

Making Good Things Happen for Lake Volney

Steve Pany and Suzanne Boda

Lake Volney is a 283-acre and 70-foot deep lake in Le Sueur County of southern Minnesota. Its watershed is 2,000 acres and includes some wetlands. In the lake's surrounding area there are many corn, soybean, and alfalfa fields, along with some dairy farms.

The public beach and pristine lake provided fishing, swimming, and watersports for many people in the area and for the 45 lakeshore property owners during the 1960s and early 1970s.

In the mid-1970s the lake's water quality started to degrade. And it got worse. By the 1990s, Lake Volney's water had turned to what looked like soupy green paint. Swimming was not something people wanted to do anymore. Runaway algae in the water caused by excessive amounts of phosphorous in the lake along with a large carp population turned the water soupy-green for the entire summer.

This change in the lake coincided with a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s that saw many wetlands in southern Minnesota drained, tiled, and tilled for farmland. These wetlands were once filled with wildlife and acted as important water quality filters for lakes, streams, and rivers. Lake Volney did not escape this misfortune and many wetlands were eliminated within its watershed.

The Lake Volney Association is Formed

The Lake Volney Association was formed in 1982. The early founding members helped secure a Clean Water Partnership Grant from the State of Minnesota in 1995 to be administered by Le Sueur County Environmental Services. This was a good step toward restoration of the lake. With this grant, Le Sueur County Environmental Services hired a professional hydrologist to

determine possible solutions. Some of them included wetland restoration, lake reclamation, ferric chloride sediment treatment, riparian buffer strips, stream bank stabilization, holding ponds, and shoreland/agricultural best management practices for farmers.

By 1998 the lake still had poor water quality that limited recreational use. We got better informed about lake stewardship and shared this knowledge via newsletters and a website with area residents to encourage them to join the effort to improve the lake. We also obtained 501(c)(3) tax exempt status for the Lake Volney Association so we could obtain grants.

The hardworking members of the Lake Volney Association have done a lot

of lake stewardship practices the past few years. They paid dues, made financial contributions, created shoreline buffers, created rain gardens (Figure 1), upgraded water related systems, used better lawn practices, funded a lot of carp seining by a commercial fisherman, and helped pay for a website and newsletter. Dan and Darlene Tuma recorded Secchi disk readings, Bob Gullickson and Terry Stier organized a yearly lakeshore cleanup, Mike and Sherry Skluzacek dredged holding ponds, Suzanne Boda organized meetings, Kenny Kalina worked with the DNR on fish stocking. Our Board of Directors had meetings and worked with many state and local agencies. All of these activities contributed to our goal of a restored Lake Volney.



Figure 1. Many rain gardens have been installed around the lake, including this one at the public access boat ramp.

In 2011 the Lake Volney Association was named Lake Association of the Year in Minnesota and awarded a \$1,000 grant by the Minnesota Waters Organization. Minnesota has 642 lake associations. We were extremely honored and appreciative of this award. The average summer Secchi disk reading in 1995 was 3 feet with very poor water quality. In 2013 it was 15 feet – at times 25 feet – with fairly good water quality for most of the summer. The lake still can have occasional algae problems. The water quality at Lake Volney has been improved but there is still work to be done by many partners to fully restore this lake.

Other Projects

Secretary of the Board of Directors Sandy Weber, who records minutes at our meetings, grew up in the area and enjoyed swimming at Lake Volney in the 1960s. Sandy's mother, Kay Gregor, was a founding member of our lake association. Sandy's daughter, Nichole Weber, is on our Board and, using her degree from the University of Minnesota, gives us her guidance on some of the projects. In 2013, she applied and received a grant from the Schmitt Foundation to restore native aquatic plants at Lake Volney. This is a three-year project. The aquatic plants include bulrush, duck potato, water plantain, 3 square rush, pickerel plant, blue iris, sweet flag, and white water lily.

The State of Minnesota's Legacy Grant Program funded a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources purchase of 900 feet of lakeshore on southwest side of the lake. This is the site of the native aquatic plant restoration (Figure 2).

The Lake Volney Association hired A. W. Labs of Brainerd, Minnesota, to do a flyover analysis of the lake and watershed in 2008 and 2012 to identify problem areas.

The Lake Volney Association, in partnership with Le Sueur County and the Department of Natural Resources, completed two shoreline buffer projects areas at the public beach (Figure 3). Lauren Klement with the Environmental Services Department of Le Sueur County has worked with land owners in the watershed created holding ponds, stabilized stream banks, improved buffers, replaced outlet stream culverts (Figure 4), worked with lakeshore owners on their



Figure 2. Native aquatic plant restoration is an important component of the Lake Volney management plan.



Figure 3. The public beach sand was moved up and away from the shore and glacial stone and native plantings were used to stabilize the shoreline.

LAKE and RESERVOIR MANAGEMENT

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Figure 4. The outlet culverts were replaced to further help prevent shoreline erosion due to high water.

water related systems, and completed five Best Management Practices for farmers in the watershed.

You are invited to view our website for more information: www.minnesotawaters.org/group/volney.

The Future

While it seems Lake Volney degraded quickly, the restoration process is long and involves the collective work of many people. The MPCA's recent Total Maximum Daily Load study has proven there is still a long way to go to reduce runoff and in-lake nutrients and restore Volney to a natural state.

As an Association, we are constantly evolving. Our members and partnerships with landowners and government agencies are increasingly important as we move into new phases of restoration efforts. We seek ways to take advantage of new techniques and technology that may reduce pollutants both coming into the lake and those that have built up within the lake over the years. We strive for continued success so as to one day leave a legacy for future generations.

Steve Pany has been treasurer and webpage manager since 1998. Steve has been going to Lake Volney to swim, fish, and waterski since 1965. Steve has been to lake conferences and has networked with lake related organizations.



Suzanne Boda spent summers at her family cabin on Lake Volney and she and her parents were founding members of the Lake Volney Association in 1982. An avid environmental steward, Suzanne has served as a Board member and Board President for many years. 

