

## What's the Difference? Lake Organizations in a Nut Shell

Imagine living in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when women commonly wore bloomers, camisoles, petticoats, and corsets; men adorned themselves with fringed riding gloves, canvas suspenders, sleeve garters and an array of hats. Apparel of the time was built to last, children often wore hand-me-downs and clothes were washed in the river. The most common way to preserve food involved smoking or drying it and refrigeration depended on ice cut from lakes. *Twin Lakes still has remnants of this time as two ice cutting/storage facilities have been converted into private residences.* Survival depended on the health of natural systems. So, in the late 1890's when people began finding vegetative debris in the ice, they grew concerned about the stability of the lake's ecosystem; which resulted in the formation of Wisconsin's very first lake organization in 1898.

Since that time 680 lake organizations have formed in Wisconsin, making it a leader in the strength, size, and number of organizations. Although almost every organization forms to address a single issue or concern (i.e. vegetative debris in ice), once formed they inevitably find numerous other topics to investigate and explore. These organizations are as varied as the reasons they form, but they generally fall into two basic categories; Associations or Districts. Associations may be further divided into Unincorporated, Incorporated, or Qualified Lake Associations. Although there are many ways to classify an association, they remain the most simplistic lake organization to form and maintain. The common denominator among all associations involves a voluntary membership and most of the functions members participate in are social events. While social activities create a sense of neighborliness, they do not maintain any regulatory authority and only Qualified Lake Associations may apply for grants. This does not mean that members cannot fight for regulatory changes; it simply means the Association cannot mandate the change nor can they implement the change.

Districts, on-the-other-hand, hold some regulatory authority especially when levying a tax. The two types of District include Lake Districts and Sanitary Districts. The District membership is defined by a boundary. In Twin Lakes the Village boundaries define the Twin Lakes Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District's membership base. Although a board of commissioners governs both types of Districts and both may be granted authority to adopt boating ordinance by the local government, only the Lake District holds an Annual Meeting – the purest form of democracy. The electors attending an Annual Lake District Meeting may grant Sanitary District Powers to the Lake District, approve a budget for the upcoming year, vote a tax on all taxable property in the District, and elect one or more commissioners to fill vacancies in the elected membership of the board.

While fashion has changed from petticoats to low-rise jeans and things don't seem to last as long as they used to, one thing remains the same; Wisconsin's lake organizations continue to push for clean water, fair use of the public trust, and a better quality of life.

For more information on Lake Associations and Lake Districts, look for the updated "People of the Lakes, Wisconsin Lake Organization Series" put out by the UW-Extension Lake Partnership with the Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL). These two publications explain Lake Associations and Lake Districts in detail.

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