



Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group Annual Report 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group (MLLWMG) helps area landowners manage their property in ways that support the water quality of Mille Lacs Lake and its surrounding area. Formed in 1997, the group connects interested citizens with local and state agency experts and resources; provides educational events and materials; and inspires simple actions that can have a positive impact on the area's land and waters.



PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Mille Lacs Compass Program

The goal of Mille Lacs Compass is to build long-lasting relationships with landowners who want to address shoreline erosion and stormwater runoff while enriching their natural landscapes. Participating landowners receive continuing on-site advice from SWCD experts about how to make property changes that improve watershed health. In some instances, more technical services are provided. Participating landowners are encouraged to help spread the word to their neighbors and friends.

In recent years there have been more than 70 conversations with landowners and 20 stewardship plans prepared plus buffer installations and other projects executed.

These select 2023 projects reported by Mille Lacs SWCD illustrate the range of efforts being pursued as part of the Compass program:

- Site visits to two Wahkon property owners who had implemented buffers and vegetated swales and were preserving existing native vegetation. They were encouraged to continue their efforts and given lists of native plants.
- A gully stabilization project on the west side of Mille Lacs Lake with funding secured through One Watershed, One Plan.
- An outreach effort targeting property owners on a Mille Lacs Lake cove with the hope of establishing a multi-property buffer along the water's edge.
- A site visit to a resort on the east side of Mille Lacs to discuss an installation of native plant buffers in front of cabins and a large deck.
- Follow-up with a Compass participant near Wahkon who was seeking technical assistance for the control and management of phragmites, a large perennial reed that can be invasive in its non-native form. *Above: Site of a shoreline restoration to be installed in 2024.*



Beyond the individual efforts of SWCD staff, Mille Lacs Compass outreach occurred through distribution of articles (see below) and the opportunity to share information at MLLWVG's Lunch & Learn series and the Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo in September.

Educational Articles

This year four articles were written and distributed through email and to local media outlets and also posted on the website. Aimed at area property owners, topics ranged from managing an invasive species to the role forests play in keeping our waters healthy.

Articles produced this year included the following (click to download a copy):

[Protecting Our Water – One Forest at a Time](#)

[Keep It Clean Campaign Comes to Mille Lacs Lake](#)

[Drone Study Captures Mille Lacs Lake Shoreline](#)

[Purple Loosestrife: A Pretty, Purple Predator](#)

Keep It Clean Campaign

MLLWVG supported the Keep It Clean campaign, which achieved a major milestone in 2023 when the Minnesota State Legislature made it illegal to leave refuse on the ice. A project of the Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation, it is a grassroots effort to address the growing problem of garbage and human waste

left on the ice by anglers and other visitors during ice fishing season. Begun at Lake of the Woods a few years ago, the program is expanding across the state and now includes Upper Red Lake, Mille Lacs Lake, Lake Vermilion, and many other ice-fishing destinations. MLLWMG supported Keep It Clean by contributing funds for the project's website (keepitcleanmn.org), sharing information, and encouraging participation.

AIS Education and Lead Tackle Exchange

With funding support from Aitkin County, MLLWMG continued its aquatic invasive species educational efforts through distribution of literature at events and a continuing presence in social media, on its website, and at its events. MLLWMG continued to participate in Minnesota's "Get the Lead Out" campaign in which anglers are encouraged to exchange their lead tackle for nontoxic alternatives.



More than 16 pounds of lead tackle were exchanged at events and at the Aitkin SWCD office drop-off location. Four fish-shaped downrigger weights were also safely recycled, accounting for an additional 24 pounds. *Above: Lead-free tackle.*

eDNA Study for Aquatic Invasives

Mille Lacs Lake was one of several lakes targeted by a University of Minnesota study to see if citizen volunteers could successfully follow a procedure to collect water samples to be tested for the presence of DNA from aquatic invasive species. Several MLLWMG members participated; study results are expected early in 2024. Early signals are that the procedure was successful.

Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

This year local elected representatives and SWCD staff members have been working with partners from up in Aitkin County all the way down to Anoka County to begin implementation of the state-approved Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. Funding has begun to flow and is being used to initiate qualifying projects that support the goals of the entire Rum River Watershed. Project approvals continue on a quarterly basis, and MLLWMG has begun discussing its key roles in the identification of projects and the broader preservation of Mille Lacs Lake, the headwaters of the Rum River.

Lunch & Learn Events

MLLWG presented three Lunch & Learn events. Each one included a free meal for attendees along with a presentation on a topic of interest to anyone who cares about keeping our lake and lands healthy. A special part of each Lunch &

Learn was the giveaway of birdhouses made by students in an Isle public school woodworking class. (See the story: [Isle Students Build Birdhouses for Watershed Group](#).) An abbreviated MLLWMG meeting followed each presentation.

