

LAKE METONGA NEWS

Volume 2021: No. 2



Association Update

Mark Truymen & Gary Mueller

After serving three terms (six years) as President of the Lake Metonga Association, Gary Mueller is stepping down (he has to by Association Bylaw rules!), and Mark Truymen has now shifted from being a Director to the President's position. Best wishes to both! As incoming and outgoing presidents, here's their thoughts on several key LMA topics:

Bullhead Minnow Harvesting Project

Mark: The Fisheries & Habitat Committee in conjunction with Mike Pruel, Mole Lake biologist, and Greg Matzke of the DNR, has set up a project to control the bullhead population in the lake. To date, we have upwards of a few dozen lake members involved in the collection process. This will be an ongoing project for a number of years, until the committee feels the population is under control, so we encourage as many concerned lake shareholders as possible to join in.

Gary: After relying on Mike Pruel and the Mole Lake Tribe for years to help try and control the

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Lake Metonga News

Truymen & Mueller continued...

bullhead population, it's become clear that a bigger effort is needed. We're excited about this project which we hope can serve as a prototype for the DNR to address this problem on other lakes, so it's really important that people participate in a way that gives us the data needed to evaluate how the program is performing and progressing. We think we're having a good start this year, and we'll let the Fisheries Committee along with Mike and Greg evaluate at the end of the season and tweak as necessary for next year.

Weeds"n"Walleyes Banquet & Fundraising

Gary: WnW is our one and only big fundraising event we have each year, generating thousands of dollars for the association that can't be replaced by any other resource. With Chris and I stepping away from the banquet after this year, we sure hope others in the organization will step up so we don't lose our biggest and best financial resource.

Mark: The Mueller Family has done an incredible job building this event into what it is today. As Gary said, this is our most important fundraising event for the association. It's imperative that members get involved to help insure that this event gets passed on for next year and the years to come. We truly can't afford to lose it. Many hands make light work. Please contact any member of the board or the outreach committee to discuss how you'd like to get involved and help.

10 Year Management Plan & Committees

Mark: The plan was started in January 2019, with eight volunteers from the lake as well as the board of directors. The plan progressed with numerous meetings between the volunteers, Onterra Inc. (LMA lake consultants), and the DNR. The plan was slowed by Covid, but was concluded by a public wrap up meeting in May 2021. The entire plan is now on our website and you can find it by going to the "Lake Info" top menu bar and scrolling down to the "Fishing" blue link.

Gary: A DNR-approved plan is required if the LMA or any Wisconsin lake association wants any state grant money or DNR assistance for milfoil treatment, stocking programs, and so on. It's that simple. We kind of broke or at least bent the rules somewhat by developing a plan that matches the specific needs of our lake and not just following the boiler plate lake management plan template. Onterra and the association members who persevered and kept an open mind on all the issues

involved in developing the plan need to be commended for an outstanding job.

LMA Strengths and Weaknesses

Gary: As I said at the Annual Meeting, it's been an enjoyable experience to work with a board that has worked together so well. And, that goes for the volunteers serving on the newly formed Fisheries & Habitat, Aquatic Plant and Invasive Species Management, and Outreach Committees as well. Lake Metonga is truly fortunate to have so many caring shareholders that are willing to apply their talents and time to the organization, and more importantly, to the lake.

Mark: Over the past few years, I've watched our membership numbers hold steady and increase. Really, there's no reason we shouldn't be able to shoot for 100% of riparian residents to become members at \$25 a year. The real challenge for the association is about finding more ways for more members to participate and get involved in the association's activities. The members participating on committees, helping with the bullhead minnow harvest, our new apparel coordinator, facebook page administrator and all good examples of how the association is expanding beyond just a board of directors and officers. We're a volunteer non-profit, organization, and without volunteers, we really can't achieve very much. Our association has been very fortunate in what we've achieved. As always, the challenge is to keep it going in a positive direction.

Biggest Concerns for the Lake

Mark: Lake Metonga is very fortunate to have the ecological benefits of a clear deep lake with a relatively small watershed which helps keep contaminants out of the lake. That being said, the property owners need to continue being responsible partners with the lake.

