



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Issue #11 June 1, 2016

[View this email in browser](#)

Keeping Lac Courte Oreilles in balance—Max Wolter knows what to do

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

Not everyone who lives on Lac Courte Oreilles likes to fish—but everyone who lives on Lac Courte Oreilles wants to have fish in their lake, particularly musky and walleye, since their numbers have been in decline for some time now.

Max Wolter is the Senior Fisheries Biologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) in Hayward. Only 29, Wolter replaced Frank Pratt in 2012, after Frank retired.



Max Wolter talks about the status of the Lac Courte Oreilles fishery while being interviewed in his Hayward DNR office. Photo by Kathy Hanson.

Born and raised in Chippewa Falls, with both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Fisheries and Aquatic Ecology (UW- Stevens Point and University of Illinois), Wolter had a short learning curve.

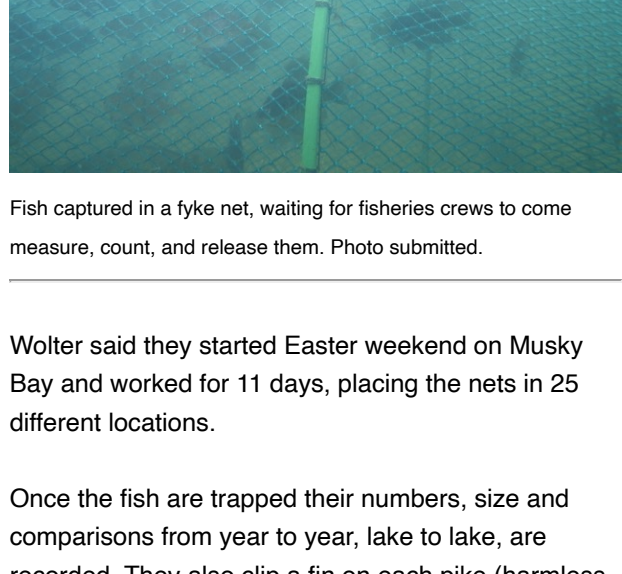
"I defended my Master's on a Wednesday and started here the next Monday," said Wolter, wearing both a grin and a baseball cap. He is as all- American looking as a youth hockey coach.

Wolter said he was only three to four months into the job here before he knew exactly what was going on with Lac Courte Oreilles. He gives a lot of credit to COLA for that and he is an outspoken fan and enthusiast for lake associations.

In fact, his understanding of lake associations and people who live on the lake in general, reflects a broad and inclusive approach.

"The challenge for any lake association is to engage anyone and everyone who has an interest in the lake, and put that to positive use," said Wolter.

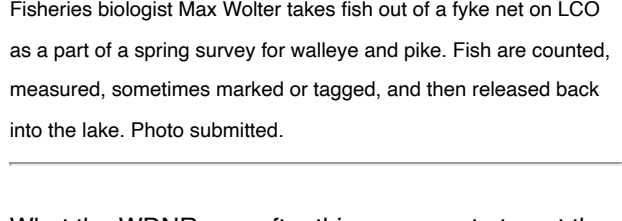
Wolter and other WDNR staff recently concluded the first half of their fieldwork on the LCO fishery survey. They used a process called fyke netting, which is a fish trap consisting of cylindrical or cone-shaped netting bags mounted on rings. It has wings that guide the fish towards the entrance of the bags, which are fixed, on the bottom by anchors or ballasts.



Fish captured in a fyke net, waiting for fisheries crews to come measure, count, and release them. Photo submitted.

Wolter said they started Easter weekend on Musky Bay and worked for 11 days, placing the nets in 25 different locations.

Once the fish are trapped their numbers, size and comparisons from year to year, lake to lake, are recorded. They also clip a fin on each pike (harmless because the fins grow back) so they are marked for the next survey.



Fisheries biologist Max Wolter takes fish out of a fyke net on LCO as a part of a spring survey for walleye and pike. Fish are counted, measured, sometimes marked or tagged, and then released back into the lake. Photo submitted.

What the WDNR was after this year was to target the northern pike in LCO, Wolter said, adding that these fish are not native. They were introduced into the lake in the 1940s and 50s and have been increasing, causing a detrimental effect.

