



# Forming a Lake Association

## Starting and Running an Effective Lake Association

### Fact Sheet

Lake associations give a voice and means to discuss and act on common issues and events and have been very successful for helping to safeguard Vermont lakes through a variety of activities.



### Why Have an Association?

Associations form for many reasons. It is good to have a diversity of issues or reasons to get together as it will help give the group staying power. In Vermont, lake associations have often predated environmental or water quality concerns about the lake.

#### Common Reasons Lake Associations Form:

- Private road maintenance
- Fire and theft protection
- Social gatherings
- Outlet dam ownership
- Water quality monitoring
- Exotic species spread prevention or control
- Loon protection
- Boating safety
- Shoreland protection and management
- Watershed protection and management

Together you can learn about the lake ecology and management and present a cohesive voice to the town and state governments to seek the best for your favorite lake.

### Forming a Lake Association

If you live on a lake without an association, you may be interested in getting together with your neighbors to address lake issues of mutual concern. Here are some suggestions on how to go about starting an association.

Assuming you have several to many people living on or interested in a lake, you can be sure there will be a variety of philosophies and expectations about how the lake should be managed. A key to success is to be skilled at finding common ground and knowing when to compromise.

First, get together informally once or twice to discuss your concerns and ideas. Possibly there will be a range of opinions about what problems there are and what the solutions are. Make it a point to not decide on a course of action until you gather more information. Make lists of issues, what you want to learn, and a short-term plan to move forward.

#### Benefits of working together:

- To develop a partnership with your lake neighbors
- To develop a communication network for sharing lake news
- To raise awareness of lake issues in the community
- To launch fundraising events and apply for grants
- To develop a wise long-range lake management plan
- To focus the wide range of skills and knowledge the group possesses
- To gain strength in numbers



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Get to know those who have gotten together. Identify someone to provide leadership to organize the next meetings. What skills and knowledge are present in the group? Decide when to meet again. Divide the work of preparing for the next meeting among yourselves.

Make new people feel welcome. Bring them up to date and be sure to ask them about their particular concerns. Acknowledge that your association will likely include people with a variety of skills and background and that your organization will only be stronger for it.

Educate yourself about what is already known about your lake and what has occurred there in the past. Contact the VT Lakes and Ponds Section (see Lake Protection Series #8 "Lake Monitoring and Obtaining Water Quality Data.") Also you can contact your District Fisheries Biologist, or the Watershed Coordinator (if there is one in your river basin area). Most likely you can get one of these people to attend a meeting and discuss your concerns with you and help provide direction.

If after this much activity the group still wants to gather and work together, begin to discuss formalizing your group. An example by-laws for a small association are available upon request from the Federation of VT Lakes and Ponds. Identify volunteers to fill positions such as president, secretary and treasurer. The most important reason to adopt by-laws is to ensure everyone has the same expectations about how the group will function.

After you have met a few times list, decide on your goals and objectives. These need not be complex, just make sure everyone agrees where you are headed. If your organization is forming because of one issue, be sure to quickly incorporate other "easy" issues to help give your group staying power and a chance for success. Identify your priority work areas and set up committees as necessary. During this process it may be necessary to table some controversial concerns until the group has more of a history of working together. Try to encourage an atmosphere where people can give a little to get more by working together. Start with a few short-term projects that have a good chance for success that everyone can agree on. This will build confidence and a sense of purpose.

By forming committees you can provide people and opportunity to work on what they are interested in or skilled at. Examples of committees:

- Community outreach
- Education (of members or landowners)
- Lake Monitoring
- Fundraising
- Publicity
- Special projects

### How to get to know your neighbors

- ~ Coffee hour
- ~ Potluck barbeque
- ~ Beach party
- ~ Pontoon boat tour
- ~ Canoe race
- ~ Progressive dinner
- ~ Shoreline litter pick-up
- ~ Walking tours
- ~ Bird/nature walk



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Once you get organized, don't lose sight of the basic jobs of keeping an organization together:

- Keep everyone informed, from membership to town officials
- Keep everyone informed regularly (so you don't appear secretive)
- Take everyone's opinions into account, address all concerns even if you can't agree or can't accomplish everything.
- Keep yourselves informed; attend conferences and workshops, get on the mailing list of relevant organizations, and talk to others interested in the same issues on different lakes
- Revisit your goals and objectives and revise your work plan at least once a year.
- Try to have the association board meet once or twice during the off season so you can "hit the ground running" during the summer.

### Jobs to Share

- ◇ Invite speaker
- ◇ Make posters announcing meetings
- ◇ Write newspaper announcement
- ◇ Keep membership list
- ◇ Telephone potential new members
- ◇ Visit neighbors
- ◇ Find meeting place
- ◇ Collect information booklets
- ◇ Arrange snacks
- ◇ Keep record of what was discussed at each meeting
- ◇ Make list of local officials
- ◇ Make lists of local groups





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### Hold a Public Information Meeting

Once you have begun to get organized, you may be ready to hold your first public information meeting. This could be a meeting to formally organize or an invited speaker on a lake issue, or a working meeting to gather public information and opinion. Such meetings help build your reputation in the community, keep people informed that you are active (even if they don't attend the meeting), and help spread the conversation about lake issues.

#### *Three months before the meeting:*

- Select a time, day and location to avoid conflict with other events.
- Reserve a convenient spot large enough to accommodate your expected attendance. Be sure to consider accessibility for elderly or people with disabilities.
- Friday nights are sometimes a good compromise between town residents and lake residents who may be only up for the weekend.
- Invite everyone, lake and town residents alike, check with the Town Clerk for addresses.

#### *One month before the meeting:*

- Prepare an agenda, let all the speakers know how much time you are giving them. Be sure to allow time for discussion and questions.
- Publicize the meeting through several means: press releases; newspaper and radio paid notices; posters at local public locations; mailed invitations and phone calls. Reminder phone calls can be very effective at increasing attendance.
- Identify people you would especially like to attend and personally invite them.

#### *One hour before the meeting:*

- Put up signs outside to help people find the meeting and parking.
- Inspect the logistics of the meeting location, are doors unlocked, lights working, chairs and equipment set up?
- Have extra agendas and a sign in sheet. Greet people at the door as they arrive.
- Start on time and stay on schedule.
- Introduce yourselves, and do introductions around the room if the crowd is not too large.

### Tips from the Trenches on Keeping an Association Alive and Productive

**Keep everyone up to speed.** Disseminate regular information to all who might be or should be interested in what you are up to. Your association members are obvious, but also remember town select boards and commissions, town residents, other local organizations whose goals might overlap such as a fish and game club, regional organizations, the Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds, state employees, and your local legislators. Contact them more often than the times you are asking them to do something for you.

**Different people want to get involved in different ways.** Some people do not want to attend meetings but are very happy to show up on a work day. Others may not have the availability to work all day on a Saturday but can help do preparation or research during the week. By knowing individuals' preferences you can avoid burning out your volunteers, spread the work around and take advantage of people's particular skills.

**Never underestimate the power of food.** Provide snacks at all meetings!

**Make things happen.** People are more likely to get involved if they think you can be successful.

**Partner.** For example, fundraisers for the fire department and ambulance give something back to the