

# Lake Monroe Water Fund formed to ensure water source remains

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Water is essential for life, and people concerned about the health of Lake Monroe have worked together to form the Lake Monroe Water Fund. On its website, it's described as an "active funder for watershed projects that conserve, protect and sustain Lake Monroe as our shared community water resource."

Lake Monroe was constructed in 1964 and filled with water in 1965 by the Louisville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a 100-year water source. The reservoir's first and primary purpose is flood control for the White River. But since it was built, the reservoir has become Indiana's largest inland lake. It offers recreation as well as drinking water to more than 128,000 customers in Monroe County and supplements other water sources for people in Brown County.

Leaders from the five counties that surround Lake Monroe and are in the lake's watershed have been involved in developing the water fund since 2017, according to Jane Martin, a retired venture capitalist who lives in Monroe County.

Martin, along with others from the five counties and various agencies, began developing the water fund because there was no group or governmental agency that had stepped up to take on the task of not only understanding the overall importance of Lake Monroe but also providing the comprehensive management needed to sustain the lake, Martin said.

The Lake Monroe Water Fund was a grassroots effort to fill that void and ensure the lake, now past its 50th anniversary, has a coordinated effort to sustain it, with many of the various groups and agencies that depend upon it included. The current board includes Martin; Bill Weeks, chair of the Conservation Law Center and an emeritus professor at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law; Melissa Moran, director of community programs with The Nature Conservancy; Alex Crowley, director of Bloomington's economic and sustainable development department; James Kruase, with Friends of Lake Monroe; Erin Predmore, executive director of the Greater Bloomington

Chamber of Commerce; Judy Stewart, a retired Brown County judge; Cheryl Munson, a Monroe County Council member; and Joe Miller, of Rose Acre Farm. Mike Chaveas, supervisor of the Hoosier National Forest, is an adviser to the board.

While the water fund is new, several of the groups that have partnered with the water fund have been active. The Friends of Lake Monroe is the group that received a grant so it could hire a coordinator to develop a watershed plan. The Friends have worked to educate people within the watershed about the lake's importance and how to help maintain it. It has also sponsored various events to help with the lake's well-being.

In addition, the Conservation Law Center has partnered with the IU Limnology Lab and City of Bloomington Utilities to place a water gauge along the south fork of Salt Creek, a major source of water for the lake. The gauge is giving data on the rate of flow into the lake as well as the amount of sediment that is being carried in the water, according to Christian Frietag, executive director of the Conservation Law Center.

"Lake Monroe is the largest inland lake in the state," Frietag said. "It's a huge economic driver for a lot of counties. It's not just for people to fish and boat. It's not just a recreational lake. ... It's critically important."

Frietag believes the Lake Monroe Water Fund will provide the necessary cooperative management needed to ensure Lake Monroe can be sustained for years to come and do it in such a way that no one has to "reinvent the wheel" but can instead utilize the expertise of other groups and people in a cooperative way.

A \$20,000 grant from the Duke Energy Foundation paid for the water gauge project. Although Duke Energy isn't on the board, its foundation has provided grants for various projects in past years and is interested in helping in the future, according to Bruce Calloway, government and community relations manager for Duke Energy.

"We are so fortunate in Bloomington with what we have, and with everything that's been accomplished," Calloway said.

Calloway said one of Duke Energy Foundation's focus areas is nature as well as conservation of water and access to good water. "We're committed to investing in resources," Calloway said, "to ensure quality water and that there's plenty of water. This all fits into our commitment to the environment."

While the various agencies concerned about Lake Monroe have been able to fund certain projects with various grants, long-term funding is what the Lake Monroe Water Fund will help provide. Board member Melissa Moran foresees a time when state funding will no longer be available and the money that the Lake Monroe Water Fund can provide will be essential, as it is with other water funds such as the fund in San Antonio, Texas, that has helped protect more than 119,000 acres above the aquifer that provides a large portion of the city's water.

"Lake Monroe is fairly well protected because so much of the land near the lake is forested," Moran explained.

Having such a diverse board of directors is a good beginning, Moran said, because the people provide so many diverse perspectives.

"It needs to be supported," Moran said. "The whole community needs to get behind it."

One of the Lake Monroe Water Fund's main goals is to help people "connect the dots," Moran said. That includes learning what a watershed is and understanding that what someone does far away from Lake Monroe can impact the drinking water and fishing and boating that can be done far downstream.

Once more funding becomes available, Moran envisions that the local groups can do more to help communities whose actions impact the lake. That could include helping provide education and funding for developing better septic systems, educating people about proper use of fertilizers and pesticides and working to provide better drainage that lessens the sediment that is dumped into Lake Monroe.



A new group, the Lake Monroe Water Fund, has been organized to help Lake Monroe, shown here. (Jim Krause / Courtesy photo)



Cutright State Recreation Area at Lake Monroe was a busy place for anglers and boaters in October 2020. (Miles Flynn / Times-Mail)

The Lake Monroe Water Fund is an active funder of watershed projects that conserve, protect and sustain Lake Monroe as a shared community water resource.

For more, go to [www.lakemonroewaterfund.org](http://www.lakemonroewaterfund.org), where there's information about watersheds, water funds and more.