

Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Issue #46 May 3, 2021

Lac Courte Oreilles

Have we learned anything from the past?

Jim Coors
COLA Board of Directors

More than 50 years ago, the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Protective Association was formed to address concerns about water quality, clarity, water levels, and native plants and animals. In 1994, the Courte Oreilles Lakes Association (COLA) was established as the official lake organization for LCO to carry on the charge. The challenges were abundantly clear in the 1960s - the water quality and ecology of the LCO lakes would deteriorate because of human neglect and carelessness.

Degraded lakes don't heal themselves when under continuous assault.

Has COLA succeeded? Unfortunately, Musky Bay, became a phosphorus-infused bed of noxious invasive plants that destroyed wild rice and musky habitat. But the rest of LCO "seems" relatively unscathed.

Not so. Appearances are deceiving - the trends are decidedly not healthy. Over the past 18 years, phosphorus concentrations have continued to rise in all of LCO - from 10.3 ppb in 2002 to 14.3 ppb in 2020. Algal growth has nearly doubled in the same period. Water clarity has substantially decreased - by nearly 1/2 in portions of the LCO lakes. COLA and the LCO Tribe are devoting ever-increasing time and effort to fight off new incursions of invasive plants such as curly leaf pondweed (CLP) and Eurasian water milfoil (EWM).

So, even with all the effort over the last 50 years, the LCO lakes are more threatened than ever before.

All of LCO is now declared an impaired water by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) based on low dissolved oxygen (DO). Low DO caused the massive fish-kill several years ago, and low DO is caused by the overabundance of decaying algae and aquatic vegetation.

What causes all this decaying vegetation? Excessive nutrients, primarily phosphorus. Phosphorus promotes excessive algal and plant growth. Aggressive invasive plants such as CLP and EWM then quickly outcompete and outgrow native plants. When these plants complete their life cycle, they die, and microbes begin to degrade the dead vegetation. These microbes consume dissolved oxygen at the expense of fish such as lake white fish and cisco. Essentially these fish suffocate.

Simply put, the LCO fishery is now nearing collapse because of excessive phosphorus. It's happened before for similar lakes across the north-central region of the US, and it's happening now for LCO.

Just knowing all of this doesn't stop LCO's degradation

Take a look at the [Timeline of Significant Events](#) on COLA's website. COLA, the LCO Tribe, and concerned LCO property owners have tried again and again to alter this trajectory. We've continuously monitored water quality for decades, promoted educational opportunities, developed state-of-the-art scientific understanding of LCO's degradation processes and causes, reached out to authorities across the north-central US for help, prodded recalcitrant property owners and agricultural operations to be more protective of the watershed, pushed zoning authorities to uphold their responsibilities, ... It's gone on and on - for more than 50 years! All without the needed result.

With your help, though, we are still trying

Here's a sampling of what's in store for 2021:

- The arrival of the Eco-Beast - You made it possible, and now it's almost on the water chomping its way through invasive plants. It arrived on May 3, and you will see it in action soon. Where will it be? [As reported last year](#), COLA has licensed the ArcGIS Collector app, which members of COLA's AIS Observation Team will use to identify and precisely map CLP and EWM. Yell, wave, and thank all the donors, volunteers, the LCO Tribe, and all the others who have made this dream come alive.
- COLA will have its [2021 Aquatic Plant Management Plan](#) approved and functioning. This plan, which incorporates the Eco-Beast and the ArcGIS technology, will allow for COLA to maintain eligibility for WDNR aquatic invasive control grants and guide COLA, the LCO Tribe, Sawyer County, and the WDNR in an aquatic plant management of the lake over the next five years (2021 through 2025).
- COLA and the LCO tribe are investigating the possibility of installing continuous monitors of DO and temperature throughout the water column in LCO's major basin. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is currently supporting the Red Lake band in MN with such a project on Tribal and ceded territory. It may be possible to get the monitors in place on LCO sometime in the first half of the summer collecting invaluable information on the [habitat "squeeze."](#) i.e., identifying what are the drivers of the hypolimnetic oxygen demand and loss of habitat in LCO.
- The Musky Bay musky spawning habitat and wild rice reintroduction project design is now complete, and the WDNR dredging permit has been applied for.
- COLA is investigating how to use aerial and satellite imagery to monitor and identify need for shoreline buffer establishment and building/zoning violations.
- COLA and the LCO Tribe's [Site Specific Criterion \(SSC\) request will be once again reviewed](#) by the WDNR and (hopefully) finally put into place. Recall that after a [three-year legal struggle](#), the Dane County Court ordered WDNR to create a more protective SSC than the current phosphorus criterion of 15 ppb for LCO. Finally, WDNR did work with COLA, the LCO Tribe, and the EPA to craft the 10 ppb recommendation to protect LCO's two-story, cold-water fishery. Unfortunately, WDNR's Natural Resources Board turned back the SSC at the last moment. So, COLA and LCO tribe have come right back and resubmitted the SSC with EPA's additional support for an even more protective level of 7 ppb.

