

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mille Lacs Lake Joins the Keep It Clean Campaign

February 2, 2022: Mille Lacs Lake has joined the Keep It Clean campaign. The campaign, which originated with Lake of the Woods in 2012, was also recently adopted by Red Lake. Designed to address the growing problem of garbage and other harmful materials left on the lakes by anglers during the ice fishing season, Keep It Clean focuses on leaving no trace.

Among the states most popular walleye fishing destinations, Lake of the Woods, Red Lake and Mille Lacs Lake hope that other Minnesota lakes come on board. “Anglers leaving garbage and other waste on the ice isn’t just a local problem or a state problem,” says Joe Henry, Executive Director, Lake of the Woods Tourism Bureau and one of the founders of Keep It Clean. “It is an entire ice belt problem. The Keep It Clean campaign gives us a universal language and key messages to help support ongoing education, awareness, enforcement and cleanup efforts. Well known fishing destinations in Minnesota have an opportunity to lead the way.”

“Healthy lakes with clean water, pristine ice and litter-free reefs and shoreline help create an ideal environment for sustainable fishing,” says Ann Brucciani Lyon, Vice Chair of the Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation, which is spearheading the Mille Lacs Lake effort. “They also help ensure that people of all ages — whether they are rugged outdoor enthusiasts or families — can enjoy being at the lake at any time of year.”

“Although, in some ways, our lakes compete for the same anglers,” says Henry, “we feel that the issue of clean water and sustainability with our natural resources — which affects fishing — is so important that we have banded together as partners in success. The more awareness we can create about this issue, the better the outcome will be for all of us who enjoy using the lakes for fishing, snowmobiling, boating, swimming and other sporting and recreational activities.”

In recent years, all three lakes have seen a dramatic increase in winter activity. The popularity of ice fishing has grown quickly with better technology, better equipment and wheelhouses, which make staying on the

ice for extended periods of time more comfortable. With the increased activity comes more pressure on the natural resources including an increase in the amount of garbage and waste left on the lake. During the 2020-2021 ice fishing season, Lake of the Woods clocked roughly 2.7 million angler hours. Mille Lacs and Red Lake weren't far behind.

"Although it's exciting to see more people enjoying the sport of ice fishing, the safe disposal and removal of garbage and human waste from the frozen lakes is reaching unmanageable proportions," says Robyn Dwight, President of the Upper Red Lake Area Association, who helped introduce Keep It Clean at Red Lake. "A true outdoorsperson leaves no trace. In fact, they strive to leave the environment they fish, hunt or outdoor recreate in as good or better than they found it."

To help reduce the amount of waste left on the ice, Keep It Clean encourages ice anglers and their guests take the following steps:

- **Make a plan for trash and waste removal before you arrive.** Whether you access the lake from a public or private access, plan to take off of the lake what you take on to the lake. Many access points and resorts offer garbage collection services. If your site doesn't, make a plan to transport it home for disposal.
- **Use colored garbage bags.** In snowy conditions, white trash bags can be difficult to see. Brightly colored or even black bags are easier to spot making it less likely trash will inadvertently be left behind.
- **Take a moment before you depart** the ice to make sure that you have picked up any garbage in your area. And if you notice someone else has left something behind, take a moment to pick it up and bring it with you.
- **Secure your garbage before traveling.** High winds, bumpy ice roads and other conditions on or off the lake can cause unsecured bags of garbage to fall out of truck beds and off of trailers and sleds without you even realizing it.
- **Make sure you have the tools you need** to move or remove a fish house. Support blocks, insulation, landscaping fabric, wood and other materials need to be properly disposed of not left behind.

"If everyone does their part to take off of the ice what they bring on to the ice, it will go a long way toward ensuring our lakes and their fisheries stay healthy and sustainable," says Mike Hirst, a Resource Conservationist with Lake of the Woods Soil and Conservation District who worked with Henry to establish Keep It Clean. "It will also help reduce the safety hazards for anglers and other recreational lake users year round."

“A clean healthy lake is the lifeblood of the resorts and businesses in our area,” says Eddy Lyback, owner of Lyback’s Ice Fishing. “We are delighted to welcome the Keep It Clean campaign to Mille Lacs Lake and look forward to helping it get up and running.”

For more information on how you can join the effort to launch Keep It Clean at Mille Lacs Lake, send an email to mlacf@ifound.org or visit <https://mlacf.org/>

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About the Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation (MLACF): The MLACF Advisory Board is a partner fund of the Initiative Foundation. Created in 1986, the Initiative Foundation is helps people throughout Central Minnesota build a thriving economy, vibrant communities and a lasting culture of generosity. The Foundation serves the 14 counties of Central Minnesota, providing nonprofit grants, business loans, leadership training and an array of donor services. It believes that local people have the greatest sum of initiative, knowledge and relationships to achieve a brighter future.