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## IN THIS ISSUE:

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LETTER FROM  
JIM KREZOWSKI

SNAILS,  
SMELLS &  
SEPTIC SYSTEMS

BIG SANDY LAKE  
FOUNDATION  
FUNDRAISER

RECENT  
FLOODING AND THE  
DAM SYSTEM

10 LAKE TIPS for  
cleaner/healthier water

AND THEN  
THERE ARE  
THE REGULARS:

- President's letter
- Editor's Letter
- Did You Know...
- Sheriff Turner



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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 January, at the Grace Lutheran Log Church on CR 14.

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**Website:**

[www.BSLassociation.org](http://www.BSLassociation.org)

# BIG SANDY LAKE ASSOCIATION

AUGUST 2012

A Minnesota *Star* Lake

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## President's Letter

Bruce Johnson

It's been a couple of months since Jim Krezowski retired from the position of President of the Big Sandy Lake Association due to ongoing health issues and I was named President going forward. Jim has been a stalwart supporter of maintaining and improving the quality of Big Sandy Lake and it will be hard to fill his shoes. So far, it has been very interesting and due to the flooding, very difficult as well.

I might as well jump in and talk about the problems we've all had with the recent floods. The high water level has caused overwhelming difficulties for so many, and there is so little any of us can do about it. There was no way anyone could have predicted that the lake level would rise so high and so fast – five feet in five days is pretty unbelievable.

I personally worked very hard to move docks and boat lifts at our place and at our neighbors, just to get them as far out of the water as possible. After all the hard work, I looked around and found that nothing looked any better, maybe even worse. My high water problems were nothing compared to so many others who had water inside their dwellings with no electricity and no way to get to or from their homes. To all of you who had really difficult times with flooding inside your homes, our sympathies are with you and we are happy that things are finally getting back to normal, for which we can all be grateful.

The assistance that has been provided by Sheriff Turner, Commissioner Napstad, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Shamrock Township employees and the Lake Country Power employees cannot be praised enough. They and many others did everything they could to lessen the problems and help us out. We should all be very appreciative of their hard work and assistance on our behalf.

We did learn a lot from this flood experience, maybe even more than we wanted to know. If we ever have another rainfall of 9-12 inches within a four or five day period we need to get to work preparing for the lake to rise from 4 to 8 feet. That means you will need to get everything possible to high ground and if you know that water will fill your dwelling, you need to find another place to stay for about 4 weeks. Most of us also learned about the charts available from the Corps of Engineers on the Internet to track the water level on an hour-by-hour basis.

On another subject, the Board of Directors of the lake association volunteered to help at the 5K run sponsored by the Big Sandy Lodge on May 20<sup>th</sup>. A total of 64 runners signed up and ran a route from the Lodge out to County Rd 14 then down 14 and back to the Lodge. I was very impressed by Don and Elisa Proulx and their family. They worked very hard to make the run successful and I am hoping that this will become an annual event with growing interest and attendance each year. Your Lake Association was the beneficiary of the proceeds from the run and for this we are also very grateful.

I would like to welcome two new board members, David Schaaf and Ben Gisselman to the BSLA board. We are lucky to have them, and look forward to working with them both. Janet Hill will take over as editor of this newsletter and I'm sure she'll do a wonderful job. Also, Andrew Streeter and Brian Herbranson will be back to work with Tom Peterson making sure that we have volunteers for the boat landings for invasive species inspections. A special thanks to Brian and Andy for keeping the BSLA website updated during the flood. Many of you depended on this website for the latest flood information.

Unfortunately, May, June and most of July were not the most pleasant or enjoyable summer months for any of us. However, now that the lake level is down to near normal levels, we can get back to enjoying the rest of the summer on beautiful Big Sandy Lake. Have fun – be safe!



## Letter from the Editor... Janet Hill, Editor, BSLA Newsletter

Each summer the Big Sandy Lake Association board rearranges itself, and this time I ended up as editor of the newsletter -- a job I'm happy to take on. We all learned this summer how vital it is for Big Sandy property owners to have a way to communicate with each other. The BSLA provides it, through this newsletter and our website at [bslassociation.org](http://bslassociation.org). Your constructive input is important, so please email or call me with any suggestions on what kind of information you'd like to see.

