



# NEWSLETTER

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## OPA MISSION

"The OPA is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the water quality and ecological health of Lake West Okoboji and the Iowa Great Lake Watershed."

## OUR GOALS

- To protect and monitor water quality, including the threat of invasive species.
- To preserve and protect the wetlands in the Iowa Great Lakes watershed.
- To participate in the control of lake development where a threat to the aquatic and shoreline environment exists.
- To promote sustainable urban and agricultural developments to protect the ecological balance of the lake and its watershed.
- To inform the community of ecological concerns of the OPA and courses of action to be taken.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear OPA members,

This year we celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Okoboji Protective Association (OPA), one of the longest running conservation organizations in Iowa. Historical records reveal a clue to its original name. In 1905, OPA was founded to "protect" its members' property from vandalism. The founders also wished to "protect" fish and game, lake water from sewage and boats from submerged dock posts and boulders.

In 1974, the meaning of "protective" changed with the development of a Water Quality Management Plan. Protection now focuses on preserving and enhancing the water quality and ecological health of Lake West Okoboji and the Iowa Great Lakes Watershed.

In 2016, the Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation was chosen to guide the OPA in strategic planning to preserve and enhance water quality. Board members recognized immediate threats to health water including:

- Herbicides/nutrients/ sediment
- High-impact development within the watershed
- Degrading infrastructure
- Invasive species

Plans were made to monitor, educate and act through partnership building. The OPA has always used monitoring to assist in prioritizing projects and activities. The best example is the 20-year partnership between OPA, the Dickinson County Clean Water Coalition, and the University of Iowa Lakeside Laboratory to monitor water quality through the Cooperative Lakes Area Monitoring Program (CLAMP).

Over time we have seen steady improvement in water clarity, a decrease in algae abundance and a decrease in average total phosphorus and nitrogen.

The need to protect and preserve Lake West Okoboji and its watershed will never end. We use education to influence decision makers and property owners to adopt sustainable development practices. Through collaboration with partners, we hope to respond to threats to our lake and watershed.

Although OPA members should be proud of their history and past achievements, we must be vigilant and prepare for future challenges.

Sincerely,

John Fieselmann, President OPA

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Pete DeKock

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Barbara Mendenhall

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# LINEUP SET FOR 10TH ANNUAL OKOBOJI BLUE WATER FESTIVAL

By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director

The 10th annual Okoboji Blue Water Festival (OBWF) set for Saturday, August 9 at the Preservation Plaza green space in Arnolds Park is now less than two months away. According OBWF co-chairs Greg Drees and Julie Peterson, they have recently secured the fishing clinician, clean water panelists, headliner and musical opening act showcasing the day's focus on raising public awareness of water quality issues in the Iowa Great Lakes and beyond.

## Fishing Clinician

Joe Henry, Executive Director of the Lake of the Woods Tourism, is being sponsored by the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club (IGLFC). President Terry Thomsen shared his excitement for the fishing seminar. "Joe Henry is an outstanding outdoor communicator and is heavily involved with the tourism on the Lake of the Woods. As a club, we are excited to have him share his fishing knowledge with the crowd."

## Clean Water Panel

One of the greatly anticipated events at the OBWF is the guest clean water panel. This year's clean water panelists include Joe McGovern, president of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation; Pete Hildreth, division administrator for Conservation & Recreation for Iowa DNR; Susan Kozak, director of Soil Conservation and Water Quality for IDALS; Larry Stone, photographer, naturalist, explorer and writer. The panel will be moderated by John Lundell, retired mayor of the city of Coralville, who has been inducted into the Iowa League of Cities' Hall of Fame for his career in local government.

## The Wallflowers to headline 2025 festival concert

"We are ecstatic that Jakob Dylan is bringing his renowned band, one of rock's most enduring acts over the past 30 years, to the festival," Peterson said. "What a way to conclude our 10th annual water quality event." The Wallflowers will take the stage at 8:45 p.m.

Dylan has been a prolific songwriter for 30 years, fusing his rock 'n roll roots with introspective lyrics and a hard-hitting delivery. Though the bulk of his career has been spent playing with a band, he has also stepped outside that setting with solo work and collaborations with such artists as Eric Clapton, Beck, Neil Young and Fiona Apple.

