

EDITORIAL

Lake monitoring underscores three gems in our area

Fresh, relatively clean water is something we take for granted in the Oshkosh area.

This part of the state is surrounded by a bounty of natural beauty we don't always stop to appreciate in our daily lives. Fortunately for us, a group of volunteers led by the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh is not letting the community forget its No. 1 natural resource and our duty to keep it safe and clean.

UWO's Aquatic Research Laboratory, led by Michael Lizotte, hosted a volunteer training session last night for the "Winnebago Pool Self-Help Monitoring Network." Last year, 86 volunteers were trained to monitor water quality on the Winnebago system, including Lake Winnebago, Lake Butte des Morts, Lake Poygan and the connecting Fox River.

It's not the first time scientists and students from the university have stepped in to perform a valuable public service. UWO continues its efforts in monitoring Lake Michigan beaches to ensure the safety of swimmers, most notably in Door County.

It's hard to believe this program, launched last year, is the first of its kind to monitor and track water clarity in the Winnebago system. The Department of Natural Resources manages the fisheries and monitors water quality by regulating municipal sewage and fresh water treatment plants and industrial discharges.

But a government bureaucracy can, rightly, only do so much.

That's where the volunteers come into the picture. If we really want to protect and enhance our natural resources, it has to be the domain of more than a government agency. It must come from real people.

The Winnebago system is blessed to be relatively unblemished compared to the Lower Fox River, which is riddled with PCB contamination. That doesn't diminish the dangers to the system, such as farm and urban runoff and unbridled shoreline redevelopment.

Yet we cannot help but be optimistic that the resource — the gem of our waterways — that initially fostered the development and growth of our city will continue to drive our future.

That confidence is due in no small part due to the other gems in our community: the university and volunteers.

The Final Thought: A Winnebago lake monitoring program led by the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh is another example of how volunteers are the key to enhancing our natural resources and bettering our community.

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