

# FACETS of Freshwater



Clear Wing Sphinx Moth  
By Carolyn Varley

May 2014

Weather Facts and Photo from *MN Weatherguide Environment Calendar*  
Monthly Normals: Temp. Max: 69.4 F Min: 48.9 F Precip: 3.36 in.

 FRESHWATER SOCIETY

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## Heeding faint alarm bells from our shrinking lakes



Steve Woods

A perfectly good mini-essay on some agricultural success stories was sitting on my desktop, ready to go into this month's newsletter. Then, last weekend, I saw one of those lines you run across every so often that grabs your attention and makes you think. It was in an opinion piece by Peter Leschak who has written superbly about the northern life and more recently as a frequent Sunday contributor to the Trib.

He was lamenting variability of memory and quoted Norman Cousins' statement, "History is a vast early warning system." Then Leschak added, "Accompanied, apparently, by a very faint alarm bell."

We've long known water supply is a variable thing. The Nov. 24, 1889, edition of the St. Paul Daily Globe is reproduced in front of me asking whether supplies are adequate and durable. Once the big irrigation rigs showed above the aquifers of the plains states 60 years ago, we all watched water levels go down **fast**.

For other reasons, Southwestern Minnesota has been trying to acquire additional water for decades.

And now, the Legislature is wrestling with some of the groundwater issues facing the metropolitan area. The most visible (literally) driver of the issue is the disappearance of part of White Bear Lake. The Metropolitan Council is calling attention to the right issues concerning our future water supplies. The council and the communities around the lake will have results of a legislatively commissioned study later this summer.

The Freshwater Society co-authored a letter (more on this later in the newsletter) hoping to draw attention to the fact that history is telling us we can't take the easy way out and just make things look better. We urged the Legislature not to start pumping Mississippi River water into the lake until we all see the recommendations of that Met Council study.

*Heeding faint alarm bells...* (continues on page 3)

## FRESHWATER SOCIETY

The Freshwater Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating and inspiring people to value, conserve and protect water resources.

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Visit the Freshwater Society web site at [www.freshwater.org](http://www.freshwater.org).

## We're Looking for People for Two Great Positions!



We have been conducting a succession plan for about a year now. First, Steve Woods came aboard in December to replace Gene Merriam. Now, our next two retirements are coming due. Joan Nephew and Pat Sweeney will both be making long-planned, eagerly anticipated retirements at the end of June. We're happy for them and glad they intend to hang out with us post-retirement as trusted counselors and volunteers.

The Freshwater Society is looking for outstanding individuals for the positions of **Assistant Director of Finance and Administration** and a **Senior Research and Policy Director**. Applications will be accepted through May 22, 2014. (This allows us to review submissions before a long weekend relaxing by the water.) If you are interested let us know! If you know people who should be interested, let them know! If you're too shy for that let Steve know directly (at [swoods@freshwater.org](mailto:swoods@freshwater.org)) and he'll contact them.

More information is available on our [homepage](http://www.freshwater.org), LinkedIn, MN Council of Non-profits, and a host of other job posting sites.

## A Celebration of Spring Raises Funds for Freshwater Programs



The fourth annual Ice OUT/Loon IN on April 24 was a rousing success!

The Rhubarb Vaseline band, led by our board member and former chair, Tom Skramstad, entertained over 200 people who enjoyed a sit-down dinner at the Lafayette Club after bidding on some outstanding silent auction items.

Dick Gray, the lead founder of the Freshwater Society who recently passed away; Joan Nephew, retiring executive director; and Clean Water Champions, Jim Gilbert and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, were honored in the program. Read a [news release](#) announcing the champions.

A nonpoint source agricultural pollution overview by new executive director, Steve Woods, led to a very successful Fund-A-Need fundraiser. Paul Huttner, chief meteorologist at MPR, lit up the evening with his energy and was aided by board member and former chair Blyth Brookman.

A kayak and NOOK HD Tablet were the featured raffle items and drew a lot of interest. Six live auction items, which included 2 ski vacations, a towboat ride, a captained pontoon cruise on area lakes, a one-week stay at a luxury vacation home on Chesapeake Bay and dinner with Chef Beth Dooley were hotly contested.

