

1 - Lake Stewards Help Lake Associations and Lakeshore Owners Achieve Their Water Quality Goals

By Jeff Forester, Executive Director, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

Bart and Cyrus became Roosevelt Lake property owners after an extensive search. They wanted a property within a 2-hour drive of the Twin Cities and spent every weekend for 3 months searching. They finally found a place on Roosevelt Lake that was two and a half hours from their metro home.

Their new lake place is an A-frame style, log sided cabin. They started renovations inside, first updating the kitchen, then finishing the basement, building a garage and updating the septic system.



The steep driveway created a challenge especially in the spring with frost still in the ground and a slippery, sloppy, muddy thawed layer on top. It was a perfect recipe for gully washes with spring rains. The solution was constructing a small paved driveway with a drain underground.

As they remodeled they cut as few trees as possible and took steps to avoid soil compaction.

With their cabin in shape they began to work restoring the land in their care. The grade sloped steeply down to the lake. After communicating with the RALALA lake association they became concerned about runoff from their two-acre lot and 107 feet of shoreline. They planted a variety of trees, and planted native wildflowers and grasses in their upland zone.

They built a bee hive and surrounded it with electric fencing to discourage bears from damaging it. They have noticed a huge change since converting the groomed lawn to native vegetation and eliminating use of pesticides, fertilizers and insecticides on the property.

There are many more animals, birds and insects including the endangered native rusty patched bumble bee. They now hear cricket serenades at night. Their property is the perfect advertisement that natural, native, undisturbed vegetated spaces become wildlife sanctuaries and corridors. They enjoy an abundance of birds—all kinds of woodpeckers including the raucous pileated woodpecker, turkeys roost in their pines at night, and an amazing variety of



other birds visit their feeders. A barred owl has nested and raised young for the past several years in a dead tree on their lush acreage.

“Many people ask why Lake Stewards are encouraged to leave dead standing trees if they can safely do so,” said Jeff Forester, Executive Director of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates. “The reason is that standing dead “snag” trees are important habitat for many, many species that people value, including owls, pileated woodpeckers, porcupine, wood ducks and other cavity nesters.” When these trees fall they add nutrients to the soil, promote mushroom and insects that birds and other animals rely on as food sources. If they fall into the water, they provide critical habitat for many fish species.

Bart and Cyrus enjoy watching and photographing their wildlife visitors which include cougars caught on critter cams, deer, skunks, raccoons, squirrels, chipmunks, coyote and a fox and woodchuck that have established an Air B & B arrangement by taking turns residing in a borrow abode.



On the shore they nurture a buffer of native plants. The bulrush bed in the aquatic zone has begun to expand now that the aquatic plants are not disturbed.

The two have made remarkable progress on their lake sanctuary, but still they want to do more. Through the Lake Steward program coordinator on Roosevelt Lake, they reached out to Sheila Boldt, a Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District technician.

She made a site visit and has given them suggestions on how to further enhance the landscape. Even though Bart and Cyrus have exceeded all of the Lake Steward criteria, they intend to implement Sheila’s suggestions and continue to find more ways to prevent runoff, improve habitat, and get greater value and enjoyment out of their dream property.

