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# THE CULLEN CURRENTS

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*Fall, 2023*



## **2023 CLA Annual Meeting**

Sixty people attended this year's Annual Meeting on Saturday, August 12. Coffee and refreshments were available before and throughout the meeting and various exhibits were on display.

CLA president Ann Beaver called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. After referring members to the minutes in the meeting booklet they received upon signing in, she asked for and received a motion and second to approve the minutes of the August 13, 2022 Annual Meeting, which then passed.

Carol Lindahl reviewed her treasurer's report, which was also printed in the meeting booklet. A motion was made, seconded and passed to approve this report.

Ann Beaver presented a proposed amendment to the CLA Bylaws Article IV Section 2 regarding board member term length. The amendment proposed by the Board would make the first term of new board members one year instead of the standard two years. After explaining the rationale for this amendment, a motion was made and seconded to adopt it. There was brief discussion of the motion after which the motion passed. In response to a request from the CLA members present, she introduced past board members who were present as well as current board members, noting which ones were standing for reelection to a two year term. She next introduced Ryan Kennedy, Lower Cullen, as a candidate for the newly approved one year term. A motion to elect the slate of candidates as presented passed unanimously.

Paul Beilfuss, Budget and Finances Committee chair, reviewed the proposed operating budget for the coming fiscal year as contained in the meeting booklet and noted a balanced budget projection. He also thanked members for their continued strong financial support for the annual treatment of curly leaf pondweed. He then reviewed the Legacy Funds and opportunities for CLA inclusion in estate planning. A motion to approve the proposed coming FY budget passed unanimously.

Board member Randy Steenholdt reminded members of the upcoming seminar on wills and family trusts and said there was still time to register for it. Denise Whitson related their positive experience taking advantage of the Shoreline Restoration Grant program offered by CLA. They requested Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to conduct a site visit of their shoreline and draw up a detailed plan on how to improve it. Once the visit was done and they received the plan, they received at the \$100 reimbursement grant towards the \$125 cost of the visit. Several other members said they also had requested a site visit but the process was not yet completed. Ann Beaver urged others to take advantage of this grant program in the coming year. A drawing was held to select a dozen or so attendees to receive a CLA logo mug or glass. Mugs and glasses were also for sale after the meeting. The business meeting was then adjourned.

The morning's guest speaker was Bill Marchel, one of North America's foremost outdoor and wildlife photographers. His program consisted of a beautiful array of his photographs along with many interesting tales of the subjects and how he managed to capture the images.

## **Getting in the mood for fall and Halloween!**



a scene along Wilderness Road

*Editor's note: Following are the committee reports that were presented at the 2023 Annual Meeting.*

### **Administration Committee**

Debi Oliverius, chair

The Administration Committee organized the 2023 annual meeting in conjunction with the full CLA board. 263 meeting reminder cards were prepared and mailed to the membership in July. Bill Marchel, noted wildlife photographer and author was contacted to speak for the educational component of the meeting. Programs were prepared and printed, refreshments were obtained and A.V. equipment and general meeting needs were organized for the meeting.

### **Education Committee**

C.B. Bylander, chair

The Education Committee initiated three new activities in 2023.

- \*It initiate a shoreline restoration grants program.
- \*It held a shoreline restoration educational seminar and tour on Middle Cullen Lake.
- \*It organized a soon-to-be held educational seminar on smart ways to transfer lake property within your family.

Regarding the grants program, about a half dozen property owners are utilizing this new \$100 incentive. Announced last fall, this program pays \$100 of the \$125 fee for a professional shoreline assessment and restoration plan. The assessment is conducted by an expert from the Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District who in turn pens a potential plan of action. The beauty of a SWCD evaluation is that if you decide to move forward with a project there is real potential that government cost-share dollars will help pay for the work. The CLA is funding this effort (currently capped at \$2,500) with Legacy Fund donations.

Regarding the educational seminar, about 30 people gathered at the Randy and Carol Steenholdt home on Middle Cullen on June 16 to learn about minimizing shoreline erosion and keeping the Cullens healthy. The two-hour program began with an overview of plants that protect shorelines and ended with a tour of three lakeshore properties. The tour helped people see how they could apply their newfound knowledge as well as witness the benefits of a natural shoreline and one being restored.