COLA and the LCO Tribe are doing all that they can

We know full well that we're only treating the symptoms, not the cause. We also know that, to date, we have had little to no regulatory support from those local, state, and federal agencies charged with preserving the LCO lakes.

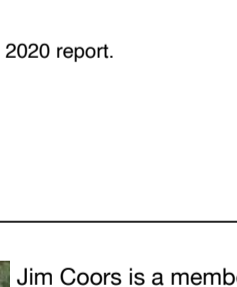
Recall the [words of Fred Prehn](#), a cranberry grower and chairman of the WDNR Natural Resources Board, who said, when turning back COLA's last attempt to adjust LCO's phosphorus standard to a more protective level:

"Nobody from the state's going to come down and change the lake any time soon."

So the question asked at the beginning of this article still remains,

Have we learned anything from the past?

Welcome Eco-Beast!



STATE OF THE LAKES
KEVIN HORROCKS, COLA PRESIDENT

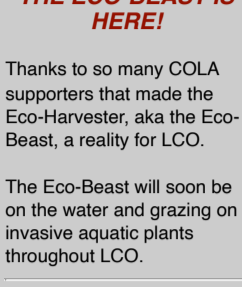
Click [here](#) for the 2020 report.

[View this email in your browser](#)

COLA NEEDS YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Please consider a tax-deductible donation today!

DONATE



THE ECO-BEAST IS HERE!

Thanks to so many COLA supporters that made the Eco-Harvester, aka the Eco-Beast, a reality for LCO.

GOV. EVERS ANNOUNCES TWO APPOINTMENTS TO WISCONSIN'S NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD

[Gov. Tony Evers announced two new appointments](#) to the Natural Resources Board, including Sandra Dee "Sandy" E. Naas of Ashland and Sharon Adams of Milwaukee. These appointments fill the vacancies created by the expiring terms of Dr. Frederick Prehn and Julie Anderson on May 1, 2021.



BASS LAKE TOWNSHIP IS CONSIDERING AN ORDINANCE TO EXPAND ATV & UTV ROUTES

Please take a look at the [proposed routes](#) and the [proposed ordinance](#). The pink routes on the map are the proposed routes, and the green are the existing routes. If you are concerned about this issue, make your views known to the [Bass Lake Town Board](#).



2021 NATURAL HISTORY FIELD TRIPS

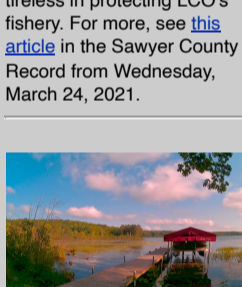
The field trips are finally back!

Saturday May 15: Nature's Salad Bar: The Hardwood Forest from 10:00 a.m. until approximately 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday May 26: Morgan Falls & St. Peter's Dome from 10:00 a.m. to approximately 5:30 p.m.

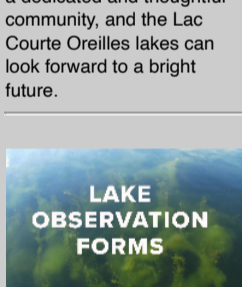
Click [here](#) to see all of this year's natural history field trips sponsored by the Extension Department at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College.

For more information, contact Cali Quaderer-Cuddy, Extension Program Coordinator, at cquaderer@lco.edu



MIKE PERSSON INDUCTED INTO MUSKIES INC. HALL OF FAME

Well done Mike! Mike is also on the COLA Board of Directors and has been tireless in protecting LCO's fishery. For more, see [this article](#) in the Sawyer County Record from Wednesday, March 24, 2021.



