



The Role of the Consultant in Lake Management

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No one knows or appreciates your lake more than you, but hiring a consultant might be just the ticket to go beyond simply loving your lake to properly managing it. Lake residents often have many questions about managing their lake. What should be done? What will be the cost? What is a reasonable expectation of success? Who should be involved? How do we get there? Who pays? Who decides? What is the return on our investment? A consultant can help answer all of these questions.

The role of the consultant is to provide professional and unbiased advice regarding lakes and lake management. The consultant will often begin with a study to evaluate the characteristics of the lake and watershed, and the feasibility and costs of management alternatives. The study is important because it becomes the basis for decision-making and development of a lake management plan. A lake consultant should have a fundamental understanding of limnology (the study of the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of lakes), land use issues, environmental regulations, lake and watershed management techniques, contracting, public relations and, last but not least, municipal financing.

On some projects, engineering and legal expertise may be needed as well. Once the plan is defined, the consultant can assist with its implementation. Throughout development and implementation of the lake management plan, the consultant can:

- Identify management alternatives that will work and those that will not.
- Define expected outcomes of management alternatives and perhaps temper unrealistic expectations.
- Identify valid and effective sampling and monitoring protocols, perform appropriate analyses, and interpret technical data.
- Guide the decision-making process and help build consensus around environmentally-sound and cost-effective management alternatives.
- Perform cost-benefit analyses, and define regulatory hurdles and financing alternatives.

- Assist with the organization and financing aspects of the project.
- Prepare plans, specifications, and bidding documents for contract work.
- Coordinate and evaluate contract work.

A consultant is different from a contractor you may hire to perform a specific service on a lake, such as herbicide treatments, mechanical harvesting, weevil stocking, etc. A consultant will look at a number of alternatives, evaluate the pros and cons of each, and make a recommendation accordingly. To be truly objective, the consultant should be independent from the contractor and contract work. Beyond providing professional services, the consultant should have no financial interest in the project.

A consultant can bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table and can help ensure that your lake management plan achieves its stated objectives. Lake residents tend to be very passionate about their lake. Developing and implementing a proper management plan may be the best investment you make in your lake. Retaining a consultant to assist with the lake management plan can help you get the most bang for the buck.



About the Authors:

Tony Groves, Pam Tynning, and Paul Hausler have nearly 70 years of combined experience working as lake management consultants with Progressive AE in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Tony, Pam, and Paul created MichiganLakeInfo.com, a website for those interested in Michigan's inland lakes. On the site you can find this article and information on topics such as lake water quality, watershed management, aquatic plants, lake levels, lake improvement boards and more.