

B8 | TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2020 | THE HERALD-TIMES

# Lake Monroe, A Resource Worth Protecting

Lake Monroe is a popular place to visit – about a million people from Bloomington, central Indiana and beyond visit the lake every year. Most visitors enjoy the time they spend at the lake, but may not recognize the value Lake Monroe provides to the region and why the lake and its watershed are worth protecting. Over 120,000 people obtain their drinking water from Lake Monroe, and the local economy receives millions of dollars in economic benefit from visitors to the area. Property values, especially close to the lake, but throughout the area, are increased due to the presence of Lake Monroe. While all these things are enhanced by a healthy Lake Monroe, all would be jeopardized if lake water quality was severely degraded.

The value of Lake Monroe as a drinking water source is hard to quantify, although in 2017 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimated the value of the water supply in Lake Monroe to be over \$150,000,000 per year. A graduate class at the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs found that the cost of providing quality drinking water can increase significantly if water quality in the lake degrades. That same group found that property values around the lake could decrease along with lake water quality.

The Lake Monroe ecosystem also provides a tremendous benefit for humans and wildlife that cannot be measured in economic terms. Activities like boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, camping, hunting, bird-watching, and picnicking are popular activities that provide the opportunity for people to commune with nature and enrich their lives. The Lake Monroe watershed is home to the Deam Wilderness, the only federally protected Wilderness Area in Indiana, and also provides for the state's largest concentrations of bald eagles. We are fortunate to have this tremendous resource in our back yard.

Lake Monroe, like all lakes, receives water inputs from its drainage area, or watershed. Rainfall and snow melt that drain into the lake carry with them sediment and nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, that can affect water quality and stimulate algal growth. This is a natural process for all lakes, but human activities in the watershed can result in more sediment



and nutrients entering the lake. Excess fertilizers and herbicides from agricultural and residential land, sediment from improperly managed construction and logging sites, bacteria and nutrients from livestock, pet waste and faulty septic systems, and eroding streambanks can degrade lake water quality and result in conditions that are favorable to algal blooms. Frequent visitors to the lake know that recreational advisories have been imposed on public beaches at Fairfax and Paynetown during the summer months in recent years due to Harmful Algal Blooms.

The Friends of Lake Monroe was formed to help protect the lake and enhance its water quality through science, advocacy and public involvement. FLM has received a two-year grant from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to hire a watershed coordinator, study the lake, and develop a much-needed Watershed Management Plan. The City of Bloomington, the Monroe County government, and the Sassafras Audubon Society have shown their commitment to the process by contributing matching funds for the grant. Numerous other community partners have pledged in-kind contributions to support the project. Two recent community forums—one in Bloomington sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Bloomington and Monroe County, and one in Nashville sponsored by the Brown County League of Women's voters—brought more than 100 stakeholders together to discuss their concerns and to begin working toward solutions to protect Lake Monroe, a resource worth saving.

Visit the Friends of Lake Monroe website at [www.friendsoflakemonroe.org](http://www.friendsoflakemonroe.org) for quarterly updates on the Watershed Management Plan, and other news and events about this worthwhile project!

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