Our first Lunch & Learn was April 15 at Red Door Resort Event Center. The topic was the Mille Lacs Lake “Keep It Clean” campaign with speakers Ann Brucciani Lyon, Mille Lacs Keep It Clean coordinator, and Bret Grundmeier, Minnesota DNR conservation officer.

Our second Lunch & Learn was June 24 at Appledoorn’s Resort and Conference Center. Our

speaker was Dan Steward, retired Board Conservationist for the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) for more than three decades. He talked about the significant role forest lands play in preserving water quality and how

Minnesota leads in forestry efforts. *Above: Dan Steward presenting at the June 24 Lunch & Learn event.*



Our third Lunch & Learn Event was September 23 at McQuoid’s Inn. The topic was Aquatic Invasive Species, with a presentation by Tom Hubbard, AIS Detector trained by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center. This Lunch & Learn was part of our 2023 Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo (see below).

Lunch & Learn was made possible with funding from the Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation. The June event was also supported by a generous donation from Appledoorn’s Resort. Additional support comes from the Mille Lacs, Crow Wing, and Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation Districts; the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe DNR; and Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group volunteers. Average attendance was about 30.

Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo

Our 2023 event was held 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, September 23 at McQuoid’s Inn north of Isle. The event included our third Lunch & Learn. In the morning, Expo visitors had the opportunity to explore the Keep It Clean wheelhouse which provided information about how to be “nice to the ice” during winter recreation. The CD3 boat cleaning unit was also on hand with its message about reducing the transfer of aquatic invasive species among lakes. An extensive collection of locally collected wild plants helped folks distinguish

between friendly and not-so-friendly species. Visitors also learned about the Mille Lacs Compass program. Lunch from Isle's Smokin' Mortars was served at noon. The lunch was accompanied by a presentation about invasive species by AIS Detector Tom Hubbard. The afternoon concluded with an informal meeting of the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group. About 38 people attended the day's activities.

The Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo was funded by Aitkin County Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force.

ADMINISTRATION

Updates to 10-year plan and By-Laws: Two core MLLWGM documents were revisited during 2023. The 10-year plan, covering the period 2017 – 2027 was revised to better guide the group's activities and aspirations. Five sections were outlined:

1. Collect and share information about the watershed's water quality
2. Define, grow, and market the Mille Lacs Compass program
3. Be an information resource for watershed health and resiliency
4. Collaborate with other organizations that share MLLWGM's interests
5. Improve organizational effectiveness

A copy of the plan is available for download [here](#).

The by-laws were modified in anticipation of formal adoption in 2024. The changes better define the organization's structures and procedures.

Meetings: MLLWGM held nine business meetings in 2023. These were in January, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, and November. An additional workshop session was held in October. The April, June, and September meetings were held in person as part of the Lunch & Learn series.

Membership: At the end of 2023 MLLWGM had 10 regular voting members and a similar number of non-voting advisory members. (A regular voting member is someone who has attended at least two meetings in the previous 12 months.) Meeting attendance averaged more than a dozen regular and advisory members. The email list grew to 129 addresses.



2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Beginning Balance - MLLWVG General Fund = \$ 873.04
Community of Mille Lacs Stewards Grant (MLACF) = \$ 1,000.00

Income

\$ 5,000.00 Aitkin County AIS Education Grant
\$ 1,000.00 Lunch & Learns Support Grant (MLACF)
\$201.60 Lumber Donation

Expenses

\$ 338.28 Lunch & Learn Venue Costs
\$ 261.06 Website Hosting / Domain Registration (AIS Grant)
\$ 1,025.00 CD3 Watercraft Cleaning Station Support (AIS Grant)
\$ 75.00 MLLWVG Media Consultant (AIS Grant)
\$ 900.00 Lunch & Learn Venue costs (MLACF Grant)
\$ 100.00 Lunch & Learn Speaker Stipends (MLACF Grant)
\$ 1,949.33 Healthy Land Healthy Lake Expo (AIS Grant)
\$ 1,689.62 Unspent Balance of Aitkin AIS Grant Returned to Grantor
\$ 201.60 Lumber for Bird Houses

Ending Balance - \$ 850.29
MLLWVG General Fund = \$ 850.29

PARTNERS

MLLWVG is grateful to its volunteers, program participants, representatives of local government, and funders without whom its work could not continue.

Local and State Agency Partners

Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District
Crow Wing Soil & Water Conservation District
Mille Lacs Soil & Water Conservation District
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Department of Natural Resources
Aitkin, Mille Lacs, and Crow Wing Counties
Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation
Round Lake Association, Aitkin & Crow Wing County
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

***Learn more and become involved with the
Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group***

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