
THE CULLEN CURRENTS



Summer, 2023

CLA Annual Meeting is August 12

The 41st Annual Meeting of the Cullen Lakes Association membership will be held **Saturday, August 12** at Lutheran Church of the Cross in Nisswa.

The business meeting will begin at 9 a.m., but come early, anytime after 8:30, to get your name tag and annual meeting booklet, enjoy rolls and coffee, view the exhibits, and chat with Board members and your fellow Cullen Lakers.

During the business meeting CLA members will be asked to approve the 2023-24 fiscal year budget and elect members of the Board of Directors. The annual meeting booklet will contain 2022-2023 financial information and reports from the CLA committees. As in past years, there will be drawings for CLA glasses and mugs and time for membership questions and discussion.

The featured speaker will be Bill Marchel, one of North America's foremost outdoor and wildlife photographers.

Great turnout for lakeshore restoration event

About 30 people gathered at the Randy and Carol Steenholdt home on Middle Cullen on June 17 to learn about minimizing shoreline erosion and keeping the Cullens healthy.

An education event, 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. She is an expert on local native plants and an advocate for managing shorelines in ways that improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

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. The list identified where these species grow the best, how much sun they need, when they bloom, spacing suggestions and more. Hiniker is particularly fond of plants that spread via webs of spaghetti-like roots because they hold soil in place so well. She also likes planting species that have different bloom times and colors. By doing so, she said, you can have a colorful and environmentally beneficial shoreline from spring through fall.

Not surprisingly, Hiniker is not a fan of using rock to protect shorelines. She explained rocks do not filter out unwanted lawn chemicals and they largely provide habitat for things you don't want—

s n a i l s ,
mosquitoes and
the like.
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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.

This shoreline restoration event was organized by the Cullen Lakes Association Education Committee. It was offered as a service to members based on a survey that indicated this would be a popular topic. Association members interested in doing a shoreline restoration should consider utilizing our new shoreline grants program which will reimburse you \$100 of the \$125 fee for a Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District shoreline evaluation and site plan. As of this writing, six Cullen property owners have taken advantage of this offer.



Are reduced bluegill and crappie limits on nearby lakes harming the Cullens

by C.B. Bylander, Fisheries Committee Chair

In recent years bluegill and crappie limits have been reduced on several nearby lakes, including the Whitefish Chain, Edward, Hubert and North Long. The reduced limits aim to maintain or improve the size of bluegill and crappie in these waters.

Anglers who fish these special regulation lakes can keep only five bluegill and five crappie, which is 15 bluegill and five crappie fewer than if they fished the Cullens. The Cullens, like most lakes in the state, are subject to the statewide limit of 20 bluegills and 10 crappie.

This difference in limits has prompted some to wonder if the new regulations are harming Cullen bluegill and crappie populations because anglers who historically fished elsewhere are coming here to keep more fish.

It's a good question. It has 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.

Meanwhile, what to do? Here are some options.

***Be vigilant.** If you see a boat that seems to be hammering fish on a frequent basis, call the Turn In Poachers hotline at 800-652-9093. You will remain anonymous.

***Exercise restraint.** If the bluegills and crappies are really biting, just harvest what you need. Encourage others to do the same.

***Think about the future.** Ask yourself: Do I prefer the statewide bluegill and crappie limit or would I prefer a reduced limit? I mention this because the Cullens were not included in the last round of regulation changes but could be considered in the future. If a stakeholder group takes a strong position, the DNR weighs this in their decision-making process.

What follows is additional history and insight. In the spirit of efficiency, or perhaps laziness, I have taken the liberty of asking and answering my own questions.

What nearby lakes have reduced bluegill and crappie limits? Whitefish Chain, East Twin, Gladstone, Hubert, North Long, and the Mississippi River. Somewhat nearby lakes are Borden, Goodrich, Perch, and Gilbert.

Why are there restrictive regulations on these lakes?

