

Nelson Lake Association

SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER



LAKE DAYS ARE THE BEST DAYS!

Upcoming Events

ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 8, 2024

9:00 A.M. — Noon

at Hayward Veterans Center

KAYAKING EVENT

Saturday, August 17, 2024

10:00 A.M. — Noon

Depart from Gerlach's landing @ 10 A.M.



ANNUAL PICNIC

Saturday, August 17, 2024

4:00 P.M. — 6:00 P.M.

at Nelson Lake Park

WINTER RAMA

Saturday, January 4, 2025

Noon—4:00 P.M.

at Nelson Lake Landing
Resort



Rick Lindner



It's been an unusually mild winter...

Other than a few days with a light dusting of snow, we had a 4 inch snowfall in December, a 2 inch snowfall in January, and a 2 inch snowfall in February. After every snowfall the weather warmed and the snow disappeared so most of the winter was without snow cover. With very little frost in the ground road restrictions were started on February 2nd. Some open water was observed on February 17th, when normally we have over 30 inches of ice. The ice was completely gone on March 12th, the earliest date in recorded history.

I want to thank everyone who attended the DNR Fisheries meeting on February 6th at the Lenroot Town Hall. We had 66 people at the meeting and 31 Zoom participants. Max Wolter did an excellent job at presenting data about our fishery and leading discussions on various topics. It's been 20 years since the Nelson Lake Fishery management plan was created and this meeting is the start of work to revise the plan for the future. To gain input for the revisions a survey was created. Over 200 people took the survey at the meeting or online to provide their opinions about changes. About 60% were members and 40% were non members. (See article in this newsletter about survey results and the fishery data presented at the meeting).

Once again this year we need to do a 4ft drawdown of the lake level this fall to repair the boat landing near the dam again. (See article in this newsletter for more details).

For property owners on Nelson Lake it will be very important to plan boat removals early next fall. Boats should be removed from boat lifts by September 15th because the water level will go down very quickly (about 14 inches per week), making it very difficult to get boats off their lifts. Also, if you hire a pontoon with fork lift to remove your lift or dock, that work will have to be completed by September 15th.

Don't be tempted to leave your dock in over winter. Refill will begin in March, 2021, while there will still be significant ice on the water. The ice could damage docks as it moves around in the spring winds. Be safe. Take your docks and lifts out of the lake as you normally would.

There will be significant communication this summer in an attempt to ensure everyone is well aware. Information will be available at the Annual Meeting in June. Posters will be created and posted at the landings and at resorts. Handout cards will be made and distributed at the boat landings by the boat inspectors. Alerts will be sent to all members of the association as key dates approach. And we encourage everyone to pass the word to property owners who may not be association members. Your help in communicating the information will be greatly appreciated.

I want to thank Rich Brouillette for serving as a boat inspector at Gerlach Landing for the last two years. Although Rich will not be there regularly he may substitute a few weekends this year. Rich also assists with the buoy changes every spring and fall. His help is much appreciated.

Best wishes to all,

Rick



From the Treasurer

Financials as of April 1, 2024

General Fund	\$26,549.65
Fish & Wildlife	\$ 4,191.91
Lake Project	\$ 2,027.28
Invasive Species	\$ 6,823.16
Nelson Lake Park	\$ 3,282.62
Scholarship Fund	<u>\$(-1,605.00)</u>
TOTAL	<u><u>\$41,269.62</u></u>

**NLA Membership
Stands at 258**

NLA Board Members



Rick Lindner
President



Harold Burton
Vice President



Glenn Rolloff
Treasurer



Steve Bilitz
Secretary



Gordy Christians



Tom LeMay



John Welter



Mike Hallum



Dale McPherson



Jeff Hanson



Casey Stangl



Mark Schaezner

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Glenn Rolloff	Treasurer	715-497-6193
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Tom LeMay	Director at Large	715-634-2594
John Welter	Director at Large	715-634-4175
Mike Hallum	Director at Large	715-797-0903
Dale McPherson	Director at Large	612-210-4449
Jeff Hanson	Director at Large	612-719-9072
Casey Stangl	Director at Large	715-699-1213
Mark Schaezner	Director at Large	612-860-9064

Board Elections

At the June Annual Meeting the positions of President and three Director At Large positions will be voted on. Rick Lindner, Jeff Hanson, Mark Schaezner, and Mike Hallum are candidates.

