



# ITASCA WATERS

*Team Up for Clean Waters*

## ANNUAL REPORT

ItascaWaters.org

2024

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## MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The mission of Itasca Waters (formerly Itasca Water Legacy Partnership) is to “Team Up” with other organizations and concerned citizens to maintain abundant, clean water for our continued health, enjoyment, and a strong economy.

**Itasca Waters (IW) is pursuing its mission by:**

- Promoting water stewardship through education and community outreach
- Engaging all Itasca County citizens to join in these efforts
- Promoting partnerships with other like-minded agencies and foundations
- Continuing its efforts to fund science-based research focused on water quality.

## SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

Partnerships sustain progress and strengthen stewardship. Itasca Waters has been a driving force behind water conservation and education in Itasca County. Our impactful work has been fueled by numerous awards and grants, which have enabled us to achieve significant milestones.

These milestones include funding for water quality research facilities and assessments, shoreland initiatives that preserve and protect water quality, and water quality education and outreach. Through these partnerships and awarded grants, Itasca Waters has made a substantial difference in the region’s water conservation efforts.

Itasca Waters builds strong partnerships with organizations to support our mission. Some of our key contributors include: the Blandin Foundation—Bush Foundation—Itasca County—Itasca Soil & Water Conservation District—ISD #318— Minnesota North College, Itasca Campus —Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources—Minnesota Department of Natural Resources—Minnesota Pollution Control Agency—U.S. Forest Service—National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Itasca Waters has also received generous financial support from several lake associations, other nonprofits, businesses and individuals. Thank you!

## COORDINATOR



Since joining Itasca Waters in early 2022, Coordinator Bethann Perendy has consistently contributed to our organization’s success. Her professionalism, organizational skills, and commitment ensure our programs run smoothly and are aligned with our mission.

In 2024, Bethann published seasonal newsletters that highlighted upcoming events, shared project updates, and celebrated community accomplishments. She also ensured efficient and transparent operations by organizing meeting materials, resources, and archived files in Google Drive.

Her dedication embodies the core values of Itasca Waters— building partnerships and community engagement that leaves a legacy.

# COMMITTEES

Below is a brief review of the work in 2024 of the active committees, including projects within each committee’s purview.

## Education

### Practical Water Wisdom Series

#### *A Virtual Learning Series Inspiring Everyday Water Stewardship*

Practical Water Wisdom: A Virtual Learning Series completed its third year of production in 2024 and continues to gain momentum as a trusted local resource for clean water education. Hosted by Itasca Waters, the series features experts and community partners sharing research-based, practical strategies for protecting and improving our region’s lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

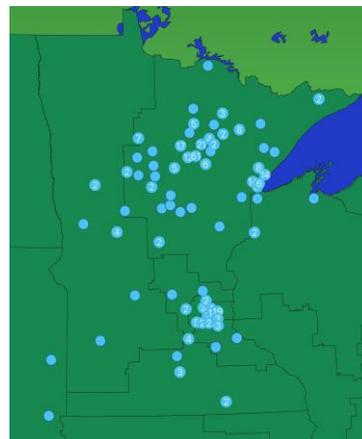
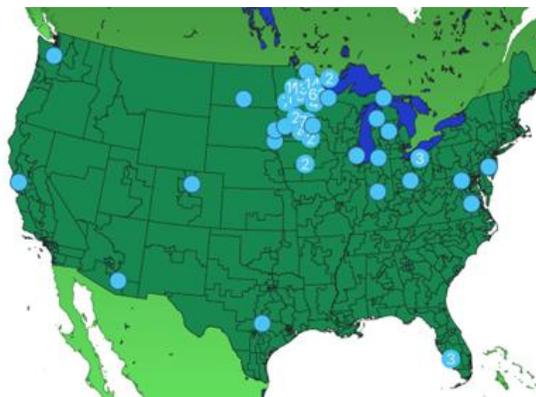
Each program connects science to everyday action—helping residents make informed decisions about shoreline management, septic care, aquatic invasive species prevention, and climate resilience. The series is made possible through the generous support of Itasca Waters members and partners, including Minnesota Sea Grant, the Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations, Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District, KAXE/KBXE, Rapids Radio, and the Grand Rapids Herald-Review.

