

Crooked Lake Primer



Our first family (Mom, Dad and three chicks) of Ospreys arrived in the Summer of 2018. Our two parents returned in 2019, 2020, 2021 2022, 2023 and now 2024. Up until this year, the routine had stayed the same, each year 3 healthy chicks all the way to migration. One observer from Iowa remarked: “Crooked Lake is becoming an efficient Osprey factory.” Cameras monitor the nest 24/7, and can be viewed live on ‘You Tube’ under “Crooked Lake Ospreys,,” OR by selecting “Tim Dygert Live.” The viewing season is

An overview of things you probably ought to know about Crooked Lake

By John Meier

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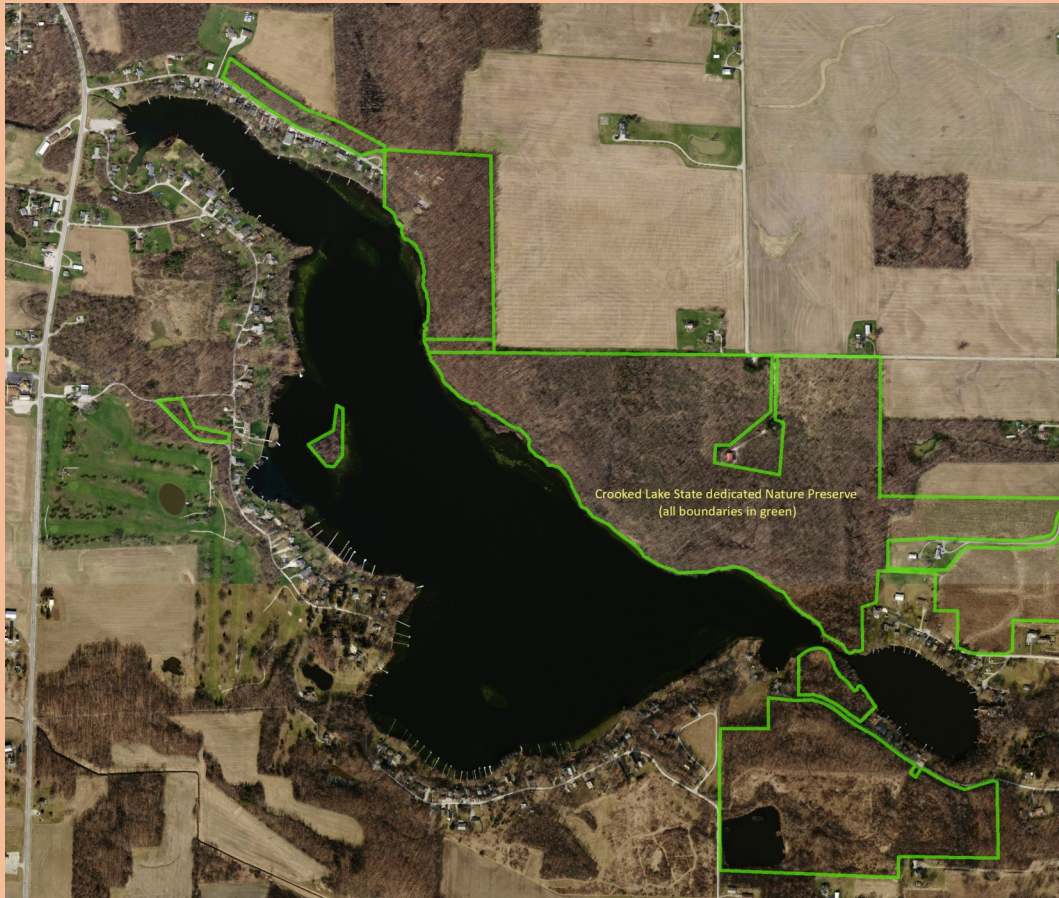
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Lake Geography

Crooked Lake is a glacial shield lake formed approximately 12,000 years ago by the retreating Wisconsin glacier. The lake is comprised of 208 acres and is 110 feet deep. It lies at the top of the Tippecanoe Watershed whose waters ultimately form the Tippecanoe River, which in turn empties into the Wabash River, Ohio River, and Mississippi River before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. It is arguably one of the cleanest natural lakes in all of Indiana, and is noted for its Cisco population. The Cisco species of fish are endangered and therefore protected. They are found in only 2 or 3 lakes in Indiana..