The featured speaker was Bonnie Hiniker, owner of Pine River's Sunshine Gardens Nursery and Landscaping. Those who attended received a three-page handout that listed 119 native plant species — trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns and more — to consider when restoring a shore. Hiniker encouraged people who want to learn more to visit the Minnesota DNR website and view information related to “maintaining and restoring natural shorelines.” She also invited people to visit her

nursery, the largest in Cass County, where display gardens include many of the species she talked about.

Regarding the upcoming family estate planning seminar, that will be held Saturday, August 19 at 10 a.m. at Lutheran Church of the Cross in Nisswa. The featured speaker will be Matt Guttman of Guttman Law PLLC. He will present general information on the importance of having your estate in order, including helpful insights on wills, living trusts, incapacity planning, cabin transfer planing and benevolence giving. The seminar will include a discussion of strategies - including tax mitigation strategies - that allow families to successfully transition the family lake property and assets to the next generation. The seminar will also address opportunities for benevolence giving to further support the CLA community. We expect a large turnout for this seminar and therefore request that you send an email to [steen@nisswa.net](mailto:steen@nisswa.net) to confirm your attendance.

The Education Committee also continued to produce its popular newsletter and maintain a well-organized website.

### **Fisheries Committee**

C.B. Bylander, chair

The Fisheries Committee received one inquiry this past year. The concern related to reduced bluegill and crappie limits on several nearby lakes, including the Whitefish Chain, Edward, Huber and North Long. The specific concern was this: Are reduced panfish limits (five bluegills and five crappies) on these and certain other area lakes increasing fishing pressure and fish harvest on the Cullen Chain, where anglers can keep up to 20 bluegills and 10 crappies?

The committee looked into this and found no good answer. That's because to accurately answer the question the Department of Natural Resources would have to conduct a creel study, which involves interviewing anglers as well as counting and measuring their fish. That hasn't happened and it isn't likely to happen. So, without data, no one can say with certainty that regulation changes on other lakes are having a negative, neutral or positive effect on Cullen fish. Perhaps three or four years from now — the likely timeframe for the next DNR fish population assessment of the Cullens — the DNR will be able to determine if anything has changed in a major way.

The Fisheries Committee submitted an article to the summer newsletter that provided additional insight and information on this topic.

### **Invasive Species Committee**

Carol Lindahl and Ann Beaver, co-chairs

**Curly leaf pondweed (CLP)** This spring the lakes again had a very late ice out -- April 29 for Upper Cullen and May 1 for Middle and Lower Cullen -- followed by unusually warm days throughout May which caused a rapid increase in lake water temperature. The daily high temp

was in the 60s six days, the 70s 14 days, and the 80s 7 days! Low temperatures rarely dropped below the 40s and 50s. Also, the ice was covered with a lot of snow for most of the winter, blocking the sunlight and thus inhibiting the CLP's normal growth throughout the winter, growth which usually gives it a head start over native aquatic vegetation in the spring. The result? When our CLP treatment contractor did their spring survey, they found the CLP to be stunted and sparse and the water temperature was already close to 60 degrees. They provided their suggested treatment polygons to the DNR, but by the time the CLP was grown enough to treat, the native vegetation's growth was also well underway and the DNR would not allow the CLP to be treated. We were able to hire a local company, Central Minnesota Aquatics, to conduct a survey in early July of the CLP in each lake before it started to die back. Thus we have professionally gathered information on areas of CLP which should be treated next year, if ice out and the weather cooperate.

**Purple loosestrife** Please monitor your shoreline for this beautiful but very invasive plant. It is not an aquatic plant, but it grows wherever it can keep its roots wet, especially along shorelines. If it is on your shoreline it is your responsibility to get rid of it. You can find more information on the CLA and DNR web sites.