Recorded programs are available for viewing on YouTube and ICTV, extending the reach of these valuable learning opportunities throughout Itasca County and beyond. You can also watch any of the recorded programs by going to the Itasca Waters [website](#).

Topics covered in 2024 were:

- The Value of Wetlands and the Regulations That Can Protect Them
- Living With Zebra Mussels in Your Lake - A Cautionary Tale
- Loon Restoration in Minnesota
- How the State Determines Fish Management Strategies, Including Stocking
- Manoomin (Wild Rice): The Food That Grows on Water
- Mining and Water Quality and How the Two Can Live Well Together in Minnesota
- Success Stories on Preventing and Remediating the Spread of AIS in Minnesota Lakes
- Changing Water Quality in Itasca County Lakes
- PFAS in Water: How did they get there and why are they so challenging to address?
- Low and No- Salt Water Softening and Conditioning

Listeners come from across Minnesota and the United States (blue dots).



## **Youth Water Summit**

Unfortunately, despite extensive planning, the Youth Water Summit planned for 2024 had to be cancelled due to inclement weather.

## **Shoreland Initiative**

The Shoreland Advisor program continued in 2024. Initially launched by the Planning Committee in 2017 with funding from the 2018 Blandin Foundation grant, the Shoreland Advisor program focuses on improving shoreland buffering in Itasca County. The focus is to use up the phosphorus that comes off the land surface through plants rather than have it end up in the water body.

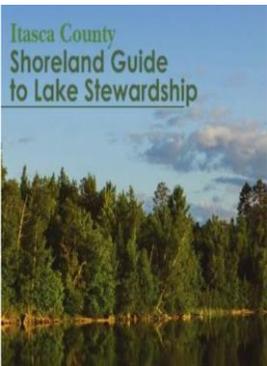
With assistance from the University of Minnesota Extension, our advisors have completed an educational workshop and an onsite training session involving a series of local lakeshore properties in various states of quality. Advisors make personal onsite visits with lakeshore owners who want information about managing shoreland property in an ecologically friendly way that helps water quality.

The Shoreland Advisor's program has grown to become a model that is used across the state by many organizations.

## **Shoreland Guide**

Our popular 2018 Shoreland Guide continues to be well received in our community. Guides are available at all Itasca Waters' events. Realtors have been distributing guides to people interested in purchasing homes and the Downtown Council has been giving them to new residents. Guides have been distributed to people and groups in connection with work on the Bush Foundation grant. Participants in our shoreland advisors' workshops received the guide and they in turn distributed them to lakeshore property owners they visited. The Guide is available online at our website. Shoreland Guides have also been mailed to new lakeshore owners in the County since 2019.

In 2022, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers adopted our Guide as the model for guides they will prepare for their Lake Steward program.



## **Membership**

*Flowing Strong Together: Sustained by the Current of Our Members*

Itasca Waters' work for 2024 was made possible by generous support from its members and dedicated volunteers. Financial contributions enable Itasca Waters to carry out its mission by providing funds for educational outreach, special events, and operational costs not covered by grant monies.

Donations totaling \$6,050 came from individuals, businesses, lake associations, and others.

The generous donations in 2024 made by both new members and members who have supported Itasca Waters since its inception, make a powerful statement about how much the people of Itasca County value our water resources and Itasca Waters' efforts in maintaining the high quality of those resources. Itasca Waters feels blessed to have the support of so many in the community.

## Community Projects & Events



### Aveda Walk for Water

On April 21, 2024, True North Salon of Grand Rapids participated in Aveda’s annual Walk for Water, a global initiative that raises awareness about the value of clean, accessible water. Each year, participating salons select a water-focused nonprofit to receive the proceeds from their fundraising efforts. In 2024, True North selected Itasca Waters as their designated grantee.

By choosing a local organization, True North extended Aveda’s broader mission into Itasca County, reinforcing the importance of community-based water protection. Their contribution supports Itasca Waters’ ongoing work in science-based education, shoreline stewardship, and public engagement.

Itasca Waters is grateful for True North’s commitment to clean water and for recognizing the importance of sustaining the lakes and rivers that define our region.