And last, but not least, the loon calling contest involved six brave contestants who enjoyed showing off their prowess.

*Oh...and lest we forget...Lake Minnetonka's ice did officially GO OUT on April 24 – just like we planned.*



*Betsy Anderson is the winner of the kayak!*



*Diane Lynch, Lisa Whalen, and Kent Sward*



*Blyth Brookman and Paul Huttner honored Jim Gilbert for his dedication to environmental education*





## Hundreds Gather to Network, Focus on Water Issues

More than 340 people gathered May 1 and 2 at Cragun's Resort in Brainerd to attend the State of Water Conference: Minnesotans Protecting Our Lakes and Rivers.

This one-of-a-kind event was formerly titled the Lakes and Rivers Conference and was organized by the non-profit Minnesota Waters until that organization ceased much of its programming in 2012.



Paul Austin, Conservation MN, and Steve Woods, Freshwater Society

After hearing requests for a return of the conference, several partners got together beginning in September 2013 to revive it. They included: Conservation Minnesota (now home to the advocacy arm of Minnesota Waters), University of Minnesota Extension, the Freshwater Society, and representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.

Lake associations, county and watershed district representatives, state agency professionals, non-profit groups and private sector consultants attended the conference. It featured 35 workshops and information sessions, plus the opportunity to network and connect with like-minded people from across the state.

Steve Woods, the Freshwater Society's executive director, welcomed the conference attendees and encouraged them to follow the example of the Society's main founder, Dick Gray. Woods told the crowd to lead as citizens who have other obligations in life, but are committed to protecting our water resources.

Attendees were able to choose from concurrent sessions in one of five tracks: Aquatic Invasive Species; Restoration of Aquatic Habitat; Watersheds; Local Impact; and Groundwater, Nutrient Management and Runoff. In addition, topics from lawn care to watershed assessment and civic engagement were covered by the four plenary speakers:

- Darby Nelson, Freshwater Society board member, aquatic ecologist and author of "For Love of Lakes"
- John Linc Stine, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Commissioner
- John Jashke, Board of Water and Soil Resources Executive Director
- Barb Naramore, DNR Assistant Commissioner



Attendees play a game simulating land use management in a watershed.

Thursday night included ample time to relax, connect with old friends and make some new ones at the exhibitors' reception, which featured booths showcasing materials and services from 25 exhibitors.

The sponsoring organizations are already planning another conference in 2016.

## Earn Money Selling Weatherguides!



Is your school, organization, or club in need of an easy money-maker? We've got that. Forget wrapping paper and candy bars. The Minnesota Weatherguide Environment Calendar is a fundraising product that can be enjoyed all year. As Minnesota's favorite calendar, the Weatherguide practically sells itself.

Earn \$8.50 for every Weatherguide sold! Contact [Jeanne@freshwater.org](mailto:Jeanne@freshwater.org) or 952-314-8113 to learn more or to customize your fundraiser to meet your goals!

## Heeding faint alarm bells from our shrinking lakes (con't from pg 1)

As I am writing this column, it is not clear how the issue will be resolved. A Senate version of an appropriation bill proposes spending \$800,000 to begin planning how to put river water into the lake. Some House members of a conference committee may propose spending about the same amount on a variety of strategies for meeting the Northeast Metro's water supply needs – probably including some new reliance on the Mississippi – and for reviving the lake. We need multiple efforts to keep the water coming reliably out of our kitchen taps and to preserve the lakes we cherish.

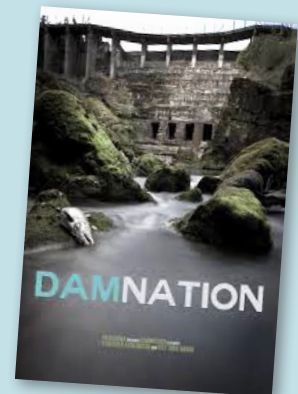
History has a faint alarm bell. The lake and the communities around it that are calling for the Legislature's help have provided an amplifier. We need to listen.

