

Big Fish Lake Association Annual Meeting  
Collegeville Township Hall  
June 13, 2026

Written by Kit Ferber

Board Members present: Mark Backes, Kit Ferber, Matt Peters, Hailey Wachlarowicz-Bayer, John Ronning, Nancy Van Erp and Bill Unger.

1. Called to order at 8:34 am by Mark. The theme this year: "You spoke, we listened!"
2. Mark welcomed the group. There were approximately 70 people in attendance with several new attendees. The agenda was introduced along with all of the Board members.
3. First Speaker was Jeff Bertram, County Commissioner for District 3 that represents 35,000 residents. He emphasized that "Nobody is going to take care of your lake like you!" WaterGuards Inspection Agency has a new manager now so inspections should continue as it should. We were reminded that the AIS Grant Program through the DNR is now going to be cut in half in 2027. Jeff handed out information regarding the County's information on items such as Shoreland Restoration, the Five Star Program and the AIS program.
4. The next Speaker was Colin Mitchell from the DNR Fisheries Department to talk about the BFL fish lake surveys which are taken every five years. It was noted that we are the only lake named "Big Fish Lake" in the State. The last survey was taken in August, 2025. We have a very low number of walleyes and stocking is done every other year with 386 pounds of fingerlings. Apparently, the zebra mussel infestation has not affected the number of walleyes according to Colin. The northern pike were low in numbers and have a poor average size, large-mouth bass were low but of a good average size. The more pike there are the smaller the fish will be in the lake. The DNR stock fingerlings during odd numbered years at 2 pounds per littoral acre of which we have 184 littoral acres at BFL. It was noted that the water in our lake is in great shape!

Future plans: The DNR is working on improving our fish population. The next survey will be done in 2030 along with a reevaluation of the stocking plan. It was asked if zebra mussels villagers (baby zebra mussels) are being eaten by the fish and Colin said he did not know. They have not done any research on that. He also noted that spawning beds should be left alone if at all possible in May and June but the beds are pretty healthy.

5. Noah from Lake Shield I-LID Company spoke next. Due to the cut in the AIS Inspection Program, the I-LID was put in place to help us oversee boats coming in and out of the access when there are no inspectors available. The I-LID is solar and cellular enabled along with announcing messages that are tailored to our lake. Cameras record the launches and exiting of all watercrafts. Reports are compiled for us to review. Violations may or may not be followed up depending on the local enforcement regulations and availability.

Our inspectors are at the landing on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays along with all holidays. The unit will be moved in the winter to protect it from the harsh weather. A new bigger and heavier base will be provided for the unit so that it won't get pushed over. The I-LID does get several false positives and they are able to filter that information out. Historically, there has been very little vandalism.

Hot weather over 100 degrees can affect the camera performance but the reports come in after the system cools down.

The company is working on increasing the volume but want to respect the noise level for the local residents. It was discussed that Noah will look into having Bluetooth speakers closer to the dock to help people hear the messages clearer. Right now the speaker is set at 30 decibels. A homeowner brought up privacy concerns regarding the camera and pictures that it is taking.

6. Membership Update: There are 213 parcels on the lake with 181 members which puts us at an 81% participation rate which is the best in the state! We have collected just under \$45,000 at this time! Congratulations, Big Fish Lake!
7. Other items of interest:
  - We purchased the I-LID unit to help with inspections.
  - We are monitoring the inlet and outlet on the lake thanks to Allen Schmitz.
  - We introduced the use of maps to show where wake board boats should go on the lake. This practice was picked up by Minnesota Lakes & Rivers (MLR) organization and is now being implemented throughout the state. Another feather in our cap for BFL!
  - The 'boat towel' was introduced and handed out to members to further educate boaters on how to protect our lake.
  - Annual water quality research, Secchi dish readings and AIS inspections continue thanks to Matt Peters and Jim & Rose Sand.
  - BFL website and social media will be expanded to continue educating our readers and to help with notices for the lake thanks to Hailey Wachlarowicz-Bayer and Nancy & Kate Van Erp.
8. Placements of AEDs were discussed. Thanks to John & Gail Ronning, John & Kim Unger and Jamie & Jodi Pelzel for having these at their homes. A huge thanks to Doris Westra for getting this program started.
9. Income sources were discussed:
  - BFL Apparel Store thanks to Doris Westra. We get 10% from the proceeds.
  - Business Advertisers in our newsletters
  - Collegeville Township Grant
  - Membership dues
  - Stearns Electric Round-Up Grant
10. Expenses were covered:
  - Purchase of the I-LID
  - Inspectors at the landing
  - Constant Contact for our newsletters
  - Mailings
  - Website domain fees
  - Boat towels
  - Misc. costs
11. John Pearson suggested that the Township signs should be updated and repaired along Schulz Road. John Ronning made note of this to report back to the Township.
12. In 2025, it was noted that homeowners were mostly concerned with weeds such as celery weed, wake board boats and jet ski usage affecting shoreline erosion. In 2026, the BFLA will introduce the Lake Steward program to evaluate your shoreline to see what best practices could be effective for the lake.

We need a small committee to promote this. Mark and Peg Backes are going to have an event at their home in August to introduce the program.

Other items will be introduced as well in 2026:

- Expand social media by being on Facebook and Instagram. There is a QR code now available to get on these sites.
  - Introduce Venmo to receive payments for dues and contributions
  - Expand water quality and testing
  - Expand the Emergency Response Plan particularly for Starry Stonewort
  - Expand involvement with the MLR and the U of M research programs
  - Formalize a task group to help identify aquatic invasive species
13. A water quality report was submitted showing how well our lake is doing. The total Phosphorus, Chlorophyll-a, Secchi depth and the Trophic State Index are all improving with over 90% confidence and are in the better-than-expected range. A huge thank you to Broderick Espelien for helping Matt Peters with the Secchi dish readings!
  14. The results from boat inspections in 2025 were introduced showing a total of 3,590 boats were inspected. The most popular type of boats that entered were 1,700 fishing boats, 685 pontoons, 647 runabouts, 237 personal watercrafts and 212 wake board boats.
  15. Mark showed a slide for the tools that can be used at the landing to take weeds off of boats coming out of the lake.
  16. A vegetation survey was done back in September of 2025 by Steve McComas from Blue Water Science with Matt Peters' help. Starry Stonewort is not in our lake at this time.
  17. Matt discussed his work on the salt level of Big Fish Lake. He designed a tool to help detect how much salt is in the lake especially next to the old beach next to County Road 50. We have worked with the County to try and reduce the amount that is laid down during the winter but have had no luck in changing the distribution levels at this time due to safety concerns. Note: one teaspoon of salt will affect a gallon of water.
  18. There are five baby loons (loonlets) now on the lake. Thanks to Ted Ruzanic, Joe DesJardins and Mark for maintaining and putting out the nests when the ice was off of the lake. Earlier this Spring, Erika Gilsdorf, a podcaster, worked with Mark to talk about our loon nest program. The podcast will be shared in a future newsletter.
  19. A fun picture was shared with the group that showed "Ruegy", long-time resident of BFL and father of Todd Ruegemer and Danna Sobania wrote down when ice was out down in his basement on studs starting in March, 1981. Todd took over for his dad now.
  20. Dave Carlson has a friend that acquired the original fishing boat that was used in the "Grumpier Old Men" movie starring John Lemmon, Walter Matthau, Sophia Loren and Ann-Margret. The boat was displayed outside of the Hall next to a letter of authenticity from Warner Bros. so that pictures could be taken. Some attendees even dressed up as some of the cast members. The boat is for sale if anyone is interested. Mark replaced the seats in the boat and was giving away pieces from the original seats.
  21. Todd Van Erp discussed ideas for social gatherings. Having a community for BFL is important to keep us all connected so that we can work together to solve problems that come our way. We will send

out a survey to get ideas from the homeowners. One event that was introduced by Albie Kraemer was to have an event called the “Fishing Has No Boundaries”. One example was that he and other volunteers took Vets to Mille Lacs Lake to go fishing and it was a huge success. He would like to see this program reintroduced and he needs help to do this. Special Needs programs will provide help if needed.

22. Elections: Kit, Megan and Bill were reelected for another two-year term. We do have one opening on the Board if anyone is interested. Contact a Board member if you have any questions about the position.
23. Door Prizes were handed out. Thank you to Doug Adamek for his woodworking donations.
24. Meeting was adjourned at 10:43.