

# WCOLA Newsletter

## Wabana Chain of Lakes Association



### WCOLA Calendar:

#### WCOLA Meetings:

**Oct. 13th @ 3pm**

#### Roadside Cleanup:

**September 29th**

\*Volunteers needed!  
Meet at 9am at the Town hall. Donuts & coffee will be available before heading out to clean our roads.

Hello to our WCOLA Members—

It's hard to believe how fast the summer has gone, but I must admit I'm looking forward to football season!!

We held our annual picnic on Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> from 3 to 5pm at the Town Hall Pavilion. Many thanks to chef Tom Horton for cooking up the brats and hot dogs. We had almost 40 people attend on a beautiful day. It was great to meet new members, as well as catch up with old friends. We have received several suggestions to change the picnic date to be later in the season, as we as include music and other activities. We will look into this for next year.



WCOLA Picnic

Our loon count results are in and included in this newsletter. (See page 5) We are happy to see that the overall loon count increased compared to last year. Thanks again to our loon counters Steve Melin, Sue Nordgren, Jim Christmas, Susan Hawkinson, Lynne Pernsteiner, Carol Speedling, Marcia & Jim Gowling, and Mary Hutter.

Our annual meeting was held on Saturday, August 16th. A big thanks to Mark Conover, who spoke on Aquatic Invasive Species and what we can all do to help keep them out of our lakes. Our committee chairpersons each gave a brief update on activities so far this year, as well as plans for next year, and I shared an update on our current financial position. One concern is that our paid memberships are down from last year. We'd appreciate it if you'd pay your membership dues for 2025 by the end of this year. This will help us cover our costs this year and be able to plan for next year.

We also discussed our "Friends & Family" membership opportunities, which has been well received. Please consider reaching out to your family members & friends to ask them to become members of WCOLA. Our WCOLA members receive our newsletter and ultimately help us continue to keep our lakes clean and pristine.

Thanks to all of our members for your continued support! Have a wonderful fall!

Scott Hutter



Mother loon & her chick on Wabana  
Photo credit: Mary Hutter

# WCOLA — 2025 Recap of Events:

## Spring Social

WCOLA members gathered at Camp Bluewater in May for our annual Spring Social. WCOLA provided the brats and hot dogs and everyone brought delicious dishes to share. John Latimer was our speaker that evening, and entertained us with several topics of interest, including loons, and the interesting things going on in our neighborhood woods and waters. It was a fun evening reuniting with everyone after a long winter.

Stay Tuned as our 2026 Spring Social is being planned. We will send out information in our next newsletter.



## Spring Road Cleanup



We appreciate all the volunteers who joined us May 31st to help clean up our roadways! Wabana Township has several miles of roads that need our help twice a year. If you're noticing that your township is looking beautiful, make sure to thank a WCOLA volunteer.

Our next road clean up is on **September 28th at 9am** and we are looking for twenty volunteers to help out. Meet at the town hall for coffee & donuts before heading out to pickup. The roads are sectioned in 1 mile "zones" for volunteers to clean. If you have questions, contact Jean Koewler at—[djkoewler@paulbunyan.net](mailto:djkoewler@paulbunyan.net)

## 4th of July Boat Parade

The July 4th parade had it's biggest turnout ever with 29 boats counted. It was a beautiful day and great to see so many families out enjoying the lake.

Next year July 4th is on a Saturday, so we hope to see even more families join in the parade with their decorated boats.



## WCOLA Picnic

The WCOLA Picnic was on August 2nd and it was great to connect with new members and old friends. Wayne Speedling updated us on the recreation project, and his wife, Carol, talked about collecting family history.

If you want to share your family's story or photo, Carol would love to talk to you! Contact Carol Speedling at—[cjspeedling@yahoo.com](mailto:cjspeedling@yahoo.com)

Next years WCOLA picnic is being planned and we hope you can join us for a fun evening!

# Wabana Chain of Lakes Association – Secchi Disc Program

By Susan Lick

The MPCA (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency) uses Secchi disk measurements as part of their lake monitoring program to assess water clarity and eutrophication (excessive nutrient enrichment). Secchi depth is a simple, visual measurement of water transparency, indicating how deep sunlight penetrates the water column. The MPCA, along with citizen volunteers, uses this data to track water quality trends and identify potential issues.