### Resilient Shorelines Workshop

In 2024, Itasca Waters partnered with Blue Thumb—Planting for Clean Water to host a Resilient Shorelines Workshop designed to help community residents learn more about how to plant to protect water quality and strengthen shoreline resilience. The workshop provided education about natural shorelines, native plantings, erosion control, and stormwater management practices that enhance both habitat and aesthetics.

Participants learned how simple changes—such as replacing turf grass with native plantings, reducing runoff, and stabilizing banks—can prevent erosion, filter pollutants, and support pollinators and wildlife. Experts from Blue Thumb, the Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Shoreland Advisors shared real-world examples, technical guidance, and cost-share opportunities available to residents and local contractors.

Local nurseries Beiers and Bloomers provided lists of their native plant offerings as well as native plant seedling samples for viewing.

Donations from the event were accepted to continue the Native Plants program in conjunction with the Grand Rapids High School Horticulture class.

The event was well-attended and generated strong community interest, demonstrating a growing commitment among local property and business owners to steward their lakes and rivers more sustainably. By connecting science-based practices with community collaboration, the Resilient Shorelines Workshop continues Itasca Waters’ mission to empower residents with practical tools for protecting our region’s clean water legacy.

### Native Planting

#### *From Classroom to Community: Students Help Native Plants Take Root*

Grand Rapids High School students that took the Spring 2024 Greenhouse & Landscaping course teamed up with Itasca Waters to transplant an existing Minnesota pollinator-friendly garden to a new expanded location in front of the Wabana Town Hall.

This field trip was the culmination of students learning about the deep water-filtering roots that native plants possess. It was great for them to see those roots on established plants, split the perennials to give them more room to grow, and help these teens understand their value as hardworking community members. It was a fun day!



## **Paddle and Pint**

On July 13, 2024, the City of Cohasset in partnership with the Mississippi Headwaters Board hosted a paddling event on the Mississippi River. This event provided an opportunity for education and outreach in the community and our board member Bill Grantges, Itasca County Aquatic Invasive Species manager, set up a booth at the public landing to help educate participants about the importance of Clean, Drain, Dispose and Dry.

The event also served as an opportunity to provide education on Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)—highlighting how paddlers can help prevent the spread of invasive plants and animals between waterways. Staff shared practical, science-based information about the Clean, Drain, Dry process, recognizing early signs of invasive species, and understanding how responsible recreation supports the long-term health of Minnesota’s rivers and lakes.

## **NCROC Visitors Day**

On July 23, 2024, Itasca Waters participated in the University of Minnesota’s North Central Research & Outreach Center (NCROC) Visitors Day, a well-attended community event that showcases research and practical solutions in natural resources, agriculture, and environmental science.

Itasca Waters connected directly with residents, families, and landowners to share science-based information about water quality, highlight current initiatives across the county, and engage attendees in conversations about shoreline stewardship, aquatic invasive species (AIS), and the overall health of our lakes and rivers. Local experts from the Shoreland Advisors Program were on hand to answer questions and provide guidance, helping community members understand how their actions can protect water resources for generations to come.

## **Trout Lake Annual Meeting**

At the 2024 Trout Lake Association Annual Meeting, Bill Grantges, Itasca County’s AIS Coordinator, offered a clear and engaging update on the countywide effort to protect local waters from aquatic invasive species. Bill outlined the pressures facing Trout Lake and the broader watershed - from zebra mussels and spiny water fleas to starry stonewort and Eurasian watermilfoil - and explained how early detection and prevention remain our strongest tools.

He highlighted the robust access-inspection program that Itasca County continues to maintain, noting increased coverage, expanded decontamination education, and the critical role of trained seasonal staff. Bill also underscored the value of collaboration. Partnerships with lake associations, Itasca Waters, ICOLA, Minnesota Sea Grant, and other local organizations strengthen public outreach, put science-based information directly into the hands of residents and visitors, and help build a shared culture of stewardship.

His message echoed a theme that runs throughout our work: protecting our lakes is a collective responsibility. The vigilance of community members, the commitment of our partners, and the coordination across programs all help ensure that waters like Trout Lake remain healthy, resilient, and accessible for generations to come.



