**Big Fish Lake Association August Board Meeting**

**August 12, 2020; 6:30 pm at Kit’s home**

In attendance: Kit Ferber, Mark Backes, Bill Unger, Doug Adamek, Chris Wenner, John Ronning, Megan Johnson, Matt Peters, Josh Hirschfeld, Jim Sand

1. Call to order (6:36 p.m.)

Meeting minutes from January approved and posted on the website.

1. Treasurer’s Report – Matt

Currently the BFLA account has $19, 759.41

1. Membership Drive Update – Donation total: $34,166
   1. Member donations total $28,441 from 157 families – 80% participation rate.
   2. Business member donations total $2,225 from 16 businesses. BFLA has three new business members: Granite Pest Control, Agency North Real Estate, and Anchor Dock.
   3. The association received a grant from the Collegeville Township of $3,500.

1. Legacy Campaign – Matt and Josh
   1. Finalizing BFLA sign to put on Josh’s property along County Road 50 to raise awareness for the legacy campaign.
   2. Current fundraising totals are $95,000 in the BFLA Conservancy Fund and $101,000 in the BFLA Emergency Fund, both funds are managed by the Initiative Foundation.
   3. The board discussed when to renew meetings with lake owners about the campaign. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the board will renew fundraising discussions through email, phone calls, and video chats rather than in-person meetings.
   4. With many new property owners on the lake, the board discussed starting a BFLA Welcome Committee to meet with new property owners, introduce them to BFLA, and discuss AIS and shoreland protection. The board agreed a welcome committee would be nice but put the idea on hold due to COVID-19.

1. Update on outlet

The lake outlet will be cleaned and the fee of $150-300 will be covered by Collegeville Township. Cleaning the outlet maintains lake water level neutrality. If the outlet is not periodically cleaned, water levels go up and shorelines erode.

1. High weed amounts washing up on shorelines – Matt

There have been many letters, phone calls and text messages to Kit regarding the vast amounts of the weeds that are predominately washing up on the east side of the lake. Several people thought the weeds were being pulled from somewhere, but this is one of the side effects of having zebra mussels in our lake. The water clarity has increased which allows more sun to get to the weeds and help them reproduce faster. The weeds we are seeing now are called water celery weeds. The plants have long linear leaves, growing up to 9 feet long and one inch wide. After the weed grows to full size, it has air bubbles in its leaves and has a very small root system. The air in the leaves actually pull the roots out of the bottom of the lake and float to the top, all of which is a natural phenomenon.

1. Starry Trek

A statewide event called Starry Trek will take place on August 15 to focus on searching for one of Minnesota’s newest aquatic invasive species, starry stonewort. In Stearns County, 22 volunteers will team up with the University of Minnesota to check local lake access points for starry stonewort. Matt Peters, John Ronning, Jill Kelley and Luke Ellis were assigned to Big Fish Lake, Clear Lake and Big Watab.

1. The board discussed checking bladders on wake board boats for invasive species at the public access. Checking bladders is not currently routinely done although it is included in the DNR protocols for inspectors. Members commented that it would be difficult to check since the boats are hard to completely empty and even when empty, there is often no way to check hard tanks.
2. Dead Loon – Kit

A dead adult loon was found on the shore of Peanut Hill in July. It did not look like it had been hit by a boat or motor so it may have died from natural causes. Unfortunately, the DNR is understaffed during the pandemic and could not take the bird. If dead loons are found in the future, the U of M will take them for research.

1. Loon nests – Matt

Three of the lakes’ loon nests have loons on them this summer. There were 6 baby loons earlier this summer, but unfortunately only 4 of them have survived.

1. Blue Water Science

Matt Peters will schedule a lake survey with Blue Water Science this fall to do a comprehensive search for AIS.

1. Member donations for research

BFLA currently has $3,341 from additional donations dedicated for lake research. The board discussed supporting Minnesota Lakes and Rivers (MLR), the University of Minnesota’s St. Anthony Falls healthy water initiative studying boat wake impacts on Minnesota lakes, and the University of Minnesota’s Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MNAISRC).

***Mark made a motion to pass on donations to wake boat research, Matt second. All were in favor.***

***Mark made a motion to donate $1,000 to MLR and $1,000 to MAISRC, Chris second. All were in favor.***

1. Request for Loon Crossing sign between Hermit Lake and Big Fish Lake on Hwy 50. Mark volunteered to look into the issue with Stearns County.
2. Boat inspections – Kit
   1. New Request for Proposals coming out in October
   2. The board discussed updating the number of hours for boat inspections at the public access from 10 hours per day on Monday through Thursday to 12 hours per day and from 12 hours per day on weekends and holidays to 14 hours per day. Kit will report back to the board the numbers from this year to see where additional hours are needed. The board discussed adding hours for the busiest times of the summer and possibly some weeknights as well.
3. Website updates

An updated bio is still needed on the website for John Ronning. Hailey will change the date on the January minutes from 2019 to 2020.

1. “License” membership signs for docks – Kit

Neil and Nancy Fandel have offered to donate BFLA signs for members to display on their docks similar to what other lakes have done. There was a discussion about whether or not the signs should be for all lake association members or for legacy campaign contributors. Kit is looking into what options would be available for the signs.

1. Property concerns:

Over the summer there have been a few property concerns over the clearing of vegetation without county permits and building a lakeshore structure larger than the ordinance allows. County ordinances require property owners to meet with the county and obtain a permit prior to cutting/removing vegetation. And, “water oriented accessory structures” must not exceed 10 feet in height or occupy an area greater than 150 square feet.

One property in the Alexander development removed significant trees and vegetation without a permit from the county. The first, was determined to be in violation of Stearns County Environmental Services guidelines and their building permit. The county is requiring the property owners to plant 85 trees and adhere to a vegetation plan; however, the property owners have decided to appeal the county’s decision and will be on the Stearns County Board of Adjustment agenda in September. On the second property, the County determined there has not been a violation. Several trees cut down were hollow, which would qualify for diseased or a safety hazard. During the site visit the county noticed the slope towards the lake needed further stabilization and will be contacting the property owners for mitigation.

A third property on the lake was found to be in violation of the county ordinance for a new shed near the shoreline that exceeds structure limitations.

Since the county is the enforcing agency for these types of violations, the board discussed what role the association should play in shoreline protection. The board decided to write a letter to the county board of commissioners stating their concerns with property violations, requesting the issue be on out on an agenda for county discussion, and inviting county commissioners to a BFLA meeting to further productive discussion on the topic.

1. Future meetings: Last Wednesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m.

September 23– next regular meeting at Kit’s, if needed. Megan will look into possible virtual meeting options since Zoom will limit us to 40 minutes.

1. Adjourn (8:41 p.m.)