



CONSERVANCY ‘SCOPE OF WORK’ REVEALS LAKE CHALLENGES;

SEWRPC TO ISSUE NEW GENEVA LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN IN 2025



GLC staff member Jaden Nickelsen and Kiera Theys testing a creek.

The Geneva Lake Conservancy board and staff this fall completed two years of research needed to draft the new Geneva Lake Management Plan 2025.

The Conservancy was assisted by the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission (SEWRPC) who is drafting the plan. The Geneva Lake Management Plan 2025 is a comprehensive examination of the current ecological health of the lake and its recreational uses, as well as challenges facing the lake and recommended solutions.

The Conservancy gathered and completed research by hosting an initial community meeting in January 2023 to hear residents’ concerns for the lake and by sending a survey to 2,000 residents in the watershed to obtain their feedback on a variety of lake issues. The Conservancy also gathered water quality and related data, conducted a two-year boat count, and arranged water quality testing in tributaries that flow into Geneva Lake.

“The entire process took thousands of hours of staff and board time from writing the initial grants to fundraising to cover the costs of completing the research and drafting the plan,” said Tom Nickols, Conservancy, Vice Chair and Co-chair of the Water Alliance for Preserving Geneva Lake.

“We can’t delay any longer in addressing the lake’s challenges – especially water quality, invasive species, fisheries and boating concerns.” he said.

The survey of watershed residents showed that water quality and boating issues were their two greatest concerns. With scientists predicting that Walworth County’s annual temperature will rise 3 degrees over the next 15 years, there are additional concerns about the impact warmer waters will have on aquatic life, water quality, and the overall ecological health of the lake, according to Karen Yancey, Conservancy Executive Director.

In addition, the near-shore fish populations are continuing to decline and new invasive species have entered the lake and threaten its water quality. This year, Geneva Lake earned the unfortunate distinction of becoming the first inland lake in the nation to have an invasion of quagga mussels (see story on page 7).

Wake surfing was also a worry of survey respondents who complained that the surf is destructive to natural and man-made shorelines, stirs up polluted lake bottom sediments, harms aquatic life, creates noise pollution and endangers other boaters.

The 2025 report will also review the recommendations from the 2008 Geneva Lake Management Plan. Many of these recommendations were not implemented due to lack of funding.

“Over the last decade as the lake was experiencing more challenges, we did not have the resources or structure in place to address these issues,” said Nickols. “The DNR and Walworth County’s budgets and staff have been cut, municipalities have limited budgets, and not-for-profit organizations dedicated to the lake do not have the capacity to raise the millions of dollars of funding needed.”

“It is essential that when the 2025 Management Plan is complete that each of the organizations involved in the lake be assigned to address different challenges and have funding sources to solve the problems before the lake’s problems impact our recreational uses,” said Charles Colman, Co-Chair of the Water Alliance and Past Chair of the Conservancy.

Some organizations have already begun to implement solutions. The Conservancy last year began a program called “Keep It Blue” to educate property owners in the watershed on how to reduce phosphorus runoff. In addition, the Conservancy has used the DNR’s Healthy Lakes program to work with private property owners to plant more than 40 rain gardens and buffer strips along the lake to filter phosphorus and other pollutants before they reach the lake.

The new Geneva Lake Management Plan also may examine how other states are addressing their lakes’ challenges. “If we are to be a leader in helping Wisconsin lakes adjust to climate change and the impacts of increased recreational use, we must be willing to look at new solutions that have not been tried before in Wisconsin,” Colman said.

Some Western states prevent invasive species from entering their lakes by allowing local governments to charge boat owners for washing their boats and emptying their ballasts before they can enter a lake.

“The costs to protect our lake are going to be much greater due to increased use by boaters and the number of boaters who now go from lake to lake,” Colman said.

Many of the organizations who are members of the Water Alliance for Preserving Geneva Lake assisted the Conservancy and SEWRPC in providing data for the new management plan, including the U.S. Geological Survey, Geneva Lake Association, Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, Walworth County Conservation Office and the Wisconsin DNR.

“Our ability to swim, fish, boat and simply enjoy the view will be impacted unless we are willing to ensure that all of the new Geneva Lake Management Plan 2025 recommendations are implemented by the organizations and property owners who are caretakers of the lake,” Colman said.

