



LAKE MINNETONKA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Save the Lake is a crucial part of the Lake Minnetonka community

Mound, Minn. -- Anyone who lives, works, or plays around Lake Minnetonka likely understands why it's such a beloved place. As Minnesota's ninth largest lake, it feeds Minnehaha Creek and serves as a highly popular spot for boating, sailing, fishing, paddling, swimming and other recreation. On its shores, restaurants, marinas, charters, and boat clubs create a thriving business and tourism scene. LakeMinnetonka also boasts a rich history and has even made its way into popular culture (Prince famously called its waters "purifying" in *Purple Rain*). People inhabit and visit the lake to immerse themselves in an entirely unique and vibrant community.

Many people in the area are familiar with the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD), an agency established in 1967 that has worked ever since to keep Lake Minnetonka clean, healthy, and safe for all who use it. Through decades of initiatives, regulations, and projects, the LMCD is a key steward helping to keep the entire Lake Minnetonka ecosystem thriving.

This is made possible by the LMCD's designation as a conservation district. That means the LMCD can focus solely on Lake Minnetonka to provide equitable, coordinated regulation that is consistent across 14 different cities and two counties. In contrast, larger organizations like the MN DNR and MCWD have a different scope of responsibility. The LMCD works with these and many other state and local agencies to protect, preserve and enhance Lake Minnetonka's environment, economy, and vitality and the LMCD's focus on Lake Minnetonka is crucial to creating a cohesive community with equitable input among the 14 cities bordering the lake.

Save the Lake initiative preserves and protects the watershed

In the 1970s, the LMCD established its Save the Lake initiative, an effort to supplement the organization's work. Save the Lake works in a direct relationship with the community to protect and enhance the lake, which has been a key part of the LMCD's success in achieving that mission.

Jay Soule, who owns Al & Alma's Supper Club and Charter Cruises, served on the Save the Lake committee for a decade. In that time, he taught boater safety lessons, and continues to volunteer, along with Paradise Charter Cruises, to install buoy lights on channel buoys. It's the small contributions from the community that add up to make a difference.

"I've had the unique and blessed privilege to grow up on this lake," Soule said. "This is an

amazing community!” Having spent his childhood and most of his adult life on or near the lake, Soule feels especially compelled to give back through his contributions to Save the Lake.

LMCD prioritizes safety on the lake

The Lake Minnetonka community understands the importance of public safety in the overall enjoyment of the lake. The LMCD’s partnership with the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office Water Patrol division is a major part of what keeps everyone safe while they enjoy the lake.

Lake Minnetonka is the busiest lake in Hennepin County, and is perhaps one of the most highly trafficked lakes in the entire state, as well as a regional and national destination. The summer of 2020 brought an even larger influx of visitors than usual, as people sought outdoor opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the LMCD and Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office were prepared to increase education and their presence, including providing a full-time patrol Deputy who was on the water 40 hours per week, funded through a grant from LMCD’s Save the Lake fund.

Captain Shane Magnuson said the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office has depended on its partnership with the LMCD even more last summer. Budget shortfalls and staffing challenges were just some of the repercussions of COVID-19 and civil unrest, and the LMCD was instrumental in providing funding through Save the Lake that was otherwise lacking. This helped crack down on threats like boating while intoxicated and operating a boat recklessly.

“We really focus on education and trying to get people to do the right thing,” Magnuson said. Last year, the department conducted roughly 1,520 hours of search and rescue on various waterbodies throughout the region, up drastically from the usual average of 300-400 hours. Thanks to the LMCD’s support, a deputy was specifically dedicated to Lake Minnetonka to patrol and respond to emergencies. This year is expected to be another extremely busy year and LMCD is funding two deputies for Lake Minnetonka.

Hennepin County Sheriff David Hutchinson commented on the role the community plays as well, whether it’s marina owners or other business owners helping promote the safety messaging. “We rely on experts from all facets to make sure the lake is safer,” he said.

The LMCD helps keep the community enjoyable for everyone, and its Save the Lake initiative directly depends on the community getting involved. Giving time and financial contributions allows the organization to operate at its fullest potential, growing and adapting with the lake.

LMCD Board Chair Gregg Thomas states he is grateful for all the agencies, businesses, recreational groups, residents and visitors who help preserve Lake Minnetonka and keep it safe and enjoyable for everyone. For more information and to make a contribution, visit lmcd.org.