

IN THIS ISSUE:

BSLA ANNUAL MEETING

June 11, 2011
Big Sand Bar
9:00 AM
Guest Speakers
Board Member
Elections
NEW Logo Items
for Sale

FABLUOUS SPORT FISH

Spring fish
assessments and
new regulations

AND THEN THERE ARE THE REGULARS:

- President's letter
- Did You Know...
- Sheriff Turner
- Q&A



BSLA members are welcome to attend the Board of Directors meetings held from 8:30 -11 AM on the 2nd Friday of each month, except for December & February, at the Grace Lutheran Log Church on CR 14.

Website:

www.BSLAssociation.org

BIG SANDY LAKE ASSOCIATION

MAY 2011

President's Letter

Jim Krezowski

Winter is gone, I thought, until today when snow was falling and blowing across my deck. In the fall we wait for the white stuff and now that it is spring we don't want to see it anymore!

With spring comes our yard and beach cleanup, docks go in and boats once again traverse our beautiful lake.

Our Voyageur newspaper of last November 16th had a great article on a contest by Fifty Lakes, MN radio station KLKS re: our duty to clean our boats and keep them clear of invasive species, pull our drain plugs out when transporting our watercraft, not to transport live minnows etc. from lake to lake. Let's stop the spread of invasive species. Help keep our lake number one.

Remember that slot limits are in effect and the reason for them is to improve our fishing in numbers and size. Keep aware as we fish and work together to improve our fisheries.

Your lake association has been criticized for not being active enough in handling property owner's requests for help with shoreline and other problems. BSLA is not an enforcement agency, nor can we stop boaters or ATV operators in violation. We can and do contact the proper agencies to the problems we see and ask them to keep us informed of their actions to carry out the law. This, as examples, involves speeds, damage to others' property, shorelines, and personal inconveniences such as dumping or leaving trash and garbage in sight of neighbors' properties.

Many have been upset over the bright strobe light at night on the NE side of BSL. Our investigation brought us the following response and I wish to quote Commissioner Napstad on this:

"With regard to the tower that everyone hates. The State of Minnesota did not ask us if they could build the tower, they told us they were building the tower and that while Aitkin County can

enforce their ordinance requirements upon citizens and businesses, the State has no obligation to follow then. Of course they also throw in the old cliché 'it's about public safety' - meaning if you disagree with them you wish harm to all."

This is a reminder for those who haven't paid their 2011 dues - We appreciate you sending them in especially since many funding organizations including the state of MN, have cut back or eliminated funding for some of our programs, such as boat launch monitoring. We are looking for volunteers to be trained to help monitor our landings.

I thank you all for your support and look forward to seeing you at The Big Sandy Lake Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 11th at 9AM at the Big Sand Bar. We promise you an interesting program.

We are a Star Lake. Let's pitch in to keep it that way.
Many thanks to all of you.



Thinking Spring

Scott Turner
Aitkin County Sheriff



As this newsletter hits your hands, the calendar will say spring, but given the way this year has gone, it may not yet feel like spring. Most certainly many of you will have begun those outside activities to make your lake home ready for the coming summer season.



Yard cleanup – with all the leaves, grass and branches – results in people wanting to burn those items. Remember that a permit is required to burn those materials for other than a “camping” fire. “Campfire” means a fire set for cooking, warming, or ceremonial purposes, which is not more than three feet in diameter by three feet high, and has had the ground five feet from the base of the fire cleared of all combustible material. Shamrock Township has a composting site near the town hall which may be a better alternative to burning.

The buoys will be going out soon, however, be mindful of the possibility that new hazards may appear with the decrease in water levels. As always, if you observe something that you think should be marked, or if you have any other lake concerns, please give us a call.



Once again, we should all be thinking Stewardship. Not just how we treat the land, water and air that we enjoy around Big Sandy Lake, but also the stewardship of our neighborhoods. How we conduct ourselves in relation to others on the lake and how we look after our neighbors property when they are not around. Get to know your neighbors and look out for one another. Working together we can have crime-free, conflict-free neighborhoods for all to enjoy!

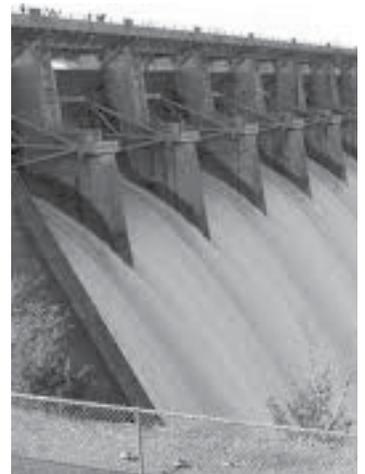
As always, enjoy that great natural resource that you have just outside your door – Big Sandy Lake - but do so Safely!

Q&A

Q: *With all the snow we’ve had this winter, in addition to the water remaining in the ditches from last fall, how has the Corps managed the dam this spring to avoid high water levels on Big Sandy?*

A: *Furnished by Jeffrey L. Steere, US Army Corps of Engineers*

As a whole the Mississippi Headwaters Project was very wet last fall going into the winter. Our efforts focused on passing as much water through the system as possible before the snow melt began this spring. Fortunately we were able to draw all of the lakes down to or near their minimum drawdown levels including drawing down Big Sandy Lake 2 feet. With the gradual snow melt and by holding the lake levels on Big Sandy and Pokegama Lake lower in March than in the past we have been able to minimize the large spike in the water elevation on Big Sandy. With all that said we typically have 1 to 1 ½ inches of precipitation in March where as this year we only had .47 of an inch of precipitation, which makes a big difference in managing the spring time water levels.

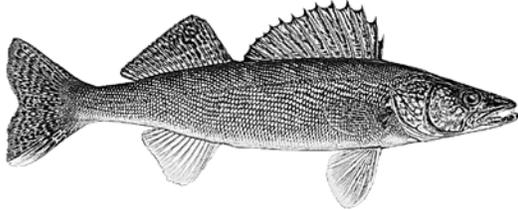


Greetings Big Sandy Lake Association!

First thing, I am very sorry I won't be able to attend your annual meeting this year. It appears that both you and Farm Island Association changed your meeting dates from the later June 25th date to June 11, and I made a commitment with Farm Island more than a year ago. In any event, I will be happy to send one of my staff who can give you a quick review and to hear directly from you how the fishing season is progressing with the new regulations.



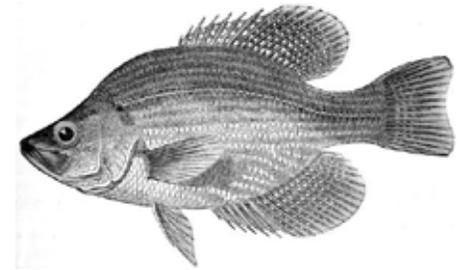
**Rick Bruesewitz,
DNR Fisheries-Aitkin**



I suspect walleye harvest will be way, way down! It appears there are two pretty good year classes that will be in the 10-12 inch range this spring, which is still too small to be harvested under the new regulations. Given the age and size of the fish, it may be one to two years before you really see the benefits in the harvest of 14+ inchers, as the 2007 and 2008 year classes grow up. We will continue with our planned

annual fall electrofishing assessment to monitor the recruitment. This will be the third year so we will start to get a feel for what different electrofishing catch rates mean at Big Sandy. In addition, as I've mentioned before, there will also come a time when it will seem that the only fish out there are 13.9 inches long! Be patient, they will eventually get bigger.

Another thing you should see for the next couple years is some pretty good crappie action. There are two pretty strong year classes (2005, 2006) that are now about 10-11.5 inches. These year classes look just as strong as the 2002 year class, which has supported your fishery for the last 5 years or so. In addition, during our fall electrofishing sampling we saw more young of year crappie than we have ever seen, anywhere! I'm not yet sure what to make of this yet, since we really want the walleye to increase in abundance, not necessarily crappie. I suspect that over time, the numbers of walleye in the system will put a cap on these bigger year classes of crappie. But in the mean time, enjoy!



One last thing that I wanted to mention is in regard to your Lake Management Plan that you developed last summer for your Star Lake status (congrats again on that!). The one thing I noticed that I don't think I would support is your desire to "enhance" a largemouth bass fishery on Big Sandy.

Here's why... Largemouth bass are increasing all over the NE part of the state. They are becoming more abundant in lakes that always had them, and they're showing up in lakes where they had never been observed.

Largemouth bass also have a tenuous relationship with walleye. In some of these lakes where they are increasing, walleye are decreasing. Whether it is because the bass are eating the walleye themselves, or are competing directly with walleye because they are preying on a common forage item, or that these changes are only coincident with increasing water clarity in some lakes (which favors bass and is a disadvantage to walleye), we just don't know.

What we do know is that there is a growing concern regarding trying to manage for both species in the same water body. To that extent, we (the collective DNR) have put together a group of biologists to look into bass management a little more closely, and as information becomes available I'll let you know. Now that's for largemouth bass – smallmouth bass are a different story altogether. If you'd like to do some management that may benefit smallmouth bass in the Big Sandy system, I would not argue, but rather encourage such activities. Smallmouth bass are not nearly as voracious as largemouth bass, and have not been observed to prey upon, or compete with walleye (they really like crayfish!). They are a fabulous sport fish, and already appear to be increasing in abundance.

Take care, and may your shorelines stay in one place this spring!

Did You Know...?

By Robert O. Harder

Since the first European immigrants began permanently settling in the Big Sandy area, circa 1870s, there have been many colorful characters living and/or working on and around the lake. We have previously written about a number of them, including such notables as Bill Horn, Jim Murphy, "Doog" McDougal, Professor Irving Hart and William Ingersoll, and the Libby boys. We thought you might enjoy hearing the personal story of another of these early pioneers, a fellow who is barely remembered today but in his time was arguably eastern Aitkin County's greatest independent logger.

Ed Douglas was born a Canadian in 1850, immigrating to Minnesota in 1867. He settled in the village of Aitkin in 1876, engaging in the lumber and hotel business. In 1881, in association with two other local businessmen, Douglas formed the Aitkin Lumber Company. The new firm flourished, with "the sawmill [Aitkin's first], planing mill, boom, and yard furnishing employment for seventy men . . . cutting fifty thousand board feet per day with perfect ease."

In the 1890s, wishing to expand his operations into the prime forest ground surrounding the McGregor/Tamarack area, Douglas formed a new partnership with fellow Aitkin businessman, Frederick Bonness (who apparently provided the financing). Together, the two formed the Sandy River Lumber Co., with its headquarters at Tamarack. The new firm grew by leaps and bounds, operating a large merchandise store, sawmill, several lumber camps, and, most importantly, controlled several thousand acres of prime pine timber. Nearly all their wood production was driven down the Sandy River, a relatively short stream sourced two miles south of Tamarack. It wound its way westerly to McGregor, swinging northwest into and through a small chain of lakes, and then on to Sandy River Flowage and Davis Bay in Sandy Lake.

In 1940, Clifford Greer, a Depression-era writer we have mentioned previously, interviewed Jim Murphy, another prominent local logger. Murphy said that in the 1890s, Ed Douglas cut and drove down the Sandy River and into Sandy Lake several millions of board feet of "christly big pine logs," which were eventually sluiced into the Mississippi River through the lock at the new government dam at Libby and finally driven to various sawmills downriver. According to Murphy, these logs were so huge, a large "artificial dam" had to be built across the Sandy River "at the head of Steam-Boat Bay [Lake]" in Jevne Township, located just above Davis Lake, which is about two miles from the entrance to the Sandy River Flowage.

Stories of the area's great white pines were still being told in Tamarack as late as the 1950s. This writer heard more than one old-timer state that the

biggest trees he'd ever seen in Minnesota were the virgin giants near Tamarack--one grove north of town and another south. There were perhaps only two or three dozen of these truly great giants, almost California Redwood-like trees that were so huge they made the many thousands of "standard" three to five foot diameter white pines seem scrawny. A persistent local story (this writer hopes someday to verify it) talked about one particular huge white pine that was harvested from a knoll one-half mile south of Tamarack. A section of it was said to have been loaded on a Northern Pacific flat car at the Tamarack siding and shipped to Chicago. This great "chunk" reportedly was between 6 and 7 feet in diameter and was supposed to have been displayed in the Forestry Building during the 1893 Columbian Exposition (the first World's Fair).

Whether such Paul Bunyan tales can be believed or not is always a question--old-time loggers were almost as good story tellers as modern day Sandy Lake walleye fishermen. Still, there can be no doubt about the essentials. In this case, just one man, Ed Douglas, extracted tens of millions of board feet (a board foot = 12" by 12" by 1" thick) from eastern Aitkin County. Almost certainly, the Aitkin Lumber Co./Sandy River Lumber Co., in toto, produced more finished lumber, railroad ties, fence posts, etc. than any other entity in the region, save the Weyerhaeuser interests headquartered in Cloquet and Little Falls.

However, as with all "booms," the bonanza was short-lived. By 1905, the best of Douglas' timbered tracts had been logged over; by 1908 all the great virgin trees and many lesser stands were gone. At the start of the World War, Ed's business interests had been reduced to his Tamarack merchandise store and the income he received as the local postmaster. Comfortably well-off, Douglas closed his businesses in 1918, passing away in 1922.

Fortunately for logging era history, fragments of the Sandy River Lumber Co. business ledgers survived, providing us with a "fossil" as valuable to understanding the richness bound up in virgin white pine forests as "Sue" the T-Rex was to dinosaur paleontology. The company's "Cash Book," the primary accounting record used in pre-Federal Income Tax days, disclosed that during the period 1900 to 1902, cash payments of \$1,000 each was paid every seven to ten days to Ed Douglas' partner, Fred Bonness. A quick calculation shows those three years of payments, separate from what Ed Douglas paid himself, amounted to roughly \$120,000, a number that would have brought tears of envy to even the most successful of their contemporary Klondike Gold Rushers.

Annual Meeting Special Guest



One of the guests scheduled to address our Annual Meeting on June 11 is Keri Hull from the DNR's Watercraft Inspection program in Brainerd.

Keri will discuss a shift in how the DNR plans to combat the spread of invasives in 2011 and will share an interesting presentation on how to inspect your own watercraft for aquatic invasive species. If you're interested, she'll also conduct a walk-around inspection of a boat on-site after the Annual Meeting has adjourned.

In addition, Keri will be conducting a special

training session at a later date (likely the week of June 13) for any lake association members who would like to join our volunteer inspectors program. We'll be looking for volunteers to spend time at our access points this summer to inform lake users about the spread of invasives and to ensure that their boats are clean prior to launch.

Please consider joining our volunteer corps and be sure to attend our Annual Meeting for more information.

Letter from the Editor...

Bruce Johnson, Editor, BSLA Newsletter

Please remember that your Big Sandy Lake Association's Annual Meeting is on Saturday, June 11th at the Big Sand Bar. We will begin at 8:30 AM with rolls and coffee and an opportunity for non-members to sign up to join. The actual program will begin at 9 AM.

We will have a table set up with BSLA logo items available to purchase and door prizes will also be given away at the meeting.

We are also looking for some new applicants for the association's Board of Directors. If you would like to submit your name, or someone else's to be included in the election process, please send an email to BSLA@bslassociation.org with ELECTION

as the subject line. We will contact you for further information. Remember, you must be a member of the association in order to vote in the election.

The Question and Answer column in the quarterly newsletter has provided some interesting and informative reading for all. I would like to again invite you to submit your questions about issues around the lake that are of concern or interest to you. We will continue to do our best to get an appropriate answer to all issues submitted by contacting the person/agency best suited to give the correct answer.

We hope to see ALL Big Sandy residents attend and participate in the annual meeting.

BSLA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**ON THE
WEB...**

www.BSLassociation.org

UP-COMING EVENTS AND AREA INFORMATION

You can find updates, copies of newsletter articles, coming events and area information, as well as the minutes of the monthly board meetings.



BIG SANDY LAKE ASSOCIATION

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