Crooked Lake has an average depth of 43 feet and drains one square mile of surrounding land. That one square mile of land produces several opportunities for surface water to create erosion problems and carry silt-laden water towards the lake, which typically would reduce the clarity and quality of the lake water. The smaller lake, called Little Crooked, covers 13 acres and represents 4% by volume of the water in the entire lake. Most of the efforts of the lake association, through various projects, have been attempts to minimize the sediment-laden water, reaching the lake.

Above can be seen the satellite view of the lake. The public access is located in the upper left corner of the view, and is entered off of St. Rd. 109, as it travels north to Wolf Lake, IN. On the lower right can be seen Little Crooked Lake and its access by Pressler and Fry roads entering from the East end of the lake and off of St. Rd. 9 as it travels north to Albion, IN. The Crooked Lake Nature Preserve is outlined in green, and has 2 1/2 miles of walking trails.

Home Development

Approximately 162 homes surround the lake, 80% of which are year-round residents. There are six streets that lead to the homes on the lake: Off of St. Rd. 109, on the north side of the public access is Northshore Dr. And on the south side of the public access is Woodstrail. As Woodstrail crosses into Whitley Co. it becomes Valley Ave. Valley then leads to Morsches Rd. Morsches Rd also enters from St. Rd. 109, at the Golf course entry. Off of 600 North is Spear Rd., which contains the Gates Addition. And lastly, off of St. Rd. 9 is Pressler Rd. and Fry Rd. These last two streets provide the entrances to the homes on “Little Crooked,” the smaller basin of the lake. (See map below and legend numbering the six streets accessing Crooked Lake).



Map Legend

1. East Pressler Rd. off of State Rd. 9
2. St. Road 9
3. East Fry Rd. off of State Rd 9
4. East Gatesworth Shores off of Spear Rd.
5. East Spear Rd. off of 600 North
6. East Morsches Rd. off of State Rd. 109
7. Valley off of a continuation of Woodstrail from Noble into Whitley County
8. South Woodstrail off of State Rd. 109
9. West Northshore Drive
10. State Road 109

The Crooked Lake Association

The lake association was initially formed in 1971 with the goal of having the property owners work together to keep the two basins clean, unpolluted, and in their natural states. The organization is comprised of an 11-12 member Board of Directors, composed of a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and seven or eight other Board members. Occasionally a past president or two is invited to Board meetings to offer an historical perspective on the discussions. The Board oversees projects that deal with various aspects of lake living, such as sediment run-off issues, water testing, recreation, fund-raising, (garage sales, plant sales, picnics and golf outings). However, in the Spring of 2022 the golf course was sold (After 52 years of operation by the Shumaker family) to a private owner who wanted to place a home on part of the acreage. Three large acre home plots have since been sold. The lake association has an annual meeting the first week of June each year.. Membership in the association is encouraged because of the many worthwhile projects performed by the association for the benefit of everyone. Annual dues is \$50 per year. Paid members receive an additional benefit of having their trash picked up at a reduced rate.

Communication with the membership can be by social media (one member oversees a Facebook page for the Association). Other communication can be by email, texting, messaging, or cell phone. Each resident is asked to provide their contact numbers to facilitate this. Call-out for volunteers is usually done by Facebook postings or bulk emails to the residents. For projects involving an hour or two of work, the word is sent out asking for volunteers to help. It may involve cleaning the weeds out of a rain garden. or perhaps a request for volunteers to help remove a fallen tree. Sometimes there will be a call-out for help on a lake-wide garage sale, or help on plant sales, many of these efforts serve as fund-raisers for our lake-wide projects. Even designing wearing apparel for lake promotions can be a project. In the spring of every year there are 11 buoys that need to be placed. Likewise in the fall, they need to be taken out, cleaned and stored. In summary, there's a place to volunteer for anyone who is interested. And oftentimes these will promote the forming of new friendships. Below are some projects.



