



WAWASEE AREA CONSERVANCY FOUNDATION

CONSERVANCY VIEWS

Protecting our watershed through **AWARENESS, ANALYSIS** and **ACTION**.

Fall 2025



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Photo credit: Larry Baumgardt

Heaven on the Water: Why Preserving The Wawasee Watershed Matters Now More Than Ever

By Bill McCully, Board Chair



Bald Eagle, Larry Baumgardt

As I write this, the sun is rising over Lake Wawasee on a crisp October morning. The houses along the South Shore are glowing with the “golden windows” effect of the sun reflecting over dark blue Lake Wawasee. The piers are empty and will soon be gone, and the only activity so far this morning is a “fly-by” of one of the bald eagles that nest next door. There is a fire in the fireplace, and I am finishing up my first cup of coffee.

Moments like these make me pinch myself to ensure I am not dreaming, because to me, this is truly heaven.

There is no doubt that the lakes in our watershed mean just as much to you. 2025 brought the moments we all cherish: busy family-centered activities, quiet nights of pure calm, and the joyful chaos of weekends and holidays. 2025 also illustrated the challenges our lakes face. A combination of weather events, increased loads of nutrients (especially phosphorus), and lake activities caused the bottom of the lakes to be stirred, resulting in a very visible impact on our waters—all evidence of the serious situation we face.

Our landmark Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study (WINS) has provided a roadmap for action. We know precisely where our problems lie, both in the lakes and upstream along the five inlets feeding Wawasee and Syracuse, and we can now shine a light on how to address them.

While we have identified the issues scientifically, we may have learned even more from our friend Jace Morgan, who, in September, swam the entire shoreline of Lake Wawasee. In his 17-mile, nine-hour journey, he was immersed in the lake and became perhaps more a part of it than anyone ever has. He dedicated his swim to WACF and to the health of our watershed. He left for his swim and returned to the pier on our property along Conkin Bay. Jace saw the crystal clear waters that we all cherish, but also saw the results of the foreign substances which have caused mucky bottoms that were once pristine sand and massive weed growths which, as Jace put it, “looked more like giant bushes.”

Based on the WINS data and the experience of Jace, we at WACF not only have the desire, but the obligation to take action to address our issues. We are actively vetting innovative approaches to address phosphorus and sediment in the lakes and upstream areas. We are working with our government partners, our agricultural neighbors, and other local organizations to plot a course of action. We will soon be asking for your help in that endeavor. Stay tuned and be ready to join us to preserve these magical waters for generations to come.

Thanks and see you lakeside!



Executive Director Project Update

By Heather Harwood, Executive Director

Thirty-four years ago, we were fortunate enough to have some very involved and caring members from the WPOA hatch a plan to create an entity focused strictly on environmental concerns to protect water quality and pristine lands around our lakes. And the WACF was born. WACF now protects 1,080 acres of sensitive and pristine lands and remains motivated by the same mission. Our projects in the upper watershed protect the water quality that flows into and through our lakes. We sincerely thank you for your support, which makes our projects possible.

Partners in our current work include the IDNR Lake and River Enhancement, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership. We appreciate their ongoing commitment in support of our shared mission.

Recent, upcoming, and ongoing projects include:

- **Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP)** - invasive plant removal, timber stand improvement, and habitat restoration continue in the upper watershed on WACF lands.
- **Pollinator Garden at The Zimmerman Preserve**, along with trails throughout the 40-acre preserve that overlooks the Johnson Bay Wetlands.

- **Dillon Creek Tributary stabilization** upstream of Enchanted Hills. This project was identified in WACF's Engineering Feasibility Study, and the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership awarded funds for construction.
- **Aquatic weed treatment** - Eurasian Watermilfoil and Starry Stonewort continue to be a threat to our lakes and channels. Grant funding by IDNR LARE, along with treatment funding provided by WPOA and SLA.
- **Trails** - are open year-round, from dawn until dusk, at the WACF Levinson-LaBrosse Lakes and Wetlands Education Center, the Syracuse Lake Wetlands, the Zimmerman preserve on Black Point Road, and the Sacajawea Overlook at Turkey Creek Wetlands.

Thank you for your support, and thanks to all our great volunteers who help with our eco zones, mowing and trimming, canoe trips, website, studies, projects, and educational events. We can't do it without you!

WACF mission:

To protect and enhance water quality and natural attributes in the Wawasee watershed through water-related land acquisition, educational programming, and scientifically-informed action to preserve the lakes for future generations.



Eco-Zone Buoy, Larry Baumgardt



The WINS That Changed Everything: From Discovery to Restoration

By Dr. Joan Szyal , Ecology Chair

Enhancing Water Quality: Turning Knowledge into Action

At every WACF Board meeting, a simple sign hangs in the room. It doesn't blink or shout—it simply reads:

"Enhancing Water Quality."

Three little words, but they're our North Star. Every discussion, every project, every vote gets measured against that mission—because every choice we make ripples through the health of our watershed.

The WINS That Changed Everything

If you've been following our journey, you've probably heard of WINS—the Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study. It's not just another acronym; it's a game-changer.

