

Lakeside monitors important to maintain water quality

Written by Sherry Kughn
Photographed by Bob Crisp



Dana Herren serves as a volunteer water monitor on Logan Martin Lake.

Linda Ruethemann longed for years to live on a lake. Her job with BellSouth required her to drive between Atlanta and her home in Birmingham, a route that took her across Logan Martin Lake and its people riding, fishing, and boating there. She made up her mind that, after retirement, she and her husband would one day live on the lake.

After retirement in 2002, she and her husband bought a lake house. They moved from Pelham and now live in Cropwell on Rabbit Branch, and she is the current president of the Logan Martin Lake Protection Association (LMLPA).

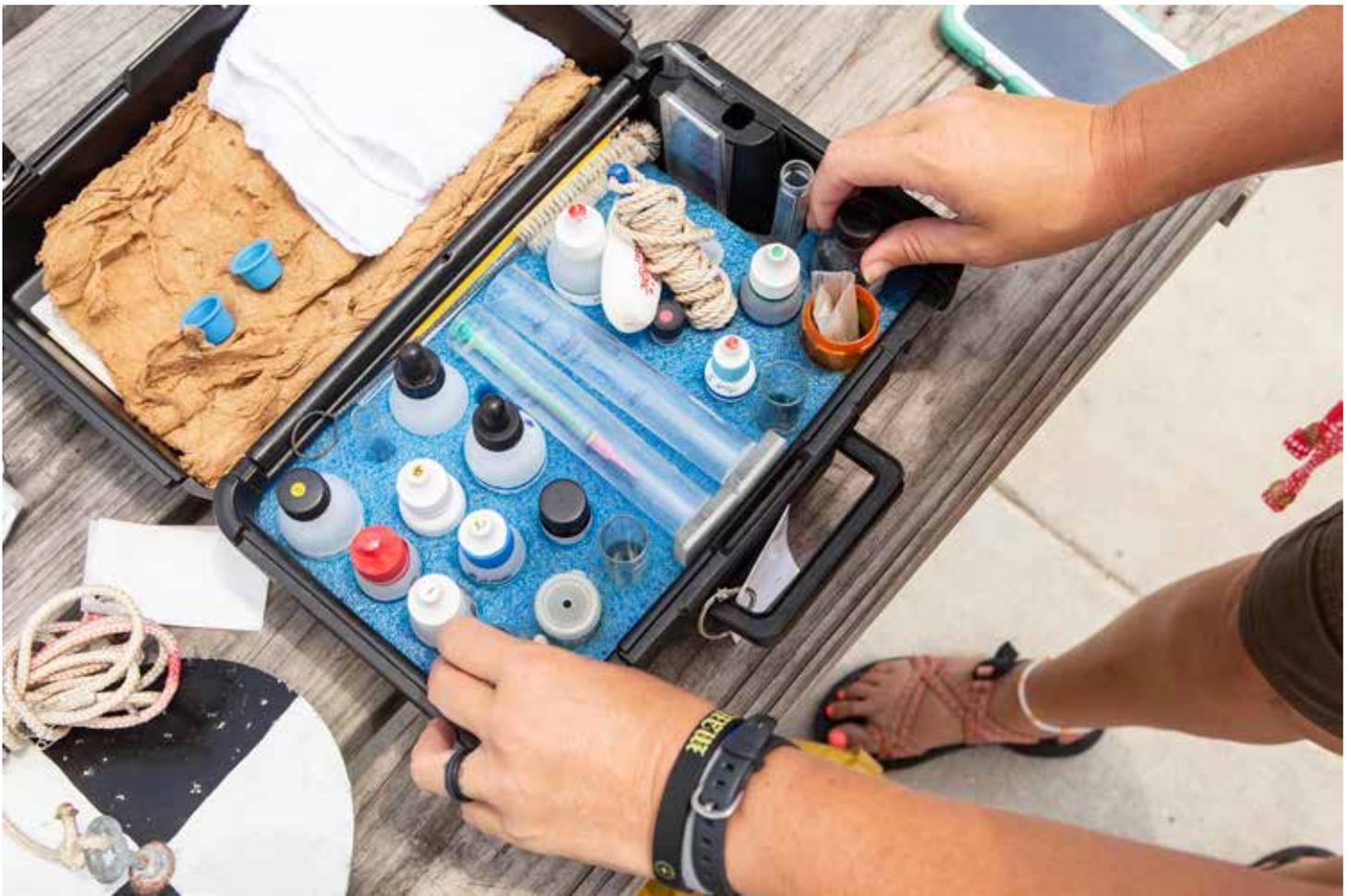
In 2004, she attended a LMLPA meeting, heard about water monitoring, and knew it was something she could do. She began working with Isabella Trussell, who originated the monitoring program for LMLPA in 1996, using methods

from the Alabama Water Watch program at Auburn. Ruethemann is now a certified Basic Chemistry monitor and trainer. She recruits new volunteers and keeps the chemicals in the monitoring kits up to date.

Once new volunteer monitors are trained using standardized equipment and techniques, they are assigned a testing site and provided a monitoring kit.

"The purpose of water monitoring is to collect data to detect changes in water quality over a period of time," said Ruethemann.

The elements tested are air and water temperature, dissolved oxygen, alkalinity, hardness, turbidity, and ph. The process of training chemical monitors involves a five-hour training program, a commitment of about an hour a month to collect water samples, test the samples, and report their



Above: Dana Herren checks the contents of her monitoring kit. Below: Wayne Wilcox tests a water sample. He and Herron are two of about 40 local water quality monitors.



results. After their first year of monitoring, they go through a recertification clinic, and then every other year thereafter.

Besides Basic Chemistry Monitors, LMLPA also has Bacteriological Monitors, that test for E. coli particularly after heavy rain events.

Currently the board of LMLPA oversees about 40 volunteers, some of whom have been monitoring since the program's inception in 1996. Six new volunteers and one new trainer joined the program this year, and several leave the program each year due to attrition. Ruethemann has trained people from age 16 to the late 70s.

Learning to monitor is an easy skill, according to Ruethemann. "Anyone who can follow a recipe can be a monitor," she said. "It is a step-by-step process and does not require a science background."

LMLPA board members encourage anyone interested in volunteering to call Ruethemann at 205-531-2372 or Trussell at 205-936-6651.

The purpose of monitoring the water in Logan Martin Lake is to detect changes in water quality.

Constantly promoting water quality

Education about water quality, quantity and safety are major missions of LMLPA. The group encourages lakeside residents to communicate related concerns to state and federal representatives, including the governor. Alabama needs a Comprehensive Water Management Plan. "Every other Southeastern state has one in place," Ruethemann said. "We fear that a lack of a plan will indicate to any court that the citizens are undervaluing the water resources in the state of Alabama."

To that end, the LMLPA offers the following services:

- Visit local schools to demonstrate water monitoring and help students get an understanding of how they can help protect the environment.
- Organize the Alabama Power "Renew our Rivers" lake clean-up each year when 600-plus volunteers remove about seven tons of manmade trash from the lake
 - Speak to various organizations about water quality.
 - Attend meetings of other state environmental groups, such as the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.



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