

Burnett County Lake Associations Impact Knowledge

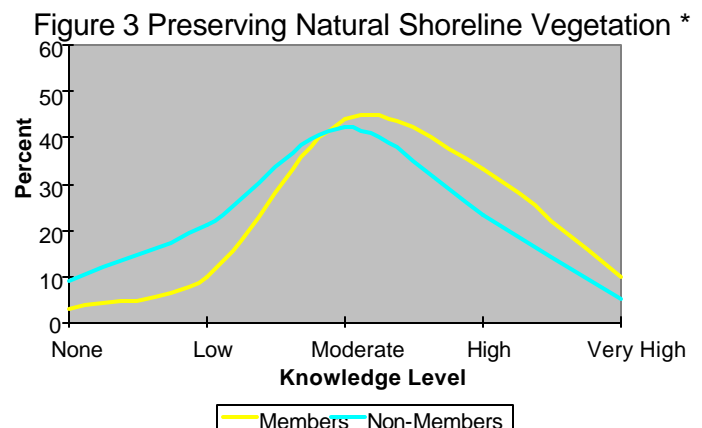
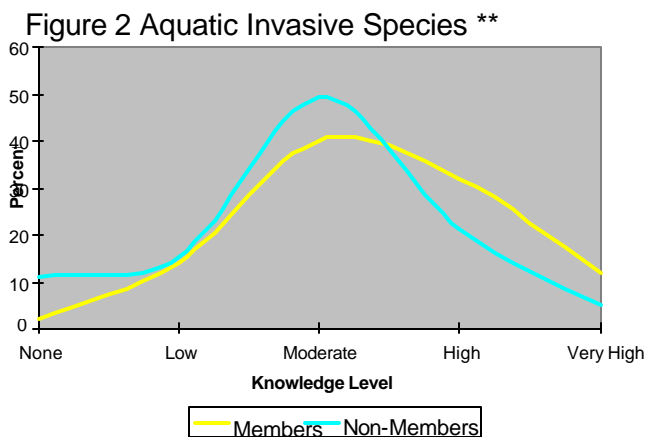
Currently Wisconsin hosts over 600 lake groups, most of which are lake associations. Recently researchers from University of Wisconsin Extension Center for Environmental Resources (UW Madison and UW Stevens Point Campuses) and UW Extension Burnett County completed a study of Burnett County Lake Associations. These voluntary organizations, initiated and managed by lake residents, conduct outreach activities and do projects to improve the health of the lake. Study questions included the role lake associations fulfill, particularly in relation to achieving healthy lakes.

A random, stratified, and matched sample of 11 lakes with associations and 10 lakes without associations was used. Random samples of residents from each of the 21 lakes were selected resulting in a total sample of 712 lake property owners. Sixty-nine percent or 499 returned the survey. Leaders of 10 lake associations were also interviewed.

Researchers learned that residents on lakes with associations and/or their members consistently reported higher knowledge levels on eight lake conservation topics than their counterparts, four of which are illustrated in Fig 1. As Fig 2 and 3 illustrate on the timely topics of aquatic invasive species and shoreline preservation, association members also report distinctly higher knowledge levels.

Figure 1.. Knowledge of Conservationist Topics (Values in Percents)					
	None	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Aquatic Plants					
<i>Lakes w/out association</i> **	8	32	48	10	2
<i>Lakes w/ association</i> **	9	28	38	18	7
Controlling rain water runoff					
<i>Lakes w/out association</i> *	15	26	37	19	3
<i>Lakes w/ association</i> *	7	25	42	18	8
Studying the science of lakes					
<i>Lakes w/out association</i> ***	30	47	18	5	1
<i>Lakes w/ association</i> ***	18	41	29	9	3
Ways to manage recreational use					
<i>Lakes w/out associations</i> ***	11	33	44	8	4
<i>Lakes w/associations</i> ***	3	22	48	21	6

* statistically significant, p-value < .05; ** statistically significant, p-value < .01; ***statistically significant, p-value < .001



Researchers found that associations promote group projects that collectively affect the lake, such as irradiation of milfoil, and these are reported as making a substantial difference to the health of the lake. Lake association membership also appeared to shape opinions towards conservation strategies and to a lesser extent how decisions are made about caring for, improving, or changing one's property and related structures.

However, researchers found that lake association membership is less of a factor shaping the individual property management behaviors of residents. Residents were asked if they had altered the shoreland (area where land and water meet) in six possible ways since ownership, about any changes they made in the 35 foot zone between the water's edge toward the house, methods for filtering or retaining water from the house roof or property, and about having a lawn and its care. What lake residents reported doing in these four areas proved to be weakly correlated with residing on lakes with or without associations, as well as membership in a lake association. Figure 4 illustrates the minimal differences in natural shoreline management between those on lakes with and without associations.

Figure 4 Shoreline Changes, Consistent with Conservationist Recommendations (Percent)				
<i>Shoreline Condition</i>	Added to what was there	Present and Remains the same	Never present and never added	Removed some or all of what was there
Natural shoreline w/native vegetation				
-All Respondents	5	75	9	12
Lakes w/out association	6	76	10	9
Lakes w/ association	4	74	8	14
Dead trees in or below water				
-All Respondents	2	26	59	14
Lakes w/out association	2	29	55	14
Lakes w/ association	3	23	62	13
Plants growing out of water				
-All Respondents	1	61	20	18
Lakes w/out association	1	67	18	15
Lakes w/ association	2	56	21	21

The study also revealed goals and activities of associations, assessment of associations by members, and perceptions of the benefits and troublesome aspects of associations. There is a wide spectrum of perceptions about associations on the part of both members and non-members with many feeling positive about associations.

The study points to the need for assistance to improve operations and to help associations develop strategies for behavioral changes in the management of personal property associated with healthy lakes. Improving internal operations and more activities focused on management of personal property in ways that promote healthy lakes would add to the educational and information sharing roles associations have.

The study will be available at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/burnett/> and for information please contact Jake Blasczyk, Evaluation Specialist at jblasczyk@education.wisc.edu or Mike Kornmann, UW-Extension Burnett County Community Development Agent, at mike.kornmann@ces.uwex.edu or (715.349.2151).