COLA'S VIEW FROM THE DOCK SURVEY

The "View From Your Dock" survey last fall was a great success. Most impressive was the thought put to answering the survey's questions coupled with the emotion expressed in the comments. The full report is provided [here](#), so take a look yourself.

It's obvious that we belong to a dedicated and thoughtful community, and the Lac Courte Oreilles lakes can look forward to a bright future.

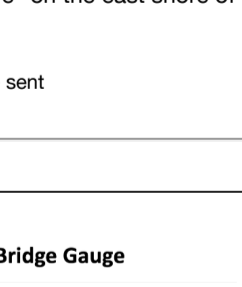


SEE ANYTHING WEIRD?

If you observe green water, algal mats on the surface or floating or dying fish - anything out of the ordinary - please take pictures and report this using COLA's [observation forms](#) immediately! COLA will alert the WDNR, the LCO Tribe, collect water samples, etc., to follow up.

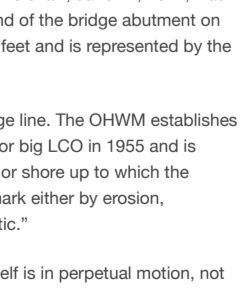
Please, if you see something, do something.

Do your part to help enhance and preserve the LCO Lakes!



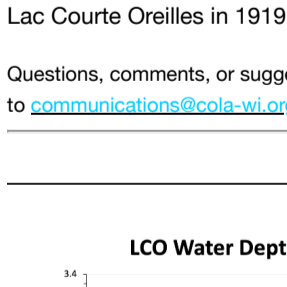
LCO NEEDS YOUR HELP

COLA is a **volunteer organization**. That means essential jobs don't get done unless someone steps up to help out. Contact communications@cola-wi.org if interested or you need more information.



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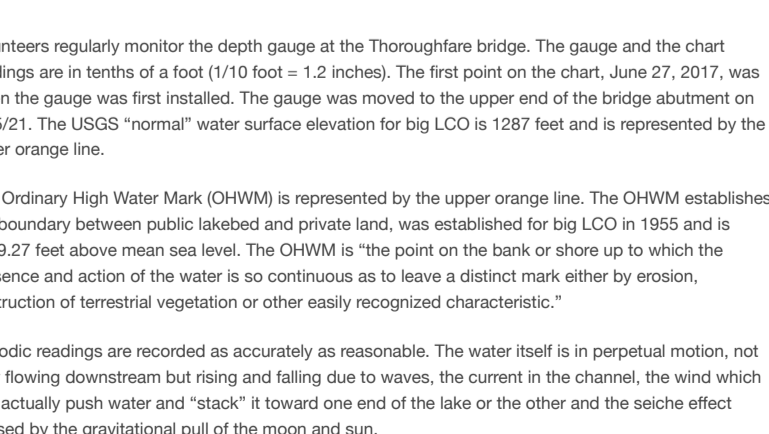
[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES](#)



Jim Coors is a member COLA's Board of Directors. He retired from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2007 where he was a professor in the Plant Breeding and Genetics program and the Department of Agronomy for 24 years. He is married to Ann Pollock whose great grandparents, Edward Cady Higbee and Grace Fassett Higbee, purchased the land now referred to as the "Camp at Reserve" on the east shore of Lac Courte Oreilles in 1919.

Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles maybe sent to communications@cola-wi.org.

LCO Water Depth Recorded at Thoroughfare Bridge Gauge



Volunteers regularly monitor the depth gauge at the Thoroughfare bridge. The gauge and the chart readings are in tenths of a foot (1/10 foot = 1.2 inches). The first point on the chart, June 27, 2017, was when the gauge was first installed. The gauge was moved to the upper end of the bridge abutment on 4/15/21. The USGS "normal" water surface elevation for big LCO is 1287 feet and is represented by the lower orange line.

The Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) is represented by the upper orange line. The OHWM establishes the boundary between public lakebed and private land, was established for big LCO in 1955 and is 1289.27 feet above mean sea level. The OHWM is "the point on the bank or shore up to which the presence and action of the water is so continuous as to leave a distinct mark either by erosion, destruction of terrestrial vegetation or other easily recognized characteristic."

Periodic readings are recorded as accurately as reasonable. The water itself is in perpetual motion, not only flowing downstream but rising and falling due to waves, the current in the channel, the wind which can actually push water and "stack" it toward one end of the lake or the other and the seiche effect caused by the gravitational pull of the moon and sun.

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COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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