A few flood-related items to pass along: If you are elderly or disabled and need help with flood cleanup, or if you are willing to volunteer to help with cleanup efforts, please contact the Aitkin County CARE office at 218-927-1383. Volunteers are needed!

Sheriff Turner and his staff have helpfully set up a "lost and found" service for items washed up on shorelines. If you have lost an item, or found one, please call the Sheriff's office at 218-927-2138 and leave a description. They'll try to match things up the best they can.

If you have other questions about flood-related issues, you can call the Aitkin County Sheriff's Office at 888-900-2138 or 927-7400. Or, visit the county website ([www.co.aitkin.mn.us](http://www.co.aitkin.mn.us)), which is the go-to place for up-to-date emergency information.

John Sturner reports that the BSLA, MNDot, and the Star Lakes Board worked out the final details in our long Star Lake process. When you are driving around the area, take a look at the Star Lake sign attached to the Big Sandy Lake sign on Highway 65, near the Big Sand Bar.

The fight against aquatic invasive species -- especially zebra mussels -- is an ongoing priority of the BSLA. Please volunteer to help spread the word. Just four hours a month at a public boat landing is all we ask to help in the effort to keep Big Sandy Lake clean, and we will provide the training and information you need. To volunteer, call Tom Peterson at 218-426-3976. Thank you!

## Past President... Jim Krezowski, Recent President of the BSLA Board

*I would like to welcome our newly elected and returning BSLA board members and commend them for their willingness to serve our lake property owners. Welcome to Bruce Johnson, our new president. I wish you a prosperous and happy experience.*

*Thank you all for working with me the last four years. I feel we have enjoyed many experiences and have learned a lot together. I apologize for not being able to attend as many meetings this past year and hope to see you as soon as we can travel back to Minnesota.*

*I miss Big Sandy. After all, it is still the Number One lake in our beautiful state.*

### BSLA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# Snails, Smells and SEPTIC SYSTEMS

By Vern Awes

We all learned more than we wanted to know about snails and smells this summer. The snails will eventually be raked up and hauled away. The smells will dissipate as the wet ground dries and the drywall and carpeting are removed. The question remains: What about the septic systems? We have all heard the stories of overflowing systems and raw sewage contaminating the flood waters.

There are two basic types of septic systems used in our area. First is the holding tank which is pumped depending on usage. Second is the drain field system which often incorporates a mound in order to provide sufficient elevation. Either system may have been compromised if the flood waters cover them.

Several things should be understood about septic systems during and after being covered by flood waters.

- ~ Do not use the system when it is covered with water.
- ~ Turn off electrical power to the system as well as water softeners.
- ~ Holding tanks most likely have been filled with flood water. Further usage can force waste water out of the tank contaminating the surrounding area.
- ~ Holding tanks should be pumped after the flood, but not until the water level in the soil is below the tank. Pumping too early can cause the tank walls to collapse or the tank can be forced upward and out of the ground.
- ~ In the case of drain fields with or without mounds, electric power and water softeners should be turned off.
- ~ The system should not be used until the soil has adequately dried in order to allow the sewage to be absorbed.
- ~ If sewage cannot be properly absorbed into the septic system's soil, it can back up into your plumbing, leach into surrounding soil, or actually surface and pool on the ground.
- ~ If flood waters have removed soil from drain fields and mounds they should be repaired.

In any of these situations the concern is that sewage may end up in the lake.

Please be sure that your system is working properly. You might consider having it inspected by a certified septic system professional. We must protect our lake from further contamination.



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## Big Sandy Lake Foundation Fundraiser

Join us for hors d'oeuvres and drinks, and visit with your neighbors on Saturday, August 18, 2012, 2:00-4:30 p.m. at Libby Dam on Big Sandy Lake, where the topic will be, "What Happened on Big Sandy This Summer?" We will try to provide answers to your questions. Plus, you will be helping provide funds to support the mission of the Foundation to preserve and protect Big Sandy Lake and its environment.

Fundraiser cost:

\$100 minimum per Family (parents and dependent children)

\$25 per Person for additional family members

\$50 minimum for individuals attending alone

Questions?? Call Jim or Ann Carlson • 218-426-4256

*The Big Sandy Lake Foundation is a public charity under the federal tax law formed to provide long term support for activities to secure the protection and enhancement of the social and economic well being of the Big Sandy Community.*

# Recent Flooding and The Dam System

By Ben Gisselman

There has been a fair amount of discussion and questions from members and lake residents regarding the role that the dam on Big Sandy (also known as the Libby dam) played in the flooding on Big Sandy and in ultimately drawing down the water back to more normal levels. To best understand the Big Sandy dam's role, it is first important to understand how the dam operates and also the system of dams upstream from us that also play a role.

Big Sandy Lake itself flows through the dam into a short segment of river that flows directly into the Mississippi just to the west of the lake. Big Sandy's dam is part of the Mississippi River Headwaters Federal Reservoir System in north-central Minnesota. The dams in this system are operated by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The gates of the dam on Big Sandy can be lowered or raised to allow for more or less water flow from the lake into the Mississippi. This process is used to maintain normal water flow into the Mississippi, to drain off excess water in times of flooding, and to maintain adequate water level for recreation and lake quality to the best extent possible. To the north of Big Sandy, Leech Lake, Pokegama, and Winnibigoshish are three separate lakes that also flow into the Mississippi, and are also part of the Headwaters Federal Reservoir System. Each of these lakes has its own individual dam that can be lowered or raised to change the flow of water into the Mississippi for the same reasons as described above. The outflow of water from any of these other reservoirs does not directly impact the water level in Big Sandy, but it can impact the level of the water in the Mississippi which, in turn, affects the amount of water that can be released freely from Big Sandy. For example, during our flooding on Big Sandy this summer, there were times when as much water was being released by the Big Sandy dam as possible, but it could not freely leave the lake due to how high the water already was on the other side of the dam itself.

Our area experienced record rainfall in May which brought the lake level up to a total, as measured in feet above sea level at the Big Sandy dam, to about 1,219 feet as of June 4, 2012. Normal lake level or the normal "summer band" at this time is usually between approximately 1,216 and 1,216.5 feet. So at that time, the lake was between 2.5 to 3 feet above normal which was the initial flooding we experienced early this summer in late May/early June. It was at this time that the Aitkin County Board instituted a no-wake zone for all of Big Sandy which would remain in effect until the lake level receded to an elevation of 1,217.5. As of June 4<sup>th</sup>, the Big Sandy dam was fully open allowing the maximum amount of water flow from the lake that the dam could allow. However, the amount of flow was restricted by the amount of water already present in the Mississippi. As of about June 20, 2012, the lake had receded back down to almost 1,217.5, when the lake again began to rise again due to significant recent rainfall at that time. Between June

17<sup>th</sup> and June 24<sup>th</sup>, 8.8 inches of rain had fallen in the Big Sandy area. On June 19-20<sup>th</sup> alone, 5.5 inches of rain fell. Because of this, from about June 20<sup>th</sup> through June 28<sup>th</sup>, the lake rose to 1,222.93 feet above sea level, which equates to approximately 6-6.5 feet above what would be within the normal range. The highest ever recorded lake level was 1,224.82 on May 19, 1950. As of the date this article was completed, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the lake level has receded to about 1,217.3 feet and the no-wake restriction has been removed.

I spoke recently with Brian Johnson who is a civil engineer with the US Corps of Engineers in Saint Paul. Part of his duties include regulating the reservoirs and dam operations in the headwaters of the Mississippi which includes Gull Lake, Cass Lake, Leech Lake, Winnibigoshish, Pokegama, and Big Sandy. We had a chance to discuss some potential concerns and questions that readers may have regarding the operating procedure used by the Corps during this recent time of significant flooding.

