

McGrath Pond - Salmon Lake Association

Stewards of Our Belgrade Lakes

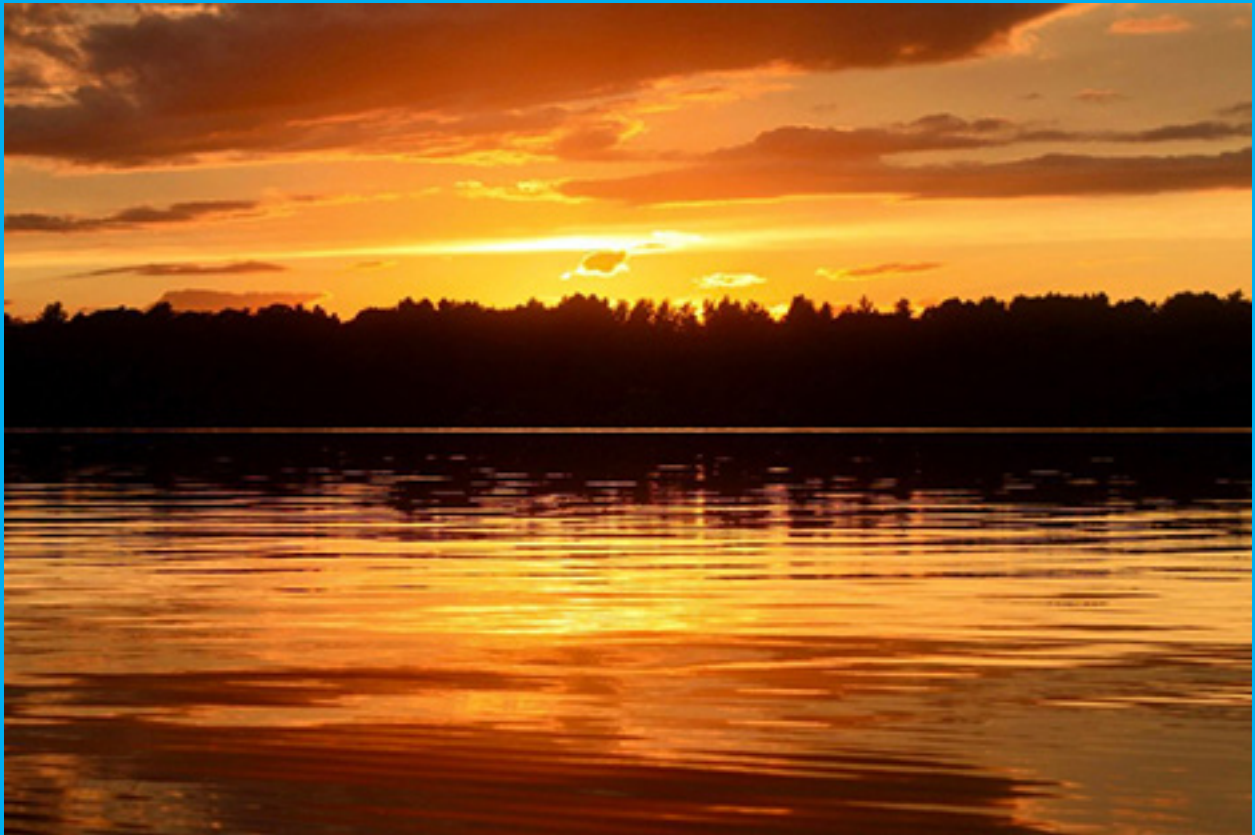


Photo - David Sandmel

2022 Newsletter

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

July 4th – McGrath Pond Independence Day Flotillia – 3 PM Pleasant Point Park

August 11th – MPSLA Annual Meeting – 6 PM Pleasant Point Park

August 12th - Rain Date - Notification by 3 PM Email

BYO Lawn Chair

FACEBOOK

facebook.com/MPSLAssoc

MPSLA WEBSITE

mcgrathpond-salmonlake.org

Partner Organizations

Town of Belgrade

Town of Oakland

7 Lakes Alliance

Camp Tracy

Whisperwood Lodge & Cottages

President's Message

Lenny Reich

Winter is finally releasing its grip as I write this. It was quite cold at times and gave us good ice cover on the two lakes. Up here in the northwest corner of Salmon Lake, we saw lots of ice fishermen poking holes in the ice and a good many fish coming out of them. The resident bald eagles took great interest, coming to check for small fish left on the ice when the fishermen vacated, and they often departed with dinner for their trouble. It's been wonderful to see the return of eagles to the lake over the course of the three decades I've lived here. If only our other environmental efforts could be so successful!

This past year on McGrath and Salmon was unusual. Although we had little precipitation in July, lots of rain fell the rest of the spring, summer, and fall, so water levels remained high. What a welcome change from the low water we've experienced in recent years!

But, perhaps because all of that rainwater flushed phosphorus into the lakes, both McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake had some of their worst water quality in years, with McGrath Pond's clarity actually less than Salmon Lake's during the fall. Among the Belgrade Lakes, only North Pond, which has been suffering full-on algae blooms, was worse than either of our two. As you will see a few pages further on in her "Water Quality Update," 7 Lakes Alliance's Danielle Wain finds this decrease in water clarity in both our lakes as cause for real concern.

We don't know for sure what caused it, but we do know that our 2017 watershed survey located 105 properties needing remediation, almost a third of all those around the lakes. In addition, streams and road ditching coming into the lakes from up in their watersheds can carry phosphorus from some distance away, especially during storm events. Somehow, enough nutrients got into the water of both lakes over spring, summer, and fall to cause algae growth and a lessening of water clarity.

With funding from the Federal Clean Water Act and in conjunction with the Maine DEP and 7 Lakes Alliance, we have since 2019 worked with 39 property owners around our two lakes to remediate runoff problems, and a new round of grants has just been approved that includes as many as 27 more properties over the next two years. This is vital work, and we were very pleased to get the grants and do the work, but it's not enough.

This is an "All Hands On Deck!" situation. Each of us with shorefront property must make sure that no nutrient-laden runoff reaches the lakes. For example, building up a buffer of native plants and natural mulch in the first 20 to 30 feet from water's edge can slow

runoff sufficiently that it sinks into the ground before reaching the lake. There are other things we can do — from crowning camp roads, to fixing septic systems, to eliminating paths that go down slope directly at the lake.

For aiding in this work, MPSLA plans to distribute several color brochures this summer to show how to take better care of our lakes. We will make sure that there are plenty to go around, courtesy of the Francis Fox Sandmel Education Fund.

I should be sure to mention the powerful LakeSmart approach, which provides the format for owners to beautify their property and improve its value as they protect the lakes. Kim and Dave Hallee run our LakeSmart program and have an article about it in this issue of the Newsletter. Be sure to take a look, and consider making your property LakeSmart. You will be very happy you did.

As I said in the President's Message last year, keeping our lakes clear is a never-ending process that requires efforts from the whole lake community, not just a few devoted people. That's never been more true than now. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work!

Thanks to everyone for efforts on
behalf of our lakes,

Lenny Reich
lsreich@colby.edu

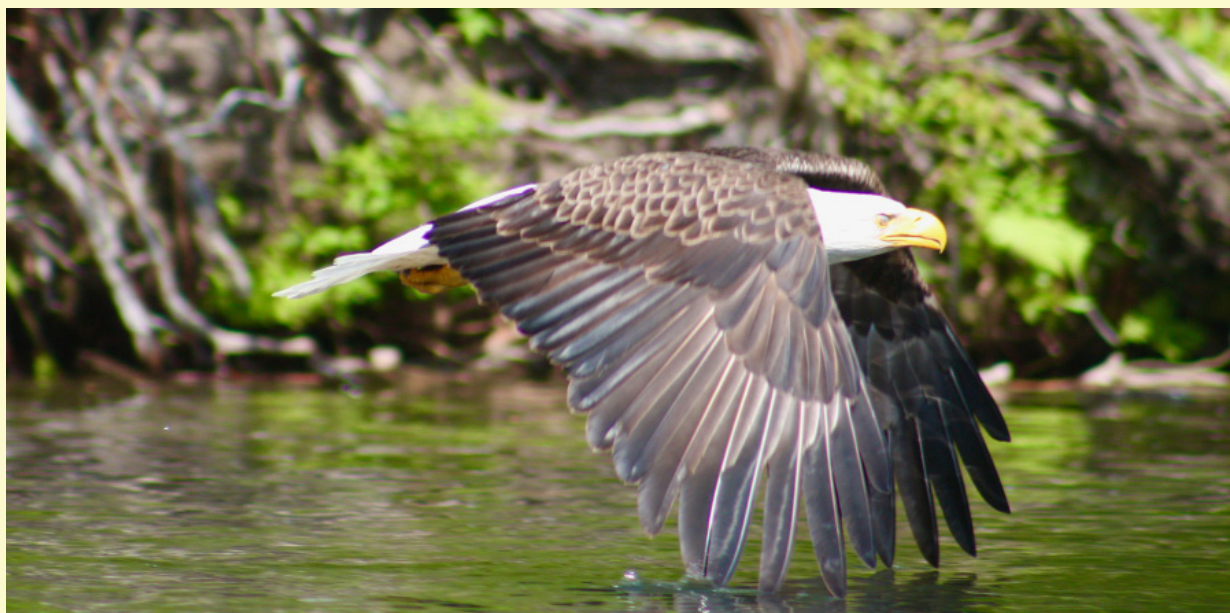


Photo - David Sandmel

Water Quality Update

*Dr. Danielle Wain - Lake Science Director
7 Lakes Alliance-Colby Water Quality Initiative*

YOUR LAKES NEED YOUR HELP!

Since 2015, 7 Lakes Alliance and Colby College have collected Secchi disk readings (water clarity) and water samples for total phosphorus (TP) analysis on McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake at Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Station 1, the deepest parts of each lake (Figure 1).

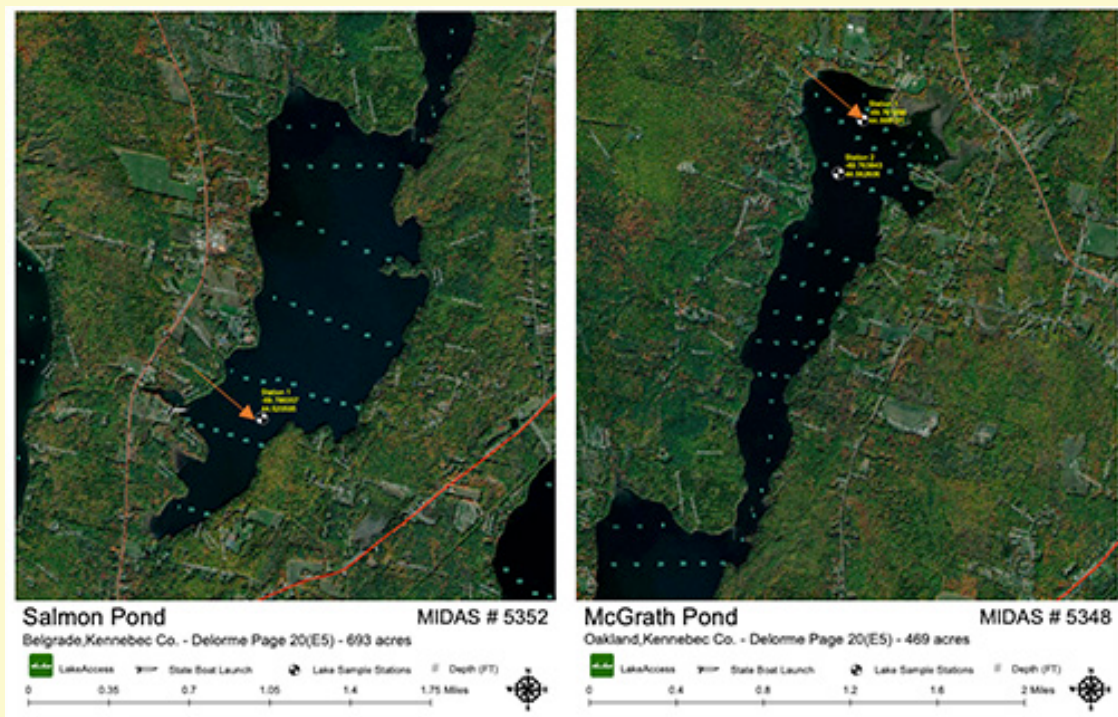


Figure 1: Map of McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake denoting the Maine DEP sampling stations (www.lakesofmaine.org)

From this monitoring, we can see how important water-quality metrics, such as average TP and Secchi disk transparency (SDT), change from year to year. These metrics are one way of classifying the trophic state of the lakes, which essentially tells us if we have good (oligotrophic), medium (mesotrophic), or bad (eutrophic) water quality.

The State of Maine has defined thresholds for water quality based on SDT and TP. An average SDT reading between 13 ft (4 m) and 26 ft (8 m) is defined as medium water quality, greater than 26 ft (8 m) is good, and less than 13 ft (4 m) is bad. An average TP value between 4.5 and 20 ppb is defined as medium water quality, with values below and above that range as bad and good water quality, respectively.

Unfortunately, 2021 was a bad year for water quality in both McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake.

There was a green tinge in both lakes through most of the summer (Figure 2). This is also shown in the numbers (Table 1). The average water clarity for both lakes was not far above 4 m, perilously close to the threshold for eutrophic waters. While their average phosphorus readings were in the medium water-quality range, these are still some of the highest phosphorus levels in the Belgrades, with only North Pond's (where there was a bloom last summer) being higher. It had an average of 17 parts per billion.



Figure 2: Algae near the boat launch at Salmon Lake (10/13/21)

Table 1: 2021 McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake Seasonal Averages and Trophic Status

	ME DEP Trophic Status Indicators			McGrath Pond Average (Range)	Salmon Lake Average (Range)
	Oligo-trophic	Meso-trophic	Eu-trophic		
Water Clarity (meters)	> 8	4 - 8	< 4	4.8 (3.1 - 6.6)	4.2 (2.6 - 6.1)
Surface Total Phosphorus (ppb)	< 4.5	4.5 - 20	> 20	12 (8 - 18)	15 (7 - 29)

How does this compare to previous years? Since we started more-intensive data collection in 2015, McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake have fluctuated but remained in the medium (mesotrophic) range (Figure 3). **However, in 2021 there was a large decrease in water clarity in both lakes!**

