



“Lakespert” – Lake Volunteer Lessons

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I have had the pleasure of coordinating two vastly different state-wide volunteer lake monitoring programs over the years. I helped coordinate a long-running program during my graduate school years. Later in my career, I started a program (modeled on the first one), but it only lasted ten years. What did I learn from these experiences? First, it takes an array of people, old and young, to make it work. Second, coordinating lake volunteers is a full-time, year-round job.

It takes no lakespert to know that a diverse group of lake-loving people are the key to a successful and meaningful volunteer program. Volunteer monitoring requires people who have a strong passion for water and lakes. It is important to have a wide range of volunteers – old, young, wake boarders, anglers, lake residents, and lake users. Welcome all.

I quickly learned that you cannot rely on one demographic. For example, I was enjoying state park employees, and I annoyingly found out that park staff shuffle from park to park each year. Having a constant jumble of volunteers made it a challenge to keep the program up and running at each lake. Many Secchi disks and volunteer training booklets were lost in the shuffle.

Communication and recruitment are two major drivers for year-round coordination. Volunteers need to stay engaged, and there is always a need for new and more volunteers throughout the year. Trainings, lakes appreciation celebrations, cleanups, watershed efforts, and lake restoration projects all require communication with lake volunteers. Full-time coordination is a must for any volunteer program.

The biggest enjoyment I got from running volunteer programs was working with life-learning people that were excited to be out on the water (Figure 1). It was rewarding to see volunteers see their lake in a new light. Volunteers are always excited and upbeat with a natural aura. These days, I often hear people say that they feel helpless and do not know what to do to help improve things. One way is to join a volunteer lake monitoring program. Volunteering is a wonderful way to get outdoors, feel like you are part of the solution, and find common interests with others. A common theme with everyone is that we all want cleaner and healthier lakes across the country.

I will end with this challenge. I think every NALMS member, consultant, lake

manager, board member, and regulator should be a lake volunteer at least once. Being a lake volunteer is the true essence to loving lakes and reservoirs. So, get out there and volunteer!

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Figure 1. Official Secchi depth reading on Grand Lake, Colorado by a local resident with three generations in the boat.