



# 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 Lakes 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,

One of my greatest fears for the future of West Okoboji Lake has been the threat of invasive species, a fear mirrored by many of our members and visitors attending the Blue Water Festival. The threat has come from fish like Asian, Bighead, and Silver Carp; mollusks like zebra mussels; and aggressive plant species like Curly-leaf Pondweed, Eurasian Watermilfoil and Brittle Naiad.

We have heard the stories of swimmers drowning and boats being caught up in the dense growth of Eurasian Watermilfoil in some of the lakes of Minnesota. Although these incidents have been infrequent, the potential threat remains.

In Northwest Iowa, we first encountered Eurasian Watermilfoil in Lost Island Lake. Then it surfaced in East Okoboji Lake in August 2022 and required a cooperative effort by the DNR and Great Lakes community due to the cost of the herbicide. The expensive treatment worked.

However, testing in the canal systems of West Okoboji Lake revealed it reappeared in the late summer of 2023. Fortunately, a new, fast acting, less expensive herbicide was available to treat this invasive species. Follow-up testing has revealed no further recurrence.

For several years, testing for Eurasian Watermilfoil has been negative in West Okoboji Lake. Curly-leaf Pondweed and Brittle Naiad are still found but have not spread enough to cause significant problems. The depth of our lake and rich diversity of aquatic species may be giving us some protections from a number of potential threatening invasive plant species. But concerns remain about the shallower areas in some of the bays and anchor drag which opens the bottom to infiltration.

Recently DNR monitoring has found Eurasian Watermilfoil in Clear Lake. Working with local partners, the DNR has developed an aggressive treatment plan for Clear Lake. Hopefully, this will be successful.

The lesson to be learned from each of these events is that monitoring and aggressive treatment when an invasive species is found can often remedy the immediate problem. In the future, we need to turn our thinking into prevention. Boats coming from other lakes must religiously wash the bottom of the boat, propellers, and fish wells. We must provide warning signage and the equipment, cleaning materials, and water sprayers at all points of entry to help visiting boaters from contaminating our lake.

We will need an aggressive communication plan to alert everyone in the area of the potential threat. Vigilance and prevention must be everyone's responsibility. Remember, we are stewards of our wonderful lake. Our future lake family and visitors deserve to experience the beauty and fun that we often take for granted. Let's get started!

Sincerely,

John Fieselmann, President of OPA

## OFFICERS

### PRESIDENT

John Fieselmann

### VICE PRESIDENT

Pete DeKock

### SECRETARY

Barbara Mendenhall

### TREASURER

Heidi Toale

## PAST PRESIDENTS

Steve Avery

Greg Drees

Joe Fitzgibbons

Brad Jones

Barbara Mendenhall

Kate Mendenhall

Dick Montgomery

Phil Petersen

Jim Rosendahl

Barry Sackett

Jane Shuttleworth

Paul Sieh

Mary Skopec

John Synhorst

John Wills

## ELECTED DIRECTORS

### WAHPETON

Joan Mael

Terri Rierson

John Fieselmann

### WEST OKOBOJI

Gayle Goodson

Aubrey Lafoy

Sue Wilmot

### ARNOLDS PARK

Heidi Toale

Paula Henry

Lori Eich

### OKOBOJI

Kate Ebinger

David Thoreson

Phil Spevak

### NO TOWN

Steve Carlson

Charles Vignal

## AT LARGE

Kathy Beachem

Amy Schlueter

Herman Richter

CJ Gibson

Kirk Stauss

Paula Streeter

Owen Primavera

Pete DeKock

Anne Slattery

Mary Jean O'Hair

Darren Dotson

Holly Skopec

Aaron Gronstal

Walt Homan

Bob DeKock

# IT TAKES A VILLAGE

By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director

Once again, the OPA board and membership have risen to the occasion, following its overall mission statement: "dedicated to preserving and enhancing the water quality of Lake West Okoboji and the Iowa Great Lakes Watershed."

In late October, the OPA's Board of Directors approved a \$15,000 donation to help the INHF achieve its goal of securing the 73-acre Arnolds Park Nature Area. The board then challenged the OPA membership to help match this donation. Just like that! Bang! It was done, only the amount totaled an incredible \$23,500 for a combined donation of \$38,500! Now that's truly stepping up to the plate and "living" the OPA mission statement! A "Tip of the Hat" to the board and its membership!

As OPA administrator, Amber Lippon said in her email to the membership following the challenge's success, "Thank you for your donation and your commitment to protecting these precious spaces for generations to come!"

This reminds me of that old adage; I'm sure it's one we have often heard: "It takes a village." How many times over the years have WE stepped up to preserve and protect the wetlands in the Iowa Great Lakes watershed and to help acquire land to protect the ecological balance of the lake and its watershed.

## **"It takes a village" at the Iowa Great Lakes**

Protecting our lakes has been a rallying cry for decades at the Iowa Great Lakes. Leadership has come through the efforts of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). Across the state of Iowa and since 1979, I have watched the INHF's conservation efforts, along with its supporters and partners, to protect over 1,500 sites encompassing over 200,000 acres, in 96 of Iowa's 99 counties. This land many times turns into county and state parks, wildlife areas and popular trails.

Right here in the Iowa Great Lakes, the INHF has protected nearly 6,000 acres over the past four decades. The most recent, of course, the 73-acre Arnolds Park Nature Area.

