Marl 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.
Marl Lake – Location

Northwest of Wautoma
North of County Road C
Township of Deerfield

Surface Area: 28 acres
Maximum Depth: 34 feet

Water Flow
- Marl 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 Marl Lake via groundwater.

Waushara County Lakes Study - Summary Report 2013
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 Marl Lake is 4,378 acres.
- The primary land use is forest land, but agriculture also account for a significant amount of acreage within the watershed.
- Land surrounding the lake includes forests, agriculture, wetlands, and developed land. Generally, the land closest to the lake will have the greatest immediate impact on its water quality.
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 lakes. Groundwater flows towards Marl Lake from the 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.

Few stretches of the shoreland around Marl Lake have healthy shoreland vegetation (displayed in green); most stretches could benefit the lake by being restored.
The aquatic plant community in Marl Lake is characterized by below-average diversity of plant species when compared to other lakes in the Waushara County Lakes Study, with seventeen aquatic species common to central Wisconsin lakes.

Ninety-four percent of sites sampled had vegetative growth. The average depth of sampled sites was 11 feet and the maximum depth was 24 feet.
The dominant plant species in the survey were *Chara* spp., Fries’ pondweed and sago pondweed. These species offer cover for fish and are important food sources for fish and waterfowl.

**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.

**Marl Lake Aquatic Plant Survey 2011: Total Number of Species**

The leaves of **white-stem pondweed** offer shade, shelter and foraging opportunities for fish. Its fruits are a valuable food for waterfowl. White-stem pondweed is relatively intolerant of disturbance and is one of the less common species in Marl Lake.

**Total Number of Species**

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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.

Total phosphorus levels measured when the lake was well-mixed during spring and fall are displayed in the graph to the left. During fall and spring 2010-2012, the average total phosphorus levels were much lower than historic measurements. Marl Lake is transitioning between oligotrophic and mesotrophic conditions.

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 February and November. It is typical for water clarity to vary throughout the year.

During the summers of 2011 and 2012, on average, the best was 17.9 feet in June and the poorest water clarity in Marl Lake was 11.9 feet in August. In comparison to measurements prior to 2011, water clarity was a little poorer during the summer.
Marl Lake – What can you do to help?

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.

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
Marl Lake – Primary Authors

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