

Weed harvester halted by state shutdown

BY PAM FISTERE
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During the recent state shutdown, the weed harvester on Lake Minnewawa was halted. The Lake Minnewawa Association (LMA) does not receive state funds to run the harvester (it is financed by membership, business and other local group donations along with fund raisers), but since a DNR permit is required to run a weed harvester, they were told they were not allowed to operate during the state shutdown. The letter received on June 30 by Greg Pfeifer, president of the LMA, states in part, "Because there will be no DNR staff available to receive notice, inspect aquatic plant control being performed, or inspect mechanical control equipment, all APM (Aquatic Plant Management) permits will be suspended in the event of a state government shutdown until state offices re-open for business."

Some people don't believe in the weed harvester and feel that cutting the weeds causes them to grow more. Steve Olson, LMA board member has an answer to that, "If that was the case, then they would have never needed to harvest here in the first place." In the 1970's Lake Minnewawa was so choked with weeds that residents could no longer enjoy the lake as they once had. "People have pictures of ducks walking across the water on top of the weeds," says Steve.

Besides the weeds, the water clarity and the phosphorous levels were awful. People would pull their docks out of the water in July because boating

See **HARVESTER** page 2

was impossible. A group of concerned lake residents decided they needed to do something to save the lake. On December 15, 1977 an association was formed calling itself Save Minnewawa Association.

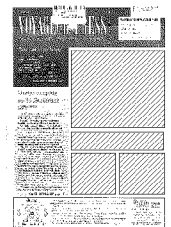
In 1982, the association purchased their first weed harvester and trailer. This har-

vester was replaced by a larger, used one in 1994 which is still in use today. It took eighteen years for the association to feel that sufficient improvements had been made to the lake. But finally in 1995, they were able to change the name of the association from Save Minnewawa Association to Lake Minnewawa Association.

Since the harvester has been in use, not only have the amount of weeds decreased, but the water clarity has significantly increased. "Last year one site where we do a second reading, we had to move to deeper water," recalls Steve. "It was that good. The last secchi out was over 9 foot." That's compared to some area lakes where the clarity reading is only inches.

A big reason for this is because there are fewer weeds dying in the lake and decomposing in the bottom of the lake. Also, the weeds contain a huge amount of phosphorous which is being removed along with the weeds. The more phosphorous in a lake, the more algae growth, therefore the lower the water clarity. "If our trailer's full we're pulling out 9,000 pounds, 3 tons of weeds," says Steve. "And every bit of those weeds contain phosphorous."

When the weed harvester is full of weeds, Lyle Marsyla, LMA member drives it to the shore and unloads it onto the



LMA's trailer. "The weeds are dumped off of the harvester onto the back and then it's all conveyer run," says Lyle. "You pull it forward as you dump and then when you go to unload you just go back and it pushes it off." John Montour, another LMA member then drives the truck pulling the trailer to the dump site. "All the weeds have to go to the DNR dump," says Lyle. "You can't just dump them anywhere." LMA leases that land from the DNR.

Since the weed harvester runs five days a week about eight hours a day (weather permitting) for three months out of the year, that's a lot of weeds that get removed. "If it weren't for the harvester, there wouldn't be a lake, not anymore" says Lyle. "It'd be all full of rice and full of weeds, there'd be no fishing or boating."

Lyle doesn't harvest the entire lake, there is a no cut area where they don't cut at all. Plus, there are certain things that Lyle doesn't cut. "We're not allowed to cut wild rice and we don't cut bulrushes, we don't cut lily pads," explains Lyle. "We don't cut them because that's part of it, DNR doesn't want to and the sunfish are in the lily pads."

The board has heard the suggestion of controlling the weeds by using chemicals instead of the weed harvester. The cost of the chemicals is very prohibitive though. "It was \$250,000 dollars and we had to treat it for the first 5 years twice a year," says Steve. "So it'd be a half million dollars." Compared to the approximately \$25,000 a year it takes to run the weed harvester.

The work required to run the weed harvester is immense. "There's a lot of hours donated by the board members and volunteers," says Lyle. "We have some real good young board members now."

"Real go-getters," adds Steve. And those go-getters are really needed with the current economic climate. "Prices go up, donations go down," says Steve. Even the price of the annual permit has gone up. "A few years ago it was under \$20, now it's \$400."

Of course, the cost of running and maintaining the weed harvester itself is also increasing. "The one we've got, it's probably '87 when it was built," Lyle says. "So we do a lot of maintenance on it."

The biggest fundraiser that LMA has every year is it's Labor Day weekend garage sale. They are currently collecting dona-

tions of quality items (excluding clothing) every Saturday morning, 9:00 a.m. until noon at their garage. By the time of the sale, the large garage is usually packed full of items. "We are a non profit organization so all donations to the sale are tax deductible," says Greg.

This year they are adding one more fundraiser that will be held at Bann's on August 20 from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This event will include a beanbag tournament and lots of great prizes, including Twins and Wild tickets and a four person hot air balloon ride.

The association will be holding their annual meeting soon and that is a great place for people to go and hear exactly what the weed harvester is all about. The meeting will be at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 13 at the Minnewawa Sportsmen's Club.



Photo by NEIL SAMPLE Voyageur Press

Weed lift: Weeds make their way up the front of the conveyor belt on the weed harvester. At the top of the photo the blades are cutting while under the water. Approximately one hour of cutting the weeds filled the harvester up.

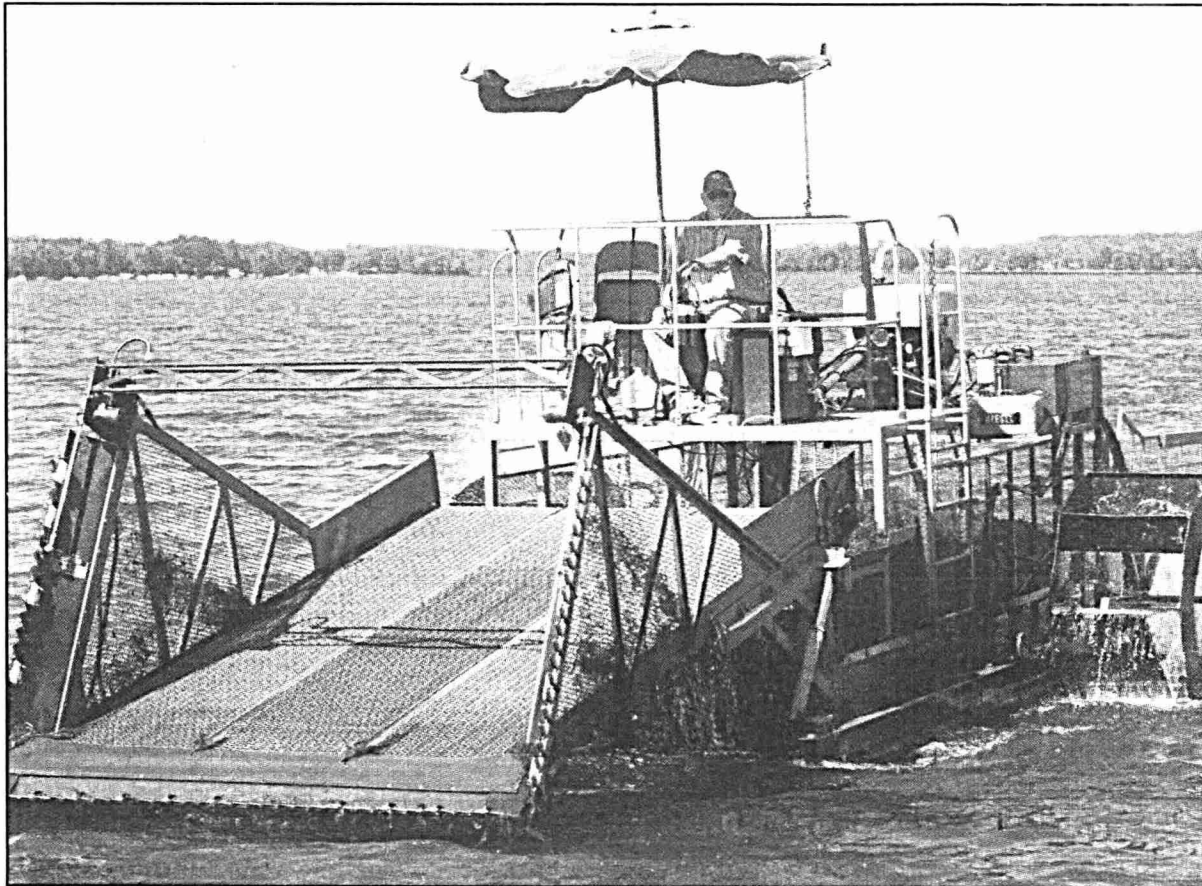


Photo by **NEIL SAMPLE** Voyageur Press

Weed eater: Lyle Marsyla cruises to shore with half a load of weeds on his first day back in action. Lyle and the machine were shutdown due to the recent state shutdown, but started up again last Thursday.