



Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Group

Healthy Land, Healthy Lake

Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Group Annual Report 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Group (MLLWG) 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, additional technical services may be 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.



Beyond the individual efforts of SWCD staff, Mille Lacs Compass outreach occurred through an online webinar, site visits, and the Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo described below.

Webinar: Lynn Gallice, shoreline specialist with Mille Lacs SWCD presented a webinar entitled Fix Your Eroding Shoreline on June 3. The webinar was hosted

by Rum River Watershed Partnership outreach coordinator Lydia Godfrey from Isanti SWCD. Those who registered and indicated that they had shoreline property on Mille Lacs Lake. The presentation is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3eEWc5L22o>

June and September Site Visits: Thanks to the generosity of a local landowner, a group of MLLWG members were able to enjoy a guided “walk and talk” on June 8 to observe the diverse bird, animal, and plant life at a secluded location on the southeast corner of the lake. Forester Paul Dickson provided insights into forest health, habitat, and water quality. On September 4, Mille Lacs Compass Program participant Guy Haglund hosted an open house to talk about his do-it-yourself shoreline restoration project and to encourage others to pursue their own projects. His property is located on the east side of the lake.

Healthy Land, Healthy Lake

Expo: Our 2024 event was held 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, September 7 at McQuoid’s Inn north of Isle. Outdoors, visitors could explore the portable CD3 boat-cleaning unit which is used at public landings around the lake to aid boaters in cleaning their watercraft to reduce the transfer of aquatic invasive species. An aquatic invasive species inspector was present to further tell the story of the impact of aquatic



invasives. Also outside was a display of plants, some of them native and some of them not-so-friendly invasives. Inside, visitors found tables set up for the Keep It Clean and Get the Lead Out campaigns. Visitors also learned about the Watershed Group’s Mille Lacs Compass stewardship program for landowners and the Northern Waters Land Trust. A free lunch from Isle’s Smokin’ Mortars was served at noon; it was accompanied by a presentation about forest health. Attendance of 28 was reported with eight new names added to the email list.

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

Keep It Clean Campaign

MLLWG continued its support of the Keep It Clean campaign which addresses the problem of garbage and waste left on the ice of Minnesota lakes. In September 2024 the campaign drew attention to trash on the lake bottom when a team of scuba divers from Clean Up the Lake examined 14 fishing hot spots. By

year's end a plan was established to set up a "Trash Tracker" website to encourage awareness and participation in lake cleanup efforts.



AIS Education and Lead Tackle Exchange

With funding support from Aitkin County, MLLWG 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. MLLWG continued to participate in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's "Get the Lead Out" campaign at its Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo where anglers were encouraged to exchange their lead tackle for nontoxic alternatives.

ADMINISTRATION

Organizational Development

In 2024 MLLWG took steps towards strengthening its position as an independent organization. Work begun in 2023 to update its bylaws came to fruition at the July 15 meeting when language clarifying roles and procedures was officially adopted. This included dropping the word "Management" from the Group's name.

Soon thereafter MLLWG officers opened a bank account at Blaze Credit Union in a step toward establishing its fiscal independence from Aitkin SWCD. Earlier in the year, MLLWG's first-ever direct solicitation for contributions was distributed to the Group's email list.

In 2024 MLLWG officially became a member of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates and Aitkin County Lakes and Rivers Association (ACLARA), reflecting its alignment with these groups' interests and advocacy.

Meetings: MLLWG held nine regular business meetings in 2024. These were held in January, February, March, May, June, July, August, October, and December. (The October meeting was held in-person on October 18.) An additional in-person strategic planning session was held April 19.

Membership: At the end of 2024 MLLWG 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.) Advisory members play a crucial role by bringing expertise in outdoor issues and connections to local government. SWCDs, the MPCA, and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe DNR are regularly represented at meetings. Meeting attendance averaged 11.5 individuals.

2024 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

BEGINNING BALANCE:	\$950.29
Income	
Contributed revenue	\$1,191.47
Aitkin County AIS Grant	\$2,028.82
Blaze Savings Interest	\$0.05
TOTAL INCOME:	\$3,220.34
Expenses	
Print ML Compass Brochure	\$139.59
Blaze Checks for Account	\$16.25
MLR Membership	\$100.00
Reimburse Fiscal Agent for Domain Reg pd in 2024	\$23.17
<i>Healthy Land, Healthy Lake Expo</i>	
Newspaper Ads	\$399.56
Social Media - Facebook Ads	\$69.95
MLLWMG Website/Social Media Consultant 13 hrs. @ \$ 34.47	\$448.11
Venue Rental (McQuoid's)	\$301.00
Smokin' Mortar Lunch	\$236.15
Lunch Items	\$57.21
Speaker Stipend	\$100.00
MLBO CD3Unit Support	\$1,025.00
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$2,915.99
ENDING BALANCE:	\$1,254.64

PARTNERS

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

Local and State Partners

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

Visit us at millelacswatershed.org or write to us at millelacswatershed@gmail.com