Garage Sales



Picnics



Golf Tournaments



Rain Garden Cleanup



Plant Sales



Brush Clean Up for Resident



Winter Tree Removal



Volunteers at Annual Mtg.

The Nature Preserve and the story of Agnes

The story of the Crooked Lake Nature Preserve begins in the 1830's with the Leaman family traveling from Pennsylvania and headed westward. The family paused near Crooked Lake. Agnes, the family's young daughter, was just about to turn 16 when she became ill and died. The family buried her on a bluff overlooking the lake. They also decided they couldn't leave Agnes here alone, so they bought the land surrounding that portion of the lake, comprised of 91 acres, and started farming.. That farm stayed in the Leaman/Stewart family from 1834 until 1975 (141 years) during which time it's estimated that several other family members were also buried in the little cemetery on the bluff. That cemetery has been preserved and can still be visited as it is now part of the Crooked Lake Nature Preserve. And this leads us to the next part of the story: The creation of the **Crooked Lake Nature Preserve** of Indiana



In 1971 the first meeting of the Crooked Lake Association was held. Their mission was to help keep the two basins of the lake in their natural state and unpolluted, and to promote environmentally sensitive future development. Secondly, they strove to acquire real estate for the preservation and protection of the natural beauty of Crooked Lake. In June of 1974, the 91 acre Leaman/Stewart farm comprising a significant portion of the eastern shore, including the Leaman cemetery, was up for sale. Besides the lake association, ACRES Land Trust was interested in helping secure the land as well. It was suggested that the property be designated a **State Nature Preserve. The selling price of \$250,000 was met by the lake association generating \$73,000, with another \$25,000 received from ACRES Land Trust, and lastly with the designation of Nature Preserve by the State of Indiana, came an additional \$150,000. The Crooked Lake Nature Preserve was dedicated on July 21, 1979.** The Nature Preserve is arguably the most talked about aspect of living on this lake. Having such an unspoiled wilderness is a definite plus and forms such a significant part of the shoreline . Since the dedication of the Nature Preserve, the residents have maintained their desire to promote environmentally sound projects. Thus with every piece of land bordering on the lake that came up for sale, the owner was encouraged to work with the lake association so the land could be purchased and included into the existing State Nature Preserve. The Result: To date (2024) the Crooked Lake Nature Preserve has **increased in size from an initial 91 acres to its current size of 181 acres**, having almost doubled in size. Thanks to resident's forethought and focus on their original mission of preserving an protecting the natural beauty of the lake.

Crooked Lake's Osprey

An Osprey is a large (6-foot wing span) fish-eating raptor found in many parts of the U.S. and the world in general. Prior to 2018, residents noted that an occasional osprey could be seen hunting for fish in the lake. These raptors are exclusively fish-eaters, and although fish were in abundance in the lake, they did not build their nests here. Some residents asked: "Why not?" So, in 2018, a plan was developed to change all that, and attract a nesting pair of Ospreys.



Platform attached to pole



REMC crew place pole and platform in ground.



Volunteers who helped

This was accomplished by constructing a nesting platform and attaching it to the top of a 55-foot pole supplied by our local rural electric company (REMC). A resident that had an ideal site for the pole volunteered to have it placed on their property and coordinated the placement of the cameras as well in that first season. The resident then worked with the cable company to feed the video 24/7 to The Internet through a 'You Tube' site. Thus, **the Crooked Lake Osprey internet site was born.**

A nesting pair was attracted in March of 2018. They produced three eggs, hatched all three and successfully had all three survive to fledge (fly for the first time) and later migrate. (see front cover) Typically, the osprey nesting season is from April 1 to late August or early September when they migrate to the South. Some osprey in the U.S. just go as far as Florida, but supposedly Mid-western osprey like ours, migrate to the Northern parts of South America. Osprey usually mate for life, but the pair do separate for several months while on migration. Then, the following spring, the adults individually return to the same lake and to the same nest, mate, and start the process all over again. According to statistics we received from 'You Tube' for the first year of our project, our osprey Internet site was viewed in over 120 countries with over a million views. In 2019 the same male and female (whom we named Noble and Whitley respectively), returned in April and raised another three chicks all the way to fledge and subsequent migration. This process has continued for every year since.