## **Fishing Line Collected for Recycling**

### *Reducing Waste and Protecting Wildlife*

For the fourth consecutive year Itasca Waters volunteers continue to make a visible impact on the health and beauty of our local waterways by participating in the BoatUS Foundation's Fishing Line Recycling Program "Reel In & Recycle." This volunteer-driven effort serves numerous public water accesses across Itasca County.

Discarded fishing line can remain in the environment for centuries, entangling wildlife, harming fish and waterfowl, and littering our shorelines. To address this Itasca Waters volunteers built and installed collection bins at popular fishing piers throughout Itasca County offering anglers an easy and responsible way to dispose of used line.

These same dedicated volunteers continue to collect the monofilament line twice during the year, clean it of garbage and send it to Berkley Conservation for processing so it can be repurposed into new products such as fish habitat structures, park benches, and tackle boxes. This program not only prevents harmful pollution—it also provides hands-on education that fosters stewardship among local anglers and visitors to our community.

Through community collaboration and continued volunteer support, Itasca Waters' fishing line recycling initiative demonstrates how small, practical actions can lead to lasting positive change for our lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Look for fishing line collection containers at the following public fishing piers:

- Grand Rapids Forest Lake
- Grand Rapids Ice (Crystal) Lake
- Grand Rapids Sylvan Bay
- Grand Rapids Mississippi River by Library
- Cohasset Tioga Beach
- Cohasset Mississippi River
- Mud Lake Dam on the Leech River
- U.S. Army Corps: Pokegama Dam Campground and 2 at Winnie Dam
- Scenic State Park
- There will no longer be a container at the Coleraine Trout Lake location as it was lost when the pier was removed.

About 1 pound of line was collected in Itasca County in 2024. Since 1990, the Berkley Conservation Institute has recycled more than 9 million miles worth of fishing line. That's enough to fill two reels for every angler in America!

## **Mississippi River Planting**

On May 15th team of Master Gardener Susan Lick, David Lick and educator Rachel Newman's class used a combination of native perennials the students grew over the winter, along with divisions from established plantings ready for thinning, to augment the hillside planting along the pedestrian bridge over the Mississippi in Grand Rapids.

Itasca Waters provided seeds for Monarda, Butterfly Weed, Prairie Clover and Blue Sage, which the Horticulture class nurtured over the winter. Now those plants are growing at several locations around the county!

# 2024 FINANCIAL REPORT

Itasca Waters contracts with Blake & Lind, CPAs accounting firm, for compilation and general ledger services. This firm records all receipts and expenses, reconciles the bank statement, and provides financial statements each month. This is a valued service to strengthen our internal controls.

Itasca Waters total 2024 expenditures were \$31,262 approximately \$6500 less than 2023. As shown in the charts below the expenditures primarily consist of general operating expenses, and educational programs including Youth Water Summit, Practical Water Wisdom, and Shoreland Advisors.

The majority of operating expenses are attributed to the Coordinator salary—an important position to keep this organization and programs moving forward. The remainder of operating expenses are spent on office supplies, cell phone, website, insurance and accounting fees.