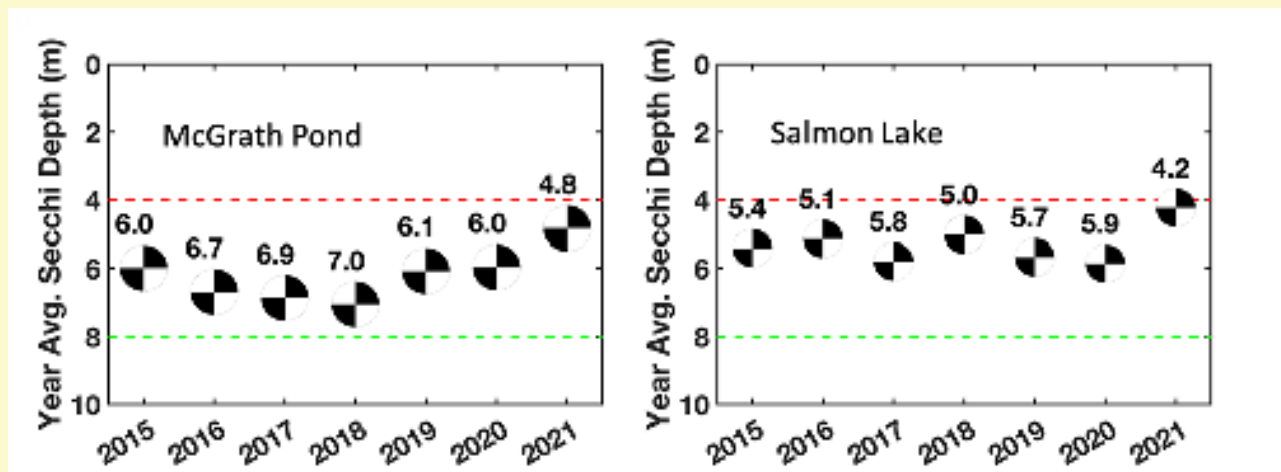


Figure 3: Average SDT for each year. The red line indicates the “bad” water quality threshold, while the green line indicates the “good” water quality threshold.

Once a water body tips into the bad/eutrophic range, it will usually not return to better conditions without significant remediation work. **Preventing McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake from falling into the eutrophic range is imperative. We all need to do our part to reduce phosphorus inputs into the lakes by reducing runoff and erosion in the watershed.** Buffer strips at the lakeshore and erosion control are key to preventing these lakes from tipping into a condition where there are blooms every summer.

If your property is not LakeSmart, get in touch with the MPSLA LakeSmart coordinators Kim and Dave Hallee to have your property evaluated. See their article elsewhere in this Newsletter. You can also get in touch with 7 Lakes Alliance (495-6039) if you would like the Youth Conservation Corps to help you do erosion-control work on your property. Either way, your lakes will thank you!

(207) 495-6039

www.7lakesalliance.org

danielle.wain@7lakesalliance.org



Dr. Danielle Wain

Grant Funding Available

Charlie Baeder - 7 Lakes Alliance

Erosion Control 319 Grant Funds Available to Landowners, 2022-2023

7 Lakes Alliance works with MPSLA on erosion control projects to keep stormwater runoff and dirt out of McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake. Runoff carries dirt to ditches, streams, and directly to the lakes. Dirt contains phosphorus which is plant food for algae. Too much phosphorus causes algal blooms that can be toxic to people and to animals, and that can diminish property values.



**McGrath Pond
Stream with Rip Rap**



**Salmon Lake
Crushed Stone, Tiered Erosion
Control Mulch and Blue Stone**



**Salmon Lake
Culvert with
"Rock Sandwich"**

We have three erosion control programs to help you keep our lakes clear: the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), the LakeSmart program, and the Maine DEP 319 grant program. Please see the MPSLA and 7 Lakes websites and this newsletter for more information about YCC and LakeSmart. This article focuses on the Maine DEP 319 grant program.

The Maine DEP 319 program administers US EPA Clean Water Act section 319 grant funds in Maine. 7 Lakes is eligible to apply for these funds because McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake are considered "threatened" lakes by Maine DEP as a result of development and water quality trends (note that all 7 major lakes in the Belgrade Lakes watershed are considered either "impaired" or "threatened").

We are also eligible to apply for grants because we are operating under the McGrath Pond-Salmon Lake Watershed Protection Plan, available at the MPSLA website. The Plan was developed following a survey of the McGrath Pond-Salmon Lake watershed in which 105 properties were identified as having erosion control problems.

319 funds are available to residential, commercial landowners, and towns. They are

cost-share grants that require match funds from landowners. We target high and medium impact sites for 319 grant funding. Low impact sites are typically referred to the YCC and LakeSmart programs.

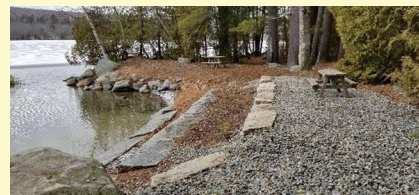
7 Lakes completed a 319 grant program for 2019-20 with several major outcomes:



**McGrath Pond
Blue Stone & Rip Rap**



**Salmon Lake
Holding Ponds & Rain Garden**



**McGrath Pond
Pleasant Point Park**

Installed 41 erosion control projects (Best Management Practices or BMPs) at 10 high priority sites, including 6 private roads, Camp Tracy, residential properties, and Pleasant Point Park.

YCC installed erosion control projects (BMPs) at 14 residential properties.

LakeSmart evaluations were conducted on 17 properties by MPSLA volunteers.

7 Lakes just received a new grant from Maine DEP and has funds available for erosion control projects in 2022-23. We plan to work with private landowners, road associations, commercial businesses, and towns on erosion control projects. Typical projects include rebuilding gravel roads and driveways, replacing undersized or failing culverts, installing shoreline buffers and raingardens to reduce stormwater runoff, stabilizing shorelines, and other water quality improvement projects.

To get more information about the 319 Grant Program and whether your project will qualify for funding, please call or email: 7 Lakes Alliance, Attention: Charlie Baeder, 207-495-6039, info@7lakesalliance.org.

www.7lakesalliance.org

charlie.baeder@7lakesalliance.org



Charlie Baeder
(207) 495-6039

Funding for this project was provided, in part, by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. Section 319 grants are administered by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection in partnership with EPA.