**Zebra mussels** These mussels are well established in Lower Cullen, already having an effect on the water clarity because of what they eat. They are becoming well established in Middle Cullen, but not yet to the extent that they are affecting the water clarity. Upper Cullen has escaped their invasion so far, likely because there is no public access and not too many watercraft can get through the culvert in the stream under the bridge between Middle and Upper Cullen Lakes. Zebra mussels can easily be spread by water that is transported from lake to lake in bait buckets, live wells, and areas of watercraft that collect lake water because their offspring, called veligers, are miniscule and can easily hitch a ride in water.

### **Land Development Committee**

Ann Beaver, chair

There have been no land use applications on the Cullen Lakes since last year's Annual Meeting that would require a variance or conditional use permit, the two types of applications CLA submits comments on to the relevant jurisdiction – Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, or Crow Wing County. We have, however, reported two possible land use violations. The Nisswa City Planner has looked into one of them and the Pequot Lakes Zoning Administrator/Deputy Clerk is looking into the other one. The one in Nisswa was found to be a violation of the land use ordinance and the property owner is required to work with Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District to revegetate the shore impact zone yet this summer. We don't know about the other one yet.

The committee members don't go looking for violations, but when they are reported to us we ask the appropriate jurisdiction to look into them.

### **Membership Committee**

Carol Lindahl, chair

CLA membership currently stands at 262. This includes 246 current property owners, 15 associate members (former owners or family members of current owners), and one complimentary membership (new owners). We are grateful for the on-going support and participation of our members.

### **Nominating Committee**

C.B. Bylander chair

The Nominating Committee identified a slate of potential board members and officers for the upcoming year and submitted an article to the newsletter that encourages association members to consider becoming a board member. New officers will be selected later this morning.

Association bylaws state that our board must be comprised of a minimum of 12 members yet no more than 18. We have 15. So, there's an opportunity to add three new board members.

While we no longer accept board nominations from the floor at the annual meeting, do consider becoming a board member. It's easy and a good thing to do. The board meets one Saturday a month from May through October. The meetings are short. Typically you're in and out in 90 minutes or less. You'll be assigned to a few committee. Sometimes committees meet between board meeting. Often, they don't. Typically, you will be assigned to committees that align with your interest and knowledge. You'll be a part of a very good organization. As a board member you have input on how dues and donations should be put to best use. Current board members have a strong interest in attracting younger people to join the board. While some "younger" folks do serve, most board members have that AARP look going for them, and that means our thinking can be AARP-ish, too. This is a problem because the long-term success of our association depends on younger folks advocating for a healthy Cullen Chain just as the pre Boomer generation did when the association was formed. So, if you know of a young person who may want to serve on the board, please reach out to them and give them a nudge, especially if they have expertise in building social/organizational connections or using WordPress.

### **Water Quality Committee**

Ann Beaver, chair

Committee members Denny Opsahl (Upper Cullen), Debi Oliverius (Middle Cullen) and Denise & Eric Whitson (Lower Cullen) have been taking water samples (for chemical analysis by a lab) and doing Secchi disk readings (for water clarity) monthly May through September each

year. The results show that the lakes' water quality has remained fairly stable over the years. I say "fairly" because the weather plays a large role in a lake's water quality and we've had changing weather patterns in the recent past. Development on the lakeshore also can play a big role, so I'm pleased to see more and more people are leaving an unmanaged buffer of vegetation and trees along their shoreline.

As you may remember, zebra mussels were discovered in Lower Cullen in 2016. That's seven years ago, and because of what they eat, they have caused the lake's water clarity to increase by a lot. That may seem a good thing, but the clearer water allows more sunlight to reach the lake's aquatic vegetation, spurring on its growth. That may make the fish happy, but it usually doesn't make people happy.

**Budget and Finances Committee**  
Paul Beilfuss, chair

According to the treasurer's monthly reports, the FY '23 budget and related expenditures were closely aligned this year. Our investments continue to improve, although we anticipate some increases in line-item budget items for next fiscal year's budget. We are pleased that reimbursements were available for shoreline evaluations from the Legacy Fund. The committee's work plan for the upcoming fiscal year includes and internal audit of the last three years' budget and related accounts. The committee will utilize current internal audit procedures and controls in place to conduct the review. The committee will also review current internal audit procedures and controls and subsequently make a recommendation to the Board for a policy that would include additional procedures and controls as necessary. After the Board reviews and approves the policy, the committee will continue to explore local area accounting firms for cost estimates and required procedures in order to conduct a possible external audit of the Association's budgets and finances as required by the Board.