The DNR will be holding public hearings for people to comment on the draft Geneva Lake Management Plan in summer 2025.

The Conservancy thanks the DNR, Otzen Family Foundation, Griffith Family Foundation, Geneva Lake Association and Charles and Dianna Colman for their financial support of the new Geneva Lake Management Plan 2025.

CONSERVANCY WORKS WITH CITY OF LAKE GENEVA TO WIN GRANT FOR HILLMOOR TRAILS

The Geneva Lake Conservancy worked with the City of Lake Geneva's Hillmoor Ad Hoc Committee this year to submit a \$242,000 grant to create three and a half miles of trails in the proposed 180-acre Hillmoor nature preserve in the city.

The grant received approval from the DNR this fall with the Conservancy as a major partner with the city in creating the trails, which will have several entry points. The Lake Geneva City Council approved the grant in April and included the \$242,000 match in its 2024 budget.

"We are looking forward to working with the City of Lake Geneva's Public Works Department to assist with the installation of these trails and new bridges over the White River that will give residents and visitors an extraordinary hiking experience," said Karen Yancey, GLC Executive Director, noting that many of the trails will be ADA compliant.

The grant also includes funds for signs and the hiring of a landscape architect to enhance the scenic beauty of the property, which has suffered from neglect since it was closed as a golf course about a decade ago.

Yancey had served on the Hillmoor Ad Hoc committee for the last two years under Mayor Charlene Klein and had also worked with Midwest Prairies to create a management plan to restore the 90 acres of floodplains on the property, including removing invasive species and planting native plants.

The Conservancy led two workdays in which local volunteers helped remove buckthorn and other invasive shrubs and plants around a 150-year old oak tree and cleared a path to the White River. The Conservancy hopes to implement other recommendations in the management plan in the years ahead.

The wetlands and floodplains on the northern acres of Hillmoor have been fairly inaccessible to the public and the new trails will open the beautiful views along the White River, which meanders through the northern parts of the property, Yancey said.

The Conservancy has been the major recipient or partner in nine Knowles Nelson grants in the last eight years, receiving more than \$875,000 in grant awards. All the grants were for purchasing open land or creating trails and other features for public nature preserves.

"We want to thank the Knowles Nelson staff for their trust in our organization to preserve open lands with high conservation value and make them accessible to the public for a variety of recreational uses," said Don Parker, Conservancy Chair.

Additional workdays at Hillmoor are planned for 2025 and will be posted on the Conservancy's website at www.genevalakeconservancy.org.



Volunteers at a past Hillmoor workday take a group photo.

2024 OAK TREE CONTEST WINNERS

The Conservancy holds an annual Oak Tree Contest each fall in Walworth County for the following categories: Oak Associated with the Best Story, Most Beautiful Oak and Oldest Oak. Oak trees are a keystone species, offering superior benefits to wildlife and helping to sequester carbon in the atmosphere. These trees are one of the most ecologically important in the Midwest, and with only 17% of our old-growth oak trees remaining in Walworth County, it is vital that we conserve them. The winners of the 2024 contest are below.

The oak tree below wins **Most Beautiful** in the oak contest. Pictured is Peggy Borg, proudly standing in front of her oak tree in her backyard in Walworth.



Pictured to the left and below is an oak in front of Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay. The oak was here before Yerkes was built in 1895, making it a winner of **Oak with Best Story** and **Oldest Oak** at 251 years old.



AUTHOR DAN EGAN DISCUSSES QUAGGA MUSSELS, ALGAL BLOOMS, AND WAKE BOATS



Dan Egan at a Lake Gathering event. Photo credit Fred Noer.

On September 6th, more than 150 people gathered at Colman Woods in Williams Bay to hear Author Dan Egan speak at the Conservancy's Lake Gathering event. Moderated by Eric Olson from UW-Steven's Point, the talk touched on topics that affect lakes and waterways, and, in particular, Geneva Lake. Egan is the author of "The Devil's Element, Phosphorus and a World Out Of Balance," and "The Death and Life of the Great Lakes."

"The problems (of phosphorus excess in our lakes) is getting worse because we keep putting fertilizer on the landscape, temperatures are getting warmer, carbon is in the air, rain storms are getting more intense," he said.

Olson said that most fertilizers are not necessary because there are ample amounts of phosphorus in Wisconsin soils, which is why they are already "so productive." Egan added.