These lakes were identified as having the kind of nice-sized bluegills and crappies that anglers prefer. It is believed that the restrictive regulations will help maintain solid numbers of good-sized fish well into the future.

Was the Cullen Chain considered for restrictive regulations? It was considered but rejected. Though fine fishing lakes, the DNR didn't believe the Cullens were as well-suited as some other lakes.

Are restrictive bluegill and crappie regulations necessary? That's a judgment call. Maybe. Maybe not. Many anglers believe the answer is yes because the average size of "panfish" has decreased over time and anglers don't want this trend to continue. In fact, they would prefer to catch fewer nice-sized fish than a whole lot of small fish. These anglers also believe that high-end fishing technology – technology used during both the ice fishing and open water seasons – makes finding and catching panfish easier than ever. This, they argue, leads to stunted fish populations that never recover, hence the need to restrict the harvest.

How many bluegills are kept in Minnesota? Years ago, the DNR estimated that Minnesota anglers keep about 14 million bluegill a year. That sounds realistic to me, given about 1.4 million fishing licenses were sold at the time of the study and kids under 16 could keep fish without a license. Typically, anglers keep bluegills at about seven inches in length. When you do the math, 14 million seven-inch bluegills equals 1,546 miles of bluegills lined from head to tail. To put that in perspective, Minnesota's annual bluegill catch is an unbroken line of sunnies from Nisswa to somewhere south of San Antonio, Texas.

Why did you say the DNR is unlikely to study the Cullen situation? That's because creel studies are expensive and therefore not many get funded. Of those that do, most are conducted on lakes larger than the Cullens, especially larger walleye lakes. Though the DNR has invested mightily in determining whether special regulations are achieving their desired goal, it has put far less energy into determining if special regulations have changed angler behavior regarding where they fish or don't fish. This means most everything you hear is anecdotal, with some people contending anglers are fishing less on the lower limit lakes, others saying things are about the same and some resort owners even marketing reduced limits as a positive. They make the case that you can catch nice-sized fish in their lake and it is going to stay that way. The fact that the resort industry hasn't come out strongly against the reduced bluegill and crappie limits suggests that the regulation changes are not harming their business. In the future, will resort owners on non-special regulation lakes complain of a real or perceived problem with the over-harvest of bluegill and crappie? Time will tell.

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Anything else? Just this. The DNR began implementing special fishing regulations 30-plus years ago after one of its studies quantified and qualified the size decline of Minnesota's most popular game fish species. Called the Fuller Tackle Shop study (researchers reviewed many years of meticulously kept fishing contest records from a tackle shop in Park Rapids), it confirmed, "Yep, fishing isn't what it used to be." Initially, very few special regulations were enacted, and most applied to walleye on popular walleye waters. Today, there are special or experimental regulations on all sorts of waters for all sorts of species. Special regulations take up some 20 pages in the fishing regulations booklet. The restrictive bluegill regulations that have become more common in recent years (they apply to about 200 of Minnesota's 4,500 fishing lakes) are part of an effort to retain size quality in panfish while the opportunity still exists. The over-arching concern is that when larger bluegills are over-harvested they are replaced by many more small bluegills that never reach a decent size. Indeed, in many lakes the tiny bluegills you see under the dock are adults that are doomed to being a runt for as long as they live.

Bears in July

from the web site bearwise.org

July at a glance: By July, cubs born this year have grown to the size of a raccoon or a small dog with big ears. Yearlings now on their own can be the size of medium dogs. Bears of both sexes mark trees and adult bears mate. Cubs smell their mother's breath to learn what's good to eat. Bears' great memories help them return to proven food sources. Yearlings are now trying to find food without their mom's help, that's why it's so important to make sure there's nothing around your place to attract them. They need to learn to find natural foods.

Cubs are big enough now to follow mom as she goes foraging for food. If mom is a wild bear, she teaches them what's good to eat and how to find and eat specific foods. She shows the youngsters how to eat berries, catch fish and dig for insects. If she has learned to rely on human-provided food sources, one whiff of mom's breath will teach the cubs to associate the smells of human food and garbage, pet food, bird seed, etc. with a full tummy and easy meals. Instead of learning how to forage in the wild, they learn how to raid dumpsters and garbage cans, knock down bird feeders, empty pet food bowls and prowl through campgrounds. If they grow up, they'll teach their own cubs this same behavior.

Bears have more than a hundred times as many smell receptors in their noses as people do and can detect and follow scent trails a mile or more back to the source. They also have a much better sense of direction than most people. Their built-in GPS guides them back year after year to wherever they found food, whether it's the berry patch that ripens in July or the trash that goes out every Thursday night.

Be bear-wise in bear country!

Several property owners are taking advantage of the \$100 shoreline evaluation offer

About a half dozen property owners are utilizing our lake association's new \$100 incentive for shoreline conservation improvement projects.

Announced last fall, the new shoreline grants 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 turns writes-up a potential plan of action. The CLA Board hoped that a fiscal nudge would prompt some people to consider making lake-friendly changes to their property, and that seems to be happening.

Among those taking up the CLA's offer are Eric and Denise Whitson of Lower Cullen. They had an evaluation conducted in May and are now mulling their next steps. Their property already does a very good job of minimizing runoff, but they are looking at doing even more.



Denise and Eric, 2nd & 3rd from the right

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. That's because Crow Wing County is very interested in maintaining good lake water quality and making that happen often starts with individual property owners. The SWCD Board meets monthly to review cost-sharing requests, and a high percentage are approved.

The CLA is funding this effort (currently capped at \$2,500) with Legacy Fund donations.

A more complete update on the program will appear in the fall newsletter. Meanwhile, if you're interested in learning more contact CLA president Ann Beaver or the SWCD at 218-828-6197.

Bored? Passionate? Available?

Have we got a deal for you!

by C.B. Bylander, 2023 Nominating Committee chair

You're out there. We know that. We could use you. Unfortunately, we don't know who you are.

That was the crux of a conversation at the Cullen Lakes Association's June board meeting where soliciting new board members was discussed yet again. The CLA bylaws state our board must have at least 12 members but no more than 18. We currently have 15. So, there's an opportunity to add three more board members. If you'd like to nominate yourself, simply send an email to CLA president Ann Beaver or me with a little information about yourself and why you'd like to volunteer.

Here are a few things you should know about serving.

***It's pretty easy.** The board meets one Saturday morning a month from May through October. The meetings are short. Typically, you're in and out in 90 minutes or less. The agenda is really cut and dried: committee reports, old business, new business and then out the door you go. You may feel a little out of place at first, but at some point you will look forward to attending the meetings. I do, and I generally hate meetings.

***You'll be assigned to a few committees.** The association's work gets done by those who serve on 10 different committees. They are: Administration, Water Quality, Membership, Education, Land Development, Fisheries, Environmental Issues, Invasive Species, Budget and Finance, and Lake Management Planning. Sometimes committees meet between board meetings. Often, they don't. Typically, you will be assigned to committees that align with your interests and knowledge.

***You'll be part of a very good organization.** CLA has been long known as an outstanding lake association, thanks to its leaders and dedicated members since its inception in 1981. Moreover, thanks to the generosity of association members, the board has funds to work with on projects such as invasive species control, water clarity and analysis, educational outreach and more. As a board member you have input on how dues and donations should be put to best use.

***You'll learn.** You are unlikely to learn anything exceptionally riveting, but you will discover some things you didn't know. For example, you'll learn about the challenges of working with government bureaucracy to monitor and combat the spread of curly leaf pondweed, what's happening with our water quality, who is proposing new development around the lakes, and what laws and ordinances are being proposed that could affect your pocketbook or lifestyle. Like I said, not real riveting stuff, but good to know.

Do know that current board members have a strong interest in attracting younger people to join them. While some "younger" folks do serve, most board members have that AARP look going for them, me included, 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 in 1981.

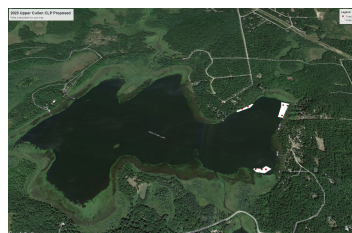
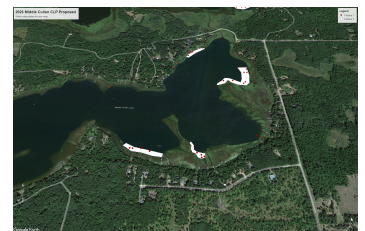
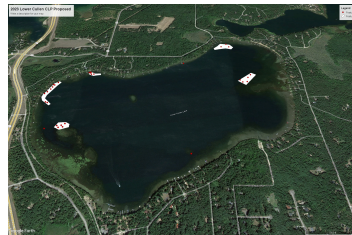
You don't have to be retired and at the lake full time during the summer to serve as a board member. And if you're not a younger person yourself but you know of a younger person who may want to serve on the board, please reach out to them and give them a nudge, especially if they have expertise in building social/organizational connections or using WordPress.

No treatment of CLP allowed in 2023

This spring the lakes again had a 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. 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, the maximum temperature allowed by the DNR for treatment to take place. They provided their proposed treatment polygons to the DNR, but by the time the CLP was grown enough to treat, the native vegetation's growth was well underway and the DNR would not allow the CLP to be treated.

We had surveys done of the CLP in each lake in early July before it started to die back. Thus we have information on problem areas of CLP which should be treated next year, if ice out and the weather cooperate.



These photos show the areas in each lake that were proposed to be treated this spring: 5 in Lower Cullen, 4 in Middle Cullen, and 3 in Upper Cullen.

The areas of CLP found in early July differ slightly and will be used, along with next spring's surveys, in our application to the DNR for 2024 treatment of CLP.

Fourth of July boat parades

It rained on our parades! A few hardy souls ventured out on Middle and Lower Cullen, some boats decorated some not, but the weather surely put a wet blanket on our usual great parades. The highlight of the Lower Cullen “non-parade” was the two hardy flag-bearing water-skiers making a tour of the lake behind their flag-draped boat. There were five decorated boats forming the Middle Cullen non-parade. Below are two photos sent in by one of the participants.



Addressing transitioning of family lake properties

by Randy Steenholdt

Will your family face the difficult task of transitioning its lake cabin or property within the family? Do you want to keep the family cabin in the family? As the current cabin owner, do you have a plan to distribute assets equitably? If not, you are in an exposed situation and could benefit from some legal advice.

The Cullen Lakes Association (CLA) will host a seminar on estate planning Saturday, August 19 at 10:00 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 planning 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. The task of establishing a legal transition plan may seem daunting, but lack of planning can result in the unwanted deterioration of the remaining family network.

We expect a large turnout for this seminar and therefore request that you send an e-mail (steen@nisswa.net) to confirm your attendance.

This is the CLA’s second educational event of the summer. It reflects the CLA’s commitment to increase educational opportunities for our members, a commitment made at last year’s annual meeting.

Is purple loosestrife growing on your shoreline?

This is your yearly reminder that by law, you must kill or remove any purple loosestrife (PL) on your property. If the PL is not too plentiful, the best method is to dig or pull it out by the roots. If the infestation is heavy, cut the blossoms off, being careful not to spread the seeds, and bag them up for disposal in the garbage. Then cut the plant off at ground level to inhibit future growth. You can also hand spray the plants with poison. If you choose to poison the plants, contact the DNR for more details on spraying and to apply for a permit to do so. You do not need a permit to hand remove the plants or cut them back.

Currents on the Cullens

New owners

Jim Christensen, Lower Cullen (L110)

Deaths

Jim Palmquist, Lower Cullen (L86)