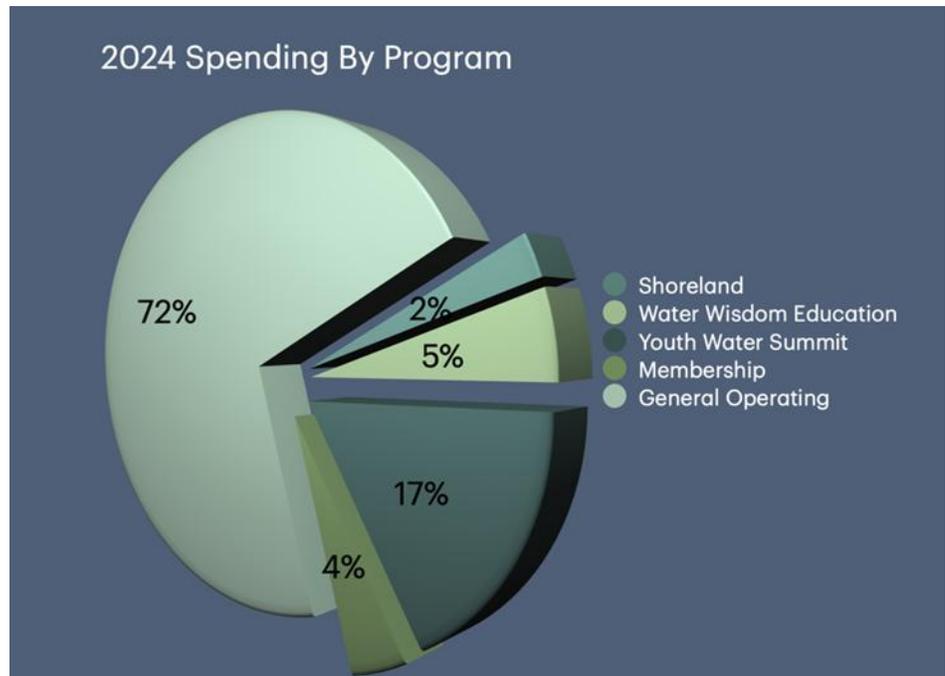
The Youth Water Summit is our annual event for Itasca County 5th Graders held in May. It is our largest event and has become a great success over the years. However, the 2024 Summit was canceled due to inclement weather and was unable to be rescheduled due to the amount of coordination needed between presenters, school districts and volunteers. Much of the supplies purchased in 2024 will be able to be used for the 2025 Summit.

The Practical Water Wisdom Program, a free monthly online educational program, is relatively inexpensive to operate thanks to the volunteer group and MN SeaGrant contributions. This program has also become quite successful since its inception.

The Shoreland Advisor program has been a beneficial program for lake property owners that need guidance in managing their shoreline for the betterment of the lake quality. Recently, most of the on-site visits have been completed by the Itasca County Soil & Water District

Membership donations in 2024 were \$6,050, a significant decrease from 2023 donations of \$10,140. At year end, the savings account included \$45,488 and \$31,13 in checking.

Itasca Waters continues to actively pursue additional board members and funding sources to support not only its existing programs but new ones as the need arises. Please contact us today if you are interested in being a board member or donating time or resources to the Itasca Waters Organization.



## ORGANIZATION HISTORY

*Rooted in Science, Strengthened by Connection: Itasca Waters is a Collaborative Force for Water Conservation*

Local water quality advocates came together in late 2006 to identify and implement a set of activities that would ensure clean water resources and quality habitat in the major watersheds of Itasca County. Itasca Waters Legacy Partnership (IWLP) formalized its operations as a community coalition by establishing a board and executive committee to guide partnership activities.

**2009:** IWLP completed its first surface water assessment grant to assess water quality for previously untested lakes in the county.

**2010:** IWLP's Certificate of Incorporation and Articles of Incorporation as a nonprofit organization were filed under the laws of the State of Minnesota.

**2011:** Qualified for 501(c)3 status with the IRS and organized a full-day adult water summit at Itasca Community College.

**2012:** Strengthened financial reporting and implemented an informal system for tracking the completion of Board and committee activities; hosted a series of evening meetings for adults; and organized the first Youth Water Summit for fifth graders.

**2013:** Released the Deer-Pokegama Study; hosted several educational events; completed a second surface water assessment grant assessing the Bigfork River Watershed; and, helped create a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) in collaboration with Leech Lake Band, Itasca County land department, MN Department of Transportation, USFS, DNR, University of Minnesota Extension and ICOLA.

**2014:** Cooperated with partners to develop a program for prevention and eradication of aquatic invasive species; released results on the economic value of water in Itasca County; hosted several educational events; and was awarded the Itasca County Outstanding Conservationist Award.

**2015:** Continued work with the Itasca County Aquatic Invasive Species program; sponsored educational events for children and adults (including a second Adult Summit in partnership with the forestry community); shared in the Outstanding Conservationist Award given to the Aquatic Invasive Species Partnership of Itasca County; and continued support for the water lab at ICC.

**2016:** Sponsored several educational events; continued work on the AIS Technical Advisory Committee; and negotiated the successful transfer of the AIS program to the Itasca County SWCD.