Why?
"There's only so much food to go around in the lake. The pike eat fish like perch, suckers, young walleye and probably young musky," Wolter said.

After that, there's not enough small fish for the musky and walleye to thrive. Wolter said that musky used to outnumber pike 2:1. Today pike may outnumber musky 100:1.

"It's time to get it back into balance," he said.

"Another problem is that fishermen don't keep the pike they catch; they're looking for something else to take home and eat. But pike are great eating fish and it's really important that anglers keep more of them," Wolter said.

Every year an estimated 12,000 pike are caught on LCO but only 15 percent are kept, according to Wolter who also emphasized that the goal is not to eradicate pike, just to bring about a balanced fishery.

The second half of the LCO lake survey is done with electrofishing, or shocking the fish. It is done at night with a specialized boat and a generator. The fish are stunned and caught, and within 30 seconds they are back in the water, Wolter explained. This part of the study is done when the water temperatures are in the upper 50s. It's usually done in May, Wolter said.

The full WDNR spring fishery report on LCO will be released after it is written this summer. Such lake surveys are done on Lac Courte Oreilles every other year.

Fish sticks

Wolter is keenly interested in another project that would help LCO and all lakes. Fish Sticks projects make use of naturally fallen trees in the water near the shoreline, which provide an ideal micro-ecosystem for many fish species. Wolter said they are a spawning habitat for yellow perch and smallmouth bass, and little fish love to hide there.

Turtles, birds and other animals also seek fish sticks out for nesting and sunning.

"After the Ice Age natural lakes had hundreds of fallen trees but over the years, as people developed lakes and wanted sandy beaches, lawns and lakefront homes, they pulled the trees out.

Now, the older growth trees aren't there to fall," Wolter said. Our shorelines have changed but fish sticks help to mimic what lakes used to look like and they bring the habitat back, he added.

Lac Courte Oreilles is a developed lake so the WDNR would like to work with lakeshore owners to develop these projects. Wolter said on DNR-owned land—such as the Chippewa Flowage—we do it all the time.

"Lac Courte Oreilles has all the building blocks for keeping things in balance—the size, depth and diversity of the lake, along with the history of all the fish. We just want to make sure we can keep things in balance," Wolter said.

COLA ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday June 25, 2016
St. Francis Solanis
Mission Church

8:30 - 9 Coffee & rolls

9 - 9:45 COLA business meeting

10 - Noon Invited speakers

Speakers to include:

Mic Isham
LCO Tribal Chairman

Hans Holberg
Associate Vice President
LimnoTech

Max Wolter
Fisheries Biologist
WDNR

Tressie Kamp
Staff Attorney
Midwest Environmental
Advocates

Kris Sivertson & John Berg
COLA/LCOFI Chairmen

[RSVP](#) appreciated for seating and refreshments.

If you prefer not to RSVP, come anyway, all are welcome!

COLA SUMMER PICNIC

Saturday, July 16, 2016
Noon - 3:00 pm
Bass Lake Town Hall

4TH ANNUAL COLA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

Sponsored by: Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation and Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

September 17, 2016
More details to follow

IN THE NEWS

[COLA, LCO Tribe ask DNR to set stricter clean-water standard](#)

Sawyer Country Record
May 4, 2016

[Fixes Come Slowly for Growing List of Impaired Lakes and Streams](#)

Wisconsin State Journal
April 17, 2016

RECENT PRESS RELEASES

[Wisconsin DNR Asked to Initiate Emergency Rulemaking for Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

HELP NEEDED

[Join the COLA Board!](#)

COLA's Treasurer, Steve Lillyblad, will be retiring soon. Are you willing to help out? Requirements: Basic computer skills, some familiarity with spreadsheet software, and a commitment to the well-being of LCO.

COLA is also recruiting two other board positions, one focusing on forestry practices and the other on watershed outreach.

Send inquires to [COLA](#).

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

We'd like to spread the news of COLA's good people and good works throughout the upper Couderay River watershed.

If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears Long Tales, [let us know](#).

Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends.

Support COLA by contributing to the [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#).

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.

The eNewsletter Editor can be reached at:

COLA
P.O. Box 702
Hayward, WI 54843
courte.oreilles.lakes.association@gmail.com