

# WCOLA Newsletter

Wabana Chain of Lakes Association

## WCOLA Calendar:

### WCOLA Meetings:

May 11th @ 3pm

June 8th @ 3pm

July 13th @ 3pm

August 10th @ 3pm

Sept. 14th @ 3pm

### Spring Social:

May 16th @ 3:30pm

### Road Clean-up:

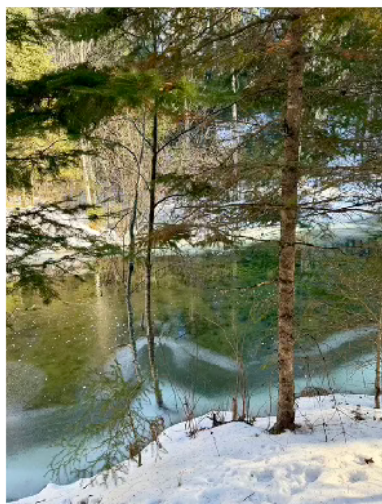
May 2nd @ 9am

### Summer Solstice:

June 20th- 5pm

### "Fun Raising" Concert:

August 7th, 2026



Hello to both our current and prospective WCOLA members—

Spring is coming and soon we'll be fishing and boating on our beautiful chain of lakes. I have a few comments to share with you as well as some fun upcoming events!

**FIRST**, we are very happy to share that the results of our November membership drive was very successful. We sent our membership letter to 264 addresses, and we already have renewed annual dues from 144 paid members. We ended last year at 136 paid members. We also received several donations, which were grateful to receive. A HUGE thank you to all of you for either renewing your membership or becoming a new member! Paying your dues before the start of this year really helps with our cash flow as well as confirming we have the funding for several activities we have planned for this year.

In addition to our membership drive letter, we included a brief survey, and Tom Horton summarized the survey results, which you can find on page 6 of this newsletter. Another big thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and suggestions. We will use your input to work on the issues that are important to you.

**SECOND**, we're excited to announce we'll be selling advertising in the newsletter to help support our organization. If you are interested in advertising in the WCOLA quarterly newsletter, introductory pricing is offered through June 2026. Advertisements can be for local businesses, or can be personal, such as a birthday greeting. All proceeds help promote the health of our lakes & community. Please consider donating an ad!

**THIRD**, we have exciting activities planned for this year—

### Spring Social- May 16th from 3:30-6:30pm at Cedar Creek Tavern!

It will be nice to get together again after a long winter. Join us at Cedar Creek for dinner and learn something new about AIS. The speaker for the evening will be Bill Grantges, AIS Program Manager with Itasca County. Come for social time at 3:30pm, and then stay for a talk on Aquatic Invasive Species and enjoy dinner. We hope to see you there!

### WCOLA "FUN Raising" Concert- May 7th from 5pm -9pm!

The WCOLA Fun Committee has planned a "Fun Raising" event to benefit WCOLA, featuring the local band, "Adessa and the Beat." You won't want to miss this fun evening of dinner & dancing. Proceeds from the concert will go to the WCOLA Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) funding. Tickets for dinner and the concert will go on sale soon. Watch for upcoming information!

If you have any questions, contact me at the email address listed below. Looking forward to another great summer on the lake!

Scott Hutter  
[president.WCOLA@gmail.com](mailto:president.WCOLA@gmail.com)

# Looking Back:

## Winter Solstice Party

Several WCOLA members celebrated the Winter Solstice on December 21st at John & Jess Gunderson’s home on Wabana Lake. It was a fun evening filled with food, drink, and conversation. Many of us enjoyed connecting with old friends and meeting new ones, as we marked the first day of winter. We appreciate Jess & John opening up their lovely home and inviting us in.

We look forward to the next solstice party on June 21st! More information to come.



## The Weather

This winter brought colder than average temperatures to our region with several days of below zero temperatures and wind chills reaching 50-60 below zero. The severe cold drove frost deeper, causing several homeowners to experience frozen septic fields, furnace vent pipes to freeze over, and water pipes to burst.

The winter also gave us some amazing views of the Northern Lights. On several occasions we were able to see the Aurora Borealis’ intense colors streaked across our sky. The strong geomagnetic storms created vivid red, pink, and green colors to appear, and the use of cell phone cameras helped us capture colors and details we don’t usually see with the naked eye.

The northern lights should continue to be visible in our area throughout 2026, because the sun is in a period of high activity, called solar maximum. Frequent and intense aurora displays are expected to be seen.

