

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: The PONDS at ORDWAY: III.) RIVER LAKE.

It is not really a pond but River Lake can still be considered among with the other ponds at Ordway. It is actually a "flood-plain lake", increasing in depth each spring as the floodwaters of the Mississippi overflow into it and returning to its shallow depth (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ meters) for the balance of the year.

Originally River Lake was a marsh and some of the older residents recall it as Metzler's Slough. It is a backwater of the floodplain of the Mississippi, made somewhat deeper by the construction in 1937 of the dam at Hastings, the closing of which raised the water level approximately $1\frac{1}{4}$ meters. There are three channels into the lake, one of which (the southerly end) has been dredged to permit small boats to enter a nearby marina. The other two natural channels - one from the north end and one from the east - permit the flow in and out of the big river but these, particularly the north channel, are dried up for most of the year. Thus the lake takes on different characteristics after the receding of the spring floodwaters; during the floods it is the same as the waters of the River.

The Lake fairly abounds with fish, most of which are "rough fish" - carp and bullhead catfish. Since there is a considerable volume of fresh and unpolluted water flowing constantly into the lake from several springs on the west bank the lake does not take on the stagnant condition which occurs in many lakes by the end of summer. The far (east) shore of the lake is included in the Ordway property but it is seldom visited because access to it is blocked by a cattail marsh which makes walking difficult.

Throughout the year this small lake (about 100 acres) is a very interesting part of Ordway and the communities which border it are vital to the whole environment. On the misty, overcast mornings of earliest spring, when the ice has not completely gone out, flocks of northbound transients find a resting-place in its opening waters: Scaup, Mallards, Mergansers - and the playful Buffleheads, bobbing upward from their dives like exquisite black-and-white corks. Gulls and terns, too, use the lake's waters throughout the summer and autumn. Along the shores swarms of warblers and other songbirds pass through each season. Finally, in the winter when the lake surface is covered with 25 inches or more of ice, the lone Red Fox trots across in the dismal graying light in his endless hunt for winter subsistence.



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