First, we talked about what was done specifically at the time that the lake again began to rise following the heavy June rainfalls. He explained that on or about June 20<sup>th</sup>, the water flow output at Pokegama, Leech Lake, and Winnibigoshish were brought to what would be referred to as their "minimum flow" in anticipation of the flooding on Big Sandy. I asked why the dams could not be closed entirely at those locations during that period of time and he explained that for one, there are federally mandated minimums that the Corps is required to follow; and two, that for wildlife, fisheries, and aquatic health reasons, the tributaries fed by the dam could not be allowed to completely dry up. To give a frame of reference regarding what is meant by "minimum flow", Brian explained that, for example, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Leech and Winnibigoshish were releasing between 100-120 cfs (cubic feet per second) of water. Pokegama's output at that time was approximately 320 cfs, and on that same day, Big Sandy's output as measured at the dam, which was fully open, was 2,427 cfs. The measurement at Aitkin however, also on June 28<sup>th</sup>, was approximately 15,000 cfs. He explained the difference between the release from Big Sandy, Pokegama, Leech, and Winnibigoshish, at that time totaling approximately 3,000 cfs, and the 15,000 cfs being measured at Aitkin, was the result of what the Corps calls a large unregulated watershed area between Big Sandy and Pokegama that is fed by large water runoff but that contains no dams or other water regulation measures. Therefore, according to the Corps, it did what it could to regulate the flow from the reservoirs upstream from Big Sandy during our June flooding, but it could not do anything to regulate the areas of the watershed in the Mississippi headwaters that have no regulation measures in place.

continued on next page

# A Year To Remember

Scott Turner  
Aitkin County Sheriff



The summer of 2012 will be one that many people will not soon forget. Our thoughts and well wishes go out to all of those who suffered damages as a result of this year's flood. As we move into the recovery/clean-up phase, and there is much work yet to be done, there are many things for which we can be thankful. The top three in my mind are:

First of all, no one got hurt. With as much as what was going on, that in and of itself, is enough for one to be thankful. Many people "weathered the storm" in their homes, at times isolated from the mainland, also without incident. When things were at the busiest for us, it seemed that everyone (county-wide) was at their best. We had very few problems around the lake during the flood – that were not flood-related. That says much about the people.

We worked well together as a team. There were so many people that came together during this time to minimize the impact on others. While there are too many to mention here, I cannot end without saying a big "Thank You" to Shamrock Township (supervisors and maintenance) and the Grace Lutheran Church (and all the volunteers that came from many denominations) for the tremendous service that they gave to so many around the lake. We are all so lucky to live in a community that responds like ours did during a time of need. All the planning in the world can never replace the wonderful relationships that exist in our community.

We learned much – just in case there is a "next time." We always strive to serve everyone in the best possible way. We will make changes for that next time. More importantly, if there are comments and/or concerns about how things were done, please do not hesitate to give me a call at 218-927-2138, or drop me an email at [scott.turner@co.aitkin.mn.us](mailto:scott.turner@co.aitkin.mn.us).

With August just getting started, let's hope that we have the best of weather to fully enjoy what Big Sandy has to offer.

***As always..... Enjoy Aitkin County ..... Safely!***

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## Recent Flooding ... continued from previous page

I also discussed with Brian Johnson the idea of whether or not more water could have been drawn down from Big Sandy in between the flooding in late May and the next stage of flooding in June, which would possibly have helped alleviate the extremely high water level that Big Sandy ended up experiencing in late June. He indicated one thing for sure and that was that no more water could have been released from Big Sandy through the dam during that time because the dam was fully open. He did indicate however, that had less water been allowed to be released from Pokegama during that same time period, that more water may have been able to more freely flow out of Big Sandy due to there being less water in the Mississippi itself. I asked why Pokegama wasn't more restricted during that time frame and he indicated first that it should be noted that Pokegama, like Big Sandy, was above normal water level during that time, necessitating the need for a drawdown through the Pokegama dam, but that more importantly, the Corps implements its policy based upon conditions as they are, and not based upon what conditions may be. Again he indicated that when it became clear that Big Sandy was beginning to rise rapidly after the heavy rains, the Corps immediately reduced the dam flow at Pokegama, Winnibigoshish, and Leech to minimum flow, while ensuring that the Big Sandy dam remained fully open.