The color of the northern lights depend on the type of particles in the atmosphere. Most solar particles collide with our atmosphere at lower altitudes (between 60 to 150 miles), which give off varying shares of green. Red and pink colors appear in the Aurora when solar particles react with oxygen at higher altitudes (above 150 miles). At higher heights, the oxygen is less concentrated and is at a higher wavelength than the denser oxygen at lower

levels. Aurora zone gases prevail at different altitudes too and vary in concentrations. Blue and purple colors are less frequently seen and they seem to appear when solar activity is high. The reaction with nitrogen causes the Aurora to be tinged with purples and blues. Keep your eye to the sky and enjoy Mother Nature’s light show continue into the spring.



Photo Credit Elaine Pearson

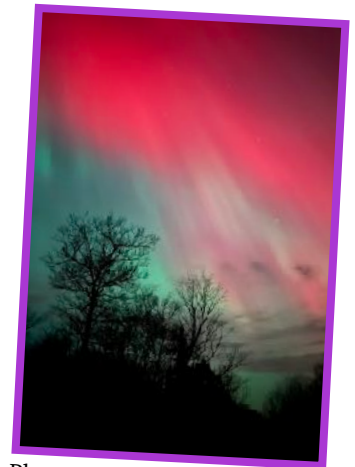


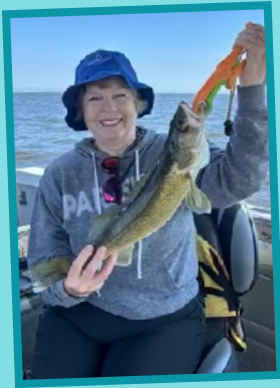
Photo Credit Sandra Nelson



Photo Credit Ray Pernsteiner

# Looking Ahead:

## Fishing Opener



Carol Speedling's catch

Minnesota's fishing opener is set for **May 9th, 2026**.

Each year the fishing opener is set on the the Saturday two weeks before Memorial Day. Fishing licenses are effective from March 1 to the last day of February of the following year. The purchase price of every fishing license goes into the Game and Fish Fund, that can only be used for fish, wildlife, law enforcement and certain other outdoor-related activities.

For more information on fishing licenses and regulations go to the Minnesota DNR website at— <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us>



Wayne's catch

**\*Send photos of your catch and they'll be published in the next WCOLA newsletter!**

## Road Cleanup

Our next road cleanup will be on **Saturday, May 2nd at 9am**. We have several miles of township roads that need to have liter picked up before the mowers come. If you are able to volunteer an hour of your time, please meet us at the Wabana Town Hall on the morning of May 2nd to get your road assignment. Coffee and doughnuts will be provided by WCOLA before we head out.

If you aren't able to volunteer that day, but would like to help, let us know and we can assign you a stretch of road so you can pick-up liter when it works for you. We also have both boat landings on Wabana that need attention. Consider having your family or Friends "adopt" a stretch of road, or a boat landing to help keep our township looking good. If you have questions reach out to Sandra Nelson at— [sj.nelson57@icloud.com](mailto:sj.nelson57@icloud.com)



Bill Grantges

## Spring Social!

**You are invited to the WCOLA Spring Social**

**When: May 16th, 2026**

**Where: Cedar Creek Tavern (34579 Hwy 38, Grand Rapids)**

**Time: 3:30pm- Social Time, 4pm- Speaker & 5pm- Dinner**

We needed a new location for our Spring Social because Camp Fire-Camp Bluewater is up for sale and not renting their space, so we decided to take a year off from cooking and try having a local restaurant host our event this year. **Please join us for an evening of fun, education, and camaraderie!**

Our speaker, Bill Grantges, Itasca County Invasive Species Program Coordinator at Itasca Soil & Water, will speak on what's new with Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and treatments being done.

A menu will be emailed to WCOLA members so you can select your dinner ahead of time. There will be door prizes and a silent auction held with items available to bid on. **If you have items to donate for the auction, contact Lynne Pernsteiner — [wabanacommunications@gmail.com](mailto:wabanacommunications@gmail.com)**

# Summer Solstice Party!!

WCOLA Summer Solstice Party **Saturday June 20, 2026 at 5 pm.**



**Where: Downing/Colburn Family residence:** (Sandy Arc) 38067 Forest Lane  
Beef hot dogs on the grill will be provided for all. Please bring an appropriate beverage and some solstice party snacks to share.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

## WCOLA's "Fun Raising" –Benefit Concert– Friday, August 7th



Grand Rapid's very own, "Adessa & the Beat" musical trio will perform live under the big top **Friday, August 7th from 5-9pm at Cedar Creek Tavern** for WCOLA's inaugural "Fun Raising" event.