Here's a breakdown of the MPCA's Secchi disk requirements and how it's used:

## 1. What is a Secchi Disk?

A Secchi disk is a black and white disk (usually 20 cm in diameter) attached to a measuring line. It's lowered into the water until it disappears from view, and the depth at which it disappears is recorded as the Secchi depth. Clearer water allows the disk to be seen at greater depths, while turbid (murky) water reduces visibility.

## 2. MPCA's Use of Secchi Disk Data:

**Monitoring Water Clarity:** Secchi depth measurements are a key indicator of a lake's health, reflecting the amount of suspended particles (algae, sediment, etc.) in the water. **Eutrophication Assessment:**

Secchi depth is used alongside [phosphorus](#) and [chlorophyll-a](#)



Henry & Charley Lick

measurements to assess the trophic status of a lake (i.e., its nutrient enrichment level).

### Identifying Impaired Waters:

Lakes with low Secchi depths (indicating poor water clarity) may be classified as "impaired" and require further management.

### Tracking Progress:

The MPCA uses Secchi disk data to track changes in water quality over time, assess the effectiveness of restoration efforts, and evaluate whether a lake is meeting water quality standards.

## 3. MPCA's Citizen Lake Monitoring Program (CLMP):

The MPCA relies on volunteer citizens to collect Secchi disk measurements on lakes across Minnesota. Wabana Chain of Lakes Volunteers monitor Wabana, Little Wabana, Bluewater, Little Trout and Trout Lakes.

Volunteers are trained to use the Secchi disk and record their readings, along with observations about the lake's condition.

This data is then submitted to the MPCA for analysis and incorporation into their water quality database.

## 4. Key Requirements for MPCA's Secchi Disk Monitoring:

Volunteers typically take weekly Secchi depth readings during summer months.

Sampling locations should be consistent with those used in

previous monitoring efforts or as defined by any relevant [TMDL](#) (Total Maximum Daily Load) documents.

A minimum number of paired samples (Secchi depth, phosphorus, and chlorophyll-a) are needed to adequately assess lake's water quality over time.

Volunteers follow standard operating procedures for using the Secchi disk, including proper lighting conditions and avoiding glare.

Volunteers submit their data to the MPCA, following established procedures.

In essence, the MPCA utilizes Secchi disk measurements as a valuable tool for understanding and managing Minnesota's lakes, with the help of citizen volunteers who play a crucial role in this process. Wabana Chain of Lakes Secchi Disc coordinator is Jack Hartung.



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# Wabana Chain of Lakes Sechi Disc Readings

By Jack Hartung

The 2024 disk reading for the Wabana Chain of Lakes seem to be in line with the previous years.

Little Wabana has seen the largest increase in clarity, which seems to be prevalent in drought years. Little Trout has also seen a small improvement. Bluewater's clarity dropped a little in 2024, but seems to have improved in the early 2025 readings.



Wabana readings change with the various depths of the lake where the readings are taken. Wakeman Bay on Wabana, seems to vary most, which could be due to when and where the reading is taken. Wakeman Bay has improved the most over the years

Thank you to our many lake volunteers who gather Seche Disc readings at designated lake locations several times a month during the summer. The data these volunteers collect is sent to the PCA (Pollution Control Agency), and we get a report at the end of the year. Without the involvement and dedication of these volunteers, we wouldn't have this information available to us.

You can find more information from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency:

