



## Protecting our Waters

This handout provides information and resources for community members interested in helping to protect our waters in Winnebago Pool lakes area, including Oshkosh and surrounding communities.

### Why Protect our Lakes?

The Winnebago Pool lakes--Winnebago, Butte des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan and their connecting rivers--lie at the heart of a rich aquatic ecosystem and define the lifestyle of our community. They are an important part of our natural heritage and a mainstay of our local economy, providing abundant opportunities for boating, fishing, swimming, hunting, snowmobiling, bird watching and lakeside living. These lakes also provide the drinking water for many communities throughout the local region, including Oshkosh.



### Some Important Water Facts:

- The Winnebago Pool lakes make up the largest inland freshwater lake system in Wisconsin, encompassing over 166,000 acres. They include 17 percent of Wisconsin's surface water and drain 12 percent of the state.
- Over two million people live within 75 miles of these lakes. About 12,000 properties occupy their shores. More than 200,000 people, including residents of Oshkosh, Appleton, Neenah and Menasha, draw their drinking water from these lakes.

- These lakes are rich in natural habitat, support numerous wild life species and are home to the largest lake sturgeon population in the world. They are second only to the Mississippi River in boater popularity and provide a wide variety of other recreational opportunities, including fishing, swimming, bird watching, hunting, snowmobiling and scenic viewing.
- **Among the major threats to these lakes are polluted runoff, phosphorus loading, aquatic invasive species, eroding shorelines, loss of natural habitat, and urban development.**



## Ten Simple Things You Can Do To Protect Our Lakes

If you live in Winnebago County, all the water that passes through your home and lawn will eventually end up in one of the Winnebago Pool lakes or the Fox or Wolf rivers. That means what you do in your home has a big impact on water quality. Here's how you can help improve the water quality of our lakes and rivers.

1. **Keep household hazardous waste out of storm drains.** The storm drains in front of your house usually end up in a stream or other waterway. Take used motor oil to the city Yardwaste/Used Motor Oil Drop-Off Facility on Idaho Street (just off of Witzel). Other hazardous wastes, such as antifreeze, unused pesticides and paint, can be taken to the Winnebago County Hazardous Waste Facility for proper disposal. Visit [http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/Solid\\_Waste/HazMat.htm](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/Solid_Waste/HazMat.htm) for more information.
2. **Keep animal waste out of streams and waterways.** When you walk your pets, pick up pet waste whenever possible. Avoid feeding waterfowl since their waste add bacteria and other harmful pathogens to water.
3. **Keep your lawn clippings on your lawn after mowing.** This is not only easy to do, but the grass clippings will serve as fertilizer for your lawn as they decompose, reducing your need to apply fertilizer. Eliminate or minimize your fertilizer and pesticide usage. If you do use lawn chemicals, keep them off sidewalks and driveways and out of storm drains. Compost your yard waste.
4. **Direct downspouts away from paved surfaces.** Hard surfaces serve as a conduit straight to the storm drain and directly to the waterway. Use the water for your yard.
5. **Take your car to the car wash instead of washing it in the driveway.** Road salts and other waste you wash off your car can contaminate ground and surface water.

6. **Use asphalt based, not coal tar, sealants if you reseal your driveway.** Coal tar contains high levels of PAHs—polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons—which have been linked to lesions in fish and cancer in humans. Runoff from driveways with PAHs builds up in sediments in lakes and streams.
7. **Dispose of old medicines safely.** Don't throw them down the toilet or the sink drain. Watch for medical collection programs in the community. Recent research suggests medications should be kept out of waterways to prevent adverse reactions to fish, other wildlife. Visit our **Medication Disposal handout** for more information.
8. **If you live near a stream ...** plant trees, shrubs, and native shoreline plants near the stream instead of grass. They will help stabilize the banks and shade the water, keeping it cool for fish. Use native vegetation whenever possible.
9. **If you have a septic system...** have it cleaned out every two to three years and check for leaks. You can call the Winnebago County Health Department if you suspect you have a leak at 920.232.3000.
10. **If you have a boat...** prevent spreading aquatic invasive species. Inspect your boat, trailer and equipment and remove visible aquatic plants, animals and mud before leaving the water access. Drain water from your boat, motor, bilge, live wells and bait containers before leaving the water access. Don't move live bait from one water body to another. See our **Sustainable Boating handout** for more information.

## To Learn More:

University of Wisconsin-Extension Water Resources  
[www.uwex.edu/ces/](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/)

Winnebago Land and Water Conservation Department  
<http://wclwcd.org>

Winnebago Lakes Council  
<http://www.winnebagolakes.org/>

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource Water Protection  
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/environmentprotect/water.html>

US Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water  
<http://www.epa.gov/ow/>



Protecting our Waters handout developed by Jan Scalpone, Sustainable Oshkosh Board member, with assistance from Justin Mitchell, Sustainable Oshkosh Board member, January 2009. Tree in Menominee Park photo by Justin Mitchell; Goose on Miller's Bay photo by Mandy Mitchell; Shells on Lake Winnebago photo by Mandy Mitchell