Join us for an evening of dinner, dancing, and socializing while raising money for a great cause! Make sure to tell your Family & Friends to save the date!

**\*Tickets go on sale soon. Watch for more information!**

The Grand Rapid's Herald Review rates "Adessa & the Beat" as one of the top-three live bands in the area. "Adessa is a powerful lead vocalist, known for her wide brimmed hats and smashing stage fashion, she's every bit a mix of Crystal Gayle, Steve Nicks, and Joni Mitchell." Adessa & the Beat is known for belting out Americana. A classic singer/songwriter, strong on the 70's B-side titles that evoke memories from the days when vinyl was king."



# The 2025 WCOLA Survey Results

By Tom Horton, WCOLA Vice-President

Thank you to all that responded to the 2025 WCOLA survey. The WCOLA board members will review these results in detail over the next few months to discuss how we can continue to meet our mission statement and bring value to the community in areas that are most important.

We received 111 responses: 97 current members, 9 new members, and 5 non-members. One hundred people surveyed had a positive or extremely positive perception of WCOLA, with no negative perceptions.

## Topics that more than 50% of responders found to be important:

- \*Aquatic invasive species
- \*Water quality & clarity
- \*Loon populations
- \*Environmental shoreline protections
- \*Impact of wake boats in surf mode
- \*Impact of septic systems on lakes
- \*Fish population management (stocking programs)
- \*Permit & variance requirements for lakeshore development
- \*Auction of public lakeshore property
- \*Boat Traffic on the chain of lakes
- \*Restrictions on VRO lake home rentals
- \*Water runoff impact on lakes



## Topics that were MOST important:

(By a very wide margin, 2 topics were identified as being the most important.)

- \*Water quality and clarity
- \*Aquatic invasive species

## Summary:

It's fair to say that some of the topics on the survey could be considered to be related to water quality. It was necessary to be granular so that we could obtain feedback on specific areas of importance. So, it's not completely surprising that Water Quality and Clarity is one of the most important.

It is interesting that the AIS is considered to be very important to a large percentage. WCOLA had been active in the AIS conversation for several years. Along with education on the topic, WCOLA funded the boat wash station and co-funds the AIS inspectors. We feel that this topic will become more important in upcoming years as the state/county funding for inspectors is reduced and the number of contaminated lakes in the area increases.

Feel free to reach out to me directly if you have comments or questions on the survey.

Tom Horton  
[vicepresident.WCOLA@gmail.com](mailto:vicepresident.WCOLA@gmail.com)

# Water Testing

By Mark Conover



Photo credit Abby Bour

WCOLA was planning to conduct comprehensive water testing on our chain of lakes this summer. But as it turns out, Itasca County Soil and Water staff is scheduled to test our lakes this summer also, except for Little Wabana, as part of the Minnesota Pollution Control Program.

Therefore, our group (WCOLA) will only need to test Little Wabana Lake. All lakes will have its water tested for several elements, along with clarity readings and temperature. Samples will be taken once per month for 5 months starting in May. Since WCOLA will incur a significant financial windfall from this turn of

events, we should have funding resources available to address other possible environmental concerns.

On another note, the county AIS inspector program will not have a vehicle available to transport the AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) Decontamination Unit to and from the NW landing on Wabana Lake this summer. (The unit cannot remain at the landing overnight). Therefore, we are looking to borrow a vehicle for the open water season, starting in late May. The vehicle does not need to be in great shape but should have adequate clearance and a trailer hitch with 2 inch ball.

## Planting at the Town Hall

By Pam Friesen

The final phase of the recreation project includes a comprehensive landscaping plan. Township resident, Susan Lick, will spearhead the project which includes planting 4 areas of "pocket woodland" areas along the county road 49 fence. The pocket woodlands will include a mixture of native trees, shrubs and native plants. A larger central growing area will be planted closer to the ice rink.

Two shade trees will be planted to the east side of the playground.

