



President's Column – Winter 2009

By Bess Smith

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season and you are enjoying a happy and healthy New Year.

Old Man Winter has certainly come on with full force this year. I haven't been to the lake since Thanksgiving weekend but I can only imagine the ice fishing, cross country skiing and snowmobile activity on the ice.

Speaking of Thanksgiving... In this uncertain economic time in our lives, I give thanks for our beautiful natural resource – Great East Lake. I am reminded that we have such limited control over our finances, our jobs, retirement savings and on and on. But we do have some control over our preservation of our natural resources. I continue to be proud of our Association's efforts to preserve and maintain our lake and its surroundings. Our volunteerism regarding water quality, weed watching, the Lake Host program, loon protection, etc. speaks volumes about our commitment to the protection of our lake.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to respond to the GELIA opinion survey in the Fall. You sent an overwhelming message that your major concern is for the preservation of the exceptional water quality of Great East. You can read about the details of the survey in this newsletter. The commitment of GELIA to water quality has supported our efforts to partner with other groups to figure out how to keep our waters so special. The Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance is working on a management plan for all the lakes that feed into the Salmon Falls River (including Great East Lake, Lovell Lake, Horn Pond, Lake Ivanhoe and Wilson Lake) that will recommend ways in which the property owners and towns can protect all these waterbodies. As part of that process we are hopeful that many of you will join

us at the Watershed Survey Breakfast on May 30th to learn more about the project and then volunteer for the Great East Lake watershed survey on June 13th. Details will follow in the Spring newsletter and you will each be receiving a letter informing you of the process.

I am sure, like me (one who has to "close up" for the winter), you await that day in the Spring when you head to the lake to shake out the linens, put in the dock and get out the fishing poles. I know that I am counting the days.



Please note ANNUAL MEETING DATE CHANGE

Mark your Calendars

The date of the 2009 Annual Meeting will be July 11th. The tables will be open at 9:00 and the meeting will get underway at 10:00 as usual.

And, of course, there will be the traditional hot dog lunch and raffle!

Great East Lake Improvement
Association

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Mission

To preserve, enhance and
protect the advantages of Great
East Lake and its environs

Survey Results Show Water Quality is Top Priority for GELIA

Submitted by the GELIA Opinion Survey Committee

Last summer, opinion surveys were mailed to 713 residents on Great East Lake and responses were received from 28% of them. You may be one of the 199 people who responded to this questionnaire about GELIA's mission and performance, which also included general questions about environmental issues. 191 of you are GELIA members, or 49% of the GELIA membership. Congratulations – that is a remarkable response rate. For those who did respond, we thank you! You may pick up your “thank you” mug at GELIA Watershed Survey Breakfast on May 30th at the Acton Congregational Church; the Annual Meeting on July 11th; or at Applecore Gift Shop, on Route 109 in Acton, once they open in the spring.

Here are some highlights of the survey results:

GELIA Performance & Mission:

- GELIA appears to be on the right track with 92% agreeing that its mission statement reflects what it ought to be doing.
- GELIA is performing well with 97% of respondents rating overall performance as excellent or good and 95% rating its management of money as excellent or good.

In terms of what GELIA should be focusing on, “protecting water quality” was cited as “very important” by 95% of respondents. Other activities thought to be “very important” include informing membership about environmental issues (87%), protecting wildlife (76%), protecting property values (72%), encouraging boating safety (62%), and informing membership about local government issues (56%).

Environmental Issues:

- While few felt “very knowledgeable” about a host of environmental issues, many felt “somewhat knowledgeable” about a range of issues including fertilizer usage, gas and oil from boats, septic systems, erosion from storm water run-off, pesticide usage, invasive plants, and loon health.

In terms of issues you are “very concerned” about, invasive plants top the list (90%), followed by septic systems (72%), invasive aquatic animals (72%), loon health (71%), erosion from storm water run-off (59%), fertilizer usage (59%), pesticide usage (56%), and oil and gas from boats (54%).

