

Council members tour Lester Lake, other Legacy locations



DNR Park Rapids Area Fisheries Supervisor Doug Kingsley tells members of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council tour group about the history and the fishery of Lester Lake near Kabekona Lake, south of Laporte.

Photos by Pat Miller

By Pat Miller
Contributing Writer

Laporte, Minn. — Lester Lake in northern Hubbard County usually doesn't entertain many visitors, but last Wednesday, the 70-acre waterway was among the backdrops of a tour of what is right in Minnesota conservation.

Located within the Kabekona Lake Watershed, Lester Lake and 370 surrounding acres were in private ownership until 2010 when, through a collaborative effort, the property was bought and transformed into a public state aquatic management area/scientific and natural area.

Among the partners joining forces to purchase and protect the Lester Lake SNA/AMA was the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, and June 28, members of that group received a first-hand look at their purchase.

"This is incredible," Mark Johnson, executive director of the LSOHC, said as he stood near the primitive boat access on the western shore. "The Lester Lake area is so unique and, absolutely, Lester Lake is a great use of our funding."

When the owner of the Lester Lake property decided to sell, Minnesota DNR officials and Kabekona Lake Foundation members were eager to buy because they understood the importance of preserving the property and the watershed. Originally, the buyer didn't accept the offer, but the negotiations continued.

In 2009 KLF members raised \$60,000, received a \$350,000 Legacy grant, and teamed up with the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund, plus other state sources and matches, for additional funding. Collectively, the partners raised the required funds, and the

"It is one thing to look at (a project) on paper, but it has to be exciting for them to see what we are doing here," Nervig said.

And it was.

"I'm glad that \$350,000 of our funds helped make this possible, but what amazes me is what the other people who had a vested interest in (the Lester Lake acquisition) were able to do to generate the remaining funds," Johnson said.

The process of channeling a proposal to Outdoor Heritage Fund fruition is not always successful. This year, according to the LSOHC website, committee members analyzed 45 projects that combined for a \$295 million price tag.

"And each year we make recommendations for about \$100 million in projects," said Joe Pavelko, LSOHC assistant director. "Minnesota is a big state with all types of ecosystems and there are many criteria we use (to determine funding)."

Last week, Pavelko and the rest of the tour group also visited

the Kabekona WMA on the west side of Hwy. 64 near Laporte, Badoura Jackpine Woodland SNA near Nevis, Huntersville WMA near Sebek, the Kaiser Wild Rice RIM easement near Backus, the Cass County Forest acquisition near Hackensack, and an aquatic invasive species training project and watershed-protection easements on Ten Mile Lake near Hackensack.

While each location benefits

the ecosystem, in the Kabekona Lake area, Lester Lake is the crown jewel. At least for Nervig.

"Lester Lake is a special place and I want to say, on behalf of our community, how thankful we are to Lessard-Sams for helping us keep it special."

For information on Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council projects, visit the council's website at www.lsohc.leg.mn



Tyler Schaefer, of Cleveland, caught and released this 27-inch walleye May 27 on Madison Lake.

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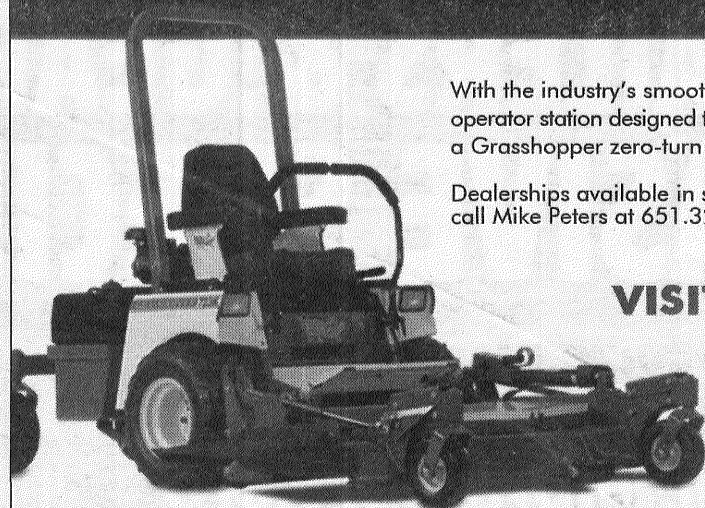


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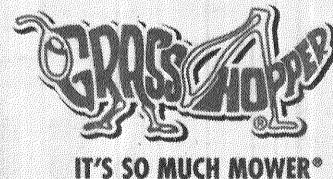
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