

The Point

Chain saws hummed all weekend on the point.

I wanted to say, “my” point, but to be truthful, it was never mine to own.

On it, though, I would hunt zig-zagging flocks of bluebills, land my boat to have a coffee break while fishing, or just go to sit for an undisturbed view of the marshland pothole the point curtained off from the main part of the lake.

Bit by bit, all weekend, that curtain came crashing down. Birch, pine and popple, every stick of brush toppled in a cloud of blue chainsaw smoke.

From across the lake, I was dumbfounded. What new use of the point would be better than those I had known?

The point was an escape route for deer passing from the oak ridges and jackpines to the thick marsh grasses and alders below.

Loons nested on its secluded shore, their nest a few inches from the safety of open water. Eagles stopped by to scan for fish or perhaps the carcass of a deer. Songbirds added their chorus to the music found out on that spit of land that served as a refuge for critters and people.

We trespassers might not have known the point’s titleholders, but we treated it with respect and welcomed the fact that there were none of those ugly “No Trespassing” signs.

For the very few using it, the point year after year was a landmark, a chunk of wilderness in a spreading ring of wall-to-wall shoreline development, and the front door

to the wildest of all places on the lake, the marshland pothole.

Then, the new landowners arrived. In a matter of hours, a diverse array of plants and people looking for some soulful uplifting were being kicked off this point.

A fragile place

Now, was this outpost to become a breezy campsite, a drive-down boat launch? Certainly no one would consider building a cabin or house so low, so close to the water! Were those trees needed for firewood? Who are these people? Where did they come from? What are they thinking? This slice of land rises no more than three feet above the lake. Would not laws, if not common sense, prevent destroying this? Why couldn’t the new landowner be as conscientious about this sensitive, fragile little place?

Before my eyes, the point has gone the way of thousands of miles of previously unbroken shoreline on North Country lakes and rivers. People in search of peaceful encounters with nature meticulously carve nature’s vital edge into stables for summer cabins or year-round houses, driving “nature” farther and farther away.

Much more attractive are those lots where owners have created a kind of mystery about their property and themselves by allowing a screen of vegetation to obscure parts, if not all, of the buildings from those on the lake. On the other side of the natural barrier, wildlife enjoys the security they must have in order to maintain residence in the lake or river environment.

Floodplain and shoreline ordinances require buffers, setbacks varying with topography. But often they are not

enforced. Reclaiming shoreline is a task akin to patching every crack in our highways.

As I turn from the assault on the point, I wonder when it all will end. Especially in this setting, shouldn't rights of fish and wildlife to survive in their world be at least equal to rights of people trying to become part of that world?

I, for one, don't want to watch another shoreline die.

Heritage "For Sale"

A few years have passed since the point was all but stripped bare. Loons no longer nest there. Sometimes, eagles land briefly on another part of the lake. Deer detour around a pumpkin-shaped mobile camping trailer parked at the base of this thoroughfare.

Today, "No Trespassing" signs warn those who come here to not land their boat or set foot on this soft-soiled porch overlooking the sanctuary beyond. Not that they'd want to, though.

Today a mechanical weedcutter is gouging a straight channel through water lilies, pickerelweed, hyacinths and arrowheads where boaters push-poled along a winding path leading to the remote pothole's storehouse of bass, panfish and northern pike. Its cutting teeth are biting into the soft muck bottom where duck hunters and their dogs dreaded to walk after a downed bird.

At 150-foot intervals, the weedcutter swings into shore to slice boat accesses to the 100-acre lake. Summer cabin and year-round residents on this tiny jewel are soon to be joined by newcomers expected to buy lake lots

slashed from the steep-banked woodlands bordering the marshy pothole.

Speculators have been gobbling up shoreland surrounding these little lakes for several years now, smaller waters bypassed in the rush to develop larger lakes. Best sites on those lakes have all but disappeared.

So, little lakes are next on Realtors lists. People buying anything offered on or near their shores, even though many times there is little or no environmentally sensible access to the water. Yet these starry-eyed little-lakes shoreland owners bring with them the expectations of what their forerunners have built on larger lakes... playgrounds for big boats and high-horsepower motors, wave-jumping personal watercraft, dawn to dusk water-skiing, radio-blaring pontooning and littered sandy beaches.

Gazing at the monotonous lakeshore cuts from a boat bobbing off the point, the future of these final refugees looks bleak, indeed.

The North Country is becoming a suburban park.

Shoreline edge is viewed as a commodity, not an intricate community.

A heritage is up for sale.