**Protect our wildlife**  
by Debi Oliverius

As homeowners are winterizing boats, garages and homes this fall it is important to not use mouse and rat poison pellets in and around buildings. Rodenticides inhibit blood clotting and cause death by internal bleeding for any animal that consumes the poison. Unfortunately, these poisons work slowly and can take a rodent up to 10 days to die. This slow sickening increases the likelihood that the rodent is eaten by a predator during this time. As the poison travels up the food chain, it also causes illness and death to foxes, owls and hawks which are beneficial to our environment and also help to keep rodents in check. Other animals are impacted as well by careless use applications of these poisons.

**FY 2024 Operating budget**

Paul Beilfuss, Budget & Finances Committee chair

The following budget was approved by the membership at the August 12 Annual Meeting.

**Income**

Membership Dues	\$ 6,300
Donations (Curly-leaf Pondweed)	40,350
Interest income	<u>500</u>
<b>Total Estimated Income</b>	<b>\$47,150</b>

**Expenditures**

Administration Committee	
Annual Meeting:	
Supplies, Postage, Printing	\$300
Food	75
Board Meeting Room Donation	250
LARA Membership	75
Soteroplos Scholarship	250
MN Lakes & Rivers Advocates Membership	200
Guest Speaker	<u>300</u>
	<b>\$1,450</b>

Water Quality Committee	
Water Quality Monitoring	<b>\$900</b>

Education Committee	
Map/Guide Update	\$ 225
Newsletter Postage	650
Newsletter Printing	1,000
Web Site Management	600
Special Sessions/Seminars/Workshops	<u>300</u>
	<b>\$2,775</b>

Aquatic Invasive Species Committee	
AIS Annual Control (Clarke)	<b>\$40,000</b>

Membership Committee	
Supplies and Printing	\$250
Postage	350
New Owner Packets	<u>60</u>
	<b>\$660</b>

Other	
Board Liability Insurance	\$900
Miscellaneous	<u>225</u>
	<b>\$1,125</b>

<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$46,910</b>
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<b>FY 2024 Budget Balance</b>	<b>\$240</b>
(Estimated income less estimated expenditures)	

## CLA Committees — 2023-2024

### Administration

Debi Oliverius - chair  
Paul Beilfuss  
Dan Hurley  
Joel Knutson  
John MacGibbon  
Pete Miller

### Education

C.B. Bylander - chair  
Ann Beaver  
Julie Johnson  
Ryan Kennedy  
John MacGibbon  
Debi Oliverius  
Randy Steenholdt

### Fisheries

C.B. Bylander - chair  
Ryan Kennedy  
Joel Knutson

### Lake Management Planning

president — chair  
all committee chairs

### Membership

Carol Lindahl — chair  
Ann Beaver  
Lora Graumann

### CLA officers

President - Ann Beaver  
Vice president - Debi Oliverius  
Secretary - John MacGibbon  
Treasurer - Carol Lindahl

### Budget & Finances

Paul Beilfuss - chair  
Lora Graumann  
Joel Knutson  
Carol Lindahl  
Pete Miller

### Environmental Issues

John Maguire - chair  
Patty Hicks  
Dan Hurley  
Denny Opsahl

### Invasive Species

Ann Beaver - co-chair  
Carol Lindahl - co-chair  
C.B. Bylander  
John Maguire  
Debi Oliverius  
Denny Opsahl

### Land Development

Ann Beaver - chair  
C.B. Bylander  
Patty Hicks  
Dan Hurley  
Randy Steenholdt

### Water Quality

Ann Beaver - chair  
Eric & Denise Whitson  
Debi Oliverius  
Denny Opsahl

## Year end report (fiscal year ended 9/30/23)

by Carol Lindahl, treasurer

### Income

CLP Donations	\$40,366.25
Membership Dues	6,600.00
General Support Donations	500.00
Interest	600.97
Merchandise Sales	40.00
Grants	6,100.00
Memorial donations	<u>3,855.00</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$58,062.22</b>