Before WINS, we knew our lakes were struggling. We could see the symptoms—algae blooms, murky water—but we didn't have the data to diagnose the cause. Then WINS came along, shining a bright, scientific spotlight on what's really happening beneath the surface.

Here's what we've learned:

- **33%** of the phosphorus entering Lake Wawasee flows in through Dillon Creek.
- **45%** comes from Turkey Creek—and half of that from just two subwatersheds: Piper and Galloway, at the southern and eastern edges of our watershed.
- Turkey Creek Wetlands isn't behaving like a true wetland; instead of gently filtering water, it's become a fast-flowing channel.
- Around **70%** of the phosphorus in the lake is "legacy phosphorus"—already sitting in the water, waiting to be managed.
- And those heavy March and April rainstorms? They're not just gloomy—they're phosphorus superhighways, causing the cloudy "plumes" we capture on drone footage.

Knowledge is power—and now, we have the power to act.

From Data to Doing

Armed with what WINS revealed, WACF is shifting gears—from understanding the problem to implementing solutions that will make a measurable difference.

Here's what's on the table:

- Can we help Turkey Creek Wetlands function like a true wetland

again—absorbing phosphorus and sediment instead of sending it racing into the lake?

- How can we partner with farmers to support land practices that keep nutrients where they belong—on the fields, not in the water?
- Are there opportunities to reconstruct or remediate wetlands throughout the watershed?
- What other innovative water treatment options could we explore?

The "when" and "how" of these projects will depend on opportunity, timing, funding—and, most importantly, sound science. This isn't a sprint; it's a long-term investment in clean water, thriving wildlife, and a healthy legacy for generations to come.

It Takes a Village (and a Watershed)

No one protects a lake alone. That's why WACF collaborates with experts like Dr. Jerry Sweeten of ECI and connects with lake associations across the country. We trade ideas, study new technologies, and share our wins—and our lessons learned.

We're also grateful for our many partners at the county, state, and federal levels who share our commitment to clean, clear, life-filled water.

How You Can Help

Here's where you come in.

Grab the watershed map in this newsletter—get to know your creeks, inlets, and flow paths. The more familiar you are with how our water moves, the more powerful you become as a steward of it.

Then, take the next step:

- Join an ecology committee meeting.

- Volunteer your time.
- Ask questions and share ideas.
- Or support the mission with a donation that keeps the momentum flowing.

Every hour, every idea, every dollar counts. Together, we can ensure that the Wawasee Watershed stays vibrant—teeming with wildlife, reflecting our skies, and welcoming generations of swimmers, boaters, and dreamers.

Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime.

The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land.

– Luna Leopold

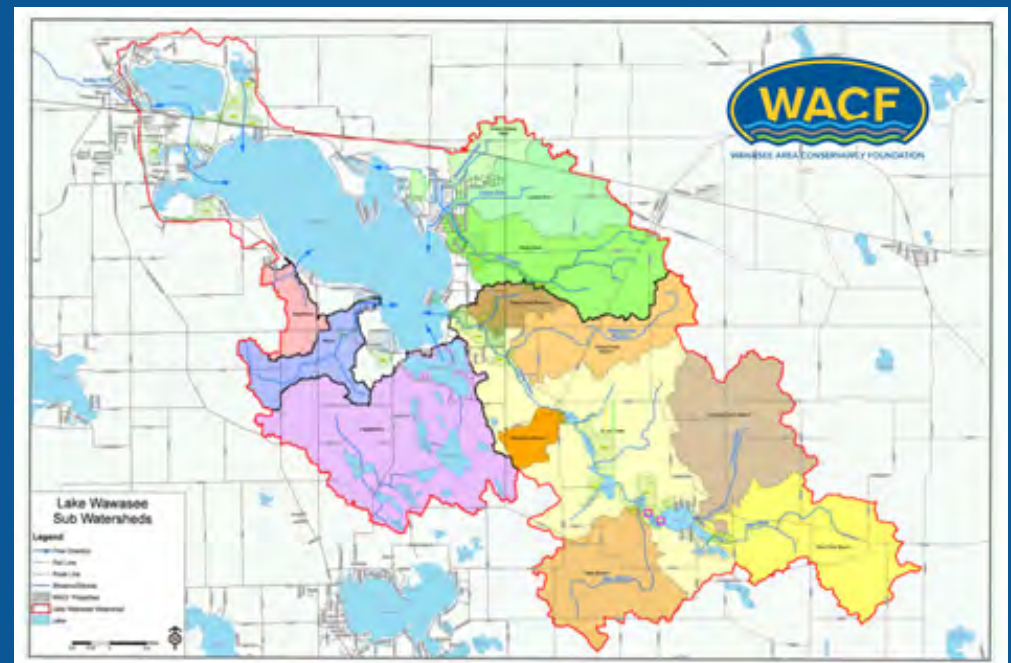




Photo credit: Larry Baumgardt



A Swim, A Community, and a Lake: How One Man's Lap Around Wawasee United Us All

By Emily Maggart, Development Officer

Some moments remind us just how lucky we are to call Lake Wawasee and the Wawasee watershed home—one of those moments happened on a bright September morning, when the calm waters of Indiana's largest natural lake rippled with excitement—and pride.