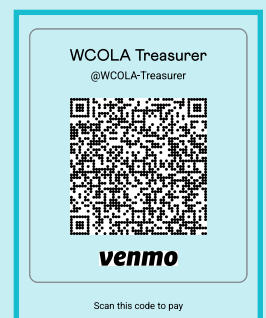
Volunteers will be needed to help with watering and weeding the new planting areas. If you are interested in helping out, please contact—

Pam Friesen (218) 343-8583 or Susan Lick (218) 256-9346



It's not too late to join! The 2026 annual dues are \$40.  
Send your dues payment or donation to WCOLA in care of our treasurer—  
Jean Koewler, 32040 Wakeman Bay Trail, Grand Rapids, MN 55744

You can also conveniently pay by Venmo— @WCOLA-Treasurer.  
Last four digits for security are: 9618



# DNR Fish Management Program

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' fisheries offices will be updating their fisheries management plans for 197 lakes across Minnesota and they are looking for your input. Wabana Lake has been added to the fish management program this year, and Trout Lake is expected to be part of the management program next year. The area fisheries will consider your observations, comments, and concerns as they develop updates for each lake.

A list of lakes scheduled to be updated in 2026 can be found on the MN DNR website—<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/lake-management/index.html>

I spoke with Doyle Hass from the Department of Natural Resources and gained some information about the fish management program for Wabana Lake and received the following report for Wabana Lake. (Note this is a draft report and only part of the report is published here. If you'd like a copy of the full report, contact me at — [wabanacommunications@gmail.com](mailto:wabanacommunications@gmail.com)

**DRAFT**

## LAKE SURVEY REPORT

STANDARD SURVEY DATED 07/14/2025 FOR DOW NUMBER 31-0392-00

### Field Notes - General Field

Survey crew: Doyle Hass, Brett Nelson, Dan Shermerhorn, Dee Dee Crist

Weather was variable most of the week; windy a few days and two rain events. It seemed gill nets set in the wind had more Walleye than nets in protection. Multiple boats noted fishing every day. Both accesses were utilized for the survey and angler use was noted. Multiple loons were seen during the week.

### Discussion

Wabana Lake is a Class 22 lake located 11 miles north of Grand Rapids with two public accesses and moderate shoreline development. Wabana Lake is 2,215-acres of which 785-acres is less than 15 feet deep. The 2016 Lake Management Plan (LMP) identified Walleye as the primary management species, with Northern Pike, Largemouth Bass, and Smallmouth Bass as secondary species. Walleye are actively managed through stocking (1 pound/littoral acre (785 pounds) annually since 2013) to help attain management objectives; Walleye gill-net CPUE of 5.0 fish/net (lake average 4.6/net). Secondary species objectives include; Northern Pike CPUE near 3.5/gill net (lake average) with presence of fish >34 inches and maintaining angling opportunities for bass. The 2025 survey was one of many assessing Walleye stocking as well as the status of other game fish.

Since stocking began in the early 1980s, Walleye gill-net CPUE has averaged 4.6 fish/net; the 2025 catch (3.7/net) approached the management goal. The Walleye catch has consistently been at the low end of the expected range for lakes with similar habitat, exceeding the median only once. Size structure was moderate (PSD-15=57, PSD-20=27, PSD-25=2, n=49) and consistent with past surveys. Sampled fish ranged from 8.4 to 27.6 inches with an average of 15.4 inches. Natural reproduction has historically been poor, likely due to delayed thermal regimes typical of large, deep systems that limit fry survival. Annual fingerling stocking since 2004 (except 2020) has generally produced consistent recruitment though other life stages have been stocked as well. Ages 2 to 10 were represented; ages -2 and -3 comprised over half of the sample (60%) and likely a product of older life stage stockings. Growth averaged 15.9 inches at age 4, consistent with statewide averages, despite low Yellow Perch abundance.

Northern Pike gill net CPUE has ranged from 1.5-5.4 fish/net since 1975; the 2025 catch (3.9/net) was similar to the LMP goal and comparable to the previous survey (5.3/net). Size structure was favorable (PSD-21=82, PSD-28=21, PSD-34=2, n=57) and consistent with past surveys. Fish ranged from 13.4 to 37.2 inches (average = 24.6 inches). The catch and size structure met management objectives. Eight-year classes (ages 1-8) were identified, with age-5 fish comprising 33% of the sample suggesting fluctuating recruitment. Growth was rapid early but slowed to statewide averages by age -5 with fish averaging 26 inches. Fish within the North-central zone protected slot (22-26 inches) comprised 34% of the sample.

Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass were sampled in both gear types. The trap net catch for both species was expected while the gill net catch for both was slightly better. Despite drawbacks of these gear types for bass sampling, some insight can be gained. Largemouth Bass up to 19 inches and Smallmouth Bass up to 20 inches were sampled, attaining management objectives.