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Activities:

- Respondents clearly enjoy the lake, citing swimming (89%), sunset viewing (82%), reading (81%), hanging out (80%), motor boating (78%), bird watching (67%), waterskiing/wakeboarding/tubing (51%), fishing (48%), kayaking (48%), lawn mowing (42%), canoeing (40%), gardening (38%), sailing (22%), jet skiing (11%), and other (13%).

Respondents' willingness to support GELIA activities with donations, participation and volunteering were quite good, with "environmental" items such as loon protection, water quality monitoring, and weed watching receiving more interest than "social" activities such as the family festival and kayak races. Interest in participating in the annual meeting was high (63%) while the history book and the photo contest also demonstrated appeal.

An interesting final note had to do with exactly *who* responded to the survey. A full 83% of respondents were over 50 and nearly 50% of them have been on the lake for 40 or more years. These are the voices that are being heard.

The GELIA Board is committed to serving our membership, advancing education and helping to preserve the unique asset that is so near and dear to all of our hearts. The survey has provided us with some good direction to guide our work, but it is not the end of the conversation. All members are encouraged to be in touch with board members and to volunteer when possible to promote our larger mission.

SAVE THE DATES!

Protect your property values from the damaging effects of declined water quality.

CALLING ALL WEED WATCHERS, LAKE HOSTS, AND CONCERNED LAKE RESIDENTS

Watershed Survey Breakfast—Saturday, May 30th

Join the GELIA Watershed Survey Steering Committee and your neighbors for breakfast and to learn about the "whys" and "hows" of the upcoming volunteer watershed survey.

Pollution from eroded soil is the **#1 THREAT** to our pristine waters and we can do something about it. Soil erosion causes sediments to cloud the water, and carry pollutants that increase algae growth.

A 3 foot decline in water clarity can mean a 20% decline in property values!! Many properties around the lake have areas that are being washed away by runoff from rain events. Most of these problems can be solved with low cost, simple solutions. Come for breakfast to learn how to protect water quality and safeguard your property values. Look for the details in the Spring *Newichawannock News*.

Questions? Linda Schier: 603-534-0671 or info@AWwatersheds.org

**Great East Lake Volunteer Watershed Survey
Saturday, June 13th**

50 Volunteers are needed! Bring your friends and meet your neighbors.

Chickadees: state bird of Maine

By Jennifer Craig



It's possible that many of you have asked yourselves, "How can the chickadees survive the harsh winters we experience at the lake?" Indeed as the state bird of Maine and a frequent visitor to our winter feeders, we see them often and feel a certain admiration for their hardiness.

In actuality, many chickadees do not survive their first winters. They are good breeders, with most couples producing three clutches of 4-8 chicks per clutch per season. They are also wonderful parents, with both the male and female working tirelessly to support their chicks. However, in extreme cold, each bird needs to consume the equivalent of at least 250 sunflower seeds per day to survive. Feeders are very important!

Chickadees do have a number of adaptive mechanisms to make it through the winter. For one thing, their winter plumage is about 25-30% thicker than in summer. To stay warm, they shiver and also pull their feet into their plumage, either one leg at a time or both if necessary. They can also roost and lower their body temperatures to 20 degrees below normal for a night, returning to regular levels come daybreak. It is believed that they spend the night crammed together in groups in protected spaces such as hollow logs, to help warm each other up. The blood vessels in their feet are arranged so that the inflows and outflows are closely aligned, thus warming the returning blood. Moreover, their circulatory systems allow only enough blood to reach the feet to prevent them from freezing, thus conserving warmth in their bodies.

One can't help but admire these tiny dynamos of energy, surviving against all odds. Feeding the birds really can make a difference in their survival, whether you do so at the lake or at your winter residence. Please remember our feathered friends!

