Interest surges in creating Noble County lakes council

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ROME CITY — The leader of one local lake association wants to connect with other communities to explore forming a Noble County organization that could work on issues affecting all neighborhoods bordering lakes.

While the West Lakes chain could use some help in preventing the type of flooding it’s experienced two of the last three summers, West Lakes Association President Diann Scott said a countywide council might be a good way for other communities to get together to focus on broader problems that affect all lakes.

There’s strength in numbers, and a lakes council could be helpful in getting grant money or, at least, having a bigger voice to talk to the state and federal governments, Scott said.

"Noble County actually has more lakes than any of our surrounding counties," Scott said. "With that many lakes involved, we really need to think about establishing a lakes council."

Steuben and LaGrange counties both have lakes councils, with Steuben’s 44-year-old group being a model for several others around the state.

Pete Hippensteel, a founding member of the Steuben County Lakes Council who still serves as an officer, said the keys to a successful council are finding issues that are important to a variety of different lake communities while also having ongoing projects that keep people engaged and active.

Hippensteel said the lakes council got started with an initial goal of guiding zoning around the lakes to make sure good development standards were created and followed. But over the years, the group has tackled issues such as group piers, funneling and the environment.

Currently, a main focus is on water quality, which is something every lake has a stake in, he said.

By getting numerous communities involved, the lakes council not only has a big voice when dealing with local governments, but it is able to solicit many different viewpoints when considering a particular challenge or issue.

"We find we get a wide variety of different opinions by having multiple lakes involved," Hippensteel said. "We have broadened our perspective greatly by having multiple lakes involved."

Lake residents purchase memberships to the lakes council, and if a lake hits a certain number of members it can have a representative on the council board. From that board, the council then elects officers to guide the group.

The Steuben County Lakes Council has about 1,200 members and this year has 19 lakes representatives.

Having that level of backing gives the council clout and the ability to effect changes in the county. For example, the council was able to help put the brakes on a proposed confined feeding operation that was going to be located near Lake Gage after expressing environmental concerns.
“Our broad representation gives us a stronger voice when we talk to the plan commission or the county commissioners or the health department or whoever is involved,” Hippensteel said. Scott said her vision for a Noble County lakes council would follow a similar line. With strength in numbers, the lake communities could work on issues like water quality, water quantity, or invasive species and weed control.
“(It is) a body that would look for common solutions and common resources. They don’t replace the lake associations; they’re additional resources. We can go together as Noble County to apply for grants to take care of that instead of each individual one doing that,” Scott said.
“We’re looking for common ground.”
The first step is connecting with other lake associations in the county, Scott said. If they get on board, then the county could have some meetings with councils from Steuben and LaGrange counties to get some information about what to do and how to get started.
Lake residents or association leaders in Noble County who are interested in exploring a lakes council should contact Scott at diannngscott@yahoo.com or 273-9441.
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