Regards,

**STEVE WOODS**

Steve Woods  
Executive Director

## June 5th DAMNATION Screening



*DAMNATION*, a film about dams and the havoc they have wreaked on American rivers, will be screened at 7 p.m. Friday, June 5, in Macalester College's Davis Auditorium, 1600 Grand Ave., St. Paul. The film's production and distribution were financed by the Patagonia outdoor clothing chain and its chairman, Yvon Chouinard.

**Learn more** about the film and view a trailer. Or phone the St. Paul Patagonia store at **651-698-1703** for information.

## Next Lecture coming Sept. 18 Measuring Declining Groundwater

**MOOS FAMILY SPEAKER SERIES**  
on water resources

A fascinating presentation on measuring groundwater declines from space will be the 14th lecture in a speaker series co-sponsored by the Freshwater Society and the University of Minnesota's College of Biological Sciences.



Dr. Jay Famiglietti

Dr. Jay Famiglietti, a hydrologist and professor of Earth System Sciences and Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Irvine, will present the lecture Sept. 18 in St. Paul.

He leads research exploring declines in Earth's stores of groundwater measured over the last decade by two orbiting NASA satellites. [Learn more and register](#) to attend.

The satellite sensing, known as the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment or GRACE, detects changes in the mass of points on the Earth's surface. Increases or declines in groundwater in storage affect that mass.

"Results point to the harsh reality that groundwater in most of the world's major aquifers – in India, the Middle East, China, and even in the High Plains and Central Valley aquifers in the United States – is being rapidly depleted, likely never to be replaced" Dr. Famiglietti says. "The global pattern of groundwater

depletion also raises important concerns about the potential for heightened conflict, and about climate, water, food and economic security."

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## Environmental Organizations Weigh in on Groundwater Use

In a Pioneer Press op-ed column this week, Freshwater Society Executive Director Steve Woods and the leaders of two other environmental organizations urged lawmakers not to rush into a plan to pump Mississippi River water into the diminished White Bear Lake.

The op-ed, published May 7, was written by Whitney Clark of the Friends of the Mississippi River, Woods, and Scott Strand of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. Read the [column](#).

At the time the column was written, a Senate version of a spending bill proposed allocating \$800,000 to begin design of a project to put river water into the lake. A comparable House bill did not include the project.

In their column, Clark, Woods, and Strand urged the Legislature to commit first to addressing the overuse of groundwater that has been blamed for the lake's decline before beginning any "augmentation" of the lake with water from the Mississippi River.

They urged lawmakers to wait for the results of a Metropolitan Council study of the lake's decline and possible



White Bear Lake is 4.5 feet shallower than it once was.

remedies. The results are due late this summer or this fall.

"White Bear Lake is not the first, and certainly won't be the last, lake, river, or trout stream that goes dry due to excessive groundwater pumping," they wrote. "Taxpayers can't be asked to build pipes to the nearest big river every time another lake succumbs."

Read an April 25 [Star Tribune editorial](#) on the same subject. It said:

"Rather than pre-empting the Met Council study and focusing on the band-aid solution of augmentation, policymakers should be getting serious about fixing the main problem: the unsustainability of current water management in the northeast metro and elsewhere."

The Star Tribune editorial cited a 2013 Freshwater Society report on groundwater sustainability. [Read that report](#).

View a Department of Natural Resources [graph showing the lake's decline](#) since 2004. The water level in the lake has rebounded just a bit since a low point in 2013.

Since the op-ed was published, some House members have been discussing a compromise. It would spend about the same \$800,000 on several strategies to address the Northeast Metro's water problems – probably by more reliance on river water – and to investigate restoring the lake, which might also involve river water.

## Join the Society – Get the Weatherguide!

Become a new member of the Freshwater Society and you'll receive the new, *2015 Minnesota Weatherguide Environment Calendar*. It's a win-win!

Help us protect freshwater resources and you'll enjoy a plethora of amazing regional photography, Nature Notes, weather history and meteorological information, gardening tips and much more.

**Become a member!**