Now in 2024, the same male has returned, but unfortunately, his mate since 2018 was challenged by another female and she was driven from the nest. Nature can be cruel sometimes. Thus in 2024 our male (Noble) has a new mate. However, they did produce three chicks and were in the process of raising them when disaster struck again. The three chicks were preyed upon and killed by a Great-horned Owl (a known predator of Osprey chicks). So, sadly our Osprey season came to an

abrupt end. And our season has been cut short. Next year hopefully they'll return and start another new family and continue our great record of providing more of these beautiful raptors.

Fishing



The lake has an abundance of fish including bluegill, red ear, cisco, rock bass, perch, large-mouth bass, catfish, bullhead, crappie, pickerel, bowfin longnose gar and others. Most anglers fish for largemouth bass, bluegill and perch. Successful fishing can be a challenge, however, due to the clear water.

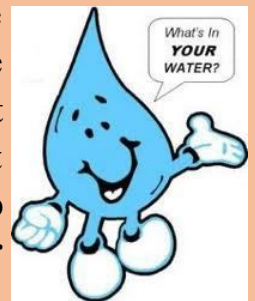
Water testing, lake buoys and water levels

The lake association is committed to maintaining the pristine quality of our lake. Marker buoys are placed in shallow areas around the lake to identify areas to avoid. The lake may be 110 feet deep, but shallow areas are numerous and can cause trouble.

Boats entering shallow water and getting stuck churn up the sediment and release phosphates that have been trapped by the shoreline plants and decaying plant material on the shallow bottom. Churning up the decaying bottom material releases bound-up phosphates and that stimulates algae growth. Please try to avoid churning up the bottom of the lake with motor props in shallow water.



The level of the lake water has been determined by the courts and set at a little over 906 feet above sea level. There is a spillway near the public access where the lake can drain its excess water over a concrete structure and into a ditch that flows under St. Rd. 109 and into Big Lake. A small marker is located nearby at the public access to validate this court-mandated water level. **When there is no water flowing over the spillway, and level with the top of the cement weir (aka a dam, or spillway), the lake is at 905.69 feet above sea level.**



Lake speed limit - 10 mph at all times

The size of a lake in the State of Indiana helps determine the suggested speed limit. The larger bodies of water (over 300 acres) have less restrictions, however smaller lakes will typically have the lower speed limits. Crooked is considered a smaller lake, and by vote of the property owners, the speed limit was set at 10 mph. **The 10 mph limit is to protect the shoreline and the effect that large waves can have on erosion of the shore.** Some people may think it's a safety reason but it's more for the preservation of the shoreline from wave action and subsequent erosion, with the ultimate effect of preserving the quality of the water in the lake. Recreational "tubing" is allowed as long as the speed limit is not exceeded.



Biological Research Station



In the 1950's Indiana University chose Crooked Lake for the site of its biological field station. Its intended use would be for research as well as a site for students to take classes in various biological disciplines. Our lake was chosen because of its depth, quality of water, and close proximity to the Ft. Wayne campus. For many years several academic institutions besides Indiana used the station, including Purdue, St. Francis, Ivy Tech and Goshen College. Classes were taught on fish ecology, invertebrates, aquatic plants, mussels and many other biological pursuits. However, over the last several years the number of classes using the facility had decreased and the facility needed an upgrade to remain a viable institution of higher learning. Thus in 2019 the property was bought by the Indiana Dept. of Nat. Resources. The research building was razed and to date in 2024, all that remains is the boathouse. The 25 acres of property has been incorporated into the Crooked Lake Nature Preserve. This increased the Nature Preserve's shoreline by some 3,100 feet and as of 2024, the Nature Preserve now totals 191 acres.