LakeSmart

Kim & Dave Hallee

LakeSmart Opportunities

We need your Help!

This is a call out for more LakeSmart evaluations and evaluators!

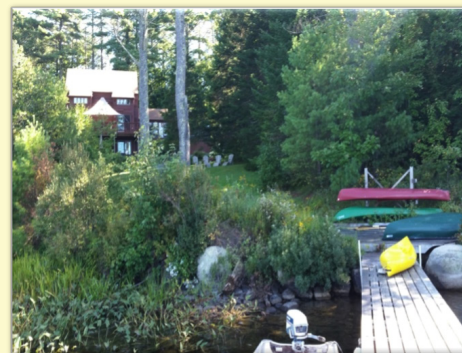
With some topical reading and a day or two of seminar, you will acquire the knowledge and resources to help your lake and your neighbors. We look forward to accompanying you as you gain confidence in helping your neighbors remedy threats to water quality.

The goal of the LakeSmart program is to provide information and resources to lake dwellers on property care and improvements that increase long term useability and conservation of land and water.

These two examples are from away, but elements of the examples shown are visible on Salmon Lake and McGrath Pond.



This first photo shows compacted soil with insufficient plant matter to diffuse rainfall's impact and provide a chance for water absorption results in runoff, soil movement, shoreline collapse and nutrient loading in the lake.



Compare that to trees that diffuse both mid-day sunlight and damaging downpours. Shrubbery can provide privacy screening, noise buffering, wildlife refuge and help define recreation areas. Shoreline buffering's root systems help protect from property loss and its foliage is a windbreak and sound barrier to neighborhood activities in both directions! If present, aquatic plants provide wildlife habitat while utilizing water borne nutrients and minimizing wave impact on shoreline.

In the eight years Kim & Dave have been LakeSmart Coordinators for Salmon Lake and McGrath Pond we have surveyed over 50 properties. Of those, 25 properties now proudly display a LakeSmart sign. Many have been caring for their properties on behalf of the lake for years. Others contacted us when informed of threat identified during the 2017 watershed survey.

The survey found 105 properties with threats to lake water quality. That is nearly 1/3rd of the properties surrounding McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake! More properties need to be evaluated, more recommendations of soil conserving remediations need to be delivered to provide the best care for the lakes we love!

There is help in reaching your property protecting goals. Illustrated descriptions of common remediations, plants, and planting methods to meet many situations are available. A LakeSmart evaluation is often a first step to 7 Lakes Alliance's Youth Conservation Corp and soil and water conservation grants.

**To our awarded neighbors:
Thank you and keep up the great care you have provided.**

**To the residents who have not yet received an award:
Keep up with your remediation efforts.**

Contact us if you have more questions. Each of your conservation efforts protects your property and preserves, and improves, the Lakes' water quality.

Kim & Dave
Hallee



Guidance and Resources

LakeSmart Coordinator – Kim Hallee 207-314-0881; khallee@gwi.net
Water Quality – <https://www.maine.gov/dep/land/watershed/materials.html>
Erosion Tech Support, Youth Conservation Corp – laura.roseday@7lakesalliance.org
Matching Grant Opportunities, 319 Funds – charlie.baeder@7lakesalliance.org
Conservation Practices for Homeowners – <https://www.lakes.me/lakesmart>

→ *We're Surrounded* ←
→ *By Invasives* ←
→ *And Need Your Help!* ←

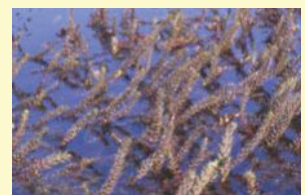
Surrounded by invasive aquatic plants, that is. Invasive plants spread rapidly, crowding out native plants while taking over ecosystems, degrading fish habitat, and making boating and swimming difficult or impossible. Once well established in a lake, invasives are just about impossible to get rid of. Of course, this lowers property values significantly.

Salmon Lake briefly had an infestation more than a decade ago, but it was discovered when still limited to the outlet stream, and Maine DEP managed to eradicate it. We were very lucky that time, but depending on luck is not an effective strategy.

In almost every case, invasive plants are carried into waterbodies on boats or their equipment. The best way to keep those invasive plants out of McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake is through careful inspection of boats, equipment, and trailers by trained Courtesy Boat Inspectors (CBIs) before the boats are launched.

MPSLA has paid for CBIs over the years thorough a program run by 7 Lakes Alliance, but costs have been going up along with wages, and it's getting hard to find and keep staff. It's become clear that if we want to protect our lakes, we need to step up and augment paid staff hours with volunteer hours. The reason is that the danger of infestation by invasives has become extremely high and is getting worse. We're literally surrounded.

To the west, Great Pond has multiple infestations of Variable Leaf Milfoil. 7 Lakes Alliance and the Belgrade Lakes Association have, since 2012, spent well over a million dollars keeping it in check. They've found that it's a fight just to keep even – and Variable-Leaf is the less aggressive of the two milfoils found in Maine waters.