**2017:** Completed transfer of the AIS program to Itasca County SWCD; rebranded IWLP to Itasca Waters; hosted the 6th Youth Water Summit; began work on the Shoreland Initiative and Shoreland Guide; and, agreed to host a six-week 2019 event, We are Water.

**2018:** Won a \$150,000 grant from the Blandin Foundation focused on protecting shorelands; hosted the 7th Youth Water Summit; hired a part-time Coordinator and opened an office; erected a billboard and updated the website; published the Shoreland Guide; hosted a Septic Secrets seminar; continued to work on We are Water 2019.

**2019:** Won a \$114,040 grant from the Bush Foundation focused on using community driven solutions to protect water and Board development; hosted the eighth Youth Water Summit; successfully hosted the Minnesota Humanities Center exhibit We are Water, and related events; rolled out the Shoreland Advisors program; worked with the University of Minnesota at Morris to survey Itasca County residents about attitudes and practices focused on water quality in the county; and, developed a plan to restructure the operations of Itasca Waters to better work through committees.

**2020:** Continued work on Bush Community Engagement Grant and the Shoreland Advisor Program; created targeted marketing (including a billboard, radio spots, videos, newsletters and social media) to promote healthy shorelands.

**2021:** Finished work on the Bush Community Engagement Grant and continued the Shoreland Advisor Program; set up containers to collect fishing line for recycling.

**2022:** Hired a part-time Coordinator, started the Practical Water Wisdom online education series, continued the Shoreland Advisor program, restarted the Youth Water Summit, and continued the fishing line recycling program.

**2023:** Partnered with students and volunteers on a native planting community engagement project. Continued the fishing line recycling program. Hosted the tenth Youth Water Summit. Continued the Shoreland Advisor program.

## 2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### *Experience, Passion and Purpose ~ Teaming Up for Clean Waters*

Itasca Waters is governed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The full Board meets six times a year and the Executive Committee, consisting of the officers, meets as needed. The board consists of both voting board members and non-voting technical advisors.

#### **Sandy Anderson, Treasurer**



Sandy moved to Minnesota in the early 80's and to Grand Rapids in 2001. With a Masters in Geography and a GIS certification, Sandy worked as a site location analyst for Dayton-Hudson Corp. for years before starting Lakehomes.com Realty in 1999 with her husband, Dan. With a family cabin on Lake Ontario and Dan's experience growing up on Rainy Lake, they brought their love of lake property to the business. In 2013 Lake Homes Realty grew into the Move It Real Estate Group keeping a strong emphasis on waterfront sales. With a strong history of waterfront sales in Northern, Minnesota, she and Dan understand the importance of clean waters on the environment and a community's growth potential.

#### **Kathy Cone, Vice-President/President**



Kathy served IWLP as Education Chair from 2012 when she joined the Board to 2020. In addition, Kathy works full time as an accountant, has two children, and volunteers on the Community Cafe Board and completed a two- year training in "Leadership for the Century".

Kathy enjoys spending time raising meat birds, pork, beef, and laying hens for the farm fresh eggs as well as raising vegetables. She also likes to paint with watercolor and oil, hunting, fishing, crafts, and spending time with friends.

#### **Jesse Davis, President**



A native of Colorado, Jesse and his husband are 4th generation family farmers in Trout Lake Township. Active in local farmers' markets and the local food community and principal viola player in the Itasca Symphony. Jesse is presently a Realtor with the Move It Real Estate Group. Jesse feels that healthy lakes and waters are integral to the economic, cultural, and social sustainability of the Greater Itasca area.

Jesse passed away in early 2024—we were deeply saddened by his passing.

#### **Jessica Loes, Secretary**



Jessica first connected with Itasca Waters in 2020 through the Shoreland Advisor program, sparking a passion for water quality. A lifelong Minnesotan, she grew up on a Ramsey County Lake, spending summers fishing, swimming, and canoeing. Fond memories of crystal-clear waters—and concerns about pollution—deepened her commitment to conservation.