The last thing we discussed was whether or not the Corps,

at this time, felt that it would do things differently in the future. I gave the example of if we had similar flooding next May as we did this year, whether the Corps would then be more aggressive in drawing down the water from Big Sandy in anticipation of possible subsequent heavy rainfall similar to what happened in June of this summer. He indicated that he believed the Corps would not do anything differently. He based this upon the notion that in reaction to this summer's flooding, the Corps acted in conformity with its mandates regarding implementing minimum flow levels on non-flood afflicted lakes and opening the dam on Big Sandy where flooding was the worst. And as far as affirmatively drawing down water more rapidly in anticipation based upon a weather report forecasting heavy rain, he indicated that if they were to operate that way, and the forecasted rain did not come, that the Corps would then be faced with another problem to deal with had they lowered the lake substantially and not actually then received compensating rainfall.

This topic of discussion will be further addressed by Jim Carlson of the Big Sandy Lake Foundation at the Foundation annual fundraiser on August 18, 2012 at Libby Dam from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. The Foundation invites and welcomes the public to attend this event.

# Did You Know...?

By Robert O. Harder

From time to time, we have in this space profiled prominent Big Sandy Lake personages from the past. On this occasion, we level our sights on one, Jim “Gold Front” Murphy.

It would be hard for anyone writing about our area’s history to come up with a more colorful character than James Edward Murphy. Born in 1861 in New Brunswick, Canada, he arrived in the McGregor/BSL community in 1881, hiring out to the firm of Libby & Rogers, a logging operation along the Sandy River in the Davis Lake area. Jim continued to “work in the woods” for the better part of the next three decades, mostly bossing his own camps. According to WPA researcher Clifford Greer (in 1940), “Murphy is conceded to have cut the most timber of any logger in the Sandy Lake region from 1888 to 1912 [when the Weyerhaeuser interests moved into the Prairie/Savanna River systems and cleaned out the last of the “lumber” pines].” His logging operations extended the whole length of the Savanna Portage Route--from the upper reaches of the Savanna, Prairie, and Tamarack rivers down to Bell Horn Bay, where the wood was boomed up and either rafted or towed to the Libby Dam lock and then down the Mississippi to various sawmills.



At one time Murphy maintained five separate camps, employing thirty to forty men in each. An average of 150 men conducted his spring log drives down the rivers. “One summer, in a single drive,” Jim bragged, “we moved 500,000 railroad ties down the Mississippi.” During his peak year, Murphy’s outfits produced six million board feet (a board foot is 12” X 12” X 1 inch thick). Beginning in the early 1900s, in an attempt to diversify, he entered the hotel business in McGregor. Later, he built a home in McGregor and lived there and in Washington State (off and on), finally settling permanently in McGregor. During Prohibition (1919-33), Jim was one of the area’s most accomplished bootleggers, “his success in rum running considerable. Several old timers remembered his huge gold watch with a one dollar gold piece hanging from the chain, a mouth full of gold teeth, and a large roll of bills he carried with a rubber band around it.”

Murphy’s personal life was every bit as vigorous as his business career. Anna, his first wife, was an Ojibway mixed-blood whose father was a Civil War veteran. Their union produced four daughters and six sons. About 1912, a second wife, Lena Jahr, appeared and they had something

like seven more children, mostly sons. Jim could speak Ojibway fluently and was said to always converse with the Indians in their native tongue, though that did not prevent him from becoming weary of some of their customs. There were, for example, the many kinds of dances he attended--mostly Medicine Dances and War Dances (where the “big Chiefs would get up and tell of their great deeds, how many White Men they had killed. etc.”). The cumulative effect of such performances eventually wore the Scot/Irishman down. “I’ve went to a hundred of those damn dances, heard ‘em high-yeah till I got damn sick and tired of it.”

Asked once during a court proceeding about his wedded life, Murphy said he didn’t remember all his squaws but that he’d been married twice to white women (apparently including Anna). And children? Old Jim pondered the question for a moment before replying. “Well, I’ve got seventeen on the main line and as to the spurs and sidelines I wouldn’t know.” James Murphy managed to spend every dime he earned in his life and without any regret, living out his final years in a tar-paper one-room shack in McGregor--smoking his corn-cob pipe on an outside bench and spinning yarns to any and all who would listen. He passed away quietly in 1950 at the Gables home in Aitkin.

His final legacy, perhaps even more than his prodigious logging and family accomplishments, had to have been the enduring memory of his glittering front teeth, “all crowned with gold.” Long known as “Gold Front” Murphy, it was inevitable that some wag would pen a bit of doggerel about him that was recited for years:

He went just across the bog  
And on the Tamarack River he logged

And all over the Prairie River did the same

He is not so very mean  
But he is rather tall and lean  
And they say that  
Gold Front Murphy is his name

*{Information gathered from Footprints of Early Backwoods Settlers, Eileen Keen; McGregor, Where Many Tracks Meet, Frank Cirilli, Editor; Twelve Poses West, Clifford Greer; and Among the Tamaracks, edited by Kai Kelley Kent.}*

# 10 tips for keeping your waters clean and healthy- **forever**

This is an ongoing series of tips for healthy lakes, from Steve McComas, "The Lake Detective." Here are tips 6 through 7:

## 6. Balance plants and algae.

A battle is always raging in lakes between plants and algae. When plants win, the result is usually clear lake water. You can help the plants win.

Maybe you've been working to manage or control exotic plants. Good! But there's a little word of caution: You will want to protect as many native plants as you can. In fact, in many lakes the challenge becomes to maintain a healthy level of aquatic plants because they use up nutrients that would otherwise feed open water algae.

As a rule of thumb, about 40 percent of a moderately fertile lake should contain aquatic plant growth. At this level, the plants win and the lake should have clear water. Is your lake at the 40 percent threshold? For lakes with good plant coverage, the challenge is to maintain those levels. For lakes that don't have that coverage, you may want to do a little investigative work to find out what is limiting aquatic plant growth.

For very infertile (low-nutrient) lakes, this 40 percent rule doesn't really apply. These lakes have so few nutrients that even the low nutrient plant specialists won't cover 40 percent of the bottom, but the water will still be clear because there are few nutrients to color or cloud the water as well.

## 7. Maintain that septic system.

A malfunctioning septic tank system can contaminate nearby drinking water wells and deliver unwanted materials to the lake.

Septic maintenance doesn't have to be a huge chore. On-site systems are miniature wastewater treatment plants that function almost entirely on their own. We feed them and they do the work, and only minimal maintenance is needed.

The first step in a basic program is knowing where your septic tank and drainfield are. Next you should know how big the tank is and the square footage of the drainfield. It helps to know how old the system is as well. Are all the components up to code or do they need some upgrades? To help answer these questions, you can consult the county records at the local planning and zoning office where you'll find these vital statistics and more.

The primary maintenance objective with a septic system is to prevent the accumulation of solids from building up in the tank to the point where they leave the tank and enter the drainfield pipes and plug them. Periodic pumping is the key. A rule of thumb: Pump the septic tank every two to three years for permanent residences, with longer intervals for seasonal use. Of course actual accumulation may vary depending on other factors including the number of people using your cabin and whether you operate a dishwasher and washing machine.



A battle is always raging in lakes between plants and algae. When plants win, the result is usually clear lake water.





# STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!

Clean ✓

Drain ✓

Dry ✓

Boats and trailers, it's the law



Great Lakes Maritime Research Institute  
A University of Michigan - Ann Arbor and University of Wisconsin-Stout Consortium



# ON THE WEB...

## [www.BSLassociation.org](http://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.*



FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

P.O. Box 21  
McGregor, MN 55760

# BIG SANDY LAKE ASSOCIATION

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