Variable Leaf Milfoil

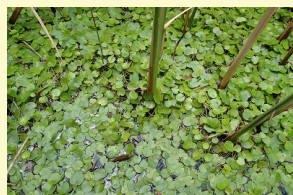
To the east, Friends of Messalonskee likewise have been battling Variable Leaf Milfoil, which is concentrated at the south end of the lake but has attached to the lake bottom in most all the shallow areas around the lake. It clogs up Belgrade Stream all the way to Wings Mills dam, and shards continually come floating down the Stream into the lake. **It only takes one shard caught on the shaft of an outboard motor or on the wheel of a trailer to infest a new body of water.**

To our north, the aquatic invasive Curly-Leaf Pondweed recently found its way into East Pond via a private boat launch on the pond's meandering outlet stream and has already spread over the dam to North Pond, although the infestation there may yet be contained. This is a developing situation.



Curly-Leaf Pondweed

And to our south, Cobbossee Lake actually has two invasive species, free-floating European Frogbit and the more-aggressive kind of milfoil, Eurasian, first discovered there in 2018. Eurasian Milfoil spreads very quickly. Strands of the plant can grow several inches on a sunny day. An article in the Morning Sentinel last August quotes the lake association vice president as saying, "A lake that becomes really infested with Eurasian Milfoil is absolutely useless to everybody. There's no boating or swimming." Whether the groups on Cobbossee can prevent that from happening is an open question.



European Frogbit



Eurasian Milfoil

So, those are the invasives on every side of McGrath and Salmon, and they present quite a threat, all season long. In addition, many of the boats arriving at the Salmon Lake boat launch come from elsewhere in Maine or anywhere in the Northeast. And with waters warming everywhere, there are greater quantities and varieties of invasive plants headed our way all the time. We need to be prepared.

Last summer, our CBI coverage at the Salmon Lake boat launch was inadequate, limited to 7:00-11:30 a.m. on weekdays and 7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on Saturday & Sunday. What happens if an invasive-laden boat arrives at noon on a weekday or 1:30 on Saturday afternoon? The boat gets launched into the lake without being inspected, drops off shards as it travels, and we soon have an infestation that may extend from the Salmon Lake outlet stream to the Narrows to Pleasant Point Park at the top of McGrath Pond. In other words, it's here to stay.

The way to get adequate CBI hours at the Salmon Lake boat launch is with MPSLA volunteers. In fact, other lake associations have been using volunteers for a number of years. The East Pond Association, for example, has staffed two days per week with volunteer CBIs so that paid staff can cover more hours the other five.

Three members of the MPSLA Board of Directors got CBI training at the end of last summer, and the remaining directors plan to go for it this spring, so that they can be the first to volunteer. Training involves a couple of hours of your time, learning what to look for and how to find it, at the 7 Lakes building in Belgrade Lakes Village. After that, volunteers will go into a pool of certified CBIs, and we will work out a convenient schedule for everyone, not to exceed an hour or two per week.

Whether we take a couple of days per week or cover several hours after the paid CBIs leave each day, we can bulk up the coverage so that the great majority of boats are launched when a CBI is there, ready to check that they don't go into our waters with invasive plant shards hitching a ride.

If you would be willing to get CBI training and help keep invasive plants out of McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake, please drop a note to this email address:

MPSLA.CBI@gmail.com

Your lakes will thank you!

Lenny Reich



Photo - David Sandmel

Loon Nest Rafts

For Salmon Lake

Rob True

On March 27th, Lenny Reich and I spent the afternoon in Falmouth at Maine Audubon building two Loon Nest Rafts that we will place on Salmon Lake once the ice is out. So far, we have put together a small team of builders and monitors that also includes Neil Korostoff and Mike Scherer, who are both on Salmon.

This project is funded by the U S Fish and Wildlife Service as part of a settlement from a fuel-oil spill in Buzzards Bay (Cape Cod) that killed over 500 loons, including some that breed on Maine lakes. This is an effort to restore the loon population. Maine Audubon and Maine Lakes are providing the expertise, materials, and any assistance we will need as we monitor the rafts over the spring and summer. We are only responsible to purchase a few items, including concrete anchoring blocks.

Placement of one raft will likely be in Snapper's Cove at the southern end of Salmon Lake, with the second raft at one of three coves at the northern end of the lake. The location of the northern raft will be decided in consultation with the staff from Maine Lakes when they deliver the chain and other items. This location will be determined by depth, prevailing wind direction, and proximity to another nesting pair.



Photo - David Sandmel

As with any loon nest, it's important that people not get too close, especially with larger boats. The monitoring of these nests will be weekly or bi-weekly, depending upon occupancy; if anyone is interested in helping out, please let me know. The other area where we need help is keeping eyes open for nesting activity anywhere on Salmon, as there used to be active nests in at least four locations.

[Please email \[robtrue@gmail.com\]\(mailto:robtrue@gmail.com\)](mailto:robtrue@gmail.com)

[Rob True](#)





Adopt-a-Shoreline & Invasive Plant Paddles

What is “Adopt-a-Shoreline?”