Egan followed with a haunting thought about algae blooms caused by excessive phosphorus. "It's a hell of a thing to think about learning to live with a beach you can't take your grandkids to," he said.

To learn how you can help keep Geneva Lake safe from pollution, prevent algal blooms, and help with soil erosion, visit our website at www.GenevaLakeConservancy.com/Keep-it-blue. A Lake Gathering video is available on the Geneva Lake Conservancy's Youtube page.

THE CONSERVANCY ELECTS DON PARKER AS CHAIR

In July of 2024, Don Parker became Chair of Geneva Lake Conservancy, after having served on the board for 13 years. He recently retired as President of Circle L Capital Management Company LLC. During his time at Circle L Capital, he was the co-founder and a board member of several closely held businesses.

Don has served as a trustee on the village board of Williams Bay where he was chair of the Finance and Personnel committees and on the Village of Williams Bay Plan Commission. He also served on the Lake Geneva Area United Way board from 2005-2010 and was president of the Williams Bay Lions Club.



He and his wife Kim have been residents of Williams Bay since 1992 and have enjoyed hiking, cross-country skiing and paddling through the exceptional natural areas of Walworth County.

“We are looking forward to having such a dedicated board member with so many years of business experience to lead our organization,” said Karen Yancey, Executive Director.

BRUNNER RETIRES AFTER 6 YEARS AS CONSERVANCY CHAIR

Kevin Brunner, a long-time Whitewater resident, was honored by the Conservancy at its summer fundraiser for his six years as Chair of the organization during a time of unprecedented growth.

During Brunner’s tenure, the organization received accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission and protected an additional 1,500 acres in Walworth, Racine and Kenosha counties. In 2020, the Conservancy was named Land Trust of the Year by Gathering Waters, Wisconsin’s Alliance for Land Trusts.

The GLC board and staff honored Brunner for his “good judgement, leadership skills, financial support, steadfastness and dedication to our conservation mission.” Brunner was instrumental in the purchase of Bromley Woods, an 83-acre oak forest and kettle pond, in LaGrange Township from the Bromley family who had owned the property since 1844. Today, the Conservancy owns Bromley Woods, a public nature preserve with more than 3 miles of hiking trails.

“I am grateful to our partners and the Conservancy board and staff for allowing us to open 5 new nature preserves in the last 5 years as well as complete more than 10 conservation easements,” said Brunner. “We have a very talented board and staff and I am excited to see what can be accomplished in the years ahead.”

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JANET HAPP RETIRES AFTER 12 YEARS WITH CONSERVANCY

Janet Happ, the Conservancy's Assistant Executive Director and Development Director, will retire from her career at the Conservancy this December.

Janet joined the organization in 2012 as Fundraising Manager and has helped the organization more than triple its unrestricted and restricted donations during that time.

She is particularly noted for organizing outstanding special events and building a network of talented volunteers. She was chief director for a variety of events throughout Walworth County each year, including those located at the former Driehaus estate, beautiful farms, lakefront estates and camps. Many of the events drew more than 200 members and their guests.



“Janet lent her style and attention to detail to all our special events and made them extraordinary for all the Conservancy's attendees,” said Cindy Milojevic, Conservancy Board Member and Chair of this year's Holly Ball.

Janet also knew how to draw and host great speakers from authors like Doug Tallamy and Dan Egan to Leslie Goddard, a Rachel Carson impersonator.

“If Janet was responsible for an event, we knew it would be special,” said Karen Yancey, GLC Executive Director. “She also served as the guardian of GLC's history and helped us earn accreditation and reaccreditation with her excellent organizational skills and strong work ethic.”

Most recently, Janet worked with Governance Chair Steve Diamond to recruit new board members to increase the board of directors to 20.

“Janet's friendships with literally hundreds of people in Walworth County made finding new directors both fun and a manageable task. I will miss her help,” said Diamond.

“We are so grateful for Janet's dedication to the Conservancy's mission, her willingness to take on any project, and her instrumental role in the organization's growth in the last decade,” said Don Parker, GLC Chair.

Janet will be honored at the 2024 Holly Ball and will be missed by the Conservancy's board and staff, Parker said.

