



photo by Tom Moser

Wisconsin Loons and Oil Spill

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Gulf spill could threaten state's loon population this fall

By RON SEELY

As many as one-half of the state's 3,400 loons, like this photographed on Lake Owen a few years ago, will find waters soiled by the BP oil spill.

Imogene P. Johnson



This summer, when Lorna Wilson hears the familiar wail of loons near her home on the St. Croix Flowage in northern Wisconsin, she finds less solace in the echoing songs and instead thinks about the dangerous and uncertain journey the loons face in the fall.

Come fall, perhaps as many as half of Wisconsin's resurgent loon population of about 3,400 will join the streams of the state's other migrating waterfowl bound for their wintering



grounds on the Gulf Coast. Awaiting them are waters and marshes made deadly by the worst oil spill in the nation's history.

"You can't undo thousands of years of instinct," said Wilson, a volunteer with the state's Loon Watch program. "They will just go. They don't know there is something dangerous down there. They'll just go. We're all totally depressed."

For those who work to protect the state's migratory birds, the season has been dominated by the BP oil spill and efforts to determine the potential impact on Wisconsin's winged populations. Most at risk, according to experts, are waterfowl such as loons and ducks as well as wading birds and shorebirds that have long relied on the Gulf Coast, its protective marshes and rich stores of food, for their winter homes. The

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for example, lists sandhill cranes, whooping cranes and loons as species that could be affected by the spill.

Also, the agency lists 36 national wildlife refuges as being at risk of damage due to the spill. About 13 million ducks, including such species as blue-winged teal and wood ducks, winter on the Gulf along with as many as 1.5 million geese.

Of special concern in Wisconsin is the small recovering flock of whooping cranes that has been trained to migrate behind ultralight aircraft to a wildlife refuge on the Florida Gulf Coast.

But there is no knowing, experts said, exactly what fate awaits any of the birds this fall when they heed the ancient urge to fly before winter's winds to warmer southern waters. Though some discussion has centered on trying to divert or intervene in migratory flights, there really is no practical way to accomplish such a feat.

"I just don't see how we can do something like that," said Karen Etter Hale, director of the Madison Audubon Society. "We just all feel so hopeless about this."

About the only thing many groups can do, Etter Hale and others said, is prepare to respond with volunteer help if the number of birds in peril on the coast increases dramatically come fall.

Etter Hale said many of the state's songbirds also migrate toward the Gulf but generally pass over the area in the fall en route to more southern destinations. The spring migration back north would be the time to worry about songbirds, she added, because many stop along the coast to eat after the tiring flight across the Gulf of Mexico.

Richard Beilfuss, with the International Crane Foundation, said officials with the whooping crane recovery project are hoping that the area where the Wisconsin cranes winter — the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge north of St. Petersburg on the Florida Gulf Coast — is far enough east of the oil spill to avoid any impact. The two areas used in the refuge are also somewhat inland, he added.

"We feel we may have dodged a bullet," Beilfuss said. But he added that conditions could change quickly, especially if a major hurricane strikes the area and moves the oil east.

Then it might become necessary to take action to protect the birds, he said.

Most concern, Beilfuss said, centers on the oil contaminating the birds' food supply. "We mostly worry about food chain dynamics," he said. "The birds eat crustaceans. The big concern is some kind of poisoning."

Both the whooping crane and the common loon are birds whose numbers are low enough that any losses could prove a major setback to their continued recovery. Beilfuss said the flock of wild whooping cranes that migrates now from Wisconsin to Florida has grown to more than 100 birds. That migrating flock was started because only one other migrating flock exists and that one also winters on the Gulf Coast in Texas.

Stacy Craig, director of Wisconsin's Loon Watch program said the spill and the fall migration could be a disaster waiting to happen for the state's loons. Their numbers are just beginning to show signs of growth with increases of between 1 percent and 2 percent a year, she said. Surveys of loon populations in the state this year and next should provide some indication of whether the spill impacted the birds, Craig added.

"It is a consuming concern at this point," Craig said of the spill and its potential impact on loons.

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Another Loss

As September started, Vera Villman lost her battle with cancer. Vera lived on the North end of the Lake and cherished her cabin designed to house her grandchildren. Her neighbors will miss this independent neighbor.

The Diamond Lake Newsletter is published by the Diamond Lakers Association and compiled by Audrey Sanderson . Cabin Biographies, photos, and Historical memories are specially welcomed. Please send to Audrey at newsletter@diamond-lakers.org.