lake id	Site location	counts	max	min	mean	max read	min read	2005	2010	2015	2016	2024	2025					
													May	June	July	Aug		
Wabana 31-0392	201 Wakemar	5	13.5	10.5	13.8	5 Jul	10-May							14	15.5	16.5	19	
	202 Deep Mid	5	20.5	20.5	18	10-Sep	8-Jul								22		19	
	203 North End	4	24	20.5	21.6	1-Aug	10-Sep										19	
	205 S. Arrowh	11	26	17	20.7	May 26th	Sept 3rd								unknown			
	205 Simmons	4	21.6	18	19.5	July 4th	Aug 1st								unknown			
	207 Island Se	5	20.5	15.5	17.8	July 8th	Sept 2nd								unknown			
	mean				18.5			17.32	19.89	21.75	19.47	18.5						
Little Wabana 31-0399	202 middle	12	35	22	25.2	June 3rd	Aug 22nd								unknown			
	mean				23.2			19.97	20.37	21.79	21	25.2						
Bluewater 31-0395	202 South end	19	22	12	17.1	Aug 24	July 10th								18	21	19	20
	203 North end	17	22	11	17.3	Aug 24	July 10th								18	22.5	20	20
	mean				17.2			18.8	19.93	15.22	18.56	17.2						
Little Trout 31-0391	202 Middle	17	22	18	20.8	Aug 24	Oct 5th											21.5
	mean				20.8			16.9	22.19	20.29	19.7	20.8						
Trout 31-0410	202 Small S. B	17	22	18	20.7	July 9th	Sept 15th								unknown			
	205 Joyce Es c	17	18	11	15.4	Aug 2nd	Oct 5th								unknown			
	206 North End	17	18	11	15.2	Aug 18th	Sept 15th								unknown			
	207 South End	17	18	12	15.6	Aug 2nd	Oct 5th											20
	mean				15.75			18.43	16.83	17.72	17.13	16.75						

Information at [www.pca.state.mn.us/cslmp](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/cslmp)  
 volunteer monitoring reports and data  
 site reports  
 Lake id number

WCOLA 2024 Sechi disc readings data

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/get-engaged/volunteer-water-monitoring>

# Annual Loon Count

On the morning of July 22nd several WCOLA volunteers went to designated loon counting spots on our association lakes for the annual loon count. A total of 55 loons were counted this year.

## The following is data from this year's loon count:

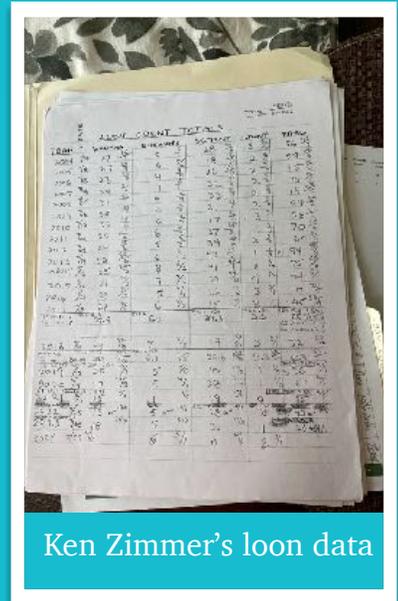
- Wabana - 13 adults & 4 chicks
- Little Wabana -1 adult & 0 chicks
- Bluewater – 3 adults and 2 chicks
- Trout- 25 adults & 2 chicks
- Little Trout – 3 adults & 0 chicks
- Clearwater – 2 adults & 0 chicks
- Doan Lake – 2 adults & 0 chicks

Ken Zimmer, a resident on Wabana Lake, has been recording loon data on our lakes since 2004, when loons were being counted on only four of our lakes.— Wabana, Bluewater, Trout and Little Trout.

In 2013, a total of 94 loons were counted, which was the most loons recorded on our lakes.

In 2021, a total of 26 loons were counted, which was the least number of loons recorded.

The five-year average for the six lakes recorded is 57.8 loons. The loon count data suggests that while the loon populations is mostly stable, there is evidence to suggest that there's a decline in juvenile loons.



Ken Zimmer's loon data

## Interesting Loon Information:

(Loon information collected from the Minnesota DNR website & University of Minnesota)

Loons are an interesting waterfowl and are fun to watch. Did you know there are more loons in Minnesota, than any other state, except Alaska? In Minnesota, loons nest in late May with chicks hatching about a month after the female lays. Loons don't begin breeding until they are three or four years old. A female loon typically lays two eggs and both the male and female loon take turns incubating the eggs. The fluffy brown chicks hatch mid to late June, and once the chicks hatch, they don't return to their nest. The chicks leave the nest soon after they hatch and swim with their parents who feed them until they are approximately 12- weeks old. Loon parents carry their young on their backs to protect them from large fish and snapping turtle predators. Young loons are vulnerable to eagles, skunks, raccoons, fox, snapping turtles, northern pike and muskies. Loon chicks are most vulnerable to prey until they become fledglings, and they are able to fly and dive. Other threats to loons are pollutants, such as lead and mercury, primarily found in old fishing tackle. Humans are also a threat, so it's important to keep your distance from the loons, especially while the loons are nesting. In September loons congregate on area lakes and begin "rafting," where they socialize and preen in preparation for their migration to their winter home along the Atlantic coast. When loons leave Minnesota in fall, their dark black and white summer plumage molts and they grow a grey and white winter coat. The black feathers on their heads also turn grey and their eyes fade from red to brown. Adults usually migrate before the juveniles, and the juveniles keep their brownish-grey coloring. Loons have four distinct calls— The tremolo, which sounds like a laugh, is an aggressive call. The wail, which is a long, drawn out sound, is a call to other loons. The hoot is a shorter call used when parents communicate with their young, and the yodel is a call males use when guarding their territory.



# Loon Lifesavers

By Lynne Pernsteiner

Several lake residents have noticed a reduction in our state bird on the lakes over the years, and one local couple decided to do something about it. Randy & Ann Blade have lived on Bluewater for over 30 years. They have witnessed predators taking loons, as well as loons being entangled in plastic beverage packaging and fishing line. “While you can’t save them all, you can certainly try,” was the thought behind Randy & Ann’s efforts. Randy Blade, a wood crafter, with expertise in log furniture building, thought about constructing a loon platform where the loons could nest undisturbed. His creative wife, Ann, came up with ways to camouflage the rafts with hopes to keep the loon chicks safe from the predators above.



The loon raft construction began in February, so the nesting platforms would be ready in plenty of time for the loon nesting season in early May. Randy designed and built the rafts, along with help from his friends Jim Sodomka, and

Kevin Costello. The loon rafts are durably constructed out of 4’ x 4’ basswood logs with decking on top. A layer of mud and reeds were put on the platform to resemble the natural environment, then a canopy made from pig fencing was camouflaged with grasses, reeds and other plant material and attached to the top of the loon platform with hopes of keeping the loon chicks safe from the birds of prey. It took some engineering and detail work to get the platforms to be a good height; low enough so the loons could “waddle” themselves onto the platform, yet high enough so the waves don’t wash the nests out. At the end of April three log rafts were placed in “quiet areas” on Bluewater, Wabana and Little Wabana and the wait for loons began.



While the loons didn’t choose the rafts to nest this summer, the hope is that they will in years to come. Experts from the DNR say it could take a year or two for the loons to discover the loon nesting platforms and use them to nest. But don’t worry, the loon rafts were still used this summer— the painted turtle and otter thought the rafts area great spot to catch a break in the sun!

“We are hopeful a loon family or two nests on them next year, and we will be able to help the loon population increase in the years to come,” said Ann Blade. As the Blades monitor the loon rafts, they will consider moving the rafts to other locations and possibly add additional rafts. Kevin Costello was also instrumental in getting loon nesting signs put up in the channels to alert boaters. They hope to have more loon nesting signs put up around our chain of lakes in the months to come.



# "I Love the Lake!"

By Tom & Debbie McCullough

## Do you? Do you really love the Wabana Chain of Lakes?

The simple answer we say is "yes, of course we do!" We love when visitors are amazed by the beauty of the waters and sound of the loons with their enchanting calls. We love coming in with a big catch and the fish fry. We love swimming in the clear waters with family and friends and snorkeling to see the abundant underwater aquarium. We love the fun atmosphere the lake creates on a pontoon with family and friends. We love watching the sunrises and sunsets on the lakes and riding on a paddle board, canoe or kayak in one of the quiet bays. And we love the thrill of fishing, skiing, tubing and jet skiing.



The problem is that it's a one sided affair. It seems to be all about us. We "love" what the lakes give to us, but what do we do for the lakes? How do we care for this amazing resource as if we actually do care about it? Many of us have invested a lot in the property around the lakes because we loved how the lake looked- it was love at first sight! But how are we protecting the resource that attracted us to invest here in the first place?

Our lakes hold a special place in the memories of many generations. They are large and seemingly unchanging, but

in fact they are very sensitive and measurements are showing big changes underway. Here are some ways we all can help to protect the natural state of the lakes.

Shoreline restoration is one of the most visual ways to encourage natural filtration. Many people like the polished suburban look for their cabin property. Unfortunately, we are hurting the lakes if too much of our lakeshore is exposed to damaging runoff and debris flowing.

Inspecting our septic systems as cabin owners is the most important for supporting high water quality. Our family had our septic system updated 15 years ago, and have pumped it every 3 years like clockwork. But we just learned that these systems need regular inspection because there are rarely obvious signs that the system is failing and harming the lake.

Picking up trash you see in the lakes, especially in the channels, is the simplest way. Don't just motor by and think someone else will take care of it! Be the "Lake Hero!" Whether you're on a fishing boat or kayak, make it a game with your kids to pick up things that don't belong in the lake. Be the example to them and to each other.

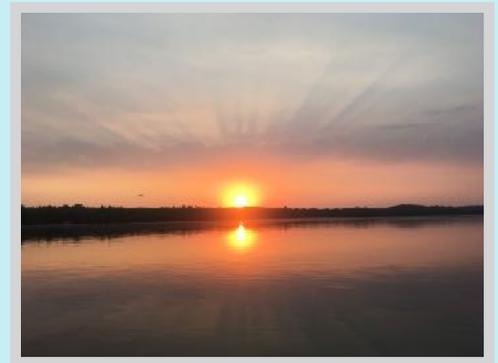


Photo Credit: Tom McCullough

WCOLA (Wabana Chain of Lakes Association) is working to help protect our lakes, but we need your help! Talk to your family, friends and neighbors and help get them involved with our community and our lake association. We need to work together to preserve our beautiful lakes for years to come.

For more information on our Lake Association visit their website— [WCOLA.org](http://WCOLA.org)

## How do you "Love the Lake?"

Looking for photos of you, and your family, & friends enjoying the lake.

Send them to Lynne Pernsteiner— [setofsteins@msn.com](mailto:setofsteins@msn.com)

# WCOLA

The Wabana Chain of Lakes Association is an organization of volunteers, neighbors and friends who are active, interested, and involved in maintaining the quality of our chain of lakes. WCOLA is guided by an elected Board of Directors and a group of activity leader volunteers. WCOLA is a registered 501(c)(3) Non-profit.

We thank our WCOLA members for your continued support! We also appreciate the generous donations several families made to us this year! Without your help we wouldn't be able to support our lakes.



**WE LOVE OUR LAKES**, and are committed to care for our lakes for years to come. Your contributions go directly towards water quality testing, invasive species mitigation, shoreline education, loon counts, helping to provide AIS inspectors at two boat landings, and providing a decontamination unit for boat owners to use if their boat has invasive species attaches, such as zebra muscles.



Tell your family & friends they too can be a part of our great organization, too! Family & Friends members will receive a free WCOLA koozie with their new membership. WCOLA membership dues are only \$35 a year. Donations are also welcome. We thank you for LOVING our lakes.

You can make your dues & donation checks payable to WCOLA. Payment can be sent to our treasurer–

Jean Koewler  
32040 Wakeman Bay Trail  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

## Did you Know??

Did you know that you could belong to the Lake Association without owning lake property? There are several who support WCOLA that don't even live here, but want to help keep our lakes healthy & beautiful. WCOLA supports several lakes, such as–Wabana, Little Wabana, Bluewater, Trout, Little Trout, Clearwater and Doan. WCOLA also supports several small lakes and streams in the area too.

**WABANA CHAIN OF LAKES ASSOCIATION**

Jean Koewler, Treasurer  
32040 Wakeman Bay Trail  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

**WCOLA Board Members:**

President- Scott Hutter, Steve Melin- Past President, Vice President- Tom Horton  
Secretary- Chris Freidlieb, Treasurer- Jean Koewler

**Committee Members:**

Environmental/AIS-Mark Conover,  
Social/Online Store- Open Position, Government Liaison- Sam Nelson,  
Communications- Lynne Pernsteiner, Secchi Disc- Jack Hartung,  
Shoreland Advisor- Susan Lick, Historical- Carol Speeding, Website- Mark Miner,  
Loon Count- Mary Hutter, Roadside Cleanup- Sandra Nelson

**Website: [WCOLA.org](http://WCOLA.org)**