As the sun rose, Jace Morgan slipped into the cool water, determined to swim a full lap around the lake. It was an ambitious goal—one that would test endurance, focus, and grit. But as he began his journey, something unexpected happened.

From the very first strokes, the lake came alive.

Boaters slowed their engines and waved as he passed. Families gathered on docks, coffee mugs in hand, shouting

encouragement across the water. Everywhere you looked, neighbors were smiling, cheering, and celebrating—not just Jace's determination, but the lake that connected them all.

"It was incredible to see," said Heather Harwood. "Jace's swim wasn't just about athletic achievement—it was a tribute to Lake Wawasee and WACF. And it reminded all of us that the clean, healthy water we sometimes take for granted is what makes moments like this possible."

Jace's swim became a living symbol of what WACF has always championed: the belief that protecting our watershed protects our way of life. Because a clean lake doesn't just mean safe swimming—it means vibrant wildlife, thriving ecosystems, and the peace of mind that comes from knowing future generations

will enjoy the same sparkling waters we do.

As the crowd erupted when Jace completed his lap, the message was clear: this lake is more than just a body of water—it's the heart of our community.

And that sense of connection doesn't have to fade with the ripples. WACF hopes everyone who witnessed the event will carry that same enthusiasm forward—by supporting water quality efforts, volunteering, or simply being mindful of how our everyday choices impact the lake.

Because when it comes to the Wawasee watershed, we're all in it together—one lap, one drop, one shared love for the water that brings us home.





WACF Education Programs Soar in 2025 — And 2026 Is Brewing Something Special!

By Pam Schumm, Education Officer

Wow—what a year! In 2025, the Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation (WACF) connected with nearly **3,400 people** through our education programs. That's 3,400 curious minds exploring everything from wetlands to watersheds—and having fun while doing it. Our mission to inspire environmental stewardship really came to life through 20+ hands-on events that mixed learning with a bit of adventure and a lot of laughs.



Looking ahead to 2026, we're stirring things up a bit. Our winter series is coming back as 'Conservation and Coffee!' Think conservation topics served alongside a warm cup of coffee and great conversation. Mark your calendars for February 7, March 7, and April 4—it's a perfect excuse to sip, learn, and chat about protecting the world around us.

None of this would be possible without our incredible volunteers. In 2025, they gave over 1,200 hours—that's almost 50 full days of pure dedication! They bring the energy, the knowledge, and the smiles that make every event unforgettable. And here's the bonus: volunteers get a free WACF t-shirt and the unbeatable joy of seeing someone light up when they spot a frog or a heron for the first time.

Curious? Excited? Ready to jump in? Reach out to me at pam@wacf.com or fill out our volunteer form at wacf.com. Let's make 2026 even more impactful—one cup of coffee and one conversation about conservation at a time!



Reflections on Summer: A Heartfelt Thank You

By Becky Levinson, Development Chair

As the fall sunset, with its bright and vibrant colors cast a warm glow over Lake Wawasee, I find myself reflecting on the whirlwind of activities and conversations that have filled these past months. It's that bittersweet moment when the vibrant energy of summer activities starts to ebb, much like the lake settling down after a busy day of boat traffic. As temperatures drop and the hustle and bustle fade, the water's surface becomes a mirror, clear and calm, allowing us to see not just the reflections of the trees above, but also the deeper emotions that come with the season's end.

This newfound clarity brings a wave of gratitude for all the time spent on the lake this summer. From lazy afternoons floating with friends to exhilarating boat rides, every moment has been a reminder of the natural beauty that surrounds us. But as I sit here, sipping my pumpkin spice latte (because yes, fall is officially upon us), I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of appreciation for you—our generous donors and stakeholders. Your contributions have been instrumental in helping WACF in our mission to maintain water quality and protect this precious ecosystem for future generations.

While many are completing the final season tasks of taking boats out and packing up their lake cottages in preparation for the migration to

winter havens, our work at WACF is far from done. As the leaves turn and the air cools, we continue to work on and plan for next year's essential projects including invasive aquatic weed control, stream bank restorations, research into phosphorus removal technologies, and wetland restoration engineering studies. Children fill the Education Center weekly on their

field trips to learn about various aspects of the watershed. It's a year-round effort that requires dedication and passion, and I cannot stress enough how vital your continued support is to our success.

I invite you to carry this spirit of gratitude into the final months of 2025. This is also the perfect time to consider making an end-of-year donation to WACF. Your support helps us continue our vital work in preserving Lake Wawasee watershed for future generations. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a significant impact in maintaining the beauty and health of this lake.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support.

Together, we're making a lasting difference in our community and the environment we cherish.





WAWASEE AREA CONSERVANCY FOUNDATION

Phone: 574.457.4549
Email: info@wacf.com

Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation
11586 N. SR 13, PO Box 548
Syracuse, IN 46567

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 8
SYRACUSE, IN

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