

Community values and experiences at Allouez Bay

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Allouez Bay is situated alongside the Itasca and Allouez neighborhoods in Superior. Many families have frequent and sometimes multi-generational experiences there. To better understand relationships with the Bay and inform thoughtful conservation planning that supports these relationships, the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve conducted a series of informal input sessions for community members.

Method of gathering community input

To collect personal input in an informal setting, the Reserve Director created a poster showing maps of Allouez Bay past and present (*Figure 1*) and set up a table at the following events:

- A Wisconsin Point bird walk hosted by the Friends of the Lake Superior Reserve, June 1, 2021
- Lake Superior Day Celebration on Barkers Island, July 18, 2021
- The Osaugie Family reunion on Wisconsin Point (*The Osaugie family members descend from Chief Joseph Osaugie, a signatory of the 1854 Treaty. The family lived at Wisconsin Point until they were forcibly removed in 1918*), August 7, 2021
- Lake Superior Elementary School parent teacher conferences on two separate evenings. (*Lake Superior Elementary serves the Itasca and Allouez neighborhoods*), October 26 & 28, 2021

While interviews were structured as informal conversations, the questions that guided each discussion were:

1. What do you remember about Allouez Bay in the past? What changes have you observed over time?
2. What do you do here or what have you done here? What might you like to do here that you don't do now?
3. What do you hope Allouez Bay is like in the future?

The Reserve Director had conversations with 34 community members over a four-month period in summer and fall 2021. This number does not include several very brief conversations where no substantial input was provided. Additionally, the director spoke with City Councilor Jenny Van Sickle, who represents the district, in a separate phone call. Conversations were not recorded but were transcribed in notes following each conversation.

Themes emerged from an author review of the notes and were distilled based on the overall frequency and depth/length of comments, as well as reflections from the length and specificity of conversations with community members. Emerging themes were highlighted and color coded in printed notes, then tallied and synthesized. The themes were reviewed by

two members of the Lake Superior Reserve staff who were not present at the input sessions but read notes from the conversations.