Webmaster Wanted

GELIA is looking for someone to improve and maintain the website, www.greastlake.org. This might be a good position for someone with excellent computer skills looking to enhance their resume with a community service project or a way for a retiree to fill some hours while helping to keep our members informed. Duties could include creating a new website, updating information, managing a forum, setting up an online store and installing a webcam. We're looking for some new ideas! If interested, please email pres@greastlake.org.

Winter Wildlife: the porcupine

By Jennifer Craig

If you've ever had the chance to walk along the lake front after a new snow, you have undoubtedly seen the tracks of the lowly porcupine, one of our most reliable winter denizens. Their front paws have four toes and their back paws have five, but the overall impression from the tracks is of a low-to-the-ground waddler.

Porcupines don't hibernate, although they do "den" during the worst weather in holes, hollow logs, or tree tops. They are fabulous climbers, with a huge claw protruding from each of their toes. They survive during the winter by eating mostly bark, although given a preference, they will opt for foliage, twigs, berries, nuts, flowers, and even discarded deer antlers. They are nocturnal feeders who also seek salt, which can lead to their being killed along salted roadways.

After capybaras and beavers, porcupines are the third largest rodents on the planet. They measure 25-36 inches long, plus 8-10 inches of tail, and they live to be 10-20 years old. Their name comes from the French "Porc d'epines" or thorny pig. They are actually quite intelligent, rapid learners with good memories. They have relatively poor eyesight but excellent hearing and sense of smell.

Porcupines' main claim to fame are their quills, which are the stuff of legend. Myths abound about their being able to shoot their quills at hapless victims; however, this is completely untrue. In truth, the quills dislodge extremely easily, as many an overly inquisitive dog has discovered to its dismay. The quills are actually modified hairs with extremely thick keratin plating. Not only are they very sharp, but they also contain a backward-facing barb which makes them very painful to dislodge. Each porcupine has upwards of 30,000 quills to bring to bear in its defense. In addition to this physical threat, a porcupine under attack will likely stamp its feet, click its teeth, hiss and raise its quills: anyone who ignores all of this will be plucking quills from his/her/its skin with extreme regret.

Porcupines breed in November-December and have a 7-month gestation, which means that the baby spikers are born in summer. Newborns have open eyes and quills, which harden upon exposure to air.

As we bank our wood stoves or turn on our electric heaters to survive the lake during winter, it is worth a moment's reflection to consider our winter neighbors who don't hibernate but actually stay with us throughout. The porcupine is one such loyal denizen...look for the close-spaced, belly-dragging tracks of our spiny, peaceful friend next time you are at the lake.



LAKE HOSTS WANTED
to conduct courtesy boat inspections during Summer 2009

GREAT EAST LAKE
Paid and Volunteer Positions Available!
Minimum Age: 18 for paid positions.
(We will consider exceptional 16- and 17-year olds.)

Volunteering as a Lake Host is a great way to serve the Great East Lake community and satisfy community service requirements for school or business.
Training is required.

For info Contact:
Linda Schier, Point Person
603-659-3302 or lindabschier@comcast.net

Second Annual GELIA Photo Contest!

By Gary Field

Our first Photo Contest was such a success we're doing it again this year! Share your fondest memories of time spent at the lake and bring the whole association closer together. I know you're sitting on a box of great pictures the rest of us would like to see. Send them in, will you!

If you don't have pictures you want to share, then you're still not off the hook; we also need volunteer judges to pick the best ones. You don't need to be a photography expert. As long as you have a computer with a CD/DVD drive that you can display pictures on, you're all set! The people who won last year's top prizes (Ernie Alvino, Mary Field, Judy Mankus) are not eligible to enter this year so we'd like to encourage them to be judges instead.

We will take the best 13 photos submitted (one for each month plus the cover) and create a calendar which will be available for sale at the annual meeting. This also has the benefit of being a fund raiser for GELIA and creating a historical photo archive of our beloved lake and its inhabitants. The best of the runners up will be posted on GreatEastLake.org.