## Festival concert to open with The Nadas

The Nadas will take the stage to perform ahead of The Wallflowers on August 9 at 7:15 p.m. "This completes the concert card, and we are excited to have The Nadas kick off the show," Peterson noted. "They have a strong fan base and a loyal regional following."

Known primarily as a folk-American act, The Nadas live show is authentic and polished with three decades of experience.

## 2025 Okoboji Blue Water Festival Schedule

**When:** Saturday, August 9

**Where:** Preservation Plaza @ Arnolds Park Amusement Park

### Time schedule:

8 a.m.	ChalkStock (Sidewalk Art)
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.	Exhibitors' Row
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.	Kids and Family Activities
9:30 a.m.	Fishing Seminar with Joe Henry
10 a.m.	Story Time
11 a.m.	Clean Water Panel

### Free concert on stage

7:15 p.m.	The Nadas
8:45 p.m.	The Wallflowers



(photo by Steve Weisman) OPA members at the OPA booth on Exhibitor's Row in 2024.

# SAILBOAT RACING ON WEST OKOBOJI

*By Kirsty Thoreson, Sailing School Director*

For over 95 years, the Okoboji Yacht Club ("OYC") has been sponsoring sailboat races on West Okoboji for its members. Currently, five classes of sailboats race: the C Scow; the MC Scow; the Yngling; the X Boat; and the new Melges 15 Class.

Each class of sailboats has its own start and is scored separately. Each boat is occupied by a skipper, who steers the boat, and one or more additional sailors called crew. The skipper and crew have different responsibilities on the boat.

The races occur at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings from early June through Labor Day. This year, on certain Wednesday afternoons, the OYC will sponsor races for the Melges 15 and X Boat Classes. The exact location of the races depends on the direction and strength of the wind.

Races are set up to start between a motorboat, called the Race Committee Boat, and a buoy. From the start, boats will race around a series of buoys on a course that has been predetermined and announced to the racers by radio and via a display on the stern of the Race Committee Boat. Each race has components of going into the wind as closely as possible (upwind), with the wind (downwind), and sometimes sailing perpendicular to the wind (reaching).

The OYC is a member of a group of yacht clubs in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan called the Inland Lakes Yachting Association ("ILYA"). During the summer, certain yacht clubs will host sailboat racers from the other yacht clubs in the ILYA, including the OYC, for regattas.

This summer, the OYC will host a regatta for all MC Scow sailors in the ILYA. The regatta will consist of five or six races, with the average scores tabulated to determine the winner and order of finish for the sailors. The MC regatta will take place on June 26–28. Approximately 40 boats are expected to participate.

The OYC is always interested in attracting new sailors to learn about sailing and sailboat racing. If anyone is interested, please contact Brad Farrar, Executive Director of the OYC, by emailing [oycbrad@mchsi.com](mailto:oycbrad@mchsi.com).

# INHF AND PARTNERS WORKING TO BRING NEW PARK TO ARNOLDS PARK

*By Joe Jayjack, INHF External Affairs Director*

There could soon be a new city park in Arnolds Park that will benefit water quality, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation if fundraising efforts are successful this year.

On the edge of Arnolds Park near the Oars Campground lies 73 acres of undeveloped land — rare open space in a community facing development pressure. Roughly 240 acres drain through the property into Lower Gar and Milford Creek. What happens on this land has a direct impact on water quality.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is working with the City of Arnolds Park and Dickinson County Conservation to realize a vision of a city-owned park — open to everyone — with management and restoration work being done by the county.

Permanent land protection and restoration of prairies and wetlands will better filter water entering Lower Gar and Milford Creek, as well as offer important habitat for Iowa wildlife.

This urban interface is a key location for a possible trail connection and trailhead, providing a safe off-road alternative for cyclists and walkers. The city's concept plan prioritizes open space and easy access to nature, with a small parking lot, shade shelter and soft-surface trail — creating outdoor recreation opportunities for improved quality of life.

INHF secured an option to purchase the property earlier this year with help from the city and private donors. Now, INHF and Ducks Unlimited need to raise \$1.9 million by October 31, 2025, to exercise the option and purchase the property. It can then be transferred to the city and opened to the public.

