



Pend Oreille Messenger

A Semi-Annual Publication of the Tri-State Water Quality Council

Spring 2009

Welcome to the Pend Oreille Messenger!

This newsletter is an opportunity to reflect on how much we value Lake Pend Oreille and how we can be better stewards of this magnificent resource. The newsletter is a project of the Nearshore Committee of the Tri-State Water Quality Council.

This first issue covers the results of a survey that helped launch this outreach and education effort, a project to replace outdated septic systems, and a tribute to our campaign's first watershed warrior, Gary Parker. Please contact me if you have any questions.

A clean lake begins at your doorstep.
John Sugden, Editor

Shoreline Property Owners' Views on the Water Quality of Lake Pend Oreille

How Do Yours Compare?

The water quality of Idaho's largest lake, Pend Oreille, is threatened by human activities in and around the lake. To understand shoreline property owners' views on the water quality of Lake Pend Oreille, the Lake Nearshore Committee of the Tri-State Water Quality Council contracted with the University of Idaho's Department of Conservation Social Sciences to conduct a survey of lakeshore residents during the summer and fall of 2007.

A total of 267 lakeshore property owners completed the questionnaires (out of 500 sent). The survey asked how people use Lake Pend Oreille, where they get information about the lake, what they know about water quality issues, and what water quality problems they have observed in Lake Pend Oreille.

Results of the survey helped launch Tri-State's community awareness campaign to engage lakeshore residents in the protection of the lake's water quality. Lakeshore property owners are very interested in water quality issues on the lake, and they place a lot of importance on water quality issues. However, they say they don't have a lot of knowledge about



water quality issues, and they don't trust all information available to them.

Almost half of the people surveyed agreed their activities can harm lake water quality. In addition, they strongly believe that water quality of the lake should be protected and that individuals must be responsible for protecting water quality. One of the biggest concerns mentioned was wastewater in the form of faulty or outdated septic systems near the shoreline.

If you are interested in learning more about the survey, contact Tri-State Water Quality Council at (208) 265-9092 email or tristatecouncil@sandpoint.net.

Quick Tip: Having lots of friends and family over for a long weekend? Save your septic tank from overuse and rent a porto potty.

Local Group Provides Opportunity to Protect Lake

Lakeshore homeowners can help keep Lake Pend Oreille clean by way of a new septic replacement program. The project was announced in Fall 2008 in an effort to curb pollution from outdated septic systems near Lake Pend Oreille. A few potential sites have recently been chosen for a pilot project.

"This program is a way that we can help willing landowners install more efficient systems that will also protect Lake Pend Oreille," says John Sugden, Program Director for Tri-State Water Quality Council.

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Due to the voluntary nature of this project, homeowners' privacy is one of the top priorities. Another priority is helping homeowners understand that the Lake Nearshore Committee, the group conducting the project, is a useful resource when they are making management decisions for their homes and properties.

Poorly maintained or substandard septic systems have the potential to increase nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, in the lake.

This septic pilot project was developed to help meet water quality standards mandated by the federal Clean Water Act in a water quality improvement plan known as a "Total Maximum Daily Load" (TMDL) for Lake Pend Oreille. The plan addresses nutrient issues in the nearshore waters.

Many lakeshore homeowners consider septic and sewer systems to be one of the biggest threats to the water quality of Lake Pend Oreille, according to a survey of shoreline homeowners commissioned by the Lake Nearshore Committee in 2007. The issue is a priority for the committee.

The committee will select a septic replacement project site on the south side of the Long Bridge. Members of the committee will be working on securing grant funds to assist with the project throughout the winter. Implementation is planned for 2010.

The project will feature a community system that will replace individual septic systems and be designed to eliminate nutrient contribution to Lake Pend Oreille. The project also is intended to raise general public awareness of the potential for outdated systems to contribute to water quality problems. If the pilot project is successful, the committee will work toward implementing a longer term program for other homes that meet the criteria.

"Outdated septic systems near the lake have the potential to cause problems," says Greg Becker, District Conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). "This is the kind of action that builds bridges to make a positive step in protecting water quality."



Lake Pend Oreille Names First Watershed Warrior

Gary S. Parker was the face of shoreline stewardship on Lake Pend Oreille until his death last summer. Gary spent his last three years with the Bonner Soil and Water Conservation District, where he launched the Pend Oreille Lake*A*Syst (Lakeshore Assessment System) Program. During that time, he reached more than 200 shoreline landowners with Lake*A*Syst materials.

Gary also worked with the city of Sandpoint and Indigo Nursery to install a water quality demonstration site at Memorial Park Boat Launch using stormwater swales and 600 feet of riparian plantings. We invite you to visit this site to see innovative efforts to protect water quality on the lake.



Gary's efforts to protect Lake Pend Oreille and create partnerships were fruitful and full of purpose. He also spent 20 years serving the public as a park ranger at Harriman, Farragut, and Round Lake State Parks.

Gary expended efforts far and wide to protect the natural resources of

our community, our region, and even our planet. For these contributions, Gary Parker receives the honor of Lake Pend Oreille's first official "Watershed Warrior." Thank you, Gary.

If you know someone who works for the good of our water resources, nominate him or her for Watershed Warrior. Submit 200 words or less and a picture of your nominee to:

Tri-State Water Quality Council
101 N. Fourth Ave., Ste. 105
Sandpoint, Idaho 83864
(208) 265-9092
tristatecouncil@sandpoint.net