In 2021, her family moved to Itasca County for its pristine lakes and strong community. Now serving on the Itasca Waters Board, she is dedicated to protecting local waterways. With a background in quality management, Jessica holds degrees in Business Management and Medical Technology Quality. She is a Shoreland Advisor, AIS Detector, and citizen lake quality monitor, working to ensure clean water for future generations.

### **John A. Downing**



John is currently the Director of the Minnesota Sea Grant College Program, a research scientist at the Large Lakes Observatory, and a tenured Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Minnesota Duluth. His research and teaching dossiers concern many aspects of the aquatic sciences. His leadership experience has included positions in the US and Canada. He has founded and run several small businesses in the US and Canada. He has a long-standing record of success in securing research funding from federal, state, provincial, and local agencies. He maintains current international research collaborations with Canada, Brazil, and Holland.

John's family has conserved and managed a shore-habitat and forest area in northern Minnesota for 108 years. He is a certified diver, a once-professional musician, and volunteers to help citizens across the US Midwest with local water quality concerns.

### **Bill Grantges**



Bill is the Itasca County Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager. He is a board member of Itasca Waters. He is currently serving on the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center's (MAISRC) Center Advisory Board. Bill had previously served on the Technical Committee of MAISRC for four years. He is a past Vice-President of Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations (ICOLA). Bill received his master's in business administration from the University of Rhode Island and worked as a program manager for Siemens Medical Systems before coming to Minnesota in 1999. He has certifications from the Minnesota DNR as a Lake Service Provider and as a Level 1 & Level 2 AIS Watercraft Inspector. He is also a certified University of Minnesota Extension AIS Detector. In 2020, Bill was awarded the Carol Mortensen Award for Individual Achievement from the Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Council (MISAC). Bill is passionate about building partnerships to help preserve and protect our strong outdoor traditions.

### **Dave Lick**



Dave is retired as principal owner of Itasca Reliable Insurance Agency, Inc., has a B.S. degree in biology, a minor in chemistry, past president of Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations, responsible for septic compliance for Wabana Township Lakes, past board member for Advocates for Family Peace, lifetime member of Izaak Walton League, current member of Minnesota Power's Citizen Advisory Board, active organizer of Citizens Advocating Responsible Power Production "CARRP," public school science teacher for four years, and he directed Youth Conservation Corp camps for the USFS for two years.

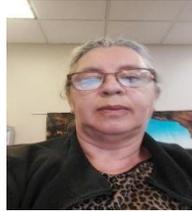
Dave's additional interests are forest landownership and sustainable forest management (from 1994 to present he converted 70 acres back to white pine), beekeeper, gardener, woodworker, avid bike rider and cross-country skier, canoeist, and scuba diver. He is married and has two children.

### **Wesley Sisson**

Wesley was born and raised in Northeastern Minnesota and joined the IWLP Board in 2023. He earned bachelor's degrees in history and political science from the University of Minnesota Duluth in 2020 and is currently pursuing a master's degree in history at Arizona State University. He previously chaired the statewide nonprofit Minnesota Public Interest Research Group in 2018 and now serves on the board of the DFL Environmental Caucus, where he advances environmental, social, and economic advocacy for Minnesota communities.

Having lived on or near lakes throughout his life—including Lake Margaret on the Gull Lake Chain, Lake Superior, and Shallow Lake in Warba—Wesley brings a deep commitment to protecting Minnesota's waters. He believes that with nearly ten percent of the world's surface freshwater in the state, Minnesotans share a responsibility to preserve water, wildlife, and the people who depend on them.

### **Christina VanDeventer**



Christina VanDeventer joined the Board in 2023 with a strong passion for community resilience and environmental advocacy. She is the founder of the Hometown Resilience Foundation, which supports small communities facing climate challenges.

Christina works at Minnesota Diversified Industries as a Customer Service Representative, promoting inclusive employment. She holds a Business Administration degree from Bemidji State University and completed environmental research through Independent Studies at Metropolitan State University.

In her free time, Christina enjoys traveling, auctions, home gardening, and spending time with her grandchildren at her Ball Club Lake property.