*cont.*



To learn more about the Arnolds Park Project, visit [www.inhf.org/arnoldspark](http://www.inhf.org/arnoldspark) or contact Abby Hade Terpstra, INHF director of philanthropy, at [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org) or at 515-288-1846 ext. 15.



## FUNDING NOW AVAILABLE FOR SOIL QUALITY RESTORATION



The Key to a healthy lawn is Healthy Soil  
Often during new home construction homes are left with high clay content and compacted soil. Soil quality restoration can help fix problems caused by poor soils through the process of deep aeration and topdressing with compost. This environmentally friendly lawn care method is great for your lawn and can even help improve our lakes water quality

Benefits of soil quality restoration

- Adds nutrients lawns need without additional fertilizer
- Reduces compaction
- Increases organic matter content
- Enables your lawn to soak up and store more water
- Environmentally friendly lawncare method good for humans and our local lakes and waterways



### Introducing a new funding program for soil quality restoration for Iowa Great Lakes, Silver Lake, and Little Swan Lake Residents

**Funding available to cover 100% of the costs up to \$1,500 dollars**

The Dickinson County SWCD has received grant funding to support a new program to assist up to 80 households to improve their lawns with soil quality restoration. The SWCD will be covering 100% of the costs up to \$1,500 dollars per property.

#### How the Program Works

- Step 1 – Submit your application
- Step 2 – Receive notification of application approval & final cost information
- Step 3 – Submit payment to Dickinson SWCD (if above \$1,500 dollars)
- Step 4 – SWCD will coordinate installation for the fall 2025

#### For more information & application details contact:

Email: [john.wills@ia.nacdnet.net](mailto:john.wills@ia.nacdnet.net)  
Phone: 712-336-3782 ext 3  
<https://www.cwa.org>

Learn more about soil quality restoration by visiting

[www.raincampaign.org/sqr](http://www.raincampaign.org/sqr)

# WAKE-UP CALL! RECREATIONAL SAFETY ON MILLERS BAY

By Deborah Lanners, The Millers Bay Conservancy

After the death of a young tourist from a near-drowning incident amidst anchored boats tied up together in Millers Bay in July 2023, The Millers Bay Conservancy is shining a spotlight on the great need to improve recreational safety of those on Millers Bay:

- Millers Bay is the home to Okoboji Yacht Club's Sailing School, Iowa Lakeside Lab, and Lakeshore Center at Okoboji & Presbyterian Camp. All three operate day camps or sailing lessons that bring children as young as pre-K out into Millers Bay's waters in mini-sailboats, kayaks, canoes, and on stand-up paddleboards.
- Kayakers – locals and tourists - flock to Millers Bay to ply its calm waters sheltered by the higher elevations to the west, drawn to Lakeside Lab's extensive native shoreline, often to look for the resident pair of mating eagles.
- Many anglers fish in Millers Bay, which has the historical reputation as "the finest fishing ground in the lakes region", along with a DNR fishing access on the south shoreline.
- Families flock to Millers Bay so their children (and dogs!) can swim off their anchored boats or play on tethered aqua mats and other "floaties".

Unfortunately, some boaters and jet skiers on Millers Bay compromise the safety and enjoyment of others. Alcohol, youth, or lack of boating experience and knowledge can create a dangerous stew in Millers Bay during peak usage times. The Millers Bay Conservancy supports a strong law enforcement presence during peak usage times on Millers Bay. Visible and active law enforcement in Millers Bay helps deter illegal or risky behavior that endangers public safety.

New Eurasian watermilfoil PSAs! Keep your eyes and ears open for our latest "Spread the Word, Not the Weeds" ads created by Blink Marketing for Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, as well as our KUOO radio spots. Thank you to the Okoboji Protective Association for funding this media campaign to prompt boaters in their 20s and 30s to remove all "hitchhiking" weed fragments from their anchors before and after anchoring throughout the Okoboji chain.

We greatly appreciate donations to support The Millers Bay Conservancy's ongoing work to protect and improve Millers Bay and, by extension, West Lake Okoboji! Follow us on Facebook and Instagram, and check out the information about Eurasian watermilfoil and Millers Bay on our website: [www.millersbayconservancy.com/news](http://www.millersbayconservancy.com/news)



(photo by David Thoreson) Youngsters at the Okoboji Yacht Club's Sailing School.



