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# THE CULLEN CURRENTS

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*Spring, 2025*

## **CLA receives DNR grants for CLP treatment in all three Cullen Lakes**

In late January the lake association received **unofficial** notices that its 2025 invasive aquatic plant management grant applications were selected from among the many applications received by the DNR. On March 31 CLA received notice that the grants had been fully signed and executed, so the grant notices were official and CLA could begin the permitting process.

The grants awarded are: Upper Cullen - \$3,420; Middle Cullen - \$5,700; and Lower Cullen - \$2,500. Upper and Lower Cullen grants are to be used for the treatment of curly leaf pondweed. Middle Cullen's grant is to be used for curly leaf pondweed treatment and also treatment of starry stonewort.

The DNR's goal for invasive aquatic plant management is to minimize harmful effects caused by invasive plants while also protecting the natural resources and their use in the State. The permitted treatments are selective for target invasive plants and minimize potential negative impacts to aquatic habitat, including water quality and native plants.

When using DNR grant money, chemical treatments must be done by a different company than the one that does the survey work. During the past winter the CLA Aquatic Invasive Species Committee requested proposals from several treatment companies. After discussing the proposals received, the committee chose Tigris, a nationwide aquatic services company with an office in St. Cloud, MN. The staff we will be working with are the same who worked for our previous long-time company before it sold its business to an out of state company. Through the years we have had a very good working relationship with them and we are pleased to be working with them once again.

The survey work will be done by Freshwater Scientific Services, a small environmental consulting firm based in the Twin Cities. The AIS Committee members had a

very productive on-line meeting with James Johnson, Aquatic Ecologist/Certified Lake Manager at Freshwater Scientific Services. He will complete the pre treatment surveys and later the midseason surveys.

More detailed information on the 2025 AIS treatments will be provided in the summer newsletter.

## **Highway 371 and Wilderness Road update**

Crow Wing County and MnDOT conducted an Intersection Control Evaluation at this location that recommended changing the intersection to a J-turn intersection (similar to Hwy. 371 at County Rd. 107/Patriot Ave. in Pequot). Following this study MnDOT was successful in getting Federal Highway Safety funding for the J-turn in state fiscal year 2028 (construction year 2027). Unfortunately, MnDOT project development takes that long from conception to construction.

In the meantime, you can make this intersection safer by:

- \*improving your sightline through/around the Paul Bunyan Trail bridge by moving up just past the stop bar without getting into the northbound travel lane.

- \*Pausing in the median when making a left turn onto southbound 371. While this is awkward with the curve banking, a vehicle can fit, although it will need to partially block the Hwy. 371 left turn lane (not comfortable, but still a safe alternative).

## **2025 Ice out dates**

These are the ice out dates reported to us:

Upper Cullen — Saturday, April 12  
Middle Cullen (middle section) — Saturday, April 12  
Lower Cullen — Monday, April 14

## Spring burning restrictions are in place

Spring burning restrictions were put in place on Tuesday, April 8 in Crow Wing County. The DNR will not issue permits for the open burning of brush or yard waste until restrictions are lifted.



People cause more than 90% of wildfires in Minnesota. A fire can easily accidentally get out of control when conditions are dry, especially if it is also windy. If a fire rekindles or escapes, the person who set it is liable for any damage caused, as well as for wildfire suppression costs.

Burning restrictions will be adjusted as conditions change. For more information and daily updates on current fire risk and open burning restrictions, visit the statewide fire range and burning restrictions page of the DNR website at [mndnr.gov/burnrestrictions](http://mndnr.gov/burnrestrictions).

Remember, when there is no snow on the ground you need a burning permit to legally conduct open burning.

## Loon calendar

from Loon Watch, Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute,  
Northland College, Ashland, WI

### *April/May*

\*The day the ice goes out, the males arrive. Females follow shortly.

\*Loon pairs bond. Courtship displays consist of subtle postures, bill dipping, synchronized swimming, and culminates when the pair chooses a nesting site.

\*Artificial nesting platforms are launched on lakes where they are necessary. One to three eggs are laid. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs for the next 26-28 days.

\*Memorial Day weekend — a dangerous time for loons: many boats and people. Loons may abandon their nests if people come too close. Boat wakes can wash eggs off the nest.

### *June*

\*Give loons 200 feet of clearance when they are nesting or have young.

\*Parents will not leave their nest for long unless humans disturb them. Eagles, gulls, raccoons, and other hungry predators keep a watchful eye for unattended eggs.

\*Some adult loons have no partner or territory. These loons may be seen challenging territorial loons, socializing, and/or fishing and resting on neutral lake areas without territorial loons.

\*Hatching date of chicks is fast approaching. Loons who lost their nest may attempt to re-nest, in the same or a new spot.

\*Chicks hatch one or two days apart and are escorted to the nursery — often a shallow, calm and secluded cove.

\*Downy chicks ride on their parents' backs or hide under their wings to stay warm, conserve energy, and keep safe from predators.

### *July/August*

\*Parents fish steadily to feed themselves and their chicks. Any disturbance of this activity hinders the loon's ability to provide for its young.

\*Chicks are born to parents who re-nested. Three week-old chicks turn chocolate brown.

\*Parents encourage chicks to catch their own food by dropping fish in shallow water for the youngsters to capture. Chicks reach one-third their adult size.

\*Chicks become adolescents and gray contour feathers emerge. They are left alone for short periods while their parents fish and socialize.

\*Chicks are two-thirds adult size and begin fishing for themselves, although they still beg for and receive food from the adults.

\*Parents leave their chicks for extended periods — it is almost time for the chicks to strike out on their own.

\*Adults teach chicks to fly by practicing take-offs. Chicks row with their wings and paddle with their feet back and forth across the lake.

### *September/October*

\*Parents leave their young and gather in social groups. They feed intensively and rest in preparation for migration.

\*Loon chicks born early reach adult size. Chicks born late (mid July through August) race against time to be strong enough to fly south before ice-up.

\*Adults begin to molt into a gray plumage and migrate, reaching speeds of over 60 mph.

\*Juveniles, following an internal compass, fly south to the Gulf of Mexico or to the Atlantic Ocean where they will spend the next 2-3 years before returning north. Migrating loons will stop and feed as they make their way south.

***Save the date!***

***CLA Annual Meeting***

***Saturday morning, August 9***

8:30 registration, exhibits, coffee and rolls  
9:00 business meeting followed by program

The morning's special program has not yet been decided. If you have any suggestions for a program topic, please share them with any Board member.

## CLA membership update

As of April 17, 2025 we have 232 paid members and associate members. Membership letters for 2025 were mailed in December to allow for those wanting to use a donation for 2024 tax purposes to do so. A second dues notice was mailed in early April to those who had not yet sent in their 2025 dues. This brought in dues and donations from several more people and checks continue to trickle in. However, there are still 34 past CLA members who have not sent in their dues yet. ***If your name is highlighted on this newsletter's mailing label, you hadn't yet paid your dues by April 17. Those who receive the newsletter electronically will receive an email notice of this.*** We hope this is merely an oversight on your part. People who have not paid their dues by July 1 will be changed to non-member status.

If you haven't already sent in your \$25 membership dues (and hopefully a contribution towards the treatment of curly leaf pondweed), please take the time now to write your check, make any necessary corrections to your personal data on the membership letter you received, and mail them both to CLA, P.O. Box 466, Nisswa, MN 56468.

## Curly-leaf pondweed (CLP) management donations update

The CLA Board of Directors would like to thank all who have contributed thus far to the 2025 CLP treatment fund.

Here are some of the statistics as of **April 17**:

\*182 property owners and family members have made a CLP donation. There are 232 paid CLA members so far this year, so that's 78%.

\*84 contributions were the \$250 suggested in the membership mailing. This does not include the co-owned properties whose owners split the donation among themselves. (We don't expect co-owners to each contribute the suggested amount.)

