

Big Sugar Bush Notes

Spring 2021 Volume 31 Number 1

Big Sugar Bush Annual Meeting
Sat. June 12, 9:00 a.m. coffee
10:00 a.m. meeting
Town Hall (possibly outdoors)
An eblast will be sent out closer to the
time with specifics

Spring is here! The loons are back. The sandhill cranes are back. The bears are coming out of their dens and the beaver are swimming. Summer cabins are being opened and all is well on BSB. I hope all of you have survived the COVID winter as we look forward to beautiful summer weather and hopefully more gatherings on the lake.

We want to extend a warm welcome to our new lake neighbors! It is fun to see the new construction, remodeling and growth of our lake community each year. While I have heard from many expressing concerns that the increase in our property values have resulted in some increased property taxes, we also appreciate the joy that our beautiful lake brings each day.

St Anthony Falls Laboratory (University of MN) Research

We continue to be concerned about the impact of wake boat activity on BSB Lake. The first phase of U of M study was completed in the fall of 2020. We are waiting for the release of their data on the height and energy of waves and the depth and force of propeller wash generated by wake boats and other large watercraft. The results of this study will help us better understand the impact on the lake bottom and shorelines.



How many eaglets are there be this year?
Photo by George Wallman

Thank you to everyone who sent in their annual dues and joined the Lake association earlier this year. If you have not received the detailed map of the lake with property owners designated, contact myself or Ken Mattson. We have completed a new contact list which will be sent in the near future. If you haven't sent in your dues as yet (\$20.00) and want to join the association, please send your dues to Bob Backman. By joining the lake association, you aid in helping to preserve the splendor of our lake, fishing habitat, and water activities. I hope to see everyone at some point this summer. Have fun and enjoy the lake responsibly.

Larry Michelson, President
Big Sugar Bush Lake Association

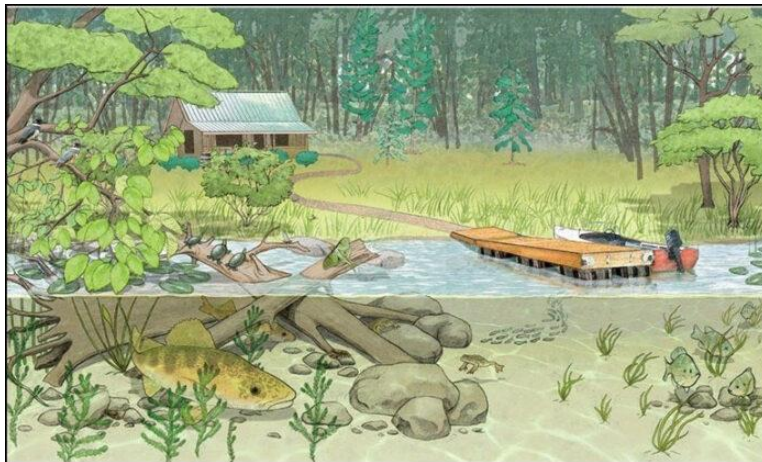


Planting on the DNR Island An additional 100 white pine trees were planted on the island Tue May 4. A group of 15, including BSB residents, members of the Isaac Walton League , and the DNR participated in the planting, followed by a picnic at the Bachman's. This was a hands-on activity for the Isaac Walton League whose mission is the conservation of land and water.



This is a dock taken out of a nearby lake last fall covered with zebra mussels. The longer we keep aquatic invasive species out of Big Sugar Bush Lake, the more likely scientists will find solutions to these problems. Please be vigilant in what boats, docks etc. that you or your guests bring into the lake.

12 Ways To Protect Your Lake: Written by Erik Bye



Healthy lakes are like Mom, puppies and apple pie – we all love and adore them. So, of course, your lake deserves TLC. There are steps you can take to make sure your cabin property is lake-friendly.

1. Let fallen logs lie to create habitat for sunning turtles above water and aquatic life beneath.
2. Rocky bottoms can serve as spawning grounds for fish, such as bass, perch and crappie.
3. Avoid creating a large beach area. If you must have a beach, keep it small. Instead, focus on creating a shoreline buffer, a vegetative zone along the shore. The presence of native plants along the shore buffers or protects the lake by keeping erosion at bay and by filtering contaminated water and/or excessive nutrients that would otherwise enter the water body. A buffer that extends 25-50 feet from shore is ideal, but even 10-15 feet is beneficial.
4. Trees along the shore provide shade for aquatic life, stabilize the shoreline and filter runoff water before it seeps into the lake.
5. Eliminate paths that run directly from the cabin to the waterfront. Curvy paths allow water to soak in, thereby increasing soil stability. To prevent the path's soil from compacting, cover it with shredded bark to help the ground retain moisture.
6. If you must keep a mowed lawn, consider limiting it to the area around your cabin. Apply fertilizers and pesticides sparingly.
7. To slow stormwater runoff, consider pervious driveways and paths. And use gutters and rain barrels for the cabin, garages and major outbuildings.
8. Maintain a properly functioning septic system that will not leach contaminants into your lake.
9. Clean your boat, motor and gear immediately after taking them out of a body of water, so you don't spread invasive species to other water bodies.
10. Maintain or replace your old 2-stroke boat motor to prevent leakage. (About 30% of all gas and oil used in these engines ends up in the water.)
11. Keep swimming areas small, while allowing emergent plants to grow. Species like bulrushes and reeds absorb the erosive energy of incoming waves.
12. Together, you can monitor lake quality, help prevent the incursion of invasive species and more!

Protect Your Lake Home with Limited Lawn Care

If you own lakeside property, keep in mind that anything you put on your lawn will probably end up in the lake. Because of this, you should try to avoid using fertilizer on the grass at your lake property. Fertilizer is full of things that help plants and other things grow. This can be wonderful for the grass on your lawn, but if the fertilizer gets in the lake, it can cause tiny plankton to grow as well. Plankton are microscopic animals in the lake that use up oxygen when they breathe, just like humans. If fertilizer gets into the lake, it can cause plankton to grow at incredible rates. An overabundance of plankton will drain all the oxygen from the lake. And, of course, oxygen is needed by fish and other animals in the lake to survive. Fertilizer can also cause algae to grow and multiply, resulting in a layer of gross, green and harmful or toxic slime.

ABOUT OUR AUTHOR Erik Bye is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota – Duluth

WHY YOU, a Lake Association Member, Should Join Minnesota Lakes and Rivers

Advocates Big Sugar Bush lake association belongs to this organization. Consider also, joining as an individual.

Mission: To protect Minnesota's lake and river heritage for current and future generations by forging powerful links among lakes, lake advocates and policy makers.

By Jeff Forester, Executive Director, MN Lakes and Rivers Advocates
Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, an organization of individual lake lovers and lake associations, has had remarkable success for lakes and lake home and cabin owners, lowering property tax rates from 2.25% to 1%, protecting lakeshore for inclusion in Conservation Easement property tax deductions, securing \$10 million Annual County AIS Prevention Aid. All of these represent our values, time spent with family and friends on a healthy lake. I know you share those values.

Members are crucial to our shared work.

Even with this success, our individual membership has declined as Lake Association membership has increased. We think we know why. Let me explain why your individual membership is just as important than your lake association's membership.

A growing base of individual members is critically important to meet our shared goals:

1. Lake associations, as nonprofits are limited in the advocacy they can do. Individuals are not.
2. Grassroots advocacy relies on numbers. There are 70,000 pheasant licenses sold in Minnesota. Pheasants Forever has 46,000 MN members. Today less than 0.06% of lake home and cabin owners in Minnesota are members of MLR and contacting their elected officials on behalf of our lakes and rivers. Imagine the impact if 5% or even 10% engaged.
3. Without individual membership support it is impossible to sustain and fund a statewide lake and river advocacy organization. There are over 500 lake associations in Minnesota. If they all joined at the current average, \$150, that would generate \$75k annually, slightly more than our current printing, mailing and electronic communications budget.



Our lakes are facing multiple threats

In 2020 the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency listed 56% as impaired, meaning they failed to meet one or more water quality standards. In 2018 40% of Minnesota's surface waters were listed as impaired. Our lakes and rivers are becoming impaired at an unacceptable and accelerating rate. The threats to our lakes, Aquatic Invasive Species, runoff pollution, road salt, and micro-plastics, are very concerning.

Lakes cannot protect themselves. And while your lake association does tremendous work, a lake association needs help. They must operate within a set of laws, statutes, and rules. While lake associations do tremendous philanthropy protecting the public waters, the public should play a bigger role in funding lake protection efforts. Often, lake associations are not fully included in discussions by state agencies like the MN DNR or the MPCA. **This is why a statewide organization is so important.**

Joining together in an organized grassroots organization is the best way to stop the destruction of our lakes, to rehabilitate the lakes that have become impaired, and to leave our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren a better lake legacy than we have enjoyed.

Go to www.mnlakesandrivers.org. Click on the Membership button, and join at whatever amount works for you. 952-854-1317 MN Lakes & Rivers Advocates ~ PO Box 22262 ~ St. Paul, MN 55122

MINNEAPOLIS NEWS STORY MAY HAVE PROMPTED EARLY ARRIVAL HERE

by Jim Jasken

In 1918, Minnesota was in the throes of three crises: the Big War in Europe, the Spanish flu and horrid forest fires in east central Minnesota. Each cast a dark shadow, costing hundreds of state lives.

But it was that summer Tom and Maida Clark Brown Boynton trekked to Big Sugar Bush Lake. Was it to escape the flu? Research into early newspapers from Minneapolis/St. Paul by

John R. Prickett suggest in an article/advertisement regarding the incredible fishing at Becker County's Big Sugar Bush likely led them to the long and arduous journey in pursuit of massive bass and other fish. With today's roads, the lake is approximately 354 miles from the Boynton home in Forest City, Iowa.



On 1918 roads, driving dirt trails, pulling a homemade trailer with a handmade boat loaded with camping gear, who knows how long the

journey? Access to the lake was from the west, through what was the Bullert farm, belonging to the parent of Donnell Bullert.

The Boyntons traversed what was at least a two-mile rutted mud road left by the white pine lumber brigade around the turn of the century (That road was still evident in the 1980s before the big winds of summer obliterated the trail).

Four years after their first visit, the Boyntons purchased the piece of the lake which is now the Prickett 's, currently owned by Sally and sons John and Tom. The Boyntons built the first cabin on the spot of the present home.

Eventually, they purchased property on Mille Lacs Lake and built the first "white man's" cabin on Wigwam Bay. This was also on an Indian reservation. This cabin was approximately 235 miles from Forest City, which made the drive to the lake much easier. Their main love, however, remained the pristine and divine Big Sugar Bush Lake!

It is possible that Native Americans fished the Sugar Bush for subsistence at that time, smoking, drying and salting their catches. In the 1970's pottery chards remained at two areas on Sugar Bush, evidence that the Indians used the shorelines for harvest of spawning suckers and possibly of other species. One of these areas is on the Prickett property. There were better beaches elsewhere, but from the quality of the fish seen in early photos, there is no question that the Boyntons were quite the fisher-people.

In retrospect, since Big Sugar Bush is one of the most sought-after real estate properties today, setting a cabin here was fortuitous. Precisely why the Boyntons picked this remote lake is mostly a mystery. Maybe that, in itself, adds to its mystique. In any case, their adventures led to a centennial of stability to one family's passion for life on Big Sugar Bush as a very special place, indeed.



Property Value Assessments - Big Sugar Bush Lake Property Owners Absorb Increases

By Jimmy Olsen

***The full article can be viewed on the website bigsugarbush.net

Estimated Market Values on the rise

Many Big Sugar Bush Lake (BSB) property owners were somewhat surprised when they received their property value assessment for 2020 (taxes payable in 2021) in the mail this spring. Collectively, 91 property owners around Big Sugar Bush Lake absorbed an overall 22 percent increase in assessed estimated market value (EMV) from 2019 to 2020. This latest assessment increased the total EMV for BSB property owners by just over \$5 Million to a total of \$27.7 Million. The average EMV for BSB property owners went from \$250,412 in the 2019 assessment year to \$306,504 in 2020. Figure 1 charts these values along with the corresponding values for assessment year 2018.

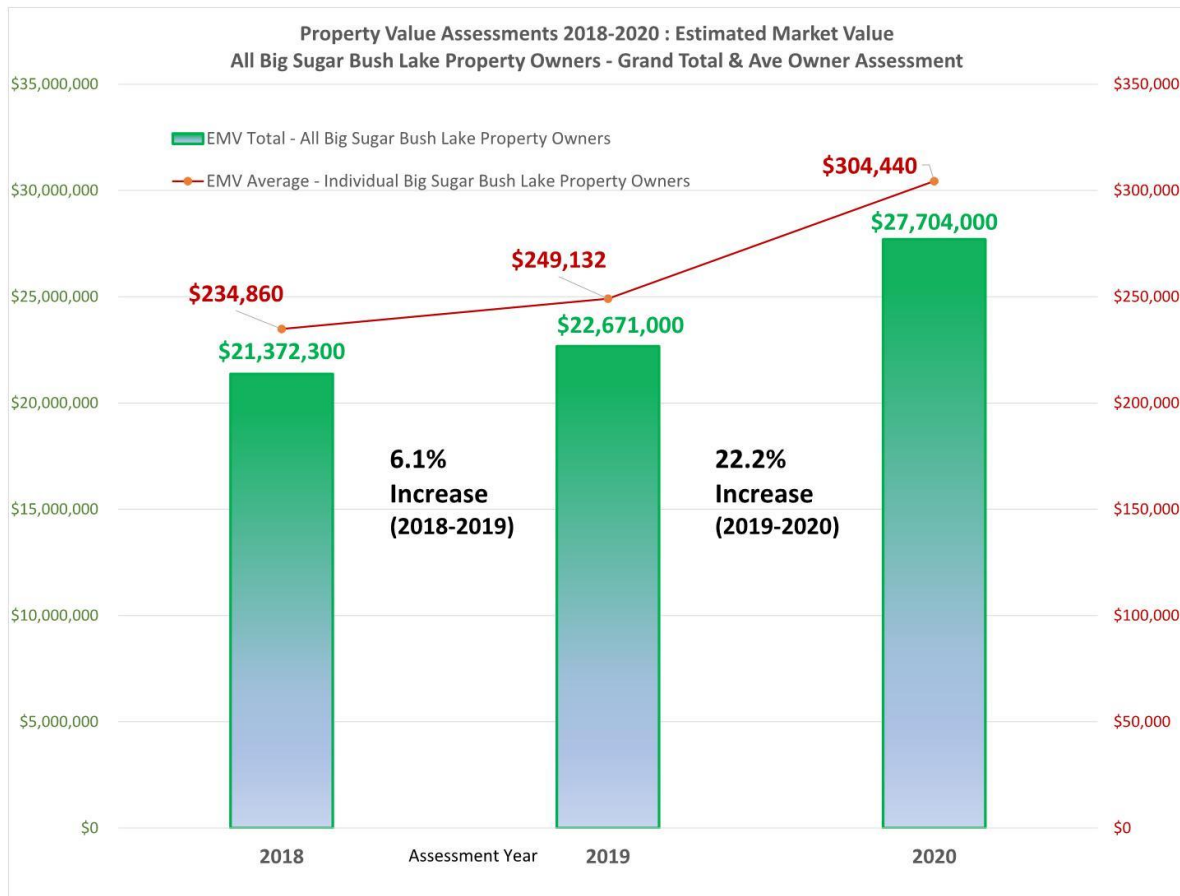


Figure 1. Big Sugar Bush Lake Property Owners Assessed Estimated Market Values 2018 – 2020.ⁱ

The overall and average increase in assessed EMVs of 22.2 percent from 2019 to 2020 raises a question: What would cause such an increase? Assessors value properties using a mass appraisal process to review sales of similar properties in the area over a set time period. The process is summarized by the Minnesota Department of Revenue in fact sheets available on their website at: www.revenue.state.mn.us. Estimated Market Value (EMV) represents what your property would sell for in an “arms-length” sale on the open market. Assessors review sales from October 1 to September 30 and adjust the prices for market trends to arrive at an EMV on the January 2nd assessment date of the following year. For example, to arrive at the 2020 EMV the assessor reviews property sales from October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. Property values and classifications then become final on July 1, 2020. These values are used to determine property taxes for 2021.

Using this timeline, the local county assessor for BSB Lake properties made initial assessments for 2020. This initial assessment was recorded in your “2021 Valuation Notice” showing your initial 2020 assessment for taxes payable in 2021. This 2021 Valuation Notice was provided to you at the end of March 2020. However, at the end of November 2020, the county assessor provided a notice of “Proposed Taxes 2021” that increased the March notice 2020 EMV assessment by 10 percent. This reflected a special assessment order in June 2020 by the Minnesota State Board of Equalization mandating a 10 percent increase to residential/seasonal property on Big Sugar Bush Lake. This revised 2020 assessed EMV (taxes payable in 2021) was also reflected in your “2022 Valuation Notice” provided at the end of March 2021. To summarize:

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Notice</u>
March 2020 assessment	2021 Valuation Notice: Values for Taxes Payable in 2021– initial local 2020 assessment
June 2020 for BSB.	Minnesota State Board of Equalization Order: Order to increase EMV by 10% for BSB.
Nov 2020 increase	Proposed Taxes 2021: Values for Taxes Payable in 2021– included State Order increase
March 2021 assessment	2021 Property Tax Statement: Values for 2021 Taxes Payable & 2020 EMV assessment

Understanding the State Board of Equalization State Order

You may be wondering what precipitates a State Order by the Minnesota State Board of Equalization since there has not been one affecting our lake properties since the initial subdivision development of BSB lake. In order to evaluate the accuracy and uniformity of assessments within the state (and to ensure compliance with property tax laws), the Minnesota Department of Revenue conducts annual Sales Ratio studies. These studies measure the relationship between appraised values and the actual sales price. Using data from sales that occurred October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019 a “Sales Ratio” is calculated:

Sales Ratios measure the level of assessment (how close appraisals are to market value on an overall basis). The 2019 sales ratio study (for the 2020 assessment year), showed the statewide median Sales Ratios for all property types were in the acceptable targeted range of 90 to 105%. However, within Becker County, Sugar Bush Township, Big Sugar Bush Lake, the Board found

assessment levels for 2020 were not within the acceptable range and unilaterally ordered a 10 percent increase to the initial 2020 EMV assessments performed by the county. Since all State Board Orders must be implemented by the county, this order - combined with the initial assessments for 2020 - resulted in the overall increase of 22.2% in EMV for Big Sugar Bush Lake properties. See Figure 2 for a summary of the order affecting Becker County properties and BSB lake property owners (highlighted in red).

¹ Data retrieved from Becker County, MN website: https://gis-server.co.becker.mn.us/www/parcel_search.aspx.

Are there no limits to assessment increases?

An increase in assessed EMV of over 20 percent in one year seems a lot to swallow for the Big Sugar Bush Lake residential / seasonal property owner especially considering many are retired and on a fixed income. It makes one wonder: Is there no limit to what increases can be assessed in any given year? Well, the answer appears to be, “No, at least not right now, but there used to be.”

About the time of the initial subdivision development of Big Sugar Bush Lake in the early 1970’s the Minnesota legislature was being confronted with the problem of escalating property values and their effect on property taxes. Although the pleas for relief came primarily from homeowners, owners of recreational property, farms, and even businesses voiced concerns.

Accordingly, the Minnesota legislature twice adopted Limited Market Value (LMV) legislation to address this problem. – once in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. LMV limits the amount by which a property’s market value, EMV, may grow for purposes of property taxation from one year to the next. It was designed to mitigate rising property taxes which resulted from rapidly inflating property values.

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Enactment of the Limited Market Value law in 1973 and again in 1993 was one of many attempts to slow the growth in property taxes, particularly for favored classes, since the late 1960s. During those 35 years governors and legislatures showed concern about rising property taxes, particularly on residential homesteads and seasonal residences. However, those concerns were somewhat eliminated with the onset of the Great Recession beginning in 2008 along with the associated collapse of the U.S. housing market. As such the LMV law was repealed after assessment year 2008.

The LMV law did materially reduce property value assessments during its tenure. Within Sugar Bush Township alone for “seasonal cabins”, LMV market valuations were reduced by a total of \$38,844,100 during the 10-year assessment period 1999-2008. Chart 3 shows the effects of these dollar value LMV market valuation reductions for Sugar Bush Township seasonal cabins as well as the percentage reductions in would-be valuations each year.

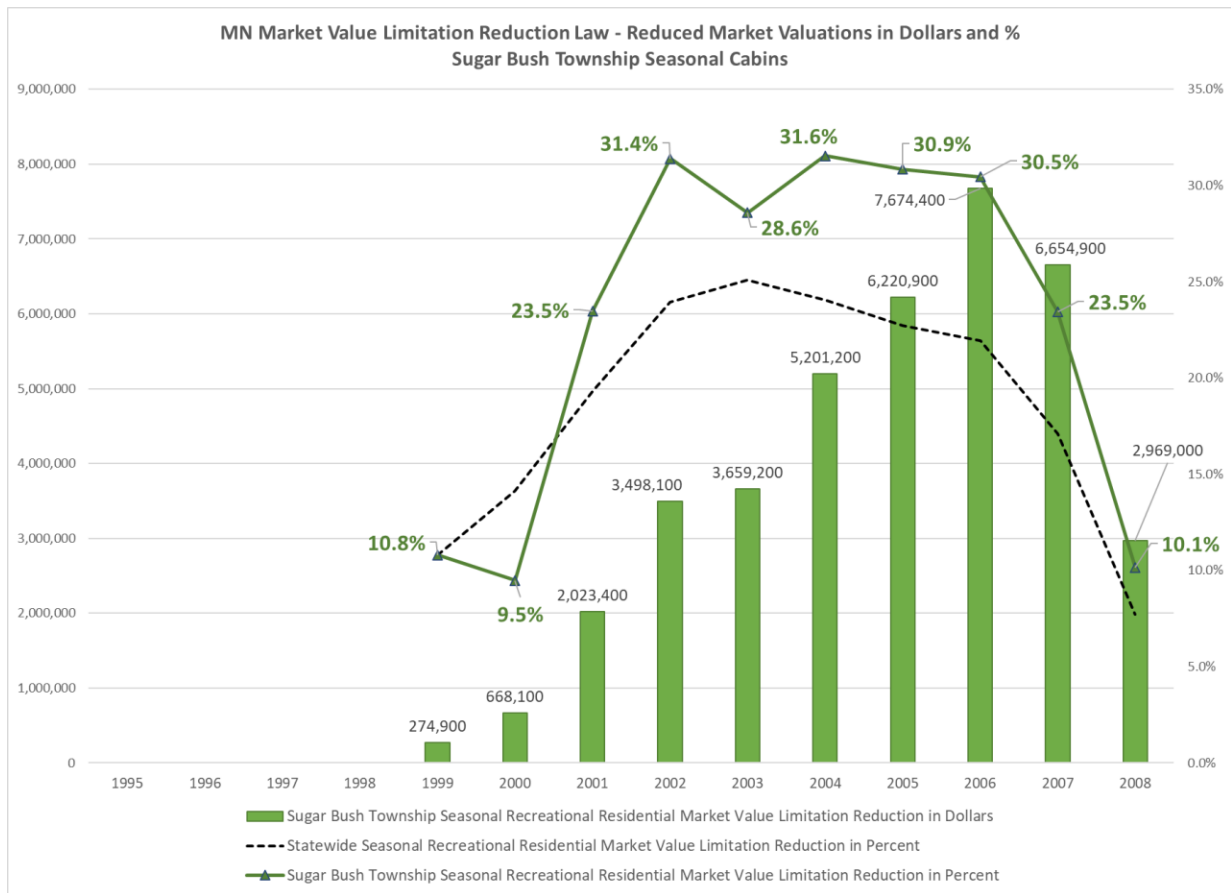


Figure 3. MN Market Value Limitation Reduction Law – Reduced Market Valuations in Dollars and % for Sugar Bush Township Seasonal Cabins¹

How have assessed valuations affected Big Sugar Bush property valuations over time?

Detailed historical records of market value assessments for Big Sugar Bush property owners are not readily available, and most of individuals do not keep a record of year-to-year changes. However, using the actual EMV records of one BSB seasonal recreational lakeshore property that was available, a picture of the trends that BSB lake property owners can be seen. Figure 4 shows this actual sample BSB property EMV assessment changes in percent from 1995 through 2008. This provides some interesting insights.

Years Trends in Estimated Market Value Assessments for Sample BSB Lake Property

- 1995-2008 Ten (10 years the BSB assessed EMV was at or below the LMV law limit. Six (6) of 10 years the BSB assessed EMV was restricted exactly at limit % value. Four (4) years the BSB assessed EMV exceeded the LMV limit due to improvements
- 2009-2019 The BSB EMV assessments were within + or – 5% of previous years assessments.
- 2020 This year the BSB assessed EMV increased 19.7% from previous years assessment.

What does the future hold?

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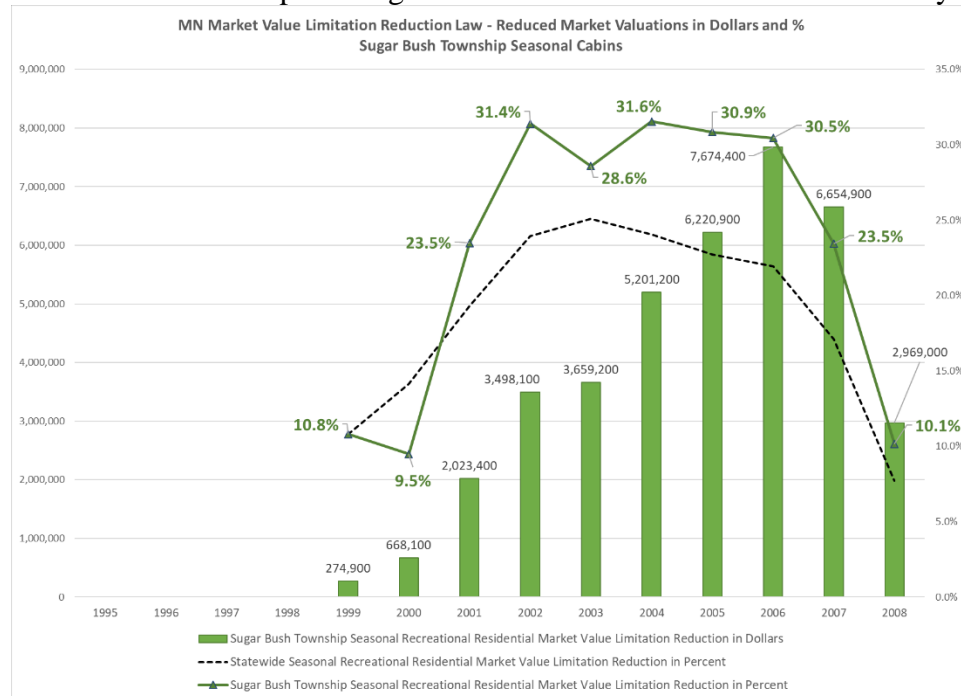


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What does the future hold?

Based on the legislative history regarding property value assessments in Minnesota, it appears state legislatures felt year-to-year increase in property value assessments over 15% were excessive. Since 2008, and up until recently, statewide property values did not increase significantly overall. However, beginning the 2020 assessment year, there appears to be a marked increase in certain property classes, including residential / seasonal properties outstate.

The recent hot market in housing sales was not fully captured in the 2020 EMV assessments since the sales period considered was from October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. Meaning, the 2021 assessment year Sales Ratio studies will consider sales from October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020. Given the recent changes in the housing market, and the Minnesota legislature’s historic concern to constrain exorbitant increases in property value assessments – it may be time for them to consider re-enacting the Limited Market Value law. Absent that, BSB lake property owners may experience more significant increases in their property value assessments.

Big Sugar Bush Lake Association Board Members

****Since the 2020 annual meeting was cancelled due to covid 19, existing board members’ terms were extended a year.**

President: Larry Michelson 2019-2023

Vice President: Ken Mattson 2016-2021

Treasurer: Bob Backman 2017-2022

Secretary: John Boots 2020-2023

Kent Anderson 2016-2021

Jimmy Olson (replacing Gary Mohlenkamp) 2017-2022

George Wallman 2017-2022 (replacing Kay Lohman)

Ken Bruss 2020-2023

Email stories and photos to newsletter editor Fran Mattson at fnkmattson@gmail.com