

Lake Puckaway

PROTECTION & REHABILITATION DISTRICT

Lake Puckaway Past, Present, and Future Fact Sheet

Lake Puckaway, like any shallow lake in Wisconsin, faces increasing management challenges. Puckaway's history serves as a reminder of both positive and negative outcomes of management efforts.

Writings from 1673 speak to Puckaway's history of an abundant wide spot in the Fox River. During June of the year, early explorer Father Marquette made note of the condition of the area now known as Lake Puckaway: "It is easy to lose one's way, especially as the river is so full of wild rice."

In the early to mid-1800s, the area now known as Lake Puckaway was a riverine marsh filled with emergent vegetation, including wild rice, cattail, burreed, and several species of bulrush.

A dam built on the Fox River at Princeton during the late-1800s impounded Lake Puckaway. Impoundment changed the lake forever, but initially helped develop perfect conditions for submersed shallow lake plants like wild celery and sago pondweed.

During the early-1900s, periods of unusual weather and high water levels caused major vegetation loss. During the mid-1930's, deep winter freezing and sudden spring floods brought about the loss of over one thousand acres of wild rice beds on the lake's eastern basin. Normal weather patterns and water levels allowed the lake to rebound quickly, with habitat staying strong until the 1950s.

These were Puckaway's days of glory. Sporting club diary accounts from the late-1800s through the early-1930s give us a frame of reference: "Shooting lousy. We killed only 30 canvasback, 50 bluebill, 21 pintail and 18 redhead." "Fishing only fair. We caught 63 smallmouth bass, two largemouths and 66 pike."

During the 1950s, unusual weather patterns and water levels again stripped the lake of much of its vegetation. This created perfect conditions for carp to overtake the lake. From 1950 through the early-1980s, increased agricultural runoff, rapid shoreline development, carp, siltation, artificial water levels, soil erosion and wind-induced wave action severely degraded the lake's fish and wildlife habitat. Lake Puckaway became a turbid, muddy lake with little vegetation, dominated by carp, with little value to desirable fish or game species. Lake Puckaway had reached a low point in its history.

In 1964, a group of concerned property owners and area residents established the Lake Puckaway Improvement Association Inc., a voluntary membership group for "the improvement and betterment of Lake Puckaway and surrounding area." In 1976, the Association led an effort to petition lake property owners in order to create the Lake Puckaway Protection and Rehabilitation District (LPPRD).



Puckaway was a very different place back in 1941. Most of the eastern basin was filled with wild rice and bulrush. Only the dredged river channel is open water. The water was extremely

clear, with abundant fish and wildlife.

By 1987, the lake had changed radically from its former self. This long term shift included the loss of fringe wetlands and dense stands of bulrush and wild rice.



The district was created in 1977. Shortly thereafter, intensive management efforts, including water level management efforts to stabilize and lower spring and summer water levels, carp control - including chemical treatment, seining, installation of carp barriers, and manipulations of predator fish populations - construction of breakwaters, and aquatic plant reintroduction, resulted in improved water clarity, rebounds of some desirable aquatic plants, and improved fish and game populations.

Though the lake received many benefits from these efforts, new management concerns have arisen. The concerns include: continued localized carp infestations, algae blooms, a cormorant rookery, decreasing amounts of desirable emergent vegetation, navigation concerns, user conflicts, artificial water levels, water quality, nutrient overloads, and land-use issues.



1941



1950



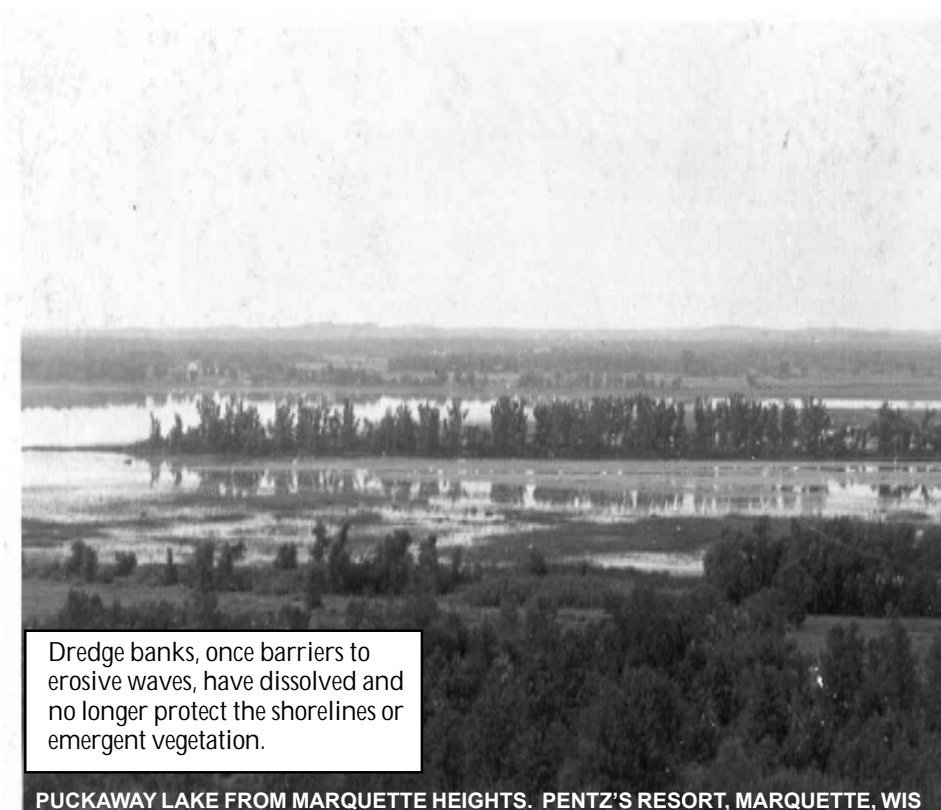
1981

In 1941, a few channels had been cut through a relatively healthy stand of bulrush, a valuable waterfowl and pike spawning habitat type. In 1950, you can see several more channels cut the bulrush bed into fragments. In 1981, the bulrushes are virtually eliminated.

LPPRD, in partnership with the State of Wisconsin, has received grants to develop a long-

range management plan for Puckaway. Citizen participation is critical. Long-range management goals will be set. These goals will be backed by a strategy that includes lake management tools. Some examples of tools might include: adopting ecologically sensitive water levels, carp control, shoreline rehabilitation, shoreline protection, offshore breakwalls, cyclical drawdowns, lake-use zoning, and fishery manipulation. Your opinion will count.

For more information readers may contact LPPRD at P.O. Box 6, Marquette, WI 53947, or visit the Wisconsin Association of Lakes website at www.wisconsinlakes.org.



Dredge banks, once barriers to erosive waves, have dissolved and no longer protect the shorelines or emergent vegetation.

PUCKAWAY LAKE FROM MARQUETTE HEIGHTS. PENTZ'S RESORT, MARQUETTE, WIS