## **Receiving the news**

At noon on October 27, I received the exciting news and by the afternoon, I received this email from Abby Terpstra, Director of Philanthropy with the INHF, "The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is pleased to announce that the fundraising goal for the \$1.9M [Arnolds Park Nature Area](#) project was reached! The INHF board of directors has approved exercising the option to purchase. The INHF will purchase the property and place a conservation easement on it prior to transferring ownership to the City of Arnolds Park. [Your gift got us here!](#) THANK YOU for your contribution." Terpstra then thanked "the village!"

- Thank you to our project partners: City of Arnolds Park, Ducks Unlimited and Dickinson County Conservation.

- Thank you to our community partners: East Okoboji Improvement Corporation, Okoboji Protective Association, Spirit Lake Protective Association and Iowa Great Lakes Pheasants Forever.

- Thank you to the lead gift donors and the more than 300 individuals and families that stepped up to make this protection possible.

Yet another example that "It takes a village!" The recently acquired Arnolds Park Nature Area proves that we are not alone in our endeavors. By working together, sharing responsibilities and supporting one another, communities can achieve more and truly have a positive impact on us all. Thanks, OPA for your continued vigilance and for being a leader in helping to protect and preserve the Iowa Great Lakes watershed!

# REFLECTING ON THE WONDERS OF OUR AREA AND THE IMPACT OF THE OPA MEMBERSHIP

By Amber Lippon, OPA Administrator

As I write this column, we are in the midst of our very own Okoboji winter wonderland after our post-Thanksgiving snowstorm. Despite the frigid temperatures, I welcome the change in season with wide open arms – the fresh blanket of snow, the frost on the trees, the ice forming on the water. It all brings a sense of calm and peace in a season that tends to bring chaos and busyness. I often find myself pulling over at a spot by the lake on my way home from work just to spend a couple minutes enjoying the view and the peace it brings. Nothing centers you like taking in a sunset over our lakes.

I have three daughters, and like most moms, I constantly find my thoughts and reflections centering around them. We are well past the baby and toddler stages and are instead immersed in everything that comes along with parenting three teenagers. My oldest graduated from esthetician school and is building her life in the Des Moines area – making all the adult decisions and making me endlessly proud. My girls and I have had many conversations over the years of how lucky they are to experience a childhood in the Iowa Great Lakes.

How many children can say they grew up down the road from an amusement park? They get to live in a place that many choose as their vacation destination. During these conversations, we always come back to this one main point: our clean, beautiful lakes are what make this area so special and coveted. I am proud to be part of an organization that recognizes the importance of protecting these waters for generations to come.

OPA's membership numbers continue to remain

steady these past several years. We are fortunate to have YOU, our generous members that show up time and time again to help financially support our mission and the projects we support. You most recently stepped up in helping us with our match challenge in support of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's Arnolds Park Project, which met their goal so that particular 73-acre greenspace is now forever protected.

With your help, we were able to contribute \$38,500 towards that project – THANK YOU! Whether you are a year-round local, a summer resident, or a seasoned visitor, we are grateful you are partnering with OPA. We can do incredible things when we work together towards the one common goal of protecting our waters.

If you could share our organization with just five of your friends, your neighbors, your family members, etc., we could grow this organization and accomplish even more in the years to come! Send them to our webpage to become a member ([www.okobojiprotectiveassociation.org/joinopa](http://www.okobojiprotectiveassociation.org/joinopa)), share our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/OkobojiProtectiveAssociation](http://www.facebook.com/OkobojiProtectiveAssociation)), or have them email me at [opasince1905@gmail.com](mailto:opasince1905@gmail.com) with any questions they might have. We would love to have them!

I am constantly in awe of the wealth of knowledge and passion I am surrounded by within this organization. Every board meeting, every event, every conversation – I leave those with a renewed sense of hope for the future of our lakes. We thank you for your continued support and hope you encourage others to join us in our quest to protect our waters, our land, our home, our future for generations to come.

## ASPECTS TO MAKE WINTER SAFE AND ENJOYABLE

By Joe Yarkosky, Iowa DNR Conservation Officer

With the weather changing quickly, we want to share some vital information regarding two crucial aspects of a safe and enjoyable winter season on the ice here on the Iowa Great Lakes: **personal safety and environmental stewardship**. Your cooperation ensures a successful season for everyone.

The single most critical factor for safely enjoying the ice is its thickness and quality. Remember, **no ice is 100% safe**, and thickness can vary dramatically, even on the same body of water. Always check the ice condition frequently with an auger or spud bar as you venture out.

**Minimum recommendations for clear ice thickness:**

- Walking/Ice fishing (on foot): 4 inches
- Snowmobile or Small ATV: 5-7 inches
- Small car or Small Pickup Truck: 8-12 inches
- Medium Truck: 12-15 inches

**Crucial Safety Reminders:**

- **STAY OFF** ice that is **less than 4 inches** thick.
- **White or snow ice** is only about half as strong as clear, blue ice.

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- Avoid areas with currents, pressure ridges, snow cover (which acts as an insulator), and inlets/outlets, as these spots are almost always weaker.

If the unthinkable happens, the right gear is your best chance for survival. Never venture onto the ice without the following easily accessible items:

- **Ice Picks/Claws:** These are vital for pulling yourself out of the water if you break through. Keep them secured around your neck or in an easily accessible pocket.
- **Flotation Device:** Wear a **flotation suit** or a **life jacket (PFD)**. Inflatable vests are not recommended for cold water.
- **Throw Rope/Bag:** A floating rope is essential for rescuing someone who has fallen through.
- **Whistle:** Use this to signal for help—it's far more effective than yelling.

The second essential part of responsible ice use is ensuring you Leave No Trace. Unfortunately, a persistent problem is the amount of garbage, waste, and debris left behind on the ice, which severely pollutes our waters and harms wildlife when the spring thaw arrives. We urge all ice anglers to make a firm commitment to pick up every single item of trash. This includes everything from bait containers, food wrappers, and fishing line to propane bottles, plastic bags, and cigarette butts. Your simple goal must be to leave the ice in the same or a better condition than you found it.

Please be aware that our Conservation Officers will be conducting a special enforcement project this year specifically to address littering on the ice. Officers will be actively patrolling and investigating areas where trash and waste are found. Those who violate the littering regulations will face citations and significant fines.

Let's work together to keep our lakes clean, safe, and beautiful for generations to come.

## KEEP IT CLEAN

*By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director*

Here's a tip of the hat to the Okoboji Protective Association (OPA) for partnering with the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club (IGLFC) for a new initiative to keep the ice clean during the long winter season.

According to Terry Thomsen, president of the IGLFC, after visiting with Iowa DNR officials, area baitshops, anglers and people who simply love the Iowa Great Lakes, the IGLFC is spearheading the "Keep It Clean" initiative! The goal is to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the ice clean as we recreate on the ice this winter.

### Definitely needed

There is simply too much garbage left on the ice. Whether it's snowmobiling or ice fishing, too many people leave their refuse behind. Nothing is more infuriating than going out on the ice and getting to our fishing spot and witnessing plastic bags, pop and beer cans, partially eaten sandwiches, banana peels, apple cores, candy wrappers, bait containers, empty propane cylinders . . . you name it!

With the partnership of the OPA, the East Lake Improvement Corporation and the Spirit Lake Protective Association, the IGLFC is implementing the "Keep It Clean" campaign.

John Fieselmann, President of the Okoboji Protective Association, strongly supports the collaborative efforts of OPA, EOLIC, and SLPA in joining the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club to spearhead the "Keep It Clean" initiative. Fieselmann noted, "Litter at the lakes is a problem during all seasons. Why not start this winter during ice activities."

### The plan

First off, reflective 4-foot color signs will be placed just on the edge of the ice at all of the lake accesses on Big Spirit, East Okoboji, West Okoboji, Upper Gar and Lake Minnewashta. The signs will read KEEP IT CLEAN - IT'S THE LAW - ICE IS NO PLACE FOR YOUR GARBAGE OR WASTE!

At the same time, throughout the ice season, beginning in December, the IGLFC will partner with KUOO radio station with a "Keep It Clean" advertising blitz.

Thomsen says, "We've talked about this over the years, and last year when Joe Henry, executive director for the Lake of the Woods Tourism in northern Minnesota, was here for the Okoboji Blue Water Festival, he

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encouraged us to do a keep the ice clean initiative. He even suggested we could model our efforts after the Minnesota Keep It Clean program. In 2023, their initiative became law in Minnesota. "

### DNR law enforcement

Captain Greg Harson, Northwest Iowa District Law Enforcement Supervisor, gave the stance he and his conservation officers take on the issue. "We take littering seriously, and if we see littering going on, we will address the situation and write citations. The 'Keep It Clean' initiative will definitely help our conservation officers. We can't always be on the ice, so we encourage everyone who sees littering happening on the ice to give one of our conservation officers a call. There is a \$95 fine for littering on the lake."



## WINTER WONDERS AT IOWA LAKESIDE LABORATORY

By Ashley Scheve, Lakeside Education Coordinator

As winter settles into the Iowa Great Lakes and the first real snow starts to stick, we're reminded how this season invites us to slow down, bundle up and enjoy nature in a different way. Whether winter is your favorite time to get outside or a season you're still learning to love, we've got plenty happening at Lakeside Lab to help you make the most of it!

For our youngest nature lovers, winter brings some of the most exciting opportunities of all. If you know a child who loves sledding, building forts and exploring the great outdoors, our winter youth camps are a perfect fit! Lakeside Lab is once again partnering with ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County to offer No School and Homeschool Camps this February through April. These day camps are designed to spark curiosity and build an appreciation for nature in all seasons. Campers may find themselves snowshoeing through the woods, learning survival skills, doing hands-on science experiments or creating nature-inspired crafts.



Campers enjoying snowshoeing.

We're also excited to continue one of our favorite Winter Games community traditions: Soup 'N Slide! Mark your calendars for Sunday, January 25 from 11am – 1pm. This free, family-friendly event invites the community to enjoy homemade soup, desserts, hot chocolate, crafts and sledding on our big hill! We love seeing familiar faces and welcoming new ones, so bring your sled (and your appetite!) and come enjoy a fun winter outing at Lakeside Lab.

Another exciting winter opportunity is our Women in Nature Day (WIND), taking place on Saturday, January 31 from 9 a.m. to 1 p. m. here at Lakeside Lab. This program is geared toward women 18+ who want to try new outdoor recreation skills, meet other nature-loving women

and enjoy a peaceful winter day on our trails. This winter's sessions include Nature Photography, Your Path Through a Dichotomous Key, Basket Weaving, Hammocking and a guided Winter Wander. Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for registration and full details!

If you're looking to get outside on your own time, we've got you covered! Lakeside's trails are open to the public all winter long. If you've been curious about trying snowshoeing, we also have snowshoes available to borrow—just give our office a call to set up a time. Our sledding hill is also open whenever there's snow on the ground, and it's a great excuse to get outside for some fresh air and winter sunshine.

We hope you and your family find plenty of reasons to enjoy the beauty of winter this season. Whether you're sledding down our hill, enjoying some homemade soup or wandering our snowy trails, we'd love to see you at Lakeside Lab!



Campers enjoying a little sledding time.

# PROTECTION SUCCESSFUL! HOW THE LAKES COMMUNITY PRESERVED THE ARNOLDS PARK NATURE AREA IN A SWIFT FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN.

*By Abby Terpstra, INHF Director of Philanthropy*

This summer, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) announced a new initiative - an acquisition campaign to protect a 73-acre property on 195th Street in Arnolds Park, adjacent to Oars Campground. The owner of the property gave INHF until October 31 to raise the money to cover the purchase price of the land; \$2 million.

In mid-March, the Arnolds Park City Council voted to assist INHF with the purchase of the property. They contributed the first \$25K that went toward the purchase of the option. This allowed INHF to get started planning a fundraising campaign.

In mid-April, INHF signed an MOU with Ducks Unlimited, making our partnership for fundraising official. Ducks Unlimited also contributed \$25K toward the purchase of the option. With INHF's contribution of \$50K, the \$25K from Arnolds Park City Council, and this contribution from DU, the option was secured. All systems were go for a \$1.9M fundraising campaign!

By mid-May, meetings had been held to discuss the future vision for the site: restored wetlands, mowed walking trails, a trailhead with parking area, and the opportunity to extend the bike path along the eastern side of the property. While these amenities were not part of the fundraising for acquisition, having the vision helped paint the picture of what the future could be if the land were protected.

At the INHF donor reception held in mid-June at Gull Point, INHF officially unveiled the project and began inviting public contributions. A sign was erected on location, and the project began to get some media buzz. By this time, an additional \$25K had been raised at INHF, and DU's Leaders in Giving campaign had resulted in close to \$100K.

July began with public appearances at the Spirit Lake Protective Association's pancake breakfast, speaking with the residents of Pelican Ridge (the property's neighbor to the south), and community-wide distribution of campaign flyers. RAGBRAI went through Milford and gave INHF another opportunity to promote the project. Visits to Oars Campground and Cedar Ridge Campground, the neighbors to the west and east of the property, bolstered the campaign with enthusiastic reception. The East Okoboji Lake Improvement Corp voted to make a leadership gift to the project. Another \$150K came in as gifts and pledges.

August saw INHF and DU at the Blue Water Festival, showcasing the potential Arnolds Park Nature Area and seeing new and old friends. A community-wide mailing was sent and additional media mentions helped keep the spotlight on what could be. An anonymous gift boosted the campaign, closing the month with \$1.02M more committed.

This was followed by another \$120K in September plus the good news that DU had received word that they would be receiving a grant from the Andrea Waitt Carlton Foundation. By now, more than 200 families had pitched in to support the Arnolds Park Nature Area vision of keeping it green! (Here, Abby starts biting her nails. Will we make it? Getting so close but not there yet!)

October began with the final 10% hill to climb. Bang! The Goodenow Family breathed new energy into the campaign by announcing a challenge match grant. In a week, the match was met. Bang! The Okoboji Protective Association rallied their members with a match challenge, which their members responded to with incredible generosity. Bang! The East Okoboji Improvement Corp decided to send in a second gift. And then, bang bang! The last week of October donations flooded in from another 100 families, reaching the campaign goal on October 27 and giving the INHF Board of Directors the confidence to approve acquisition of the land.

Enthusiasm for the Arnolds Park Nature Area has remained high and donations continue to arrive. All gifts beyond the acquisition price are being held for restoration work on the property and as 2026 begins, so does planning for the unveiling of an incredible new nature area, for the public and made possible by the public.

What's next? INHF will place a permanent conservation easement on the property before turning it over to the City of Arnolds Park. This will ensure the space always remains natural. Some restoration work will begin with removal of invasive species, planting additional prairie plants and developing a plan for wetland restoration. There are sure to be more stories unfolding with a bang over the next few years. Through it all, we can know that this space is forever protected and doing its part to make the Iowa Great Lakes beautiful and keep the water clean.

# FITZPATRICK TO CONCENTRATE RESEARCH ON PADDLEFISH SURVIVAL AND MOVEMENTS

By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director

A year ago in October, West Lake Okoboji welcomed 2,000 paddlefish into its waters. Since that time, there have been scattered sightings, but how are they doing?

Well, an answer is on the horizon. As Publicity Director for the OPA, I'd like to welcome Conor Fitzpatrick, a graduate of the University of Maine with a Bachelor of Science in Ecology and Environmental Science, as the first recipient of the Edward Thelen Graduate Fellowship, which recognizes the career of Edward "Ed" Thelen as a Fisheries Technician with the Iowa DNR.

The Graduate Fellowship provides funding and field opportunities for a graduate student to conduct research in partnership with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory located in Dickinson County, which is operated by the University of Iowa.