Lake Projects help protect the quality of our lake water

The Department of Natural Resources states that Crooked Lake is arguably the cleanest natural lake in the State, and residents are committed to maintaining the quality of our lake water. Over the years, sediment ponds (above left) have been constructed to provide a place for excess water, laden with eroded material that needs to settle out before it gets into the lake. Residents are encouraged to use and promote natural shorelines of vegetation or glacial stone and avoid installing sea walls or beaches that can result in excessive erosion. The DNR issues permits for anyone wishing to put any type of material in the lake in terms of shoreline treatment. The rule of thumb is to check first with the permitting biologist at the DNR. Often times an unseasonably high amount of rain with subsequent run-off will make for a less-than-ideal clarity, but in time the clarity usually returns.



New retention pond



Retention pond working



Natural Shoreline



Glacial stone

Types of watercraft found on the lake

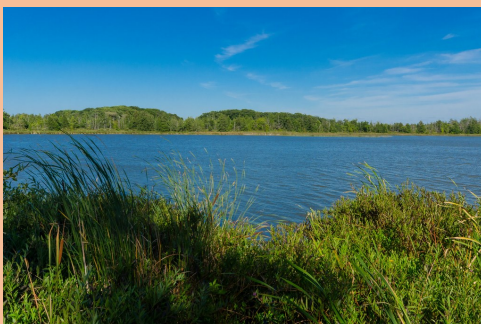
By far, the most popular boat on our lake is the pontoon boat. A recent survey noted 90 pontoons on the lake. However, there are also power boats, large Bass boats, self-propelled paddle-wheel boats, Duffy battery-powered boats, row boats, kayaks of all manner of design, canoes, paddle boards, and, of course, a few sail boats. It is expected of everyone that they will abide by the recommended speed limit for the good of the environment. Thus, here are ten different ways for you to enjoy being on the lake



For questions regarding alteration of your shoreline contact the local regional DNR office in Columbia City, at 244-3720 and ask for the permitting biologist.

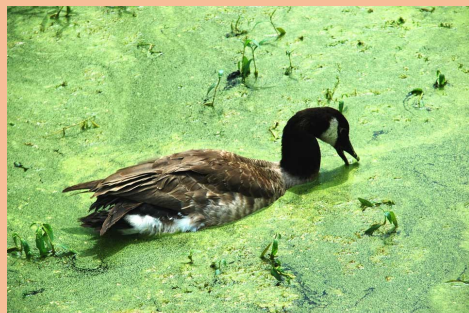
Shoreline Treatment – Natural, Habitat Restoration, and Glacial Stone are all good ways of being environmentally conscious when dealing with shorelines.

ALWAYS check with the DNR before you alter your shoreline with sand, gravel, rock, weeds, plants etc., or attempt to create a space for your watercraft. Relative to the length of a dock, a resident may have a dock up to 150 feet long or until there is navigable water, (six-feet deep), whichever comes first. The DNR does allow a resident to remove up to 625 square feet of vegetation to gain access for his watercraft. The DNR may issue fines for any homeowner who violates the rules set by the State of Indiana. When in doubt, first check with the DNR Office.



Fertilizing your yard

The use of fertilizer in one's yard is acceptable so long as the phosphate percentage is zero (0). On the fertilizer bag is listed the various percentages of chemicals, usually in three numbers separated by a dash, i.e., 15-5-10. The middle number is the amount of phosphate and this should be zero for lawns bordering lakes and streams. Anything chemical used on this "riparian" land will eventually end up in the lake through natural drainage, but it's the phosphates that promotes algae growth which is hazardous to water quality. Certain types of algae can be hazardous to humans and pets as well. **Most shoreline vegetation filters out the phosphates and are thus beneficial to keeping the water healthy.**



Neighbors = Community

Living at the lake also means we all share a common back yard. And we each have a responsibility to keep our backyard tidy. Our community is only as effective as our association is strong and supportive of the membership. Getting to know our neighbors increases the enjoyment of lake living. Cruising the lake on a warm summer's evening is a popular pastime, sharing a cruise around the lake or..... just waving a "Hi" to the neighbors.



Crooked Lake Golf Course



Golf in Columbia city began in the summer of 1924 when Argyle Luckenbill and a few of his friends carved out a seven-hole course in a small tract of land west and north of the Luckenbill residence east of Columbia City on St. Rd. 205. This makeshift course was used for two years before a group of golfers decided that Columbia City needed a better golf course. Forty acres was purchased in 1927 from the Crooked Lake Development Co. and 42 people purchased shares at \$50 each. Improvements continued every year to keep the course up to the golf standards of the day.

In 1969 the course and all the equipment was sold to John Schumaker for \$100,000. The first club pro was Dick Lazier. He was pro until 1975 when John Schumaker's son Bill became the new pro. Father and son managed the course until son Bill took over and continued as club Pro and owner/manager for over 40 years. In 2017 the course was put on the market to be sold. A group of seven local people purchased the course with the agreement that they must keep it as a golf course for two years minimum. Bill Schumaker agreed to continue as the PGA Pro and also be available for lessons.

Now in 2024, the course has been sold to a single buyer and developed into several 7-9 acre lots, three of which have been purchased so far, with two of those currently having homes being built on them.

It's possible that the remaining original acreage may be kept natural and thus one of the largest areas of fertilizer run-off contributors to our lake inadvertently may have been mitigated, adding to another reduction of chemicals finding their way to the lake. We welcome the new neighbors, but mourn the loss of one of our favorite Crooked Lake activities.



The Watershed Foundation

Our cherished lake is part of a much larger ecosystem, an ecosystem that is at risk from human impacts. Luckily, Crooked and Little Crooked Lakes have as their residents, great caretakers, our lake association and The Watershed Foundation.



The Watershed Foundation helps each of the 60+ lakes that drain the watershed to fight pollution and help keep the water of the highest quality possible. Our lake, and the square mile of land that drains into it, is considered the headwaters – the very start of the Tippecanoe River, meaning that water from all the lakes that make up the Tippecanoe watershed starts with our Crooked lake. All the rivers and lakes in the watershed help form the Tippecanoe River, which leads to the Wabash and Mississippi Rivers, ultimately emptying into the Gulf of Mexico.

Crooked Lake itself is fed by runoff and snowmelt that travels over acres of farmland, miles of roads, and through drainage ditches and streams, often collecting unwanted sediment and nutrient pollution. The Watershed Foundation (TWF) focuses on preventing this pollution from reaching Crooked Lake and all the lakes in the watershed by working directly with local land-owners.

For more than 20 years, TWF has been taking action for healthy lakes by:

- Stopping water pollution at its source on the land through healthy shoreline projects and conservation farming practices!

- Encouraging youth and adults to do the right thing for our waters by engaging them in Snapshot Water Monitoring Day and the [ClearChoicesCleanWater.org](https://www.clearchoicescleanwater.org) educational campaign.

- Leading partnerships throughout the watershed – like the Upper Lakes of the Tippecanoe River Watershed Association (ULTRA). Together, we truly are making a difference!

By supporting TWF, you can do what none of us can do alone – *Protect our Lakes Forever.*

The Name of our lake?.....Crooked Lake of course..... Is that a problem?

You may already be aware that there are two Crooked Lakes in our area of the state. The other one is further north and east, by Angola, Indiana. So which lake was the first Crooked Lake? In an email from Mr. Bob Wilkinson with the surveying and mapping section of the DNR, he stated: “We may never know which name is older, but the Crooked Lake in Whitley and Noble appears first in print in the map series used as a source for the U.S. Board of Geographic names.”

Therefore, we have concluded that until proven otherwise, we can declare ourselves “The Original” Crooked Lake in the State of Indiana.

See you on the lake