You have until the end of March to work on digging out and selecting your favorite pictures so you can send them in.

There are of course rules:

<http://www.greateastlake.org/contest.html>

Download and print an entry form:

<http://www.greateastlake.org/entry.html>

Or, if you have no internet access you can write to:

Gary Field, PO Box 762, Tewksbury, MA 01876

And I'll send you the rules and an entry form.

To volunteer your services as a judge send an email to: PhotoContest@GreatEastLake.org

Family members living in the same household as a judge are not allowed to enter the photo contest.

Good Luck!



Lake Associations and Towns Partner with AWWA to Strengthen Water Resource Protection

By Linda Schier, AWWA Executive Director

The Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance has had another busy year working with the lake associations, Towns and citizens to protect the local waters. #1 on the To-Do list is to prevent stormwater runoff from transporting sediments into lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. Sediments reduce water clarity and carry pollutants. The major pollutant is phosphorus even though it is a naturally occurring element in the soils. When it is concentrated in fertilizers, pet waste, faulty septic systems and yard waste it can stimulate excess plant growth and reduce dissolved oxygen levels, stressing the fish population. These conditions can cause a decline in overall water quality and property values.

AWWA partners with the lake associations and towns to lead the charge against water quality decline with the Youth Conservation Corps, watersheds surveys and watershed-based plan project. Some highlights:

- ◆ Since 2006, the Youth Conservation Corps has worked on 45 project sites on eight waterbodies in Acton and Wakefield. 13 sites are on Great East Lake with a total of 39 conservation practices preventing at least 15.9 tons of sediment and 14 lbs of phosphorus from reaching the lake each year. Be sure to look for AWWA signs as you cruise the lakeshore next summer and feel free to stop and take a look at these effective and appealing projects.
- ◆ In 2008, AWWA recruited over 50 volunteers to survey the 1000+ properties in the Horn Pond and Lovell Lake watersheds. The teams identified over 200 sites that are contributing sediments into the waters. AWWA will offer advice to landowners with concerns and will work with the towns of Acton and Wakefield to address the bigger problems.
- ◆ In the spring of this year, AWWA will partner with GELIA, Wilson Lake Association and residents to survey the Great East, Ivanhoe and Wilson lake watersheds and make recommendations for correcting and preventing pollution problems. We need lots of volunteers so please mark June 13th on your calendar and join the GELIA survey team.
- ◆ In January '09, AWWA led a community forum to identify priority concerns and solutions for the Salmon Falls Headwaters (Great East Lake, Horn Pond, Lake Ivanhoe, Lovell Lake, and Wilson Lake) watershed-based plan. Thirty reps from the Acton and Wakefield town governments, lake associations, land trusts, and interested citizenry shared their concerns and ideas. Specific recommendations will be compiled and prioritized in the final plan. Thank you to GELIA members John Ciardi, Jennifer Craig, Chuck Hodsdon, Dave Mankus, Don & Catherine Mills, and Pat Theisen for their contributions.
- ◆ Visit www.AWwatersheds.org for details on the AWWA programs and pictures of all the YCC projects.

BOATING SAFETY
NEW HAMPSHIRE BOATING EDUCATION COURSES

By Walter Neff

If you have not yet completed the New Hampshire Boating Education Course and passed the proctored exam to obtain the mandatory state certification there is still time and many opportunities to get this done before boating season begins.

The State of NH publishes their schedule of courses and tests on their website www.nh.gov/safety (look for "Boating Education"). There are literally dozens of sites and dates starting in January 2009 through Dec.2009 and this list is updated frequently. You will also find information there about the online course, home study and pre testing as well as the "testing out option", the 14 day temporary certificate and other sources of certification such as Coast Guard, US Power Squadron, and approved NASBLA (National Association of State Boating Law Administrators) courses. You can also call 1-888-254-2125 or 603-267-7256.



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

GELIA
P.O. Box 762
Tewksbury MA 01876

NEW HAMPSHIRE NEWS