### Expenses

<b>Administration Committee</b>	
Annual Meeting/Supplies	\$456.92
Annual Meeting Speaker	450.00
Room Use Donation	400.00
MN Lakes & Rivers Membership	200.00
LARA Membership	75.00
Soteroplos Scholarship	<u>250.00</u>
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,831.92</b>

<b>CLP Surveys/Treatment</b>	<b>\$7,950.00</b>
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<b>Water Quality Monitoring</b>	<b>\$840.00</b>
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<b>Education</b>	
Guide/Map Update	\$196.58
Newsletter Postage/Labels	556.50
Newsletter Printing	928.28
Special seminars	150.00
Web Site Management	<u>262.32</u>
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,093.68</b>

<b>Membership</b>	<b>\$567.15</b>
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<b>Other</b>	
Board Liability Insurance	\$913.00
Misc.: Postage, PO Box	134.00
Transfer to Legacy Fund	3,855.00
Shoreland grant program	<u>400.00</u>
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$5,302.00</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,584.75</b>
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### Current Assets

Checking Account	\$ 4,747.10
Business MM — General Fund	<u>108,855.98</u>
	<b>\$113,603.08</b>

### **Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation**

<b>Investment Funds</b>	
CLA Legacy Fund	\$ 83,172.49
CLA Activities Fund	\$110,660.22

### **Currents on the Cullens**

#### **New Owners:**

Gary & Stephanie Moore, Lower Cullen (L96)  
Brian & Sarah Carlson, Middle Cullen (M8)

#### **Deaths:**

John Weise, Middle Cullen (M35)



## MnDOT responds to CLA letter of concern

*Editor's note: The following is the MnDOT District Traffic Engineer's response to CLA's letter of concern regarding the Wilderness Road/107 and Hwy. 371 intersection.*

Thank you for reaching out to MnDOT regarding the Cullen Lakes Association's safety concerns on Hwy 371 at Crow Wing County State Aid Highway (CSAH 29)/County Road (CR) 107/Wilderness Road. This intersection is outside of the limits of the current Hwy. 371 Corridor Study from Baxter to Nisswa, as we set those limits to correspond with the upcoming construction project limits with the northern limit being Nisswa Ave.

We are concerned with the safety of this intersection. I have an Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE) planned for spring next year to assist us in determining the best long-term intersection type out of the identified alternatives. I also have a placeholder for a J-Turn at this intersection for our State Fiscal Year 2028 (the type of intersection could change based on the ICE final recommendation). Please note that 2028 is the earliest year I can access those safety dollars as I already have Fiscal Years 2024 – 27 programmed out. We also need at least 4 years from project conception to construction for our program delivery process.

In the meantime, please let the Association members know that there is enough room in the median to park a passenger vehicle waiting to turn. That vehicle would block the left turn lanes, however taking this as a two-stage crossing would be considerably safer than as a one-stage crossing.

We will continue to monitor crashes at this location as well as keep communications open with the Cities of Pequot Lakes and Nisswa as well as Crow Wing County.

## Crow Wing County Board of Commissioners approves contract for intersection study

At their September 26 meeting, the County Board approved funding for a contract for an intersection control evaluation of the Highway 371/29/107 intersection to take place immediately this fall. The County hopes the results of the study may point to opportunities to stop the crashes and near crashes that have been occurring there. This does not include any construction, but this fall's study results may help speed up the process of improving the intersection.

## Is Upper Cullen still free of zebra mussels?

With zebra mussel populations in Middle and Lower Cullen increasing every year, it is even more important for everyone who fishes or duck hunts on Upper Cullen to take every precaution possible to ensure they don't accidentally introduce the mussels into the lake. Remember, their invisible-to-the-naked-eye offspring, called veligers, can easily hitch a ride in any amount of water.

The narrow, often hard to navigate stream flowing from Upper Cullen into Middle Cullen limits the lake's exposure to people traveling from the lower two lakes, but it is still no guarantee that someone won't unwittingly bring the mussels along with them when braving the stream to fish or hunt.

Upper Cullen folks, if you discover zebra mussels on any of your lake equipment this fall, please notify the DNR and someone on the CLA Board.

## Pileated woodpecker trivia

by Ann Beaver, with help from the internet



photo by Ann Beaver

It isn't rare to see a pileated woodpecker in our lake country, but you don't often see one on your hanging bird feeder, especially right outside your kitchen window. This one stayed for a long time and let me get up close and personal, right on the other side of the glass.

This pileated is a female. It lacks the red cheek stripe, similar to a mustache, that the males have.

While pileated woodpeckers spend a lot of time in trees looking for bugs and larvae under the bark, they will also eat wild fruits and nuts. At bird feeders they primarily eat suet, but they will also partake of seeds and nuts from time to time. The woodpecker in this picture is eating sunflower seeds, although it took her a while to figure out how to get at them.

A pileated woodpecker pair stays together in its territory year round. However, the male and female roost separately at night. Even if they use the same tree, each bird has its own roosting cavity — probably because their large size would make sharing a cavity a bit too crowded for comfort.

## Everything you wanted to know about septic systems but were afraid to ask

by Randy Steenholdt

Void of city underground sewage systems, lake homes/cabins predominantly rely on septic systems. As conscientious stewards of our environment, we must all remain knowledgeable about city/county septic codes as well as septic system maintenance.

For new or upgraded septic systems, please refer to the applicable Crow Wing County web site (<https://www.crowwing.gov/225/Septic>) for all aspects of operating permits, tank integrity, septic compliance inspection, and other design and installation/upgrade requirements. Additionally, limited county assistance is available via the Septic System Improvement Grant program. The goal of this funding is to protect groundwater and surface water from impacts resulting from non-compliant septic systems.

Whereas lake home/cabin owners typically know what can and can't be flushed into the septic system, company/guests are not always aware of septic tank protocol. The following sign strategically located in every bathroom may prevent septic tank dysfunction and/or damage.



### CLA Facebook page

With the goal of helping to build a feeling of community among Cullen Lakers, your CLA Board is asking you to submit photos, short news items, lost/found/wanted announcements and the like to our new Facebook manager, Ryan Kennedy. Our page will only be as good as the items you submit. Please send them to Ryan at [kenryan26@gmail.com](mailto:kenryan26@gmail.com).

## Help wanted

In September the Cullen Lakes Association was contacted by the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) about participating in a newly created Loon Friendly Lake Registry (LFLR) program. This program is a successor to the DNR's Loon Watcher Survey, something lake association members participated in off and on for almost 40 years.



The main purpose of the program is to identify management actions on the lakes that can protect loons and increase successful loon nesting and chick survival. This purpose can be achieved by having volunteers on

each lake monitor the lake's loons from May through August or September and report their findings and observations to a CLA loon liaison (for now, C.B. Bylander) to be named by the CLA Board.

The Board has identified three volunteers to monitor the loons and nesting conditions on Middle Cullen. We still need to find volunteers on Upper and Lower Cullen. One person does not have to monitor the whole lake. For instance, on Lower Cullen one or two people could monitor the west and northwest portions of the lake where we know there are usually two nesting sites; one person could monitor the southeast portion of the lake where we know there is at least one nesting site; and one person could monitor the east portion of the lake where there is often at least one pair of loons attempting to nest and raise young. Upper Cullen could similarly be divided into two or more sections.

Monitoring loons on the lake would consist of the following:

- \*Conduct a survey at least once a month, but preferably more often, to determine the number of loons present, the number of loons nesting, and chicks surviving.
- \*Note the type of nests being used (natural vs nesting platforms).
- \*Try to determine, without disturbing the loons, the number of eggs laid in each nest.
- \*Note how many of the eggs in each nest hatch.
- \*Note how many of these chicks survive the first few days.
- \*Note how many chicks survive until fall, when they are no longer likely to fall prey to eagles, snapping turtles, northerns, and the like.

If you and/or your family are willing to help monitor the loons on Upper or Lower Cullen Lake, please contact C.B. Bylander (contact information on the last page of this newsletter).