### **Cory Smith**

Itasca County Commissioner District 1

### **EMERITUS BOARD MEMBER**

### **Harold E. Dziuk**



As a young kid, Harold first learned to appreciate the wonders of nature on a small dairy farm in Benton County, MN. He left the farm to embark on undergraduate and graduate studies in Veterinary Medicine and a career in teaching and research. His graduate studies were delayed for two years while he was on active duty in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps at the Biological Warfare Laboratories, Fort Detrick, Maryland.

His employment included a wide range of public and private venues, including the Tuskegee, Minnesota and Iowa State universities, General Electric, and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

His primary role in IWLP over 8 years of service on the Executive Committee was to seek grants to support IWLP's many initiatives.

### **Jan Sandberg, Education Chair**



Jan joined the IWLP Board in 2012 and helps ensure that the board's work is kept on track. She assists with Google Drive and Dropbox. Since retiring as a program evaluator with the Office of the Legislative Auditor in 2007, she stepped down from the Board in 2024.

Jan and her husband, Richard, spend much of the summer at their Pokegama Lake cabin that they purchased in 1986. In 2017, they welcomed their first grandchild and plan frequent visits to Vancouver, British Columbia to "help" as needed. Jan makes Minneapolis her urban home, stepping down in 2025 after 15 years on the Minneapolis Charter Commission.

### **2024 TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD**

### **Andy Arens, District Manager, Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District**



Andy Arens, a Forest Management Bachelor of Science graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 2001, has been with the Itasca County SWCD since 2003. Initially serving as a Forestry and Shoreland Specialist, Andy has held the positions of District Manager and Water Plan Coordinator since October 2015.

### **Ben Benoit, Chippewa National Forest, Deer River District Ranger**



Born in Hartford Conn, Ben likes to jokingly tell people that he has lived the Ojibwe migration story. Starting on the East coast and ultimately making his way to Minnesota, Ben went to high school in Anoka, began college at St Cloud State and finished with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in Biochemistry. After college, Ben worked for a few years in industry, as a microbiologist and chemist and when he began looking for a house but decided that city life wasn't for him, and it was time to rejoin his family in the North. The best parts of Minnesota are found in this area. Some of the most pristine lakes and watersheds in the county and he is committed to protecting them for future generations to rely on as his family does today. He was taught that if we care for the manoomin, land and waters, they will care for us. That is the mission Ben works towards in his former role as Leech Lake Environmental Director and as an Anishinaabe man. He hopes that through working with Itasca Waters he can further develop relationships between local governments, help push projects that benefit all parties and share the core values that bring people together to care about the water.

### **Meghan Christianson, Visit Grand Rapids**



Megan has been the Executive Director of Visit Grand Rapids since 2012. Megan has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Concordia University, St. Paul Campus. She has 20 years of marketing, public relations, and trade industry membership/advocacy experience. She is currently Chair of the Minnesota Arrowhead Committee and is the NE Minnesota representative on the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council. She serves on the Mississippi River Parkway Commission from Grand Rapids to Brainerd. She is also a Blandin Foundation Community Leadership Alumni.

Megan lives in Cohasset Minnesota with her husband (Chad) and their two children (Madison, 17 and Caleb, 15). She enjoys being on the lake, scrapbooking, and spending time with family and friends.

### **Stephanie Kessler, Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations**



Stephanie was born and raised in Grand Rapids. She has two Geography degrees: a Bachelor's degree from UMD and a Master's degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where she focused on water resources. She worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency for 24 years in the Mitigation Division, mostly with flood recovery programs and floodplain management. She served eight years on the Itasca Water Plan Implementation Committee, eight years in leadership roles with the

Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations, and now is President again with ICOLA. She has been her lake association president since she attended her first meeting, 20 years ago.

She and her husband have two teenage children. She volunteers for Girl Scouts, Itasca Synchronized Swimming Club, and 4-H. She has done event planning as a consultant, and she currently makes a cooking show for the local TV station, ICTV. She recently was hired as the part-time City of Cohasset Parks and Rec Coordinator. In her spare time, she likes to be outside in all seasons. She grew up on the water and has valued water as a critical resource for as long as she can remember.

### **Eric Raitanen, Fisheries Biologist, Chippewa National Forest**

**Chad Severts, Board Conservationist, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources**