



## How to Develop a Lake Management Plan

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While Michigan has a variety of laws that regulate activities in and around lakes, there is not a state-wide strategy that addresses lake-specific management issues. It is often the property owners around lakes who must take the initiative to get organized and make something happen.

There is no panacea or “one-size-fits-all” in lake management. Each lake is different and what works on one lake may not be appropriate or effective in another lake. For example, in a high-quality lake with few aquatic plants and good water clarity, reducing nutrient inputs to the lake may be the most effective way to preserve water quality. However, in a lake that naturally supports abundant aquatic plants, reducing nutrient inputs may not have much of an impact. That is not to say nutrient reduction is not important, but one must know how a lake may respond to management measures before embarking on a management plan. This allows for a more efficient use of time and often limited financial resources.

Ideally, a lake management plan should address both short-term improvements (e.g., aquatic plant control) and, to the extent practical, long-term pollution abatement issues (i.e., watershed management). However, in the context of this article, a lake management plan can encompass anything from a plan to control an invasive aquatic plant to watershed management. Regardless of the scope of the plan, the steps outlined below will probably apply.

**Get Organized:** The first order of business is for people to get together and decide they want to do something. Many lake management plans begin with a lake association or a group of property owners who share common concerns, and a desire to make something happen.

**Get Help:** Seek out and get input from someone with expertise in lake issues. This could be a university professor, a county or state agency or a **lake management consultant**.

- **Get the Facts:** In devising a lake management plan, it is important to get the facts. An evaluation of the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of the lake should be performed and an analysis of the watershed should be conducted to evaluate land uses, soils, and drainage features.
- **Identify Problems:** Identify specific problems that the lake management plan needs to address: Are invasive aquatic plants a problem? Is fertilizer runoff a problem? Are there too many boats on the lake? On many lakes, the management plan will need to address a variety of issues.
- **Identify Solutions and Costs:** Once problems have been identified, corrective actions and management strategies can be defined. The benefits can then be weighed against the costs.



**Build Consensus:** Effective communication is often the key to success in lake management. These days, people appear to be busier than ever. Make sure you make the most of people's limited time. Attempt to communicate in a clear, concise and factual matter. By disseminating information regarding the proposed scope and cost of a management plan, people are in a much better position to make an informed decision on moving forward with a particular management plan.

**Get Financing:** Obtaining financing is often one of the biggest challenges in implementing a lake management plan. Evaluating funding sources and fundraising can be a time-consuming (and sometimes thankless) endeavor. In some cases, sufficient funds can be acquired by increasing association dues or through voluntary contributions. While there are some grant programs, competition is generally keen and grant requirements can be narrowly focused and cumbersome. (You can't expect them to just give you the money.) Many grants have an extended time period between the grant application and actual award of funds which, in turn, complicates planning. Many communities have opted to establish **special assessment districts** to finance lake management plans. With this approach, all property owners who benefit from the project pay a fair share. With costs equitably distributed amongst benefitting property owners, individual costs can become much more reasonable. A special assessment district can enable projects to be tackled that would otherwise be financially out-of-reach.

**Get Going:** Implement the plan and take comfort in knowing you have taken action to protect one of your most valued assets — your lake.

#### **About the Authors:**

*Tony Groves, Pam Tynning, and Paul Hausler have nearly 70 years of combined experience working as lake management consultants with Progressive AE in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Tony, Pam, and Paul created MichiganLakeInfo.com, a website for those interested in Michigan's inland lakes. On the site you can find this article and information on topics such as lake water quality, watershed management, aquatic plants, lake levels, lake improvement boards and more.*