Black Crappie catches have been low in all surveys, consistent with the lake type. The 2025 survey had a catch of 0.8/gill net, exceeding the lake type median (0.4/net) while the trap net catch was 0.1/net, below the lake type median (0.8/net). Lengths from the gill net catch ranged from 6.1-12.4 inches (average 8.6 inches).

Bluegill abundance has been variable (6.6-71.7/net), though most trap net catches exceeded the lake type median (15.3/net). The 2025 catch was 19.9/trap net, comparable to the previous survey utilizing trap nets (23.7/net). Size structure was poor; 5% > 8 inches. Lengths ranged from 3.4-8.9 inches (average 5.8 inches). Age and growth were not assessed.

Tullibee gill net CPUE has been relatively stable in the last 25 years (range 2.7-4.6/net). The 2025 catch (2.0/net) comparable to the expected lake type median (1.6/net) and the lake average (3.7/net). Fish ranged from 8.7 to 19.9 inches, with most between 14-19 inches, suggesting multiple age classes.

Yellow Perch gill net CPUE has generally been lower than the expected range, never exceeding the lake type median. The 2025 catch (2.9/net) was lower than expected and comparable to the lake average (5.8/net). Low perch

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catches can negatively impact Walleye management. Sampled perch ranged from 5.9-8.7 inches (mean = 6.7 inches), indicating poor size structure, but similar to previous surveys. The poor size structure is likely of little interest to anglers.

Other species sampled Green Sunfish, Hybrid Sunfish, Pumpkinseed Sunfish, Rock Bass and White Sucker.

**DRAFT**

**LAKE SURVEY REPORT**  
**STANDARD SURVEY DATED 07/14/2025 FOR DOW NUMBER 31-0392-00**

**Status Of The Fishery**

Wabana Lake is a 2,215-acre lake about 11 miles north of Grand Rapids. It has two public boat accesses and a moderate amount of shoreline development. For anglers, Wabana is managed first and foremost as a Walleye lake, with Northern Pike and both Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass also important parts of the fishery. The 2025 survey is part of ongoing work to see how well Walleye stocking is working and to check the overall health of the lake's game fish populations.

Walleye are stocked every year to help sustain the fishery, because natural reproduction in Wabana has historically been low. The lake's deep, cold water tends to delay spring warm-up, which can limit fry survival. Since stocking began in the early 1980s, Walleye numbers have stayed fairly steady but usually run toward the lower end compared to similar lakes. In 2025, the gill-net catch rate was 3.7 fish per net, close to the long-term average and near the management goal. The size structure was moderate and similar to past surveys. Walleye ranged from about 8 to nearly 28 inches, with an average of 15 inches. Fish from ages 2 through 10 were present, and growth was good—about 16 inches by age 4—which is in line with statewide averages. Even though Yellow Perch numbers are low, stocked Walleye continue to show consistent year-classes.

Northern Pike numbers in 2025 were consistent with management objectives. The catch rate was 3.9 fish per net, similar to past surveys. Pike ranged from 13 to just over 37 inches, averaging about 25 inches. Size structure was good, with some larger fish over 34 inches present. About one-third of the Pike sampled were in the protected 22-26 inch slot for the north-central zone. Growth was fast early on, with fish reaching about 26 inches by age 5, then leveling off to average. Overall, Pike are providing a solid opportunity, including chances at memorable-sized fish (34 inches).

Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass were caught in both trap nets and gill nets. While those gear types are not the best tools for sampling bass, results show both species are present in expected numbers. Largemouth up to 19 inches and Smallmouth up to 20 inches were sampled, indicating good size potential and continued angling opportunities for both species.

Black Crappie numbers have always been on the low side in Wabana, which is typical for this type of lake. In 2025, gill nets caught slightly more crappie than average, though trap nets caught fewer. Fish ranged from 6 to just over 12 inches, averaging about 8.5 inches. Anglers may find a few keeper-sized fish, but crappie are not a dominant species here.

Bluegill numbers have bounced around over the years but are often better than expected. The 2025 trap-net catch was similar to the previous survey. However, most Bluegills are small. Only about 5% of the sample was over 8 inches, and the average size was under 6 inches. This means anglers can expect numbers, but not many larger fish.