# TUNE IN TO THE OPA'S CLEAN WATER CAMPAIGN ON KUOO

*By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director*

OPA members are encouraged to tune in to 2025 Okoboji Protective Association's Clean Water Connection on KUOO (103.9 FM) radio with Kari Broelsma at 3:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Each week, Kari will interview a water quality expert about a specific topic relating to important clean water topics. The weekly interviews will last through Wednesday, July 30.

All of the Clean Water Campaign interviews, along with any photos and/or videos the speakers can provide will be archived under the Community tab on the Explore Okoboji website.

The first segment on Wednesday, June 11 featured John Fieselmann, President of the OPA, telling the OPA story, its support of the Iowa Great Lakes and an invitation for listeners to join the OPA. Two other recent interviews have included John Wills, Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance Coordinator on Wednesday, June 18 and Mary Skopec, Director of the Iowa Lakeside Lab on June 25. Listed below are the future clean water experts:

- Mike Hawkins, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist – July 2;
- Steve Anderson, District Superintendent-IGLSD – July 9;
- Joe Jayjack, Iowa Natural Heritage Communications Director – July 16;
- David Thoreson, From an Explorer's Perspective – July 23;
- Greg Drees, Okoboji Blue Water Festival – July 30;

Greg Drees, former OPA president and co-organizer of the Okoboji Blue Water Festival (OBWF), says, "The OPA's Clean Water Connection offers KUOO's listeners a host of experts with outstanding insight into the challenges we face to protect our waterways and lakes. We must all remember that our cherished way of life depends on clean water: healthy ecosystems provide wildlife habitat and places to fish, paddle, surf and swim. Our economy depends on clean water: manufacturing, farming, tourism, recreation, energy production and other economic sectors need clean water to function and flourish. People, wildlife and plants depend on clean water. Without clean water, life itself is impossible."

OPA members are encouraged to have neighbors and friends tune in to KUOO, and if they can't do so, to check out the Community tab on the Explore Okoboji website.

## THE OKOBOJI YACHT CLUB SAILING SCHOOL (OYCSSL) A.K.A. THE OKOBOJI SAILING CENTER (OYC)

*By Kirsty Thoreson, Program Director, Okoboji Yacht Club Sailing School*

The Okoboji Yacht Club Sailing School (OYCSSL) is located on West Lake Okoboji on the North shore of Millers Bay. The OYCSSL has been an important part of the lake's heritage since 1898, with over 100 years of fostering the love of sailing. The OYCSSL is a nonprofit organization open to the public, dedicated to teaching sailing and boating safety to students of all ages.

We offer camps from early June to mid-August with our "Learn to Sail" programs: 'Little Puffs' ages 6-8; 'Big Gusts' ages 9-12; and 'Adult' classes. We offer 'Intermediate' and 'Bic/Laser' classes for more advanced young sailors.

In addition, children in grades 4-9 can sign up for our "S.T.E.M. Adventure Sailing", a program taught in collaboration with Lakeside Labs. 'X-Boat Racing' classes teach our more competitive sailors racing skills they use during Okoboji Yacht Club weekend races.

The Sailing School is a cornerstone of the Okoboji community, blending recreation, education and competitive sailing in fun environment, and we welcome anyone new to the sport.

There are still spots available in our 2025 youth camps and adult classes, so check out our website [okobojisailingcenter.org](http://okobojisailingcenter.org) or send an email to [okobojisailingcenter@gmail.com](mailto:okobojisailingcenter@gmail.com)

For the safety of all sailors, power boaters are asked to maintain a 'no wake' speed near the little sailboats in classes during the week and near weekend racecourses to avoid disrupting the sailboats with large wakes.

# OKOBOJI PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION



 **FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK!**

## OPA NEWSLETTER

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The OPA Newsletter welcomes submissions from its readers.  
Editors: ..... Barbara Mendenhall  
Steve Weisman

## WORLD WIDE WEB

OPA  
<http://www.okobojiprotectiveassociation.org>