

# Lake District works with local businesses to promote p-free lawn fertilizer

By Greg Farnham and Ruth Johnson, Lake Sinissippi Improvement District Commissioners

In summer 2007, the Lake Sinissippi Lake District contacted local hardware stores and found that only one of the four stocked phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer and weed 'n feed. We discussed with the store managers the possibility of stocking phosphorus-free fertilizer products as part of a spring 2008 sales promotion by the Lake District. Each store manager agreed to participate in the promotion.

The summer 2007 newsletter for the Lake District included an article on the phosphorus problem, the importance of using non-phosphorus fertilizer for normal lawn care, and the sales promotion project planned for 2008. The article reminded property owners who use a commercial applicator for lawn care that they can request that phosphorus-free fertilizer be applied. We also encouraged persons with questions about the need for additional phosphorus to have a soil test done and referenced the UW-Extension Office in Juneau.

In December 2007, we issued a news article to the three newspapers serving the lake community and watershed: the Dodge County Independent News, Horicon Reporter and Mayville News. The article was entitled *Phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer to help river and lake*, and included a chart depicting

a total phosphorus water quality index (see article below). The article indicated that phosphorus-free lawn fertilizers have Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K) nutrient numbers with a zero in the middle, such as 22-0-15, and identified the four participating hardware stores. Lastly, the article said that the Lake District planned to collaborate with the stores and promote the sale and use of phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer within the Rock River-Lake Sinissippi community during the 2008 growing season.

We worked with the media department of one of the newspapers and developed an attractive and eye-catching advertisement for the promotion program (see right). Each advertisement included a discount coupon good for \$2.00 off the purchase price of a bag of phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer or phosphorus-free weed 'n feed at the participating hardware stores.

In March 2008, half-page black and white advertisements were run in the three community and watershed newspapers. At the same time an information letter and coupon were mailed to Lake District property owners, and in-store promotion displays were prepared for each of the hardware stores. A follow-up media run was made in early May with quarter-page two-

color advertisements in the three newspapers.

More than fifty households participated in the sales promotion, purchasing bags of phosphorus-free lawn care products with the redeemable coupons.

The Lake District is pleased with the results of our initial efforts. We included an article in our summer 2008 newsletter about the program and featured a photograph of the store manager who sold the most bags of fertilizer with

the coupons. We had soil test kits available at our annual meeting in August for those in attendance. Although we plan to repeat the promotional effort in 2009, it is clear that the only truly effective, meaningful step for long-term water quality improvement is a statewide restriction on phosphorus-containing lawn fertilizer. The Lake District is supportive of efforts by Wisconsin Association of Lakes and other organizations to persuade the Wisconsin Legislature to complete this important work.

**Save Our Rivers and Lakes!**

Lawn fertilizers normally contain a mixture of nutrients including nitrogen phosphorus and potassium. Phosphorus is represented by the middle number.

**Phosphorus Directly Affects The Water Quality of The Rock River and Lake Sinissippi.**

- Currently the Rock River and Lake Sinissippi have twice the concentration of phosphorus that indicates poor water quality.
- Most soils in this area have high amounts of phosphorus. So high in fact, additional phosphorus is not needed. Excess phosphorus does not help our lawns, but harms our waterways.

**High Phosphorus Levels Mean Large Amounts of Algae in Streams, Rivers and Lakes.**

- Algae makes water green, affects recreational activities such as swimming, water skiing and boating.
- Algae can have an unpleasant odor and when algae dies it depletes the water of oxygen resulting in fish kills.
- 1 pound of phosphorus washed into surface waters results in 500 pounds of algae.

**Join Lake Sinissippi Improvement District In Keeping Our Rivers, Lakes and Streams Healthy!**

**Purchase Phosphorus - Free Lawn Fertilizer This Year and In The Future!**

Lake Sinissippi Improvement District • [www.lakesinissippi.org](http://www.lakesinissippi.org)  
 "A Wisconsin Public Inland Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District Established by Dodge County"

**Save \$2.00**

**\$2.00 OFF Your** Next Purchase of Phosphorus-FREE\* Lawn Fertilizer or Weed and Feed at These Participating Stores

Mike's Hardware | Ace Hardware  
 Hustisford | Mayville  
 Hardware Hank | Ben Franklin/True Value  
 Horicon | Mayville

Coupon Expires Nov. 1, 2008  
 Coupon Good For \$2.00 OFF One Bag of Phosphorus-Free Lawn Fertilizer or Phosphorus-Free Weed 'n Feed.  
 \* Phosphorus Free Lawn Fertilizers have nutrient numbers of zero in the middle.

**Save \$2.00**

## Effects of phosphorus on Lake Sinissippi

Both the Rock River and Lake Sinissippi in Dodge County appear on the federal EPA 303(d) list of impaired waters due to nutrient enrichment from high levels of phosphorus. Finding ways to effectively deal with this pollutant presents Lake Sinissippi Improvement District with a considerable challenge.

The total watershed of the lake is more than 500 square miles, a challenging factor when trying to moderate the effects of eutrophication and improve lake water quality. Upstream from Lake Sinissippi, the Rock River watershed includes the Horicon Marsh as well as thousands of acres of agricultural land and urban areas of Waupun, Mayville and Horicon.

In 2002, Lake Sinissippi Improvement District began monitoring levels of phosphorus and other water

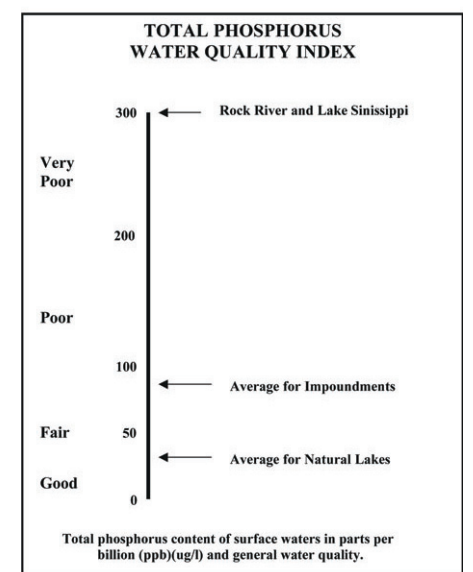
quality parameters in the lake and tributaries. Total phosphorus concentrations in excess of 150 micrograms per liter (ug/L or ppb) generally indicate very poor water quality. Phosphorus values in the river and lake are usually twice that amount, over 300 ug/L!

These high phosphorus levels are a contributing factor in production of large amounts of algae in the lake during summer months, which can adversely affect water recreational activities. When the algae die and are decomposed by bacteria, oxygen in the water is depleted. Dissolved oxygen concentrations in the lake can drop to levels that are conducive to a fishery dominated by rough fish.

The Lake District has been working with county and state officials to establish

regulations that restrict the sale and use of phosphorus-containing lawn fertilizer for residential and commercial applications.

In 2007, the Lake District decided to initiate action on the local level to target the lawn fertilizer issue. We reviewed studies of soil nutrient composition within our watershed and found, not surprisingly, that most soils have very high concentrations of phosphorus—so high, in fact, that no additional phosphorus is needed for normal lawn care. We also read, with interest, about outreach work conducted by Lake Ripley Management District and the Rock River Coalition to heighten public awareness of the phosphorus problem, and to encourage use of phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer.



Total phosphorus levels in Lake Sinissippi are 300 ug/L, twice the amount of phosphorus that generally indicates very poor water quality.

Although Wisconsin is considering a state-wide restriction on phosphorus lawn fertilizer, as modeled on the current laws in Dane County and Minnesota, legislative action in Madison is unfortunately stalled.