

WHY YOU, a Lake Association Member, Should Join Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

Mission: To protect Minnesota's lake and river heritage for current and future generations by forging powerful links among lakes, lake advocates and policy makers.

By Jeff Forester, Executive Director, MN Lakes and Rivers Advocates

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, an organization of individual lake lovers and lake associations, has had remarkable success for lakes and lake home and cabin owners, lowering property tax rates from 2.25% to 1%, protecting lakeshore for inclusion in Conservation Easement property tax deductions, securing \$10 million Annual County AIS Prevention Aid. All of these represent our values, time spent with family and friends on a healthy lake. I know you share those values.

Members are crucial to our shared work.

Even with this success, our individual membership has declined as Lake Association membership has increased. We think we know why. Let me explain why your individual membership is just as important than your lake association's membership.

A growing base of individual members is critically important to meet our shared goals:

1. Lake associations, as nonprofits are limited in the advocacy they can do. Individuals are not.
2. Grassroots advocacy relies on numbers. There are 70,000 pheasant licenses sold in Minnesota. Pheasants Forever has 46,000 MN members. Today less than 0.06% of lake home and cabin owners in Minnesota are members of MLR and contacting their elected officials on behalf of our lakes and rivers. Imagine the impact if 5% or even 10% engaged.
3. Without individual membership support it is impossible to sustain and fund a statewide lake and river advocacy organization. There are over 500 lake associations in Minnesota. If they all joined at the current average, \$150, that would generate \$75k annually, slightly more than our current printing, mailing and electronic communications budget.



We held a focus group to try to discover why some individuals have not yet decided to join MLR.

- Some believed that if their lake association is a member of MLR, there is no need for them to join.
- Some did not realize that individual membership was important.
- Some have intended to join but just let it slip - life is busy.

Our lakes are facing multiple threats

In 2020 the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency listed 56% as impaired, meaning they failed to meet one or more water quality standards. In 2018 40% of Minnesota's surface waters were listed as impaired. Our lakes and rivers are becoming impaired at an unacceptable and accelerating rate.

The threats to our lakes, Aquatic Invasive Species, runoff pollution, road salt, and micro-plastics, are very concerning.



Lakes cannot protect themselves. And while your lake association does tremendous work, a lake association needs help. They must operate within a set of laws, statutes, and rules. While lake associations do tremendous philanthropy protecting the public waters, the public should play a bigger role in funding lake protection efforts. Often, lake associations are not fully included in discussions by state agencies like the MN DNR or the MPCA. **This is why a statewide organization is so important.**

Your voice at the capitol.

You and your lake need a voice at the state capitol. MLR is that voice. We are at the Capitol everyday it is in session representing the issues our lake home and cabin members tell us are important. You and the lake you love have already benefited from our work, but there is much, much more to do.

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates works at the state legislature to pass laws and secure funding to help lake associations and lake home and cabin owners protect their family heritage. With two full time lobbyists, a media specialist, and a state of the art "one click" email action alert system, MLR is able to frame lake issues for state policy makers, educate them about solutions, and provide a large enough grassroots base in support to see that those solutions are funded and codified in state statute.

In the last few legislative sessions, MLR, its partners and its base of members were able to convince the legislature to restore aquatic invasive species management grants for lake associations, fund the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, and rebate the sales taxes lake associations pay for chemical treatments of lakes.

Please Join MLR Today

Here are three reasons for you to join MLR today even if your lake association is also a member:

1. As nonprofits, lake associations are limited in the political advocacy they can do. But as individuals, you can and should engage, let your elected officials hear your voice.

2. With professional lobbying and our email action alert system, MLR amplifies your combined voices and tracks the process so that your communications are well informed and timed for maximum impact.
3. Grassroots action truly is a numbers game. There are over 600,000 lake home and cabin owners in Minnesota. The lake is a core value for all of them, yet less than 0.05% have made the choice to engage on lake issues.

Joining together in an organized grassroots organization is the best way to stop the destruction of our lakes, to rehabilitate the lakes that have become impaired, and to leave our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren a better lake legacy than we have enjoyed.

Can we count on you to join MLR and support our statewide efforts to protect Minnesota's iconic lakes and rivers?

Go to www.mnlakesandrivers.org. Click on the Membership button, and join at whatever amount works for you. The average is about \$84 a year. Please consider using the sustaining membership, about \$7.00 a month, less than one trip to the ice cream parlor with the kids. Sustaining memberships allow us to put more of your contribution towards our shared mission.

Minnesota's lakes deserve our support. Only an engaged and committed group of lake lovers like you and me can reverse the troubling trends. It is time for all of us to pull together and take action. I hope we can count on you.

Please call 612-961-6144 or email me at jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org with any questions or comments you may have. It would be my pleasure to talk lakes with you.

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