Gary: Lake Metonga is an ongoing moving target. A decade ago, milfoil was our number one serious concern. Today, it's the overabundance of bullheads and their impact on the walleye and perch populations. What is most encouraging in facing these ongoing threats and challenges to the lake is the people we have who are truly interested in learning, understanding and dealing with the issues head-on. The new committees and volunteers we have stepping up to the plate are proving critical to take the pressure off the board who simply just can't do it all any more.

2021 Bullhead Removal Underway

It started with Mike Preul and his crew from Mole Lake Fisheries electroshock harvesting 12,906 bullheads. Catching as many as 800 per hour, it still took 2-3 outings per week over five weeks to complete the catch which was donated to the raptor center by Antigo.

On Saturdays beginning July 10 through mid-August, the Lake Metonga Association is collecting bullhead minnows brought in by volunteers on the lake.

As of August 1st, the LMA has collected approximately 610,000 bullhead minnows! And, it is hoped to hit a million before the end of the season. As an incentive (particularly for the young kids who are more nimble at chasing down the elusive schools), the LMA is giving away \$10 Yeti or Eats N Treats gift certificates for each gallon brought in, and a \$50 Schaefer's shopping card for those reaching the five gallon mark. All registered volunteers are also entered into a \$100 drawing at the end of the season. So far, about a dozen people are participating and have spent less than 30 hours total collecting the minnows averaging under a half inch to a little over an inch in size.

50 Members Attend Annual Meeting



Due to Covid, the LMA Annual Meeting was held at the Mole Lake Convention Center instead of the Crandon HS on Saturday, July 3. The election of officers included: Mark Truymen, President; Jim Elam, Treasurer; and Don LeMaster and Steve Parks as Directors.



The highlight of the meeting was a presentation by Mike Preul from Mole Lake Fisheries, discussing the interconnection between bullheads, walleye and perch. (see Badger Sportsman article on the following pages which provides a good summary of Mike's presentation. Following the meeting, Mike invited the membership to a tour of the extensive Mole Lake walleye fisheries facility.

Preliminary minutes of the meeting are available on the website under [Association Info < Meeting Minutes](#).



Above: Mole Lake Fisheries harvested just under 13,000 bullheads over a five week period averaging 8-3/4 inches in size.

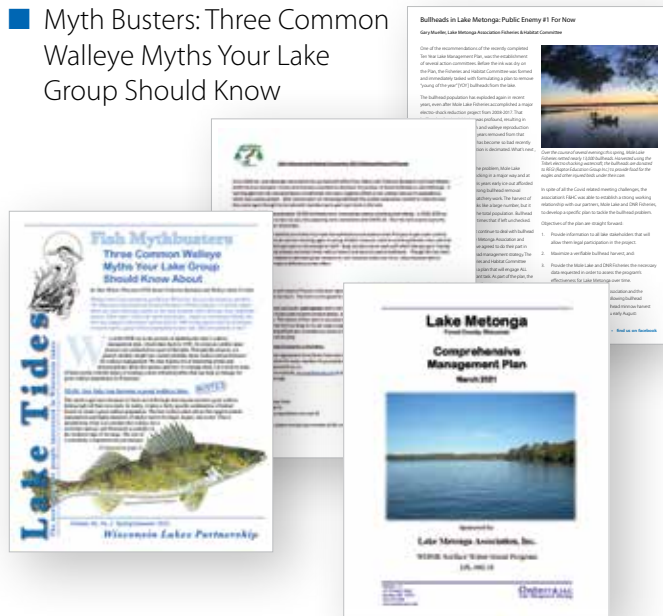
Right: A quart bag containing <1/2" size minnows is collected in a matter of minutes, and are kept conveniently in the freezer until collection day.



Reference Materials on LMA Website Worthy of a Read

If you go to the website home page under the top pull down menu "Lake Info" and then go to "Fishing", there are several new documents you may find of interest, including:

- Lake Metonga 10-Year Management Plan
- Bullheads in Lake Metonga Public Enemy #1 Article
- Bullhead Removal Program Overview and Bullhead Removal Volunteer Application Form
- Myth Busters: Three Common Walleye Myths Your Lake Group Should Know





Badger Sportsman

WISCONSIN'S OUTDOOR MAGAZINE

July/August 2021

Creating a Void for Walleye

How Bio-Manipulation Saved the Walleye of Wisconsin's Lake Metonga

By Eric Engbretson

Something was going very wrong in Lake Metonga. The 2,000-acre lake in Wisconsin's north woods had been a successful walleye lake for decades, but by the late 1990s, natural reproduction and walleye recruitment had slowed to a trickle. To make matters worse, by 2004, the adult walleye population had sharply declined.

Spawning habitat was excellent, but young fish, either stocked or natural, were not surviving to adulthood.

Mike Preul, fisheries biologist for the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa Community, has been involved with fisheries work on Lake Metonga for twenty years. He took a closer look at the lake to see what changes might explain why walleyes were suddenly having such a rough time.

Restoring balance

The fish community in Lake Metonga had always included black bullheads, but now fishermen were telling Mike how often they were catching the small catfish. "We were doing some routine electro shocking one day, and when the stunned fish floated to the surface, all you could see were yellow bellies. That's when I knew there was a problem". The abundance of bullheads had become enormous. "We did some simple math and calculated what a bullhead eats in a year.

They were taking up a lot of space in the system and stressing the available forage for walleye."

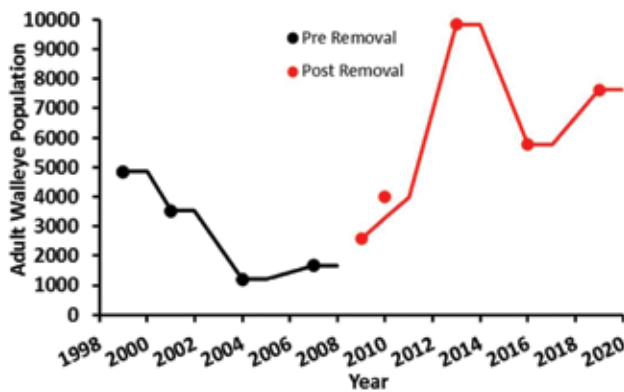
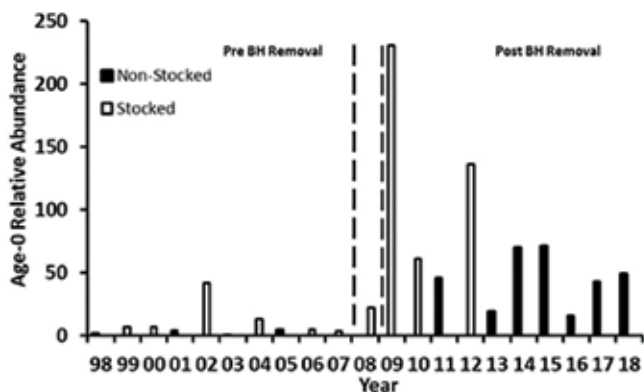
The theory was they were outcompeting walleyes for important forage at critical times when walleyes need an abundance of specific-sized food. "We knew stocking wasn't working, so the idea was that if we could create a kind of void, the walleyes might rush in to fill it."

Like many fisheries managers, Mike's resources were limited, and he privately wondered if this was really a battle he could win. His plan was to create conditions where walleyes could thrive, and that meant doing something about how much of the lake's biomass was tied up in bullheads. His plan reversed the fortunes of the lake's walleyes almost overnight. In the spring of 2008, Mike began the first of what would become an annual bullhead removal on Lake Metonga. The work was labor-intensive. "At first, we set fyke nets, but the fish weren't moving into them in sufficient numbers, so the decision was made to electroshock for bullheads." Mike's crew worked until their arms ached, shocking and netting the whiskered fish out of the lake. By summer's end, they had removed **13,337 pounds of bullheads**. All the fish were donated to the public, to food banks and to nearby wildlife rehabilitation centers for the feeding of raptors. Into the newly created void, Mike stocked 5,000 large fingerling walleye.

The next spring, another 6,216 pounds of bullheads were removed, and over two million walleye fry were stocked. But this time, something different happened. Substantial numbers of young walleyes survived from the two years of stocking and began to show up and be counted in fall recruitment surveys.