Dates to Consider

The Grand View dump hours change on October 15. Until then, the hours are Wednesdays 2pm-6pm and Saturdays 8am-2pm. After October 15, the dump is only open on Saturday.

Fall Fest in Cable is September 25 and 26. Fall color should peak this very week.

Save Saturday, July 23, 2011, at 3 p.m. for the Annual meeting of the Diamond Lakers. More in the spring newsletter.

**Diamond Lakers, Inc.
Annual Association Meeting
July 24, 2010**



The Annual Meeting of the Diamond Lakers Inc. was held at the Chuck and Ellie Raths residence on Saturday, July 24, 2010. Tim Tully, President, called the meeting to order.

Minute Review

The minutes of the July 18, 2009 annual meeting were reviewed as posted on the web site and there was a motion to approve.

Treasurer Report

Treasurer Larry Sanderson reported on a balance of \$ 2109. There was a motion to accept the treasurer's report.

Diamond Lakers Inc. Web Site

The lake association web site continues to provide a communication vehicle for the membership and Tim thanked Bob Jacobel developing and maintaining this site. Bob reviewed that there had been 18,000 hits.

Waste Management

Tim reviewed the issues with waste management for residents on the lake. Waste Management companies have new guidelines for the type of container and large 96-gallon containers are now being used since trucks have an automated system for picking up containers. The size of the container and the distance for the pick up location is an issue so many residents opt to leave the containers along the road. There are options for

smaller containers but getting these to the pick up location is still an issue and the containers are not bear proof. The smaller containers are 66 or 36-gallon size.

Lake Monitoring

Larry Sanderson reported that there is no change in the lake quality.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Eurasian water milfoil continues to be of concern but there is no evidence of spread in the region. VHS has been reported in the Apostle Islands and the Duluth Harbor.

Northwest Lake Conference

Larry Sanderson reported on the Northwest Lake Conference, which was held at Drummond High School since Telemark Lodge is now closed. The new law related to invasive species is helping to monitor boats as they move between lakes.

New Lake Laws

1) Wisconsin now has a law prohibits phosphates in lawn fertilizer. Since phosphates contribute to the growth of lake algae, clearing products used in the home should also be phosphate free since the phosphate enters the septic system.

2) The transportation of aquatic plants and animals law can now be enforced by any law enforcement official.

3) The new No Wake Law is now implemented on all lakes in Wisconsin and the law prohibits boaters from operation their boats faster than slow, no-wake anywhere within a 100 feet of shore.

Personal Water Craft need a 200 foot no wake zone from shore, and 100 feet from docks and platforms. For water skiing, boats must be 100 feet from ashore before take off .and it is still illegal to take off from docks or rafts.



If there are concerns about violations, it is best to videotape the violators since the video can then be used as evidence. There was discussion about a recent non-compliant boat motor and that boat is no longer on the lake.

Fishing Report

The DNR dropped the proposal to change the northern pike limit as reviewed in the Newsletter. Tom Goeltz reported that he had made this request to change the bag limit from one 32 inch to two 26 inch Northern Pike. He reported that this is still under consideration.

Wildlife Update

Tim reviewed the concern related to deer ticks that transmit Lyme disease and the risk for humans and household pets.

The loons on the north end of the lake have hatched a baby. There has been discussion about finding another location for nest but no decisions have been finalized. The outlook for the loons with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is of concern and it is unknown how this will affect the loon population or if they will return in future years.

Nominations Committee Report

Jerry Robotka presented the Nominating Committee Report and the following offices, board positions were open, and the incumbents agreed to serve another term. Scott Byrd vacated one board position.

The following officers were re-elected:

President: Tim Tully – Term 2010 – 2012

Secretary: Susan Trankel – Term 2010 – 2012

Board Members re-elected:

Jerry Robotka – Term 2010 – 2012

Bruce Pankonin – Term 2010 – 2012

Audrey Sanderson – Term 2010 – 2012

1-year term vacated by Scott Byrd, filled by:

Bob Jacobel – Term 2010 – 2011

Location of 2011 Annual Meeting

Tim Tully reviewed options for locations of the annual meeting in 2009.

The Volicky's volunteered their home for the meeting in 2011.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Trankel, Secretary



The following pictures record the interactions during the social hour following the meeting:







