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The Paw Paw Lake

Watershed

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**Rising Waters
Prairie Streams Watershed Initiative
Characteristics of a Healthy Watershed
Observations on Phosphorous Loading
Fertilization Guidelines from Michigan State University
In My View: Musings of your Lame Duck President**

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Providing a forum to address issues...to maintain and enhance the welfare and safety of the lake...ensure the health and recreational use of the lake....
protect riparian rights.....to build cooperation between the Association
and the Greater Community

This fall newsletter finds us recovering from a major rain event and a lake level not seen in years! That is the bad news; the good news is the flood control system installed on the lake in the '90's worked.

However, many docks and piers were overwhelmed and a number of watercraft and pier sections were swept away by the rising waters. Many of you spent time on the lake in a deluge to help your neighbors round up errant craft and other debris in the lake. We thank all those good Samaritans for the good work.

During the rain storm cooperation between the township supervisors and our drain commissioner along with their quick actions to close the dam (initially opened to relieve lake flooding) while opening the weir saved many of us from an event which could have been much worse than we experienced.

The next weekend found the Sheriff's Marine Division on the lake advising boaters of the No Wake advisory issued for all lakes in Berrien County. The sheriff at the request of the DNR also closed both public launch sites on the lake. The advisory was in effect until the lake returned to a normal level.

Welcome returning Board Members, Charlie Pater and Deborah "Kip" Wright both long time residents of Paw Paw Lake and long time dedicated PPLA Board members. Also welcome our new Board member, Dr. Ray Lechner, Superintendent of the Wilmette IL Schools District.

As we move forward with lake restoration it will take more than dollars to accomplish the goal of restoring the quality of the lake. It will take action on the part of our membership and others, individually to be good stewards of the resource we enjoy. How might we be good stewards?

That guidance comes from a collaborative group in Illinois called the Prairie Steams Watershed Initiative, (PSWI) an initiative to restore and enhance the watersheds of Forked, Grant and Prairie Creek covering a 250 square mile area serving the Des Plaines and Kankakee Rivers in Illinois. This collaboration of groups, include local residents, governmental units, environmental agencies and non profit environmental organizations with common goals. These stated goals include:

- Infiltrating and cleansing Stormwater

- ✓ Avoiding sediment discharges into creeks, drains, rivers or lakes from construction activity
- ✓ Controlling erosion on all properties
- ✓ Stopping or minimizing unregulated pollutants from entering water courses.

PSWI maintains economic and regional growth do not have to be at odds with environmental protection and restoration. Before the next building boom, now is the time to be proactive, before more land is transformed from agriculture to residential. PSWI believes they have a once in a lifetime opportunity to protect their watershed for the safely and enjoyment of their children, families and communities.

If local governments, developers and citizens support principles of conservation design and best management practices, the growth may be used as an opportunity to protect local flora and fauna and help to create healthy neighborhoods.

Characteristics of a Healthy Watershed

- ✓ Drains and creeks with low sloping banks to disperse floodwater energy
- ✓ Minimal use of chemicals (pesticides, herbicides & fertilizers)
- ✓ Deep rooted native plants to infiltrate rains of 2" to minimize flooding
- ✓ Detention ponds designed to infiltrate more than they discharge
- ✓ Buffer areas wide enough to allow creeks and drains to meander and create pools and riffles
- ✓ Creating a healthy biodiversity a short walk from home which includes, fish, frogs, butterflies & birds.

Resource supplied by Walter Gerhardt, PPLA Member Courtesy of the Prairie Streams Initiative

As you can see we are not alone is striving for a healthy watershed or a healthy lake. These goals and characteristics are essential if we as stakeholders, whether governmental units, lake organizations or individual property owners truly wish for the best possible outcome for our area. Striving for these goals is essential whether we live on a lake, a stream, river or drain or simply live on our own personal watershed.

Walter Fusilier, PhD a limnologist (one who studies lakes) in his September 2008, *The Water Newsletter* profiled Paw Paw Lake and had an interesting observations regarding phosphorous loading in the lake. After several years of sampling the lake and its various inlets, with Frank Jurenka, a phosphorous budget was calculated based on their assembled data.

Based on their sampling data approximately 60 per cent of phosphorous loading came from lawn fertilizing, 23 per cent from the Branch and Darby Drain and 16 per cent came from Little Paw Paw Lake, the immediate watershed and the Sherwood drain.

Dr. Fusilier comments “we” contribute “2.5 times more phosphorous to the lake than does the second largest contributor”. Fusilier further states, “If riparians want to improve the water quality of their lake, the best way is to quit using lawn fertilizers”.

Not all phosphorous, of course, due to lake flushing. However, only 31 per cent of the input is flushed from the lake on a yearly basis, which means more phosphorous is building year after year. Realizing that this nutrient drives our weed growth and ultimately reduces dissolved oxygen it is reasonable to assume regardless of how we treat our lake, weed growth is ultimately in our own hands. We can stem the growth of weeds, simply by our own actions and by being good stewards.

Interestingly, Muskegon, Ottawa, Allegan and Van Buren Counties either have or are in the process of enacting county wide bans on the use of residential fertilizers containing phosphorous and it may be time for us to petition our County Commissioners to be pro active along this front.

Guide lines for fertilizing based on MSU research cautions:

- ✓ If you don't use fertilizer, don't start.
- ✓ If you do, don't use a fertilizer containing phosphorous unless a soil tests proves you need it.
- ✓ Make sure the nitrogen is a slow release product
- ✓ Use no more than eight lbs. of nitrogen per ¼ acre.
(100 X 100 ft)
- ✓ Don't fertilize lawn until 3 weeks after the lawn turns green in spring. If you do fertilize again do it in fall to promote healthy root growth
- ✓ When spreading fertilizer do not allow it to land directly in the lake and sweep it off any impervious surface.

Irrigation

- ✓ In dry periods water 15 minutes a day rather than heavily once weekly
 - ✓ Best time is early morning or afternoon to prevent evaporation
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Mowing

- ✓ Mow to an MSU recommended height of 3 – 3 ½ inches
 - ✓ Twice weekly in Spring, every two weeks in summer and weekly in fall
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Greenbelts

- ✓ Plant a greenbelt strip along your shore to trap pollutants from entering the lake
 - ✓ A greenbelt should be at least 10 ft., 30 ft. being desirable
 - ✓ Do not fertilize the greenbelt
 - ✓ For a natural look, do not mow, allow natural grasses and wildflowers to grow
 - ✓ For a landscaped look, use native plants, ferns, groundcovers and shrubs
 - ✓ The lakefront should be landscaped to allow full recreational accessibility of the lake and still provide for water quality. Lawns alone do not make good greenbelts. Plant varieties should be selected that are attractive, easily maintained and are effective buffers
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In my view:

The PPLA needs to stay engaged with our townships to promote meaningful and beneficial riparian zoning. We need to work with our Drain Commissioner, developers and zoning officials to promote Best Practice Management when new building occurs and to protect our riparian rights.

We need to strive to protect our remaining wetlands to provide habitat and to help cleanse our lake of excess nutrients.

PPLA members should set the example for others, following the 100 ft rule, traveling counter clockwise, using common sense boating practices and avoiding alcohol when driving any watercraft.

We need to promote and support common sense solutions for weed management, lake management and restoration.

We need to work with county officials to work for a county wide ban on residential phosphorous use and to promote usage of slow release nitrogen fertilizers.

Finally, join and support your association. Volunteer for committees and projects important to you! The PPLA exists for you and your being involved will help us meet your needs!