equipment when traveling to different water bodies and REMOVE any attached aquatic plants or animals (before launching, after loading, and before transporting on a public highway).
- DRAIN all water from boats, motors, and all equipment after use at a lake.
- NEVER release live fish, bait or pets into a wetland or water body.
- BUY minnows from a Wisconsin bait dealer. Only use leftover minnows at that same water body.
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