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# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet

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## Give Your Lake a Voice: Create a Lake Association

### What is a Lake Association?

A lake association is a voluntary organization made up of people who own land on or near a lake. Land owners often form an association when they are concerned about issues regarding the quality or use of the lake and want to deal with them in an organized manner.

### What is the Purpose of a Lake Association?

A lake association provides a forum for residents to raise concerns, become educated about problems, and work towards solutions. Just like any organized group that shares a common interest, they are able to work out difficult problems by sharing objectives, knowledge, skills and resources. Together they can have a greater influence on local and state local governments through lobbying and working with government agencies to help influence ordinances and regulations.

Lake associations serve several functions including:

- Developing a partnership with lake neighbors.
- Gaining awareness of neighbors' lake interests.
- Developing a communications network for sharing lake news.
- Raising awareness of lake issues in the community.
- Launching fund raising events and applying for grants.
- Evolving a long-range lake management plan.
- Acting as a support group for members.
- Gathering information and presenting educational programs for membership and those living near the lake.
- Conducting data collection on a broad range of lake concerns (water quality, aquatic plant surveys, watershed development, and recreational use conflicts).
- Gaining a historical perspective from long-term residents.
- Networking with other lake associations.

### Organizing A Lake Association: Gathering Interest and Support

#### 1. Informal Discussions:

Discuss your interest in forming a lake association with lake residents to get an idea of its appeal to others, and do some research on the significance of its formation.

2. **Exploratory Meeting:**  
Invite individuals that may be interested in forming a lake association. Provide simple snacks and beverages. Invite a member of another lake association and/or a Department of Environmental Services lake biologist for support and help in answering questions. Also, pass out a sign-in sheet to collect contact information and poll the group to see who is willing to make a commitment. If there is interest in forming an association, select a chair and secretary and ask for volunteers to serve on a steering committee to draft bylaws and nominate officers and directors. Set a date for a "Bylaws Committee Meeting" and a "Charter Meeting."
3. **Bylaws Meeting:**  
At this meeting the group should choose a name for the group and draft bylaws (general rules used to regulate the affairs of the group). For an example of model bylaws visit [www.wisconsinlakes.org/Lakegrouphelp/groupbylaws.htm](http://www.wisconsinlakes.org/Lakegrouphelp/groupbylaws.htm).
4. **Prepare for the Charter Meeting:**  
This meeting brings together the steering committee and the lake community to decide if they want to form a lake association. Be sure to effectively publicize this meeting and what it will entail by doing the following:
  - Notify all residents in the watershed by mail, telephone, and possibly door-to-door visits.
  - Post flyers advertising the meeting at public meeting places.
  - Advertise the meeting on the local community access television channel, radio station and newspaper.
  - Be sure to advertise that a vote on bylaws and election of officers will be conducted. Distribute copies of the proposed bylaws before the meeting so that the community will be informed.
5. **Conducting the Charter Meeting:**  
The meeting should be organized as follows:
  - Sign-up sheet: Place this at the welcome table (where people fill out name badges) and ask for the name, telephone number, email address, summer and winter mailing addresses, family composition, principal occupation(s), and specific interests in the association or projects.
  - Call to order the meeting.
  - Discuss the meeting purpose and introduce the steering committee.
  - Present the organization meeting report.
  - Discuss/vote to adopt bylaws.
  - Elect officers.
  - Discuss briefly association activities.
  - Appoint committees.
  - Plan a membership drive.
  - Establish a mailing address for the association.
  - Set a date and place for the next meeting and then adjourn the meeting.

## Formalizing Your Lake Association

1. **Legal and Tax Issues:**  
Once the group has decided to formally establish a lake association, you will need to decide how it will be set up according to state and federal law. It would be best if a property owner who is a lawyer handles this step. Typically, lake associations are organized as not-for-profit. Nonprofit status means an organization is exempt from

income tax. Most nonprofit organizations fall under the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) "501(c)3" exemption. In New Hampshire, lake associations must first incorporate with the Secretary of State and then will need to apply to the IRS for a tax identification number.

2. Accounting:

It is imperative that the association maintain adequate financial records. A treasurer familiar with commercial financial accounting should keep track of the books.

3. Funding:

How the association pays for dues will depend on what activities the group is involved with. Lake associations can rely on various funding mechanisms, including:

- Dues
- Property owner assessments
- Taxes
- Government grants
- Foundations
- Industry/corporations
- Fundraisers

4. Insurance:

Lake associations usually try to carry directors and officers liability insurance. The association should contact local insurance agents, possibly one belonging to the association, for information on what types and how much insurance will be necessary.

What DES Has to Offer a Lake Association:

- Exotic Aquatic Plant Control Matching Grant Program
- Non-Point Source Pollution Grant Program
- Volunteer Lake Assessment Program
- Volunteer Weed Watchers Program
- Volunteer Mercury in Fish Program
- Watershed Maps

For More Information

If your group is interested in starting a lake association and have additional questions, and/or would like a DES lake biologist to speak at a meeting, contact Amy Smagula, DES Limnology Center, at [amy.smagula@des.nh.gov](mailto:amy.smagula@des.nh.gov) or (603) 271-2248.

Sources: Flock, G. J. Taggart, and H. Olem. 1991. *Organizing Lake Users: A Practical Guide*. Terrene Institute, Washington, DC.