At first, there seemed to be no end to the steady stream of stunned bullheads that rose to the surface every time Mike's crew flipped on the electrodes of his shocking boat. But gradually, fewer and fewer bullheads appeared, and it took longer to fill up the tubs on the boat with fish. This process became a ritual every spring on Lake Metonga, and by 2012 the total catch rate had dropped by 87%. During the same time, the abundance of walleye fingerlings was steadily increasing. During 2011 there was a large year class consisting of purely naturally reproduced fish. With the resurgence of naturally reproduced walleye, stocking was no longer needed after 2012. With bullhead numbers reduced and in better balance with other fish, walleye production in Lake Metonga boomed. Eventually, both natural recruitment and adult walleye density reached historic highs. For Mike Preul, this felt like the kind of victory that fisheries managers too rarely experience.

"I won't lie to you, it was a lot of hard work some days, but the results have been so amazing."



Keeping healthy lakes

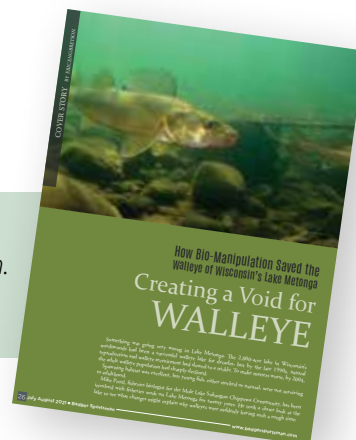
Today Mike Preul spends only a few days each spring shocking for bullheads. It's become pure maintenance now, like mowing his lawn. "As long as they don't get out of control, I think we're good," smiles Mike. Walleye production has its up and down years but has remained reliable overall. What Mike learned on Lake Metonga could fill a book. His bio-manipulation method of removing bullheads to rebuild embattled walleye populations was successfully employed on Patten Lake in nearby Florence County and worked like pure magic. When that lake's over-abundant population of bullheads were severely reduced, the walleyes quickly came back in record-setting density.

Keeping walleye lakes healthy and productive is an ongoing issue, and all lakes face their own unique challenges. Overall, there likely aren't a great number of walleye lakes affected by bullhead populations, but where such lakes exist, Mike Preul's pioneering work is one silver bullet that fisheries managers can now add to their arsenal.

Bio:

For further information, questions or comments about his work, Mike Preul can be contacted at:

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Special thanks to Badger Sportsman for allowing us to reprint this article in our newsletter; and to Ed Smith from the Fisheries & Habitat Committee for bringing this article to our attention. Check out the original Badger Sportsman article on our website.

Lake Metonga News

New for 2021: Lake Metonga Association Apparel

The new clothing line is in!

If you missed it at the Annual Meeting, 4th of July Picnic or Kentuck Day, there's still time at our Art in the Square booth coming up on September 18 from 10 am to 3 pm.

Or, feel free to call Chris Ebben, our new apparel coordinator at:

lakemetongaclothing@gmail.com

All items are available in L, XL and XXL. Other sizes are available upon request.



■ T-Shirts – \$27



■ Polos – \$42



■ Ribboned 3/4 Zip – \$45



■ Fleece (Hoodie, Cowl, 3/4 Zip) – \$38



4th of July Boat Parade Winners



1st Prize: "Black Pearl" Mike and Shawn Drefahl



2nd Prize: "Loontoon" Gary & Chris Mueller



3rd Prize: "U.S. Minnow" Brittney Streu



4th/5th Prize (Tie):
"Getting' Groovy on Metonga" Randy Herberer
"What Campground???" Andy Basten



LMA Draws Crowds at Kentuck Day

The Association booth at Kentuck Day drew a good deal of traffic all day long checking out the new line of apparel, and to read up on key lake issues. Many stopped to read about the injured eagle from last year's 4th of July fireworks that is now residing at REGI. The new bullhead minnow harvesting initiative poster drew quite a few discussions with Lake Metonga and other nearby lake residents stopping in to discuss this issue.



Add Another One to the List...



Alan Wirt of the DNR has confirmed that the snails (about the size of a quarter) that Rosemary Resch found along the shore just north of Farmer's Bay are Banded Mystery Snails. He will be taking care of the paperwork to have the snails added to the list of AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) in Metonga. According to Wirt, these are native to southeast USA and are in many WI lakes as invasives, adding: "There is no known ecological impact of the snails presence and there is no treatment other than physical removal when you find them." A fact sheet about the snails can be found on the website under [Lake Info > Invasive Species](#).

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Andy and Jane Basten's grandkids checking out how the the bullhead minnow harvest is coming along on a Saturday afternoon.