THE CONSERVANCY SAYS THANK YOU

We appreciate our supporters helping us to achieve environmental successes. Thank you to:

The Fontana Garden Club for their grant to install an educational sign in the Mill House Gardens.

Wagner Essman Foundation for their grant to install a boardwalk at the Anglin Family Nature Preserve.

Geneva Lake Association for their grant to test and determine the sources of pollutants in Big Foot Creek.

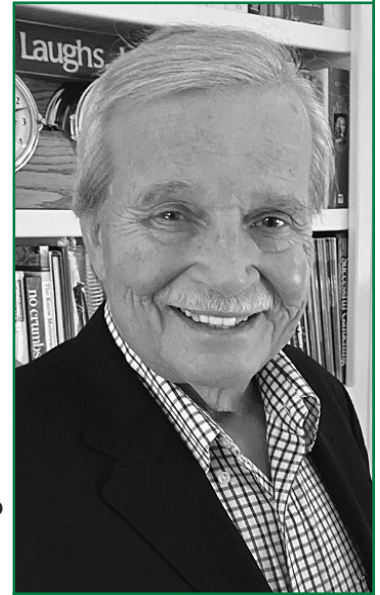
Lake Geneva Garden Club for their grant towards our “Keep it Blue” program.

THE CONSERVANCY REMEMBERS ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATE, CHUCK EBELING (JULY 1, 1943 — JULY 9, 2024)

Charles “Chuck” Ebeling, 81, passed away on July 9, 2024. Chuck’s accolades are vast and diverse, ranging from his time in the military where he received an Army Commendation Medal and Vietnam Service Medal, to working side-by-side with McDonald’s owner-operators to expand the Ronald McDonald House program across the United States. In his last year of active duty, Chuck managed the implementation and media of the Kansas phase of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s funeral. In total, he was the officer in charge of 43 military funerals at Gettysburg National Cemetery.

Chuck served on the Greater Chicago Food Depository board, an organization that works on alleviating hunger; the Ronald McDonald House board, and served as the past Chair of the Geneva Lake Museum. He was also President of the Environmental Education Agency, past President of the Chicago Literary Club, and past Chair of Geneva Lake Conservancy. In 2018, Chuck helped to stop the sale of Yerkes Observatory for commercial development, then formed a group called the Yerkes Future Foundation, on which he became a director.

Chuck will be remembered for his love of the Green Bay Packers, stray cats, and apple trees, and his care of others and the environment. (Research credit goes to Jack Modzelewski.)



Charles “Chuck” Ebeling

QUAGGA MUSSELS FOUND IN GENEVA LAKE

In July, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources confirmed that quagga mussels are in Geneva Lake. In recent decades, quagga mussels have adapted to living at greater depths and in colder water, allowing them to survive in a variety of waterways.

Quagga mussels are roughly one inch long and feed by filtering plankton in the water. Unlike their cousins, zebra mussels, that attach to harder surfaces, quagga mussels attach to softer surfaces. This can be detrimental to Geneva Lake considering it is 95% sand and 5% gravel. Quagga mussels are known as the more aggressive mussels due to their harmful impacts. This particularly invasive species can clog water pipes, damage the aquatic ecosystem and disrupt food webs.

Quagga mussels were found in Lake Michigan in 2000 and Lake Superior in 2005. They were most likely transported to Geneva Lake by a boat. Due to the persistent nature of invasive species, boats need to be thoroughly cleaned, flushed and dried to prevent species transportation between waters. CD3 (clean, drain, dry, and dispose) units have been placed near Geneva Lake to help boat owners keep boats clean, but they do not flush the ballasts of wake boats.

The ability to remove quagga mussels from lakes is limited and involves extreme measures such as chemical application. To prevent the spread of quagga mussels, please carefully wash your boat if you have taken or plan to take it to other waterways. Educate others on the importance of proper care of boats when they are taken out of the lake.



Pictured above is a quagga mussel. Photo credit: USDA National Invasive Species Information Center.



Geneva Lake Conservancy

Our mission is to protect and restore the lands and waterways of Walworth County and beyond.

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Annual Meeting
Saturday, December 14, 2024
Join the Conservancy at our public annual meeting!
Horticultural Hall, Lake Geneva
10 AM-11:30 AM
Coffee and cookies provided
RSVP to outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org



Use this QR code to zoom into the meeting: