



# Friends of Lake Wingra



Promoting a healthy Lake Wingra  
through an active watershed community

## Wingra Watershed News

Spring/Summer 2004

volume 1, number 1

### From Snowing Season to Growing Season

Laura England

With the warming of the seasons, snow melts, earth thaws, and lakes liquefy. Our storm sewer system becomes active, shunting runoff from streets and parking lots directly to our lakes. Active storm sewers remind us of the connection between how we live on the land and the health of our lakes.

Our City is taking leadership with two new initiatives that will reduce the effects of stormwater runoff on our lakes. Starting May 1<sup>st</sup>, the "Clean Streets, Clean Lakes" program will expand to include Matt Sloan's 13th Aldermanic district (Bram's Addition, Bay Creek, Greenbush and Vilas neighborhoods). This weekly street sweeping program will keep tons of debris and pollution out of Lakes Wingra and Monona. Research has shown that high efficiency street sweeping can reduce the run-off of sediments by 60%. Also new is a city ordinance banning the sale and use of fertilizer containing phosphorus, a nutrient that contributes to algae growth in lakes. Dane County is also working on a similar ordinance to limit the use of phosphorus fertilizers throughout the county (which may be approved by the time this newsletter is in print). Though the city's phosphorus ban doesn't take effect until January 1, 2005, now is a great time for homeowners to get ahead and make the switch to lake-friendly lawn care.

#### **Growing season doesn't have to be mowing season!**

As you begin your yard and garden projects, please think of Lake Wingra. Consider replacing grass with attractive and low-maintenance native prairie plants or a rain garden. Learn more on page 5 about how you can take care of the lakes in your own backyard this growing season, and thank you for being a Friend of Lake Wingra!

Laura England



### Windows on Wingra

#### **All About Rain Gardens**

Mark your calendar now for the first of the Friends' new seasonal events – **Windows on Wingra** on Saturday June 12, 2004 from 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at the Mazzuchelli Center on the lakefront at Edgewood College. We're hosting a drop-in workshop, All About Rain Gardens, for those new to the rain garden idea and those with experience. Tour the rain gardens at Edgewood, including the new experimental units at the renovated Mazzuchelli Center, and learn about plants, soils, and design options for your own unique situations.

## Friends of Lake Wingra

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### Mission

We promote a healthy Lake Wingra through an active watershed community.

### Steering Team

Anne Forbes, Chair  
Laura England, Vice Chair  
Sue Ellingson  
Steve Glass  
Hannah Harris  
David Liebl  
Jim Lorman  
Katharine Odell

### Thanks

Many thanks to some recent volunteers: Roger Bannerman, Cheryl Bauer-Armstrong, Bob Liska, and Amanda Okopski.

The Friends thank Edgewood College for continuing to serve as our fiscal agent and Dane County for special assistance with DNR grants.

### Become a Friend

To become a Friend of Lake Wingra, send your tax-deductible contribution to Friends of Lake Wingra, c/o Office of Advancement, Edgewood College, 1000 Edgewood College Drive, Madison, WI 53711-1977. Please make checks to Edgewood College – FOLW.

### Wingra Watershed News

Spring/Summer 2004, Vol. 1, No. 1  
Wingra Watershed News is published twice each year by Friends of Lake Wingra.

## From the Chair

On a sunny winter day in January 1998 and with Lake Wingra in full view through the windows at Edgewood College, some forty people embarked on an exploration of the health of Lake Wingra and its watershed. Shortly after that first meeting, initiated by now retired DNR biologist Jim Leverance, a self-selected group of good-hearted and slightly naïve people began to meet regularly as the Friends of Lake Wingra. Six years later, we're still here with many new faces and lots of excitement as we unveil some initiatives to support and expand our active watershed community.

Harking back to that first time we gazed out the windows together, we are launching a series of seasonal events **Windows on Wingra**. Each one will begin at Edgewood's renovated Mazzuchelli building for orientation and then evolve into a workshop, field trip, or work project. We might plant a rain garden, do a homeowner's stormwater audit, tackle invasive plants, campaign for fall leaf cleanup, survey the plants and animals in the lake, create community watershed art, or take kids fishing.

What can you do? Mark your calendar for the first **Windows on Wingra** on Saturday June 12. Note the calendar and opportunities in this first issue of **Wingra Watershed News** and check our website for frequent updates. Make a donation to support our work, and thank all those who have donated time and resources so far. Thank Edgewood College for acting as our fiscal agent and frequent host so that your donations go directly to work in the watershed. And be sure and take time to enjoy the lake!

We're here to make a difference. We hope that you'll join us.

—Anne Forbes, Chair

## Learn More

Interested in learning more about Lake Wingra and the Friends' work in the watershed? See our growing online library of management planning documents, scientific reports and proposals at [www.lakewingra.org](http://www.lakewingra.org).

# Microbial Contamination Remains a Mystery

Jim Lorman

The source of the microbial contamination that closed Vilas Beach for much of last summer remains uncertain. There are also questions about the exact nature of the potentially pathogenic *E. coli* bacteria (*E. coli* O157) found in lake samples. The Madison Department of Public Health (MDPH) is working with the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene (SLH) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to solve the mystery and protect the health of swimmers.

No illnesses among lake users have been attributed to this *E. coli* strain, despite the fact that it was found in samples throughout Lake Wingra, in stormwater entering the lake, and in waterfowl feces in Vilas Park. Vilas Beach was closed on July 25, 2003, and remained closed the remainder of the swimming season.

The MDPH regularly monitors beach water quality to confirm that beaches are free from pathogens and safe for swimming. For the last two years, the relatively low-cost routine sampling for “indicator” microbes (that indicate the possible presence of pathogens) has been supplemented by much more intensive (and expensive) sampling for pathogens themselves. This additional research has been funded by an EPA EMPACT (Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking) grant to the MDPH, in partnership with the USGS, SLH, and FOLW. Our role is to provide public outreach and education on water quality and beach safety.

The bacteria found in the Wingra watershed and identified by the SLH as *E. coli* O157:H7 is more commonly associated with food poisoning than with lake water. Not much is known about its occurrence or public health significance in lakes. Also, the techniques for identifying specific strains of O157 are somewhat experimental, and the identifications may not be conclusive. Work is continuing in order to verify the identity of the *E. coli* found in Lake Wingra last summer.

The MDPH, SLH, and USGS are now interpreting 2 years of data from Lake Wingra, and hope to reach more definitive conclusions about the meaning of the *E. coli* O157 findings in the next few months. For updates and more information, visit the Friends of Lake Wingra website [www.lakewingra.org](http://www.lakewingra.org) and the City’s EMPACT website [www.ci.madison.wi.us/health/envhealth/Empact.html](http://www.ci.madison.wi.us/health/envhealth/Empact.html).



Greg Fries and Genesis Steinhorst of City Engineering (center) met with the Friends to discuss plans for the Rain Garden Street (on left: Roger Bannerman and Anne Forbes, on right: Sue Ellingson and Laura England)

## Featured Partner Greg Fries, City of Madison Engineering

Sue Ellingson

Our success is thanks to our partners—those folks who are in charge and who, remarkably, don’t hang up when a volunteer calls with a wacky idea. Greg Fries (pronounced “freez”) is a stormwater engineer who works for Madison’s city engineering. When the Friends proposed a rain garden street in the Lake Wingra watershed, not only did Greg not hang up, he attended meetings with us to hash out the details. He put his name to a grant proposal, which was funded. Now he’s designing the gardens and leading neighborhood meetings.

Greg is in his mid-thirties. He often bikes to work from his in-the-watershed home. Like many in town, he says, “I came here to school and hung out after. I like the place.” He’s worked for city engineering for 13 years.

He enjoys the challenge of water quality projects like the rain garden street. They call on not only his engineering, but people and organizational skills, too. “There are so many issues and so many people involved, it takes two years or more to get a project from design to construction.”

It’s important work. “Engineering aside, all you have to do is look at the lakes to know the water quality is not tremendous.” Unfortunately, solutions won’t happen quickly. “We live in such a ‘now’ society,” he says. “You take an action and want to see a result next year. Most water quality projects are long term, where you might see changes in decades. It took decades to get the lakes bad; it’s going to take decades to get them nice.”

The Friends of Lake Wingra are here for the long haul. We’re lucky Greg Fries and City Engineering share that commitment.

*Our Partners*

Friends of Lake Wingra helps to coordinate actions and facilitate communication among the multiple levels of government and diverse groups involved in lake and watershed management. Look for information about one of our partners in each edition of our newsletter.



# Watershed Watch

February 30, 2004

Steve Glass

One of the best vantage points from which to observe the watershed's natural rhythms and seasonal flow of events may be the view from your kitchen window of the action on and around your own backyard birdfeeder. In our neighborhood at the west end of the watershed, seasonal courtship behavior has been on display.

Six pairs of cardinals silently graced our feeder all winter in a wonder of cooperative, or at least tolerant, behavior. This was replaced on February 4<sup>th</sup> when the male cardinals began their early-morning territorial calls; sniping and mad chases through the yard suddenly seemed more important than stocking up on sunflower seeds.

My friend Bob, an avid bird watcher and year-round feeder of birds, keeps me posted on the comings and goings of the great horned owl pair that in recent years have roosted in a larch tree in his Nakoma yard. The owls signaled their nightly presence by their gentle cooing and calling and spent most nights from November through January outside his upstairs window. But, Bob reports, by mid-February the owls are silent—a signal that they have moved deeper in the woods where they took over a hawk, crow or squirrel nest. Incubation lasts about 30 days; two to three young will fledge in about eight weeks.

A pair of sandhill cranes were heard in the west marsh on February 27<sup>th</sup> where they joined newly-arrived red winged blackbirds; the next day four sandhills flew over our birdfeeders and towards the lake. If any pairs stick around they will begin to build a nest in mid-April at about the time the great horned owl chicks are ready to fledge.



## Celebrity

The fact that  
a great horned owl has chosen  
our neighborhood pocket to roost  
has each of us crossing  
lawns in our nightshirts  
at 3:00 a.m.

When we meet at midday  
voices curve like hula hoops  
chins stretch and tilt skywards  
awe surrounds us like steam

Everyone declares  
their forehead felt his shadow  
they called and he answered  
they saw his silhouette

Everyone likes to say  
*'It is my pine  
he's sleeping in'*

Shoshauna Shy's poems often reflect her home place in the Lake Wingra watershed. *Celebrity* is reprinted from the Wisconsin Poets' Calendar 2000.

Laura England



# Lake Wingra Filling With Mud!

David Liebl

Have you seen the new island rising out of Lake Wingra to the west of the Wingra Park boat house? Did you know that each year, the water under the boathouse docks is getting shallower, and that it's become difficult to set the lane markers for the rowing regatta because the west end of Lake Wingra is filling with mud?

Sedimentation is normal in all lakes, and Lake Wingra is expected to gradually fill as the surrounding watershed erodes, over the course of *thousands of years*. The alarming rate of sedimentation we are seeing in Lake Wingra today is not normal. It's being caused by unnecessary erosion from storm water running off roofs, streets, sidewalks and parking lots.

The sources of this sediment are easy to find. Not only does street sand and dirt and runoff from yards carry sediment to the lake, more serious sites of erosion point to the need for action. Follow the storm water as it flows to the Lake from the outfall located south of the intersection of Manitou Way and Nakoma Road. Or, walk along the gully on the north side of the South West Bike Path between Glenway Ave and Virginia Terrace. You can see that many cubic yards of soil have been washed from the uplands into Lake Wingra.

The Friends of Lake Wingra are working with the City of Madison and the UW-Arboretum to stop this erosion before more sediment fills our Lake.

## Seasonal Tips

### How You Can Be a Friend to Lake Wingra

Find the 3 yard care tips in the article to the right! And, note these additional ways to keep excess nutrients, toxins, and yard wastes from being carried to the Lake this spring and summer.

- Use lawn and garden chemicals conservatively, or switch to organic practices.
- Compost your weeds and lawn clippings or take them to a public site (at [www.co.dane.wi.us/pubworks/recycl/compost.htm](http://www.co.dane.wi.us/pubworks/recycl/compost.htm)).
- For most lawns, choose a fescue and rye mix, instead of blue grass, to reduce the need for fertilizer and watering.
- Use commercial car washes to keep wash water out of the storm sewers.
- Take hazardous household chemicals to the County-City Clean Sweep and Product Exchange for safe disposal or reuse. 2302 Fish Hatchery Road, Tues, Wed, Fri, and Sat, 7:30 am - 2:00 pm beginning May 1<sup>st</sup>. 608-294-5358.

Roger Bannerman



## You Can Become a Storm Water Guardian

David Liebl

All of us can help make Lake Wingra cleaner by managing the storm water that runs off our property. Every inch of rain that soaks into the ground, instead of running down the gutter to the storm sewer, reduces pollution to the Lake and improves groundwater.

Here are a few simple steps you can take: If your downspout drains onto a driveway or sidewalk, try redirecting it to a lawn or garden where the water can soak in. If you have bare ground that can erode and wash into the street (and ultimately to the Lake), re-seed bare spots in the lawn and mulch open areas of gardens.

If you'd like to do more, how about planting a Rain Garden that can absorb all the runoff from your roof? The Friends of Lake Wingra can help you decide where to plant your rain garden to get the best performance, while avoiding problems from standing water or wet basements. Contact us about becoming a FOLW Storm Water Guardian by calling 663-2838, or by emailing us at [info@lakewingra.org](mailto:info@lakewingra.org).

Laura England



# Spring/Summer Calendar

See our online calendar at [www.lakewingra.org](http://www.lakewingra.org) for more details on these and other upcoming events.

## April 22

### April Steering Team Meeting

Feel free to join us for our Steering Team meeting on the fourth Thursday of each month. Thursday, April 22, 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Edgewood College Lake Room (Regina Hall). Email [info@lakewingra.org](mailto:info@lakewingra.org) for meeting agenda.

## April 24

### Friend and Volunteer Meeting

Come learn about the volunteer needs for Friends of Lake Wingra, and discuss with others strategies for protecting and restoring our lake and watershed. Saturday, April 24, 11 am – noon at Edgewood College Lake Room (Regina Hall).

## May 27

### May Steering Team Meeting

Thursday, May 27, 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Edgewood College Lake Room (Regina Hall). Email [info@lakewingra.org](mailto:info@lakewingra.org) for meeting agenda.

## June 12

### Windows on Wingra – All About Rain Gardens

Whether you're new to the concept or an experienced rain gardener, drop in for this workshop to learn more about plants, soils, and design options for your own backyard rain garden. Saturday, June 12, 11 am – 2 pm at the Mazzuchelli Center on the lakefront at Edgewood College.

### Take a Stake in the Lakes

Volunteer cleanup sponsored by Dane County; visit the Information Center at Wingra Park. Information at 224-3601. Also, Wingra Creek cleanup sponsored by Capitol Water Trails; meet at Wingra Dam at 9 am. Information at 223-0995.

## June 19

### Wingra Clean Up

By canoe or on foot. Meet at the Wingra Park boat launch. Saturday, June 19, 9:30 – noon. Sponsored by Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association's Lake Wingra and Healthy Lawn Team. For information, 232-1462 or [harris@merr.com](mailto:harris@merr.com). Be sure to return for Jazz in the Park from 2:00 – 8:00 pm.

## Volunteer Needs

As we continue to expand our work in the Wingra Watershed, we're always on the look out for new friends and volunteers who would like to help us in our efforts to promote a healthy Lake Wingra. No particular knowledge or skills are needed – anyone with enthusiasm for the lake is welcome. To find out how you can help, email us at [info@lakewingra.org](mailto:info@lakewingra.org).

As our organization grows, so do our needs for special skills. If you are skilled in any of these areas and would like to get involved, please let us know!

- Fundraising
- Event planning
- Writing for outreach materials
- Graphic design for outreach materials
- Web site management
- Database management
- Media and publicity
- Volunteer coordination
- Legal knowledge for non-profits
- Environmental education curriculum development

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