Tullibee (Cisco) numbers have been fairly stable over the past couple decades. The 2025 catch was close to what's expected for this type of lake. Most fish were between 14 and 19 inches, with several age classes present. While not a primary target for most anglers, Tullibeas remain an important forage species.

Yellow Perch numbers continue to run low and below what's typical for similar lakes. The 2025 catch was again on the low side. Perch ranged from about 6 to nearly 9 inches, averaging just under 7 inches. Size structure remains poor and likely isn't of much interest to anglers. Low Perch abundance can make Walleye management more challenging since Perch are an important food source.

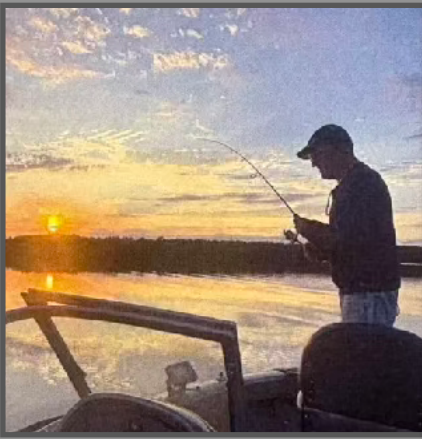
Other species sampled in 2025 included Green Sunfish, Hybrid Sunfish, Pumpkinseed Sunfish, Rock Bass, and White Sucker.

In short, Wabana Lake continues to offer steady Walleye fishing supported by stocking, a healthy Northern Pike population with some larger fish, and solid Bass opportunities. Panfish are present but generally small. For anglers, Wabana remains a dependable multi-species lake, with Walleye and Pike leading the way.

According to Doyle Hass, Wabana Lake is managed for walleye and has a history of producing moderate numbers and sized fish, which was again observed in 2025. The 2025 lake survey also indicated plenty of fish species that look good to the DNR management team as well. The Bluegill numbers are good and provide good action. There are lots of nice sized crappies, northern, and bass. The number of largemouth bass has been increasing across Minnesota, which is also true on Wabana. The size of perch is small, which is good because they are a prey fish, but their numbers could be better. There are no plans to add muskies for the foreseeable future. After looking at the lake and fish data, the DNR doesn't plan to make many significant changes to its fish management for Wabana Lake. Trout Lake will be surveyed in 2027 and lake trout stocking may resume again at that time if there is public interest. This may re-ignite some angler interest in Trout Lake, which could increase traffic on the lake. The chain of lakes is already quite popular and sees a lot of use.

There has been a shift in fishing over the years, and fishing has become more family focused. Families are out on the water more often, and many of the lakes have changed from "fishing lakes" to become more "recreation lakes." The type of fish people are looking for has changed too, and fisheries hope to keep up with the changing times. "It's not like the old days where you sit with grandpa in a boat waiting hours for a bite," Mr. Hass said. "Today, a lot of families prefer more steady action, like bass and sunfish provide, and they don't want to wait around for a big catch. And that's what's nice about lakes like Wabana, where there's a good mix on angling opportunities."

If you have a comment or concern about fish management send them to— [Grandrapids.fisheries@state.mn.us](mailto:Grandrapids.fisheries@state.mn.us)



Denny Koewler, passed away peacefully on February 19th, 2026 at the age of 83. Denny, and his wife, Jean, have lived on Wabana Lake since Denny's retirement from Sperry in 1999. Denny loved his retirement home on Wabana and spent much of his time fishing, hunting, and being outdoors doing the many jobs necessary to maintain their lake property. Denny had an engaging personality and was a friend to all. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, and members of his lake community.

(paid donation to WCOLA )



On February 13th, 2026, my mother (and editor), Marcia Gowling, left this world to be with her Savior, Jesus Christ. Marcia was an avid gardener and loved animals no matter how great small. Marcia enjoyed the "lake life" and was happy to share her passions with her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Marcia's memory will live on in her love for nature, and the living things around us... especially all the plants and critters that call Wabana home.

(paid donation by Lynne Pernsteiner)

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SATURDAY	Prime Rib	\$38 / \$42
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**We are excited to announce we will be selling advertising to help support our organization.** If you are interested in advertising in our quarterly newsletter, introductory pricing is being offered through June 2026. The cost of a full-page color advertisement per quarterly newsletter is \$100, a half-page ad is \$50, and a quarter-page ad is \$25. Advertisements can be for local businesses, they could be personal too, such as a birthday greeting. It's a great way to support a good cause and it's tax deductible.

**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, Government Liaison- Sam Nelson,  
Newsletter/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)**