



## **Meeting Minutes**

Meeting date: August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

The fifth 2011 meeting of Polk County Association of Lakes and Rivers (PCALR) was held Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Polk County Justice Center in Balsam Lake. Meeting came to order at 7:00 p.m.

### **Attending:**

Gordon Kill, Big Round; Dick and Agnes Hollar, North Pipe; Jim Maxwell, Big Blake; Peter Frohnert, Loveless; Phil Foster, Bone Lake; Larry and Bev Bresina, North Pipe; Ken Peterson, Butternut; Katelin Holm, LWRD; Carl Holmgren, Balsam Lake P&R District; Randy and Angie Herman, Paulson; Bob and Cass Carty, Paulson; Karen Engelbretson, Bone

### **Agenda:**

Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute LoonWatch Presentation by Erica LeMoine and summer intern Erica

**LoonWatch Overview** LoonWatch started as a volunteer monitoring program and was established in 1978. The program shares research which is used to make management decisions. The main data collection programs are the Annual Lakes Monitoring Program and the Wisconsin Loon Population Survey.

**Loon Behavior** The word loon is derived from a Scandinavian word meaning “clumsy” because loons are ill suited to walking on land. If a loon is spotted on land for a prolonged period of time the DNR should be contacted because the loon is most likely sick. Loons have solid bones which allow them to dive to depths of up to 200 feet. However, because their bones are solid, loons require a huge runway for flying and must circle around a lake numerous times before reaching an altitude above the tree line.

**Loon Range** In Wisconsin, we are at the Southern edge of the breeding range for loons. Loons migrate and spend the winter season along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts and often re-appear in Wisconsin within a day of ice out. Loons migrate individually with males leaving and returning first, followed by females, and then juveniles.

**Loon calls** There are five calls which researchers know the meaning of:

1. Yodel → male only; a territorial call
2. Wail → sounds like a wolf call; “where are you?” call
3. Tremolo → distress call in response to eagles, raccoons, humans, etc.
4. In flight tremolo → “is it okay to land here?” call
5. Hoot → communication between chicks and adults or adults and adults in the fall when loons group together and are no longer territorial

All calls can be heard on the LoonWatch website: [www.northland.edu/loonwatch](http://www.northland.edu/loonwatch)

**Loon mating** Loons are more tied to a specific location than a specific mate and do not mate for life. Males will dispute with other males for a specific territory and females will dispute with other females for a specific territory. Thirty percent of the time one male will die in a territorial dispute and six to seven percent of the time one female will die in a territorial dispute. Male loons will sometimes kill other males by piercing them from below through the breast which can resemble a gunshot wound.

**Confusing species and Loon identification** Loons can be confused with Canada Goose, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Western Grebe, and Double Crested Cormorant. Adult loons have a red eye, white breast, and black/white coloration. The white breast acts as counter-camouflage, making an adult loon difficult to see from below-water predators. When migrating, the loons eye will turn black and the plumage will turn grayish/brown.

**Loon habitat** Loons are visual hunters and require clear water. They also favor naturally vegetated areas with small islands or peninsulas. In these areas loons feel protected and are better able to visualize predators.

**Artificial nesting platforms** If a loon pair has been un-successful in nesting for three years in a row, then nesting platforms may be considered. However, nesting platforms are not encouraged because natural habitats are preferable. A DNR permit is required to install a nesting platform and a wildlife biologist is needed to assist with nest placement. Artificial nesting platforms are lifelong commitments since loons can live up to 25 years and often require a great deal of work. Nests need to be placed at ice out and removed as soon as chicks leave the nest (24 hours after hatching if one egg and 48 hours after hatching if two eggs). Also, nests need to be maintained because loons will continue to re-nest even if the nest becomes flooded or otherwise damaged. Loons will continue to use damaged nests because they were successful in the nest in previous years.

**Nesting and Development** Loons are very protective of their nest and if predators approach will hide by hanging their head over the nest. If loons become very nervous they will do a penguin dance which expends a lot of energy. Humans should give loons at least 200 feet of space. For the first ten days of their lives, chicks remain on the back of adult loons. This allows chicks protection from predators and also thermoregulation since chicks lack the oily feathers which keep them warm. At six weeks old chicks begin to feed themselves and develop adult feathers and at 12 weeks old chicks are considered fully fledged.

### **What can I do to protect loons?**

- Get the lead out: Thirty percent of loons deaths are the result of lead poisoning
  - A single small lead sinker, when ingested, can kill an adult loon. Loons require pebbles for digestion and ingest sinkers because they resemble small pebbles
- Protect our lakes: loons require good water quality
  - Restore shoreland to natural state; especially first 10-15 feet. Natural shoreline plants have extensive root systems that absorb nutrients, leading to less algae blooms in lakes. Natural vegetation also keeps Canada geese out of your yard. Geese love lawns because they feel safe from predators and eat the grass clippings
  - Build a rain garden and/or utilize rain barrels
  - Use phosphate free products and maintain your septic system
  - Reduce oil consumption
  - Reduce energy consumption: most energy is produced from coal which causes mercury buildup in lakes. Mercury causes loons to become lethargic, become poor parents, and often leads to the production of eggs which are not viable
  - Educate fellow lake users

**Loon population levels** In 1985 the population of loons in Wisconsin was only 2,357. Loon populations have been growing 1.5% a year. Currently, in Wisconsin populations are estimated at approximately 4,000 individuals. It is thought that loons might be reaching their carrying capacity in Wisconsin and are beginning to move farther south into territory they once occupied.

**Kevin Kenow loon tagging research** Loons have been tagged with satellite tags and geo locator tags. These tags give accurate information on daily location, temperature, light levels, and water pressure. Satellite tags are surgically implanted on males only. The tagging was initially done to research the effects of botulism on loons but has been used to make predictions on the effects of the Gulf oil spill. Research has shown very little short term effects on loon populations but long term studies may be more telling.

**A note on the Avian Botulism study** Aquatic invasive species seem to be contributing to the promotion of botulism outbreaks. Zebra and quagga mussels filter the bacteria and pass it up the food chain when they are eaten by fish such as the round goby which are fed on by water birds. Additionally, invasive mussels make the water clearer when filter feeding which can lead to

more algae growth. The increase in algal growth, and subsequent decay, can decrease the amount of oxygen in a lake and lead to anaerobic conditions which are necessary for botulism toxin production.

To contact LoonWatch:

Website: [www.northland.edu/loonwatch](http://www.northland.edu/loonwatch)

Phone: (715) 682-1220

Email: [loonwatch@northland.edu](mailto:loonwatch@northland.edu)

Next PCALR meeting is Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>

**Polk County LWRD will be writing a new AIS grant** to submit in February 2012. The department is looking for input from Polk County lake districts and lake groups to draft plans for this grant. Please attend the September meeting and bring your ideas to share in a written form, if possible.

In the second part of this meeting **ornithologist/biologist Brian Collins**, will present his recent **58-point auditory survey of bird species around Bone Lake**. While Brian's report is specific to Bone Lake, everyone interested in birds will enjoy hearing about bird/habitat communities in Polk County while enjoying his extraordinary photographs.

Minutes submitted by

Katelin Holm, Secretary

Polk County Association of Lakes and Rivers

August 22<sup>nd</sup>