Any member of the Association can run for a position on the Board of Directors. The board meets six times per year, generally on the first Monday of even-numbered months. Please contact Rick if you are interested in being a candidate for the NLA Board of Directors.



42nd ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 8, 2024

9:00 A.M. — Noon

At Hayward Veterans Center

AGENDA

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 9:00 am | Coffee, cookies & donuts |
| 9:30 am | Lenroot Town Report (Gordy Christians) |
| 9:45 am | Drawdown Proposal |
| 10:00 am | Annual Meeting Business <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approval of June 10, 2023 Minutes• Walleye Update• Kayak Event• Treasury & Membership Report• Nominations and Elections• Other Business |
| 12:00 Noon | Adjourn to June 7, 2025 |

Introduction

In 2024, DNR sought feedback from stakeholders with an interest in Nelson Lake fishing. A public meeting was held at the Lenroot Town Hall on February 6, 2024. Around 50 people attended the meeting in person, with additional people participating via Zoom. DNR staff presented on recent fisheries trends. Comments and opinions were then heard. There was also a questionnaire that was made available to all meeting participants. The same questionnaire was circulated online for two weeks following the meeting. The results of this questionnaire will provide useful feedback to DNR on angler preferences and management direction. Here, we present the pertinent results of that effort, concluding with some potential next steps.

Who we heard from

We received 45 survey responses from in-person meeting participants and 184 responses to the online survey option for a total of 229 responses. We believe this is a sufficient sample size to gauge angler preferences on Nelson Lake. Encouragingly, we were able to hear from a wide variety of Nelson Lake users (Figure 1). We reached a larger percentage of non-shoreline owners (40.2%) than the input received as a part of the 2004 management planning process.

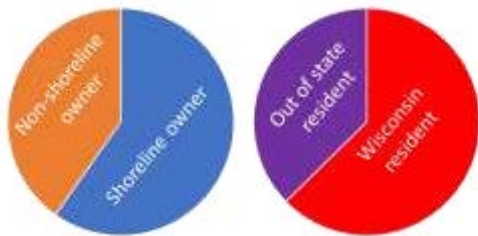


Figure 1. Breakdown of survey respondents by property owner status and residency.

We were also able to hear from resort owners/guides and resort guests, which made up 2.2% and 20.1% of all responses, respectively. Receiving feedback from resort guests was particularly exciting and useful since those anglers are not always captured in these kinds of surveys.

General Species Preferences

We asked anglers to indicate their level of interest in fishing for various species in Nelson Lake. We then used these responses to generate an “Angler Interest Score” for each species. Angler Interest Score was generated with the following equation:

$$\text{Angler Interest Score} = ((\# \text{ high interest responses} \times 3) + (\# \text{ medium interest responses} \times 2) + (\# \text{ low interest responses})) / \text{total} \# \text{ of responses}$$

Angler Interest Scores from 2024 were compared to those from the 2004 management planning exercise, when the same question was asked (Table 1).

Table 1. Angler Interest Scores for popular species in Nelson Lake, based on feedback received in 2004 and 2024. Arrows in the 2024 column indicate a species increasing or decreasing in both rank and score compared to 2004.

2004		2024	
Species	Angler Interest Score	Species	Angler Interest Score
Walleye	2.84	Black crappie	2.53↑
Bluegill	2.53	Walleye	2.47↓
Black crappie	2.39	Bluegill	2.20↓
Northern pike	1.55	Largemouth bass	1.93↑
Largemouth bass	1.45	Northern pike	1.73
Smallmouth bass	1.19	Yellow perch	1.64↑
Yellow perch	1.10	Smallmouth bass	1.57

Major changes between 2004 and 2024 include:

- Increased interest in black crappie, which supplanted walleye as the top species
- More interest in largemouth bass and yellow perch
- Less interest in walleye and bluegill, but both still ranked in top-3.

General Management Preferences

The questionnaire asked anglers if they preferred a management approach that emphasized size, abundance, or a mix of size and abundance for each major species in Nelson Lake.

“Balance” between size and abundance was the most popular response for all species in the 2024

survey. This differs slightly from 2004, when a majority of anglers indicated a preference for size-based management for northern pike and largemouth bass (“Balance” was the preferred approach for all other species in 2004).

The questionnaire also asked if anglers preferred catch and release, harvest, or a management approach that balanced both. Again, 2024 anglers indicated a preference for “balance” for most species. However, “catch and release” was the most popular response for the two bass species.

Specific Management Question

Two questions were asked on the 2024 questionnaire that related to specific management issues or topics in Nelson Lake. The first question dealt with angler attitudes about pike regulations and harvest (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Northern pike question, response options, and percent of respondents selecting each option in the 2024 Nelson Lake Fishery Survey. Based on 229 responses.

New angling regulations are being considered for northern pike in Nelson Lake. Which of these best describes your attitude towards northern pike in Nelson Lake:	
I prefer the current regulation and trophy management approach	16.7%
I am interested in more pike harvest opportunities, while maintaining a trophy management approach	36.6%
I would prefer a harvest-oriented approach to pike management that does not include trophy management	22.9%
I am not interested in harvesting pike of any size, regardless of the angling regulations	23.8%

Anglers were somewhat split among different pike harvest and management approaches, but the most popular response (36.6%) was to retain a trophy management approach while still allowing more pike harvest. The current regulation does not appear to be popular, with just 16.7% of all anglers selecting that option.

There is considerable interest in the walleye fishery in Nelson Lake, as demonstrated by high ratings from anglers, interest in a tribal subsistence fishery, and considerable investment

of time, money, and effort that has been put into managing the walleye population. However, combined walleye management efforts have not been very successful at achieving walleye objectives in Nelson Lake, prompting a question to get angler feedback on future directions for walleye and broader fish management (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Walleye question, response options, and percent of respondents selecting each option in the 2024 Nelson Lake Fishery Survey. Based on 229 responses.

For close to 20 years, DNR, tribes, and the Nelson Lake Association have worked to increase the abundance of adult walleye through stocking, protective regulations, promoting harvest of other species, and habitat manipulations like drawdowns. These efforts have been unsuccessful at returning walleye to their historic abundance, primarily because walleye no longer reproduce naturally in Nelson Lake. Virtually all available management approaches have been attempted, using significant resources (money, time, stocking investment) from the groups working on the issue. Which of these approaches for the future of walleye in Nelson Lake do you most support?	
Focus future time and effort to maximizing quality in other areas of the fishery (panfish, pike, bass)	45.7%
Focus on creating “new” fishing opportunities that have not existed in the past on Nelson Lake (specific ideas would need to be generated)	9.4%
Continue to put time and energy into the walleye fishery, repeating past actions and seeking new management actions that may arise in the future, even if it means spending less time on other species.	44.8%

Respondents were almost perfectly split between an approach that would shift focus to species other than walleye and an approach that would continue the same walleye-centric strategies. Many who wanted to continue walleye management expressed frustration that the specific reasons walleye were not succeeding in Nelson Lake were not fully understood.

Less than 10% of respondents preferred an interest in “new” fishing opportunities, with introduction of muskellunge being a popular idea among this group (Note: introduction of any new fish species requires careful evaluation and there are currently no plans to introduce new fish species into Nelson Lake).

- Max Wolter DNR Senior Fisheries Biologist

Actions and Recommendations

This survey effort was initiated because Nelson Lake is at a potential turning point in its fishery management history. While walleye were the dominant species for about a 20-year span ending in the 1990s, efforts over the next 30 years to restore high levels of walleye abundance have been unsuccessful. Most available walleye management rehabilitation strategies have been applied, with limited or no success.

Other important species like panfish, northern pike, and largemouth bass have received less attention from fisheries managers while the focus has been on walleye. These species are equally or more important than walleye to many anglers, and they can be managed without significant cost inputs (stocking).

The results of this survey point towards the following recommendations and actions from DNR and partners like the Nelson Lake Association (NLA):

DNR Actions and Approach

1. **Propose new pike regulations** – Northern pike abundance has increased while size has decreased over the last 10 years. Anglers do not favor the current regulation and would like to see more harvest opportunities for pike while maintaining an overall trophy management approach. A proposal for a 25-35” protected slot limit has been submitted for internal (DNR) review, and if approved, would move to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress for consideration. Public input will be included in proposal review. Regulation changes for other species may be proposed in the near future, but pike regulations showed the most immediate need for change based on population data.
2. **Conduct surveys to fill information gaps** – There are multiple areas where additional information is needed to guide management. Firstly, DNR will continue to monitor walleye recruitment to the extent possible, particularly following stocking events or any fall/winter drawdowns that may occur in the future. Additional information is also needed regarding panfish recruitment and growth to generate strategies that might improve panfish size. Stakeholders must understand that survey frequency by DNR will be dictated by time demands, staffing, and funding.
3. **Provide expert consultation and guidance to partners** – NLA has expressed interest in privately-funded walleye stocking, future drawdowns, and other activities. These activities may be particularly important for stakeholders who want to see a continuation of a walleye stocking program in Nelson Lake. DNR will have a role in reviewing stocking permits, making recommendations, and providing survey data on stocking results (when possible). Additionally, DNR will review any proposed drawdown plans developed by Sawyer County (dam owner) in consultation with NLA and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Proposed Partner Actions and Approach (Nelson Lake Association and others)

1. **Walleye stocking** – NLA was issued a private stocking permit for walleye in 2023. Private stocking can continue, with rates and frequencies largely set by NLA.
2. **Shoreline habitat improvements** – Tree drops and “fish sticks” have been added to most of the public shoreline of Nelson Lake, totaling over 1,000 trees. While most of the publicly-owned shorelines have received woody habitat additions. Very little has been done on private shorelines. There is huge potential for wood addition in these areas, considering that they make up a bulk of Nelson Lake’s total shoreline.
3. **Shoreline best practices** – Private shoreline owners also have an important role to play in preserving/improving water quality and near-shore fish habitat. Learn more [here](#).

Nelson Lake Association

2024 Raffle



Enter
to Win

**Tickets are \$10 each,
or 3 for \$25**

- 500 tickets sold; 3 prizes raffled
- Tickets available for purchase at the NLA Annual Meeting June 8 or at any Nelson Lake Resort



1st Prize
Raffled



36" Blackstone Cooking Station

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- Includes electric pump & tow rope



3rd Prize
Raffled



Yeti Soft Cooler

Hopper Flip 18

- Fits 30 cans (only)
- Fits 28 lbs of ice (only)

Winners will be drawn
at the NLA Annual
Picnic on August 17.
Need not be present
to win.



WinterRama - January 6, 2024



WinterRama started with a hike on TagAlder Trail instead of the Big Island Ski Challenge due to lack of snow cover needed for skiing on the ice. About 20 people participated in the hike. All enjoyed the beautiful trail on a very nice winter day.

The Chili and dessert contest started at noon. There were about 8 Chile entries enjoyed by about 40 people. The winner was Dave Yohnk. The desert contest winner was Cathy Yohnk.

TOWN OF LENROOT-REPORT



Road projects last summer in addition to the normal maintenance activities included new blacktop on Christiansen and James Roads and short segments on Boedecker and Tanning Point Roads. Anticipated projects for next summer include a new culvert on Porky's Road on Mosquito Brook estimated to cost \$100,000 (50% of which is covered by grant). Porky's Road will be closed for about a week sometime in August - September to allow for this work. Also, we plan to install new blacktop on Simons Rd. and segments of Nelson Lake Rd. and Company Lake Rd.

Soaring real estate prices over the last few years requires a complete township reassessment, which began last fall and will continue this year. Property owners will receive a post card from our assessor Claude Ringlemon explaining the process and what he will need from you. Your property value will probably rise, but since the township levy has been essentially frozen since 2011, the township portion of the tax will probably be about the same as the last few years.

A new set of children's playground equipment was installed at the Nelson Lake Park. This was purchased by the Nelson Lake Resort Association and assembled by town workers. In addition, blacktop was laid around the shelter with a path to the parking lot. About half of the cost was covered by the Nelson Lake Association.

Thank you to both organizations for the support.

Check out the township website at www.townoflenroot.net for information about township meetings, recreational facilities, voting, taxes, and other information.



NELSON LAKE PARK BOAT LANDING REPAIRS

Gordy Christians (4/3/24)

This landing was developed in 2012 to provide public access to the west side of Nelson Lake. Four 8' x 14' cement pads were pushed into the lake sliding on a pair of steel guard rails laid on the lake bottom, and joined together with galvanized steel cable. After 8 years, the cables had rusted away and the pads began to slid around leaving large openings between the pads. In addition, the practice of power loading boats had created a scour hole at the deep end of the ramp causing problems for those who backed their trailers into it.

The 2020 drawdown to 4' below normal, allowed us to reposition the pads and make new connections between the pads (completed work shown in the pictures). This work could not have been done underwater. In the three years since then, the landing has received increased use and the practice of power loading has continued. The scour hole has again appeared. Lower than normal water levels due the drought has exasperated the problem.

To again address this issue and hopefully solve it into the future, we intend to install another pad to the deep end of the ramp, attach it to the existing pads, and add large rip rap rock beyond that. This work can not be done under 4' of water so we are proposing another 4' drawdown this fall using the same schedule as 2020.

A review of the information from the last 4' drawdown in 2020: We started September 15th and reached 4' on October 28th (42 days). A more rapid drawdown is possible but probably not desirable because of potential fish stranding in the lake and flooding downstream. I know some of the resorts want as late a drawdown as possible, but DNR wants it as early as possible (turtles, frogs, etc.). If we get rain or have a drought, timing could be shifted. (Launching a boat should continue to be possible at Gerlach Landing and probably some of the private launches unless they have a big boat.)

So, as a suggested option (lower to 4' beginning in October then refill after the work is done) if we got approval to have a later start - say October 1 (probably unlikely given DNR interests) that would be the middle of November to reach 4'. Allow a few days to do the work then start filling, we could have ice forming before we reach even 2', especially since inflow would be slowing down and at least 10 cubic



feet of water per second needs to be released to maintain river flow. Rising water would leave thin ice along the shorelines which might persist into the winter if we get snow cover. (It took 34 days to refill with a 2" rainfall plus snow melt in 2021.)

I don't know how to satisfy everyone, still do a 4' drawdown which will be needed to repair the boat launch and still regain enough water to reliably have good conditions for ice fishing and snowmobile access.

2024 WALLEYE STOCKING PLANS

Gordy Christians

Background: *Nelson Lake had high walleye numbers in the first fifty years after flooding with a shift to high crappie numbers in the last forty years. In both cases, as numbers increased, individual fish size decreased. To try to shift fish populations back to more balanced population of predator/prey, stocking extended growth walleyes (5" – 6") was begun in 2003 with a few hundred per year to 25,000 stocked by DNR every other year. It was felt that larger walleyes avoided losses to predation. DNR stocking ended last year so NLA purchased a small number extended growth walleye from the St Croix hatchery.*

After more than twenty years of stocking tens of thousands of extended-growth walleyes at up to \$3- \$4 each, there has been very limited success. The NLA board felt it was time to reassess the program and try to determine the cause or causes of our failure to significantly increase walleye numbers.

Analysis: During the previous twenty years weather was within the normal range of conditions for northern Wisconsin. In all cases, the fish being stocked appeared to be healthy with very few or no mortality at the stocking sites, No dead fish were seen in the weeks following stocking (though cold fall water may have played a part in this). All of the hatchery fish had been grown in ponds and fed a steady diet of minnows to keep them from cannibalizing each other. (With the exception of the one year that minnows were stocked with the walleyes there was no concentration of food at the planting sites.) During the twenty years that stocking was done, crappie (and to a lesser extent bass) numbers were high with large numbers being relatively small. By the spring following stocking events, few or none of the stocked fish were seen by fishermen or by DNR surveys.

If disease, water temperature, lack of dissolved oxygen, or predation were not obvious consistent causes of mortality, the only other logical cause would be starvation. If there was a normal amount of prey available at any one site, a concentration of hungry predators (the young walleyes) could have depleted it in short order. Also, hatchery raised fish being accustomed to being fed and not having to hunt for their food might not disperse far enough to avoid starving. In addition, large numbers of 4"-6" crappies could have easily depleted any natural walleye reproduction thus keeping overall walleye numbers from any source depressed while their numbers increased. (Suckers and bullheads have also declined.)

The plan: To test this theory, we plan to purchase and stock about 9500, 2 ½"-3" walleye fingerlings in late June/early July in an effort to taking advantage of large numbers of "young of the year" pan fish and lake flies that appear in midsummer that they could feed on. These fish, from the St. Croix tribal fish hatchery, will have been fed minnows for around two weeks so should be focused on eating them instead of plankton that they had been fed earlier. The cost of these fish should be around \$.79 each. In addition, we plan to stock these fish at several sites around the lake.

This stocking plan needs to be done over several years to cover year to year variations in weather, prey availability, and predator numbers. Compared to natural reproduction, 9500 is a pretty small number so change may not be evident for a number of years. A more balanced fish population should begin to show a smaller number of crappie of larger average size and increased numbers of walleye.

HAYWARD, WI

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Thanks to all the volunteers that make Nelson Lake a fun place to live and play. Your assistance with the many activities the association hosts during the year is much appreciated. Our association depends on volunteers like YOU!



REGULATIONS



NELSON LAKE

Species	Season	Daily Bag Limit	Length Limit
Walleye	General gamefish*	3	18" minimum
Northern Pike	General gamefish*	1	32" minimum
Largemouth Bass	General gamefish*	5, both species combined	None
Smallmouth Bass	Catch and release only from first weekend in May to third weekend in June		None
Panfish (Crappie, Bluegill, Yellow Perch, Sunfish)	Open Year Round	10 combined	None

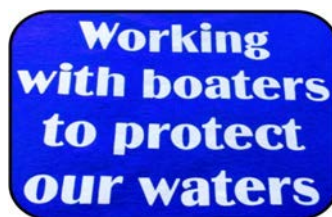
*General gamefish season runs from the first Saturday in May through the first Sunday in March

3-line fishing and motor trolling is allowed (3 hooks, baits, or lures per person)



The purpose of the Association is to preserve and protect Nelson Lake and its surroundings, to enhance the water quality, fishery, boating safety, and aesthetic values of Nelson Lake as a public recreational facility for today and for future generations while respecting the interests of property owners and the public and to provide the opportunity for fellowship among Association members.

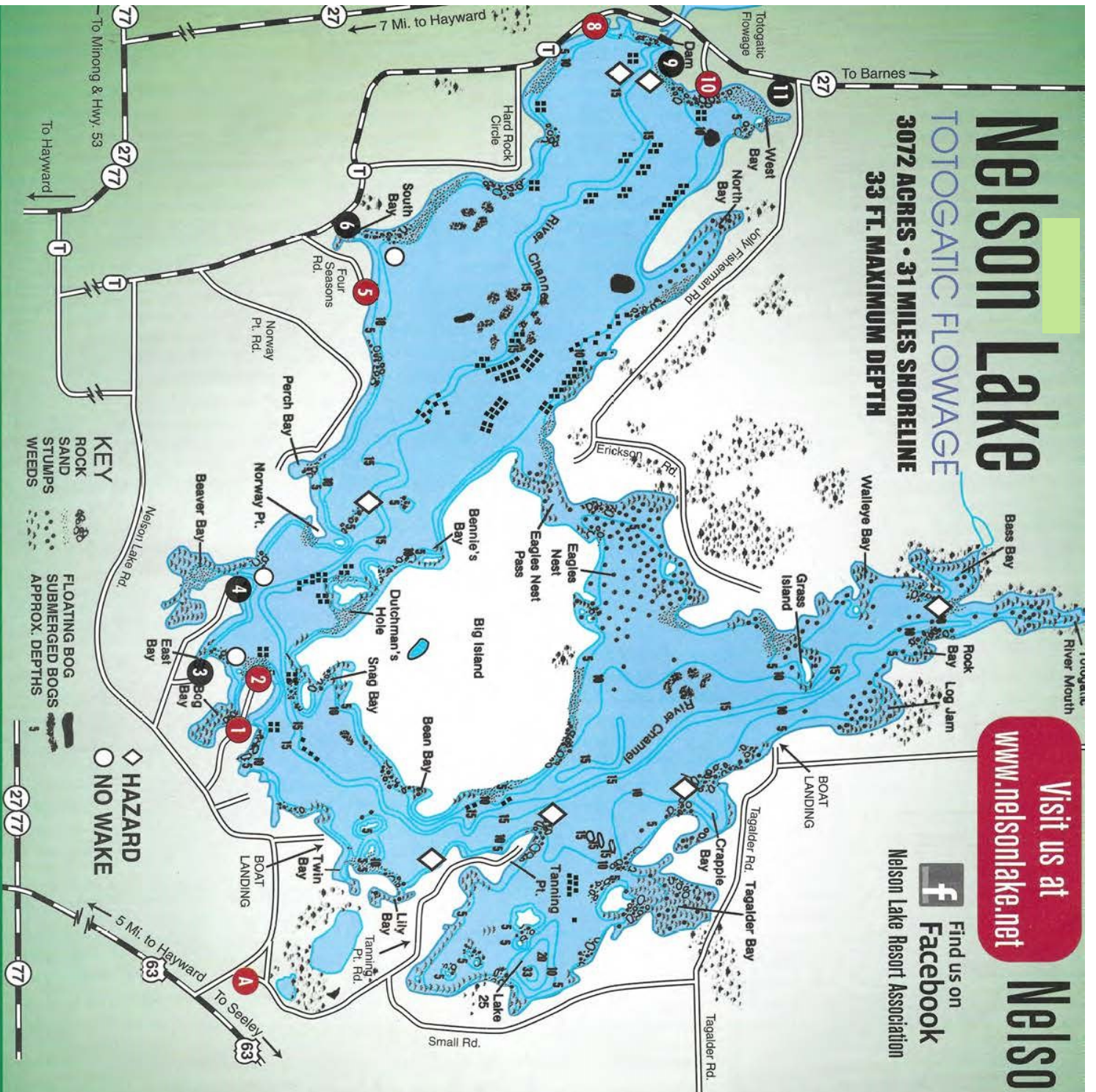
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 Nelson Lake Association is a 501(c)3
 Non-profit Organization



Nelson Lake

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Obey Marker Buoys. Major Hazards and No Wake areas are marked for your safety and to protect shorelines from erosion.

Protect Wildlife. Nelson Lake has a variety of wildlife including loons, eagles, ducks and geese. Give them a wide berth so they can remain undisturbed.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Hayward, 715-634-2688

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