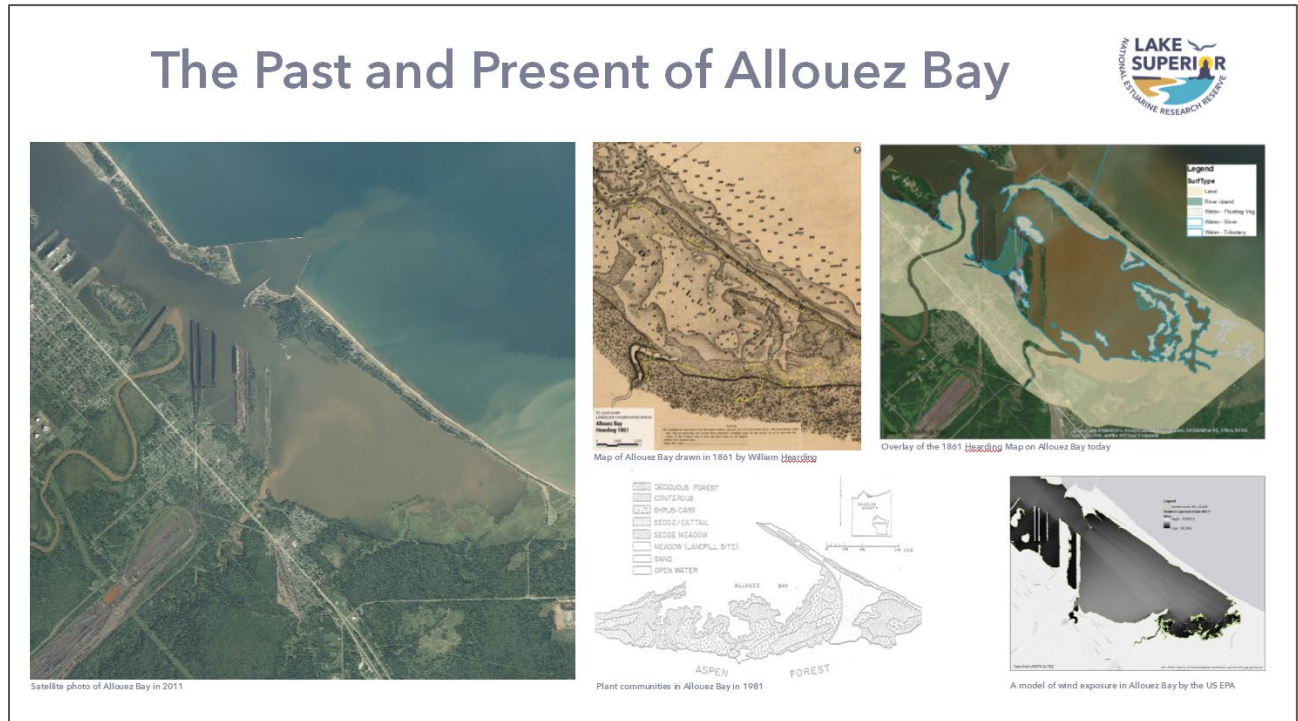


Figure 1 The maps used during Allouez Bay conversations at each event

Themes

1. Community members engage in and value opportunities to hunt, fish, gather and explore along Allouez Bay year-round and are interested in the fish and wildlife habitat provided by Allouez Bay.

Fishing and duck hunting were the most frequently described activities on and near the Bay, followed by paddling activities like canoeing or kayaking. People who described fishing often talked about the best locations to fish, noting that much of the bay is shallow. Walleye fishing in June near the mouth of the bay is popular, but anglers also referenced perch, crappie and northern pike. Ice fishing was referenced and may occasionally conflict with annual ice races that access the ice from the boat launch near the Power Squadron dock. Several people referenced fishing in the



Figure 2. Fishing and hunting activities were described in each of these approximate locations by multiple people. Duck hunting locations were not specifically described.

deeper water (~10 feet) area to the west of the mouth of Bear Creek and two people shared that they believed this deeper area was dredged out during construction of Highway 53. One said that dredged sediment from the bay had been used to construct the bridge over Bluff Creek.

Most access for fishing and duck hunting was from the boat launch at 44th Avenue East. Paddlers also described launching there or from the boat launch on Wisconsin Point. The most often referenced place to paddle was up the mouth of Bear Creek.

One community member talked about bow hunting for deer on land around the bay and shared that he had seen several bear and once, a wolf in the area.

Several people shared that they learned these activities from a parent or grandparent or that they share them with their children or siblings.

2. They have observed some ecological losses or changes through time.

A discussion with members of the Osaugie family who live in Superior illuminated some of the ecological losses that community members have observed at Allouez Bay. One elder talked about a change in duck populations in the bay. He had hunted ducks throughout his life and remembered large populations of ducks throughout the open water season in his youth and then mostly migratory waterfowl coming through in later years. He also reported that his duck blind had been stolen at one point and he had to find a new location. He wasn't sure if duck hunting was allowed in the bay today, a question asked by several people at Lake Superior Elementary as well. He had also gathered plants at Wisconsin Point and Allouez Bay in his youth and said "you can't do that anymore." Another elder remembers wild rice in the bay as a child in the 1950s, as well as "millions of muskrats" that he trapped in a series of small channels (his description of the bay was reminiscent of a dendritic form of estuary). He was concerned about lead shot being used in the bay that may still be in the sediment and shared a story from his grandfather of boats with "cannons" on the front being used to hunt large numbers of ducks during migration, likely before the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed in 1918.

Members of the birding group described similar loss of habitat and bird populations at Allouez Bay. An older woman who had birded there for many years remembered mud flats being in the bay, saying that birds need places to rest and that constructed mud flats would need to be resilient to changing water levels. A birder also shared that the closed demolition dump at the base of Wisconsin Point may have been a seiche fen before it was constructed in the 1950s.