\*28 contributions were more than the suggested \$250.

\*Contributions have ranged from \$10 to \$975.

\*Contributions total \$39,618.

**THANK YOU!**



## Fourth of July boat parades

Each of the three Cullens will have its annual Fourth of July boat parade informally organized by its lakeshore property owners.

Participants are asked to gather at the east end of their lake on July 4 shortly before 2:00 p.m.

**Plan on making one entire trip around the lake so on-shore observers can view all parade participants.**

For safety reasons, please avoid excessive speed and do not weave in and out of the line-up of boats.

Send photos you take of your parade to the newsletter editor to be included in the summer newsletter.

## NEEDED!

Due to the retirement of the previous volunteer, we have a vacant volunteer position that needs to be filled if we are to continue monitoring the water quality of Upper Cullen Lake, something that was begun in the early 1990s and has been carried out on a regular basis ever since.

**WHO?** Someone on Upper Cullen or someone on Middle Cullen who has a boat small enough to pass through the culvert and motor into the deepest part of Upper Cullen (the east part of the lake out from Upper Cullen Resort).

**WHEN?** Once a month May through September, preferably at approximately the same time each month.

It does not take a lot of time or expertise. Equipment and "training" will be provided. The Secchi reading (water clarity) and water samples will be collected from you for delivery to A.W. Research Laboratories in Brainerd where they, along with the samples taken from Middle and Lower Cullen Lakes, will be tested for total phosphorus and chlorophyll *a*.

If you can help the lake association by filling this position, please contact Ann Beaver, Water Quality Committee chair, as soon as possible.

## Highlights from the 2025 Cullen Lakes Association membership survey results

In mid February 240 surveys were mailed to CLA members. Of these, 134 surveys (56%) were completed and returned by the April 1 deadline. Not everyone answered every question, but to simplify calculating the following percentages they are based on all 134 surveys returned. For the same reason, the percentages will not always equal 100%.

### Section 1: Lake property and its use

\*87% of the properties are used in the spring, 99% are used in the summer, 90% are used in the fall, and 50% are used in the winter.

\*72% of the properties have a winterized dwelling and only four properties have no dwelling.

\*35 properties have been in the same family's ownership for more than 50 years, 24 for 31-50 years, 20 for 21-30 years, 29 for 11-20 years, 15 for 5-10 years, and 10 for fewer than 5 years.

\*62% of respondents said their use of the property is staying about the same and 25% said it is increasing.

\*81% of respondents said their property has a buffer of natural, unmanaged vegetation along the shoreline. Of these, 58% are over five feet deep and 78% of the buffers of all depths extend along at least 3/4 of the property's shoreline.

14 respondents said they have participated in the CLA shoreline grants program and 12 of those said they have had a SWCD site visit and have chosen to make the shoreline changes suggested. 54 respondents said they might consider participating in the program in the future.

\*54% of respondents said they clear aquatic vegetation along their shoreline. Of these, 86% do so by hand. Eight people reported using a weed roller and eight do so with chemicals.

### Section 2: General impressions of the Cullen Lakes

\*The lake related issues perceived as a moderate problem or worse by 50% or more of the respondents are: native aquatic vegetation growth and curly leaf pondweed growth. This, by the way, is the same result as in the 2020 survey. If we lower the percentage to 30%, the issues expand to include overall water quality of the lakes, purple loosestrife shoreline infestation, lake users being inconsiderate, and inconsiderate use of personal watercraft.

\*As to the overall quality of each of the lakes: Upper Cullen - 2 people felt it is getting better, 24 felt it is about the same, and 10 felt it is getting worse; Middle Cullen - 2 people felt it is getting better, 46 felt it is about the same, and 33 felt it is getting worse; Lower Cullen - 8 people felt it is getting better, 36 felt it is about the same, and 41 felt it is getting worse

\*Of the 130 respondents who answered the question about Starry Stonewort in Middle Cullen, 94% are concerned about it and 90% would support CLA trying to control it.

\*22% of respondents said the presence of zebra mussels in