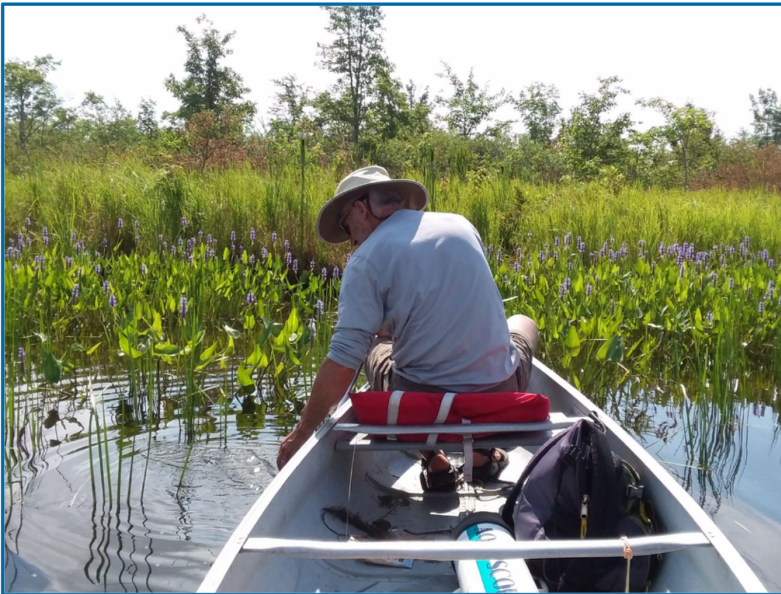
Adopt-a-Shoreline is an easy, low-commitment way to keep **invasive aquatic plants (IAP)** out of the Belgrade Lakes. Adopters survey their shoreline for IAPs twice a season via motorboat, kayak, canoe, paddle board, etc.

Do I have to own shoreline property to participate?

Absolutely NOT! You can adopt any stretch of shoreline where you recreate. Have a favorite paddle route? A secret swimming hole? Any stretch of shoreline that you care about is worth adopting!

Do I need to be good at identifying plants?

Nope! Adopters are encouraged to attend a quick (under one hour) training session at a location convenient to you. We supply volunteers with waterproof “Quick Keys” to identify common IAPs in the area. A good rule of thumb is that if you see something you haven’t seen before, it’s worth checking out! What is most important to us is that you know who to call: **Ghostbusters!** Just Kidding, call our IAP specialists at 7 Lakes Alliance (495-6039).



Join us for a special pre-season webinar to discuss Adopt-a-Shoreline and Invasive Plant Paddles for the upcoming season on Tuesday, April 19th, 6:00 p.m.

<https://maine.zoom.us/j/5670307631>



What is an “Invasive Plant Paddle?”

An Invasive Plant Paddles (IPPs) is a volunteer-powered, group survey for invasive aquatic plants (IAP). It's a great way to “paddle with purpose” and do your part to protect the waters you love!



What is the time commitment of a plant paddle?

IPPs take ~3 hours from 8-11(ish) a.m. The water is calmest in the morning, thus, we like to start early to avoid wind for best visibility and paddle safety.

Do I need to be good at identifying plants?

Nope! IPP volunteers are paired with experienced, knowledgeable people so that you always have a buddy to answer your questions.

I can't commit to paddling. Is there another way I can help with survey efforts?

YES! We are looking for access to shoreline properties on Salmon Lake and McGrath Pond that can provide parking for two or three vehicles during daytime surveys. This will enable us to survey more effectively and safely as small groups can split up and cover more territory in specific regions.



Do Invasive Plant Paddles make a difference?

YES! Just ask our friend and local hero, Bonnie! Bonnie is a resident of East Pond's long outlet stream, the Serpentine. Before attending one of our IPP outings, Bonnie was practicing her aquatic plant identification on one of her daily paddles and found something she hadn't seen before. She brought the UFO (unidentified floating organism) to a plant paddle and *Boy!* are we glad she did. Turns out, Bonnie had identified a new infestation of Curly-Leaf Pondweed (pictured below), an invasive native to Eurasia. Thank you, Bonnie!

Now, who's with us?



How do I sign up for Adopt-a-Shoreline and/or get more information?

To sign up, please fill out this form

<https://forms.gle/x8R1Z74Ey9GKrRJ9>

or contact our IAP manager sharon.mann@7lakesalliance.org

Wheeler's Camps

A Century (and then some) on Salmon Lake - Robyn Deveney

Although many of its summer guests trace their roots here to the early 1900s, the small colony of rental camps nestled into the northeast corner of Salmon Lake is still a fairly well-kept secret. It's not uncommon for a lifelong area resident to exclaim upon arriving, "I had no idea this was here!"

The story of Wheeler's Camps begins in 1899, when my great-great-grandfather William Wheeler and his friend Henry Kenney built a summer cottage on Kenney's land in Oakland, previously within the Wabanaki Confederacy. This wide swath of woods and pasture ran from the shore of Messalonskee Lake to the shore of Salmon Lake.



William & Eliza Wheeler



Camp Keneo

Camp Keneo – a wry mashup of "Kenney" and "Kineo," a grand Maine resort hotel of the era – was set on a peninsula in a sunny cove, and it immediately became a favorite gathering spot. Over the next four years William's brother Abel and a couple of other friends from the local community, George Allen and Arthur Leonard, built three more camps on "Birch Point" for their families.

By the early 1920s, William's son Dean had taken the reins of the family businesses in Oakland, Wheeler's Funeral Home and Wheeler's Furniture Store. With passenger train service now running between New York and Maine, the Belgrade Lakes region was becoming a wildly popular summer destination. City-weary visitors, ready to reconnect with nature, arrived at Belgrade Station with steamer trunks containing up to a summer's worth of belongings.

Dean noticed the increasing demand for summer rentals, and thought it would be a fun way to bring more family and friends to this peaceful lakeside retreat. He bought out Kenney's half of the property (now a mere 100 acres), and between 1921 and 1942, with the help of his friend and employee Alden Savage, designed and built half a dozen well-spaced camps along the point. He charged \$14 a week, but encouraged guests to rent by the month. He and his wife Ethel became gracious hosts to an expanding community of like-minded souls. The camps were quickly filled by word of mouth; thus many guests already knew one another.



Those early decades on Birch Point were highlighted by activities such as community potlucks, campfire sing-alongs, horseshoes and croquet tournaments, fishing (yes, there were salmon!), sailing, and canoeing. Occasionally a small group of hardy youth would canoe the entire Belgrade Lakes chain, portaging as needed and spending one or two overnights camping along the way. Local businesses catered to the summer crowd by coming to Wheeler's to sell their wares directly. Bakery, milk, and fish trucks, as well as groceries and the U.S. mail made their way down the 3/4 mile gravel road. The housekeeping plan meant that guests did their own cooking, and left their camp ready for the next visitors.

Daily life on Birch Point was somewhat primitive, although not a stretch for those times. Food was prepared on wood- or oil-fired cookstoves. Blocks of ice cut from the lake the previous winter provided refrigeration. Oil lamps were the only source of nighttime illumination. Plumbing consisted of a hand pump that delivered lake water for washing up, and drinking water was brought from town in huge glass jugs.

Later updates brought small luxuries: a DC generator installed in 1929 provided modest electric lighting and pumped water to a wooden water tower, which gravity-fed to all the camps. This move to indoor plumbing also happily marked the end of the outhouse era (hot running water was still 5 decades away, however). After the generator was replaced in 1948 with service from Central Maine Power, iceboxes made way for refrigerators, and guests were offered the option of renting electric ranges.

Although each cottage was unique, they all embodied a common rustic simplicity. The relaxed and convivial atmosphere of lakeside life often gave rise to creative expression. Guest books from the early years are filled with humorous "sung to the tune of..." offerings, and poems like this one penned by long-time campers:

Come rest you here! Give care the slip
Give up the days to fellowship
And let's be done with scowling.
There's time enough for doubt and fear,
And bitter thoughts throughout the year,
When winter storms are howling.
'Tis friendship holds these walls together,
They were not built for heavy weather.

("Camp Sunset," Lilian and Henry Dill, 1937)



Camp Sunset 1926

The 1960s saw mature forest reclaiming the pastureland above Birch Point. Waterskiing competed with sailing and canoeing as the preferred youth activity, while potlucks and campfire songs continued undiminished. Dean's son Alfred was now running the family businesses, and had eased gracefully into the role of camp manager with some help from his sister Ruth. Eventually, they divided the property so that Ruth and her family could enjoy their time at the lake without responsibilities, and Alfred and his wife Barbara carried on as camp hosts.



Barbara & Alfred Wheeler

Family reunions and courtships, legendary adventures and life-changing retreats continued as the third Wheeler generation kept the cottages open for their summer friends. By the late 1990s, the great-grandchildren of the first campers were arriving on the scene, and the original four cottages were seeing their fifth generation of summer shenanigans. New families were welcomed into the fold each year. Alfred and Barbara were in their 80s, and their energy for camp operations was waning. Having followed Gramp on his rounds each summer since childhood, I was hired as camp assistant.

Upon Gramp's death in 2010, with the support of my partner Phyllis, I stepped fully into his (much larger) shoes. We began gently refurbishing the camps while preserving the atmosphere that has lent them so much charm. A century ago, Wheeler's Camps started out contemporary, albeit rustic; simply by not changing much, the place has become something of a quaint anachronism. Now as then, it tends to attract folks seeking refuge from an increasingly fast-paced and complicated world. When former campers return after many decades away and exclaim, "It looks just the same!" we feel that our efforts have been successful.



Twin Pines 1945



Twin Pines 2021

This article might have been titled "A Century of Living Lightly on the Lake," but for the fact that, until the 1970s, humans were largely unaware that we could harm our planet – and the Wheelers were no exception. They and other families built camps wherever they wanted (usually just feet from the water's edge) and generally carried on with no consideration of potential effects on the environment.

Common practices of that era included using dynamite to move huge glacial boulders that were "in the way," bathing in the lake with soap and shampoo, bringing in truckloads of sand to make beaches, and allowing cows to drink and wade in the water. Septic arrangements were casual, the ubiquitous 2-cycle outboard motor spewed oil with every smoky chug of a piston, and nobody imagined that dirt washing into the lake might result in algae blooms decades hence.

Today, we are becoming ever more aware of the fragility of the lake we love, and we strive to incorporate environmental stewardship into everything we do. We're fortunate that the families who vacation here are equally enthusiastic about preserving the local ecosystem. They understand the value of Salmon Lake as a sanctuary and a place of timeless beauty, more precious with every passing year.



Phyllis & Robyn



Photo - David Sandmel

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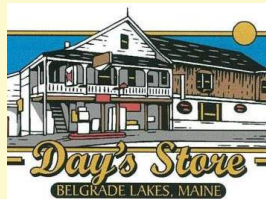


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