The demolition dump site and the active Superior landfill were both discussed by several people. Concerns expressed about the closed dump included the proximity to Lake Superior, concern about the quality or contamination in the sediment from Howards Pocket being used to cap the site and concern about leachate. A construction/demolition worker at Lake Superior Elementary shared that he had dumped material at the site before the dump was closed in the 1980s and remembered liquid bubbling up to the surface. Another reported unverified accounts of barrels with unknown content from the oil refinery being

deposited there. Regarding the modern landfill, a hunter reported that plastic blowing off the site litters the nearby woods and impacts wildlife.

Other changes associated with possible climate or water level impacts were noted by two people who also fish in the Bay; an increase in submerged aquatic vegetation in shallow areas over the last five years and an increase in clay and turbidity in the water.

3. Most access to Allouez Bay from neighborhoods is unimproved, informal or difficult. In most cases, improved access is desired.

One of the most common responses to questions about Allouez Bay was a lack of experience with the bay. Frequent comments along the lines of "We've never been out there", "It's a long drive out there" or "It's really hard to get down there from our house" or "There's no easy way to get there." illustrate a perceived and actual lack of formal access from the neighborhoods adjacent to the Bay. A few people said that you needed a boat to get to Allouez Bay.

Several people talked about access that had formerly existed along the retired grain dock known as the Power Squadron dock (for the boat club that has a private launch there). People reported they "used to walk their dogs out there", watch birds and a "little park". However, private property at the base of the dock seems to have reduced or eliminated access to this waterfront area at the end of 44th Ave. E in Itasca.

Existing access was primarily from the boat launch at the base of the Power Squadron dock, Loons Foot landing or boat launch at Wisconsin Point. People had positive reflections on the improvements at Wisconsin Point, especially the availability of parking. Many people also reported positive experiences on the relatively new Bear Creek Trail and appreciated the new view of the bay, though one person who enjoyed "tromping" around near the bay with his children reflected that the trail brought a loss of solitude.

Aside from the boat launches, reported access to the Bay seemed to be mostly informal, such as small trails through the woods or crossing private land to access waterfront areas and the woods surrounding Bear Creek.

When asked about hopes for the future, a frequent response was improved access to the area as well as interest in maintaining the natural and undeveloped state of Allouez Bay.

4. Community members value the beauty and undeveloped nature of Allouez Bay and wish to see it preserved or restored.

While no one shared memories of harvesting wild rice on Allouez Bay, many people expressed support for the restoration of wild rice in the Bay, especially because wild rice is a food source for ducks. A couple people who said they were Ojibwe band members were interested in the opportunity to take children ricing closer to home in the future.

People expressed support for both maintaining natural habitat and restoring wetlands. Several explicitly mentioned that they did not want to see buildings constructed along the bay and said "Keep it like it is." or "Keep it natural for birds and animals." Notably, those who discussed fishing experiences in the bay did not express concern about wetland restoration

when it was described using the map, perhaps because the wetland areas at the back of the bay was not described as a frequent fishing location.

In many discussions, community members talked about the beauty of the area and the uniqueness of Lake Superior. One person especially appreciated the wetlands that connect the bay to Lake Superior, saying it was very pretty in the winter when the wetlands froze and you could explore. Another parent at Lake Superior Elementary had a photography business and used both Wisconsin Point and the Bear Creek Trail as a background for family portraits. One person exclaimed "We're so lucky to have this kind of stuff here!"

Conclusion: A need for increased community outreach

Throughout the discussions, many community members who had multi-generational experiences or personal knowledge of Allouez Bay expressed a sense of ownership over the area. They were interested in restoration projects, water quality and the capping of the closed demolition dump. Their many eager questions also gave a sense that they had not had readily available access to information or prior opportunities to ask questions about the area near their homes, especially in the input sessions at Lake Superior Elementary. As the landscape design process moves forward, it will be important to provide informational opportunities and seek guidance and input from community members at the neighborhood level to refine restoration projects. City Councilor Jenny Van Sickle recommended providing information at common neighborhood gathering locations such as churches and church socials, the popular and historic Belgian Club, and public schools, or soliciting input directly at the 44th Ave E boat launch. With urban neighborhoods so close to the area, knowledge and engagement in the process of conservation can support overall community identity and well-being.