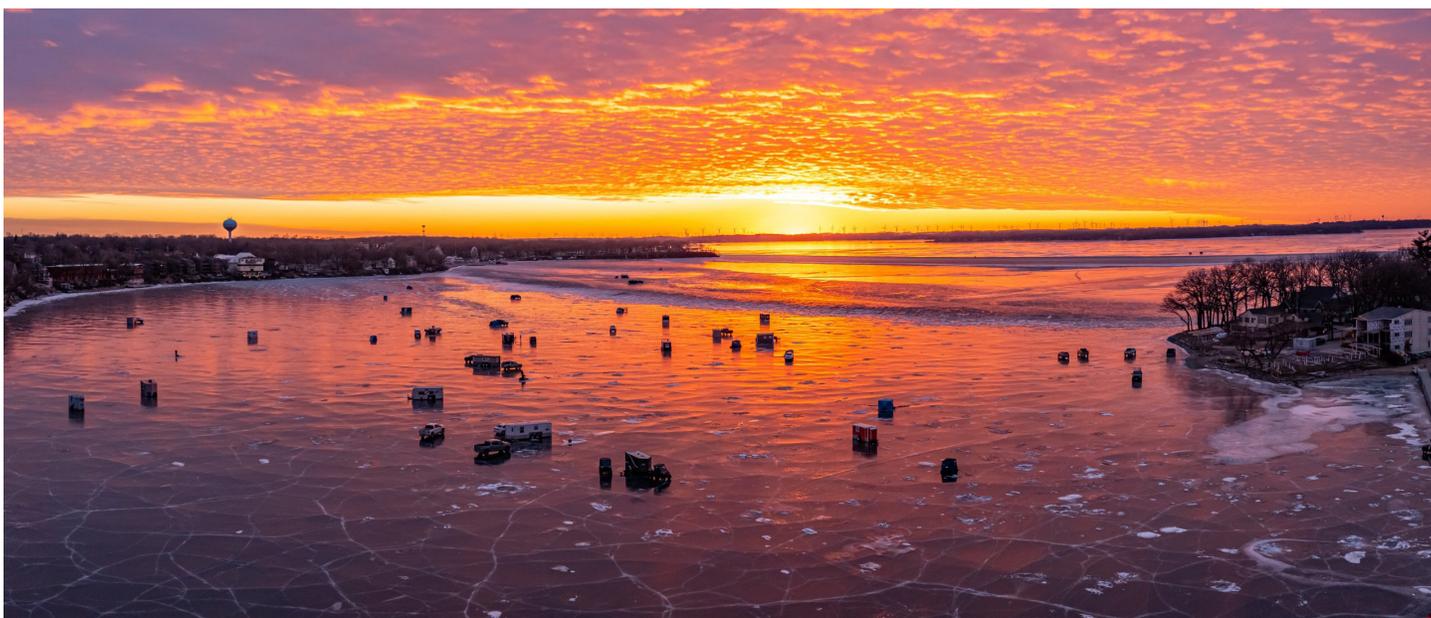
Fitzpatrick will have the opportunity to focus his research on a wide range of topics such as fish population dynamics, invasive species management, water quality monitoring, and watershed health.

According to Andrew Carlson, DNR Fisheries Management Biologist at the Spirit Lake Hatchery, "We had over 20 extremely well-qualified applicants. We are excited to have Conor arrive in January. He will concentrate his research on paddlefish survival and movement in the Iowa Great Lakes, along with a study of panfish age and growth dynamics. Conor can also expect to become immersed in many of the fisheries research and management activities here at the Spirit Lake Hatchery."

Fitzpatrick reflects on the Fellowship opportunity. "I am both thankful and excited that I was awarded the Edward Thelen Fellowship. I am excited to start working with the Iowa DNR on the projects beginning in January and learn more about paddlefish movement and behavior, as well as panfish age and growth in the Iowa Great Lakes.

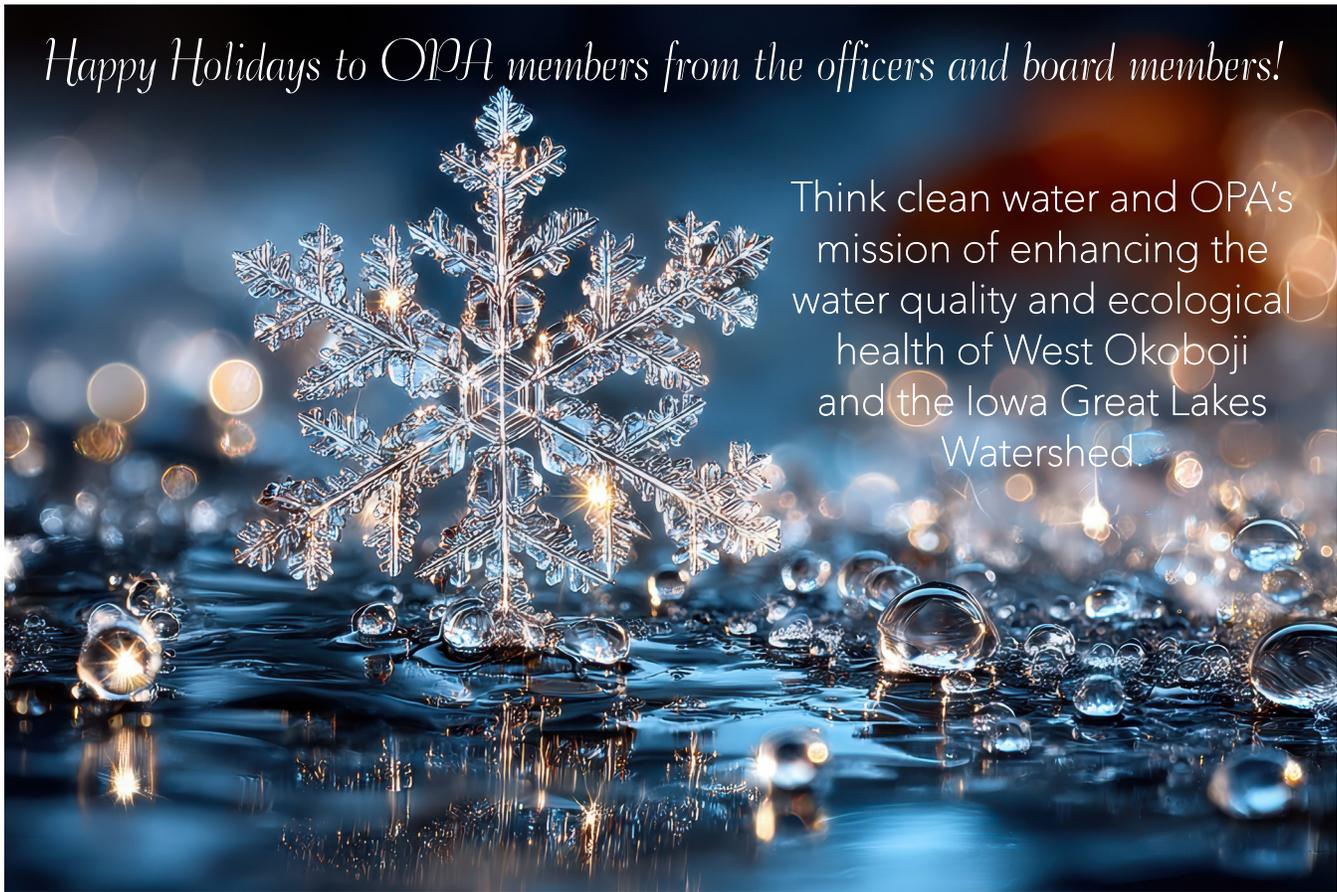
At the same time, Fitzpatrick will spend two to three years pursuing his master's degree from Nebraska University at Kearney. As part of the Fellowship, Fitzpatrick has been awarded both room and board at the Iowa Lakeside Lab for the duration of that student's Fellowship.

Welcome to West Lake Okoboji, Conor!



Winter fun on Lake Okoboji

*Happy Holidays to OPA members from the officers and board members!*



Think clean water and OPA's mission of enhancing the water quality and ecological health of West Okoboji and the Iowa Great Lakes Watershed.



## ANNUAL OPA MEETING

### 120th Anniversary of the OPA - 1905

- Friday, June 20<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.
- Gull Point State Park Lodge
- Focus of Meeting: State of the Lakes

### THE OKOBOJI PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION WAS FOUNDED IN 1905 WITH THE FOLLOWING GOALS:

- To Protect Water Quality & Properties from Vandalism
- Encourage Propagation of Fish and Game
- Minimize Contamination of Lakes with Sewage
- Encourage Removal of Submerged Dock Posts and Boulders which are Menace to Power and Row Boats
- Replace Dam at Mill Creek

### 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.

**THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE MADE OUR 120 YEARS POSSIBLE!**

### LIST OF MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE LAST 120 YEARS

- 1906 – Paid to have dam at Mill Creek restored to maintain fish population
- 1906 – Helped write first fish and game laws that were approved in 1910
- 1915 – Encouraged Iowa legislature to create public lands – State Parks on West Lake Okoboji
- 1915 – Contributed funds to build Fish Hatchery on property between East Lake Okoboji and Big Spirit Lake
- 1940 – Spearheaded planning of Dickinson County Sanitary district and obtained funding from Iowa General Assembly
- 1988 – Support Iowa State University water sample analysis
- 2001 – Contributed funds to Ducks Unlimited Center Lake Complex project
- 2013 – Significant contribution to Electric fish barrier at junction of Lower Gar and Mill Creek
- 2015 – Contribute to purchase of GLEON buoy on West Lake Okoboji in partnership with Iowa Lakeside Lab
- 2016 – Participated in purchase of Reed's Run on eastern shore of Big Spirit Lake in support of Spirit Lake Protective Association and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- 2021 – Participate in purchase of the Narrows Preserves project on East Lake Okoboji in support of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- 2022 – Participate in purchase of Reed Farm adjacent to Spring Run Wetland Complex  
Contributed funds to Eurasian watermilfoil eradication in East Lake Okoboji and Lower chain of lakes
- 2024 – Support Millers Bay Conservancy to preserve Millers Bay ecosystem
- 2025 – Support Turtle Lake Conservancy efforts to improve the health of Turtle Lake

### OPA PRESIDENTS

- Ferdinand J. Smith 1906-1915
- G.S. Robinson 1918-1922
- Walter Mendenhall, Sr. 1923-24
- John D. Carpenter 1924-26
- Judge C.S. Bradshaw 1928-40
- Wally Mendenhall 1961-62
- Carl Thacker 1963-64
- Fred Moore 1965-66
- Jim Cravens 1967-68
- John Cory 1969-1973
- Newell Redmond 1974
- Earl Rose 1975-78
- Ray Bailey 1979-80
- Dick Montgomery 1981-82
- Steve Avery 1983-84
- Brad Jones 1985-86
- Barbara Mendenhall 1987-88
- Judy Thoreson 1989-90
- Ned Stockdale 1991-92
- Harry Meginnis 1993-94
- Ace Cory 1995-97
- Paul Sieh 1998-99
- John Synhorst 2000-01
- Jane Shuttleworth 2002-03
- Greg Drees 2004-05
- Hank Miguel 2006-07
- Phil Petersen 2008-09
- Joe Fitzgibbons 2010-11
- Jim Rosendahl 2012-13
- Barry Sackett 2014-15
- John Wills 2016-17
- Greg Drees 2018-19
- Mary Skopec 2020-21
- Kate Mendenhall 2022-23
- John Fieselmann 2024-25

Learn more about keeping Okoboji Blue and our unique aquatic ecosystem at:  
[www.OkobojiProtectiveAssociation.org](http://www.OkobojiProtectiveAssociation.org)

# SAVE TURTLE LAKE PROJECT GETS UNDERWAY

By Steve Weisman, OPA Publicity Director

One excavator bucket at a time, the dredging of Turtle Lake has begun with work contracted with Superior Seawalls, Docks and dredging, which is located in Illinois City, IL directly across the Mississippi River from Muscatine, IA. They have completed dredging projects throughout the Midwest, including Iowa.

The process being used is called mechanical dredging, using heavy equipment like excavators and dredge barges to physically remove sediment (silt) from the lakebed. This method is suitable for larger sediment volumes and areas with easy access.

## So, the work begins

According to Tim Ireland, a member of the Save Turtle Lake Committee, "The hope is the entire project will take two to two and a half months once they get going in the spring. This fall's work is mostly preparatory with excavators set on shore along the southwest corner of the main body of water."

This fall's plan is to excavate down and remove enough sediment, so that there is a three-foot depth of water, which is enough depth for the steel floating barges to be able to move about the lake to handle an excavator and the dredged sediment. This is then taken back to the shoreline, where the load of sediment is then scooped by bucket into a big dump truck for removal to a county-owned gravel pit near Milford. The work this fall will stop when Turtle Lake becomes ice covered.

## Next spring

Interested onlookers have questioned the minimal equipment being used this fall. That will change next spring. "Next spring is when the real work begins," noted Ireland. "Superior Seawalls will bring in a lot more equipment with at least 5-6 dump trucks and floating barges."

Cost for the excavating comes in at \$21.50 per cubic yard, which is an amount based on when the planning began a few years ago. According to Ireland, "While that is costly, by today's standards, bids are coming in between \$32-\$38 per cubic yard. It has really helped that our contractor is honoring the original price!"

## Going for a complete restoration

So, what about the canals? Committee members and donors of the project are now looking at expanding the operation to include what's known as Paddler's Path and Wilderness Way. Yes, it will cost more money, but the cost of \$21.50 per cubic feet will never be available again, and it would cost an additional \$80,000 to bring the equipment back in the future.

With dredging operations for Turtle Lake itself being funded through grants and donations, committee members are hoping others will come forward to help out with the additional areas. The cost for dredging Paddler's Path and Wilderness Way has been estimated at an additional \$800,000.

What a coup it would be if the entire project, not just Turtle Lake but also the canal system, could be completed at the same time.

Ireland concluded, "You can help us restore this essential ecosystem and recreational area by sending your tax-deductible donation in the form of check, IRA contribution or securities to the Okoboji Foundation, PO Box 593, Okoboji, IA 51355. Donations can be made at [Okobojifoundation.org/giveboji/](http://Okobojifoundation.org/giveboji/). Scroll down and select Save Turtle Lake. You can also call Mindy Gress with your Save Turtle Lake contribution at 712-332-7177. Please specify Save Turtle Lake."



(photos by Steve Weisman) Excavator operator takes sediment from the bottom and dumps it on a second barge to be taken to shore.

# A PREHISTORIC RESIDENT RETURNS: PADDLEFISH ARE BACK IN OKOBOJI

By Andrew Carlson, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist

After an absence of more than 100 years, an ancient resident has returned to West Okoboji Lake. In the fall of 2024, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) executed a historic conservation plan, reintroducing 2,000 American Paddlefish into West Okoboji Lake.

The DNR followed up with two additional stockings in summer 2025 (200 Paddlefish) and fall 2025 (200 Paddlefish). This exciting initiative brings back a native species that was last seen in the Iowa Great Lakes around 1919.

## Why Did They Leave?

Long-time Okoboji residents may have heard stories of these giant, primitive fish, with unconfirmed historical reports of Paddlefish weighing over 200 pounds being pulled from West Okoboji in the early 1900s. These fish were once able to migrate from the Missouri River up the Little Sioux River to reach our lakes. However, the construction of dams over a century ago fragmented these river systems, blocking migration routes and causing the native population to disappear from the lakes.

## A Living Fossil in Our Waters

The American Paddlefish is often called a "living fossil" because its species dates back millions of years, even before the dinosaurs. Here's what makes them special:

- **Unique Appearance:** They are instantly recognizable by their long, paddle-shaped snout, called a rostrum. This "paddle" is covered in electroreceptors, which they use like an antenna to detect the microscopic zooplankton they eat.
- **Filter Feeders:** Paddlefish are gentle giants. They pose no threat to other fish, as they feed by swimming with their mouths open, filtering tiny zooplankton from the water.
- **Scaleless:** Instead of scales, Paddlefish have smooth, gray skin like a shark.

## The Importance of Their Return

The DNR's Paddlefish reintroduction project is about more than just stocking a new fish; it's about restoring our natural heritage and biodiversity. By bringing back a native species, we are helping to return the Okoboji ecosystem to a more natural state.

Paddlefish cannot reproduce in a lake system—they require flowing river water over gravel bars to spawn—so the Okoboji population will be maintained by the DNR. This reintroduction is the first step in a long-term management plan.

To help guide that plan, DNR fisheries biologists implanted 25 of the stocked Paddlefish with acoustic tags. These tags will allow the DNR to study their movement, survival, and habitat use, providing invaluable data for the future of this program. For instance, we know that at least one Paddlefish was stocked in West Okoboji Lake and moved to East Okoboji Lake.

So, as you're out on the water, keep an eye out. Boaters and barge operators have already reported sightings of these amazing fish. The return of the Paddlefish is a thrilling new chapter for the Iowa Great Lakes.

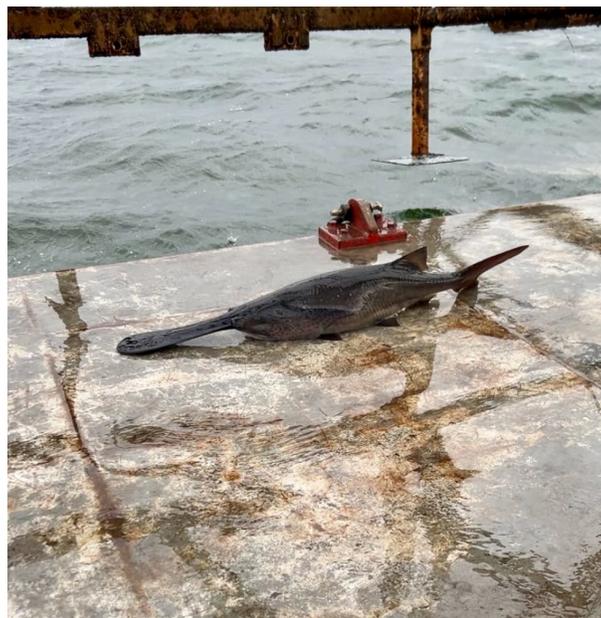
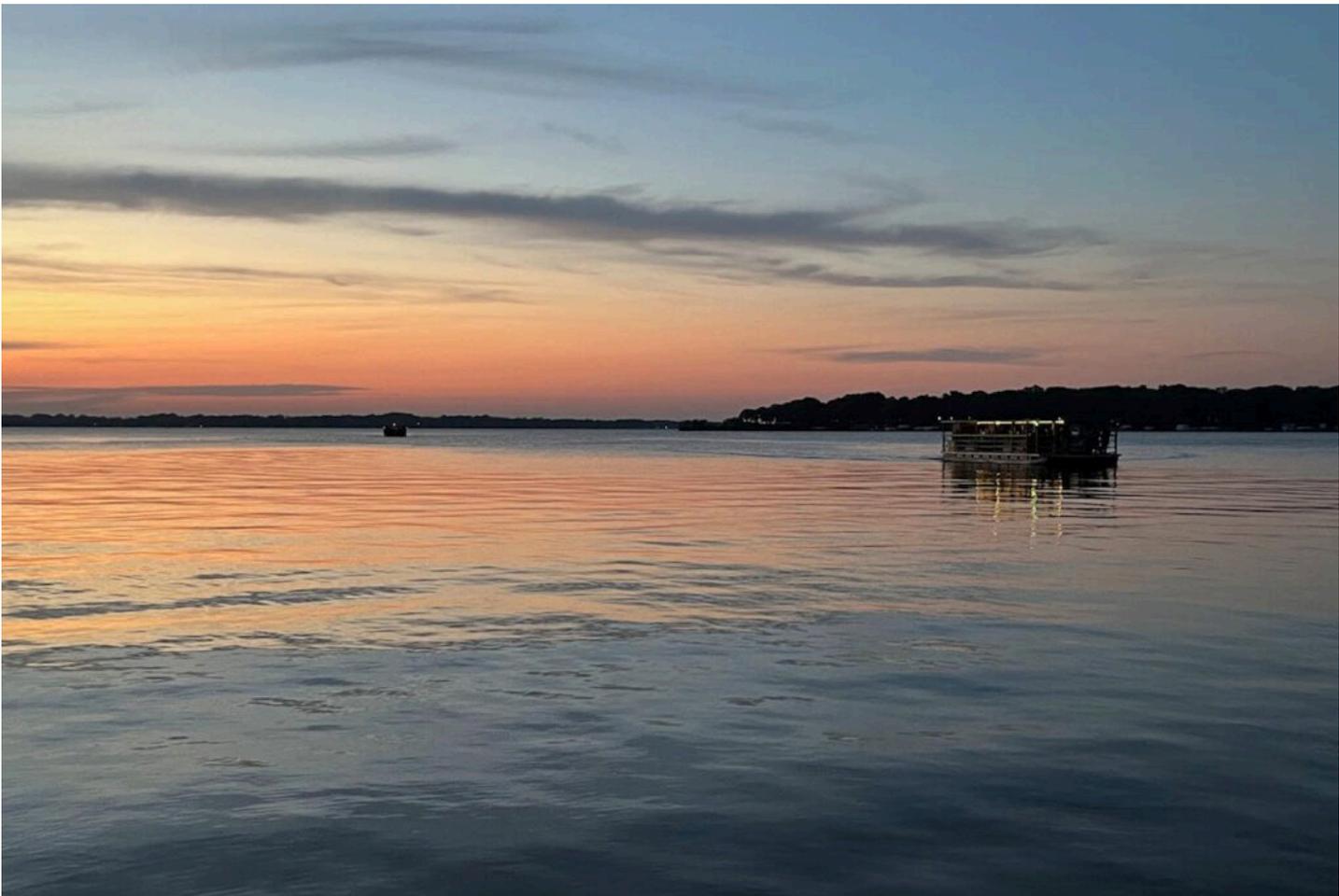


Photo courtesy of Colby Dicus

This paddlefish, which was released in the fall of 2024, recently appeared on the Clary Lake Service barge. After a quick photo, it was released back into the water.

# OKOBOJI PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION



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### OPA NEWSLETTER

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P.O. Box 242  
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[okobojiprotectiveassociation.org](http://okobojiprotectiveassociation.org)  
[opasince1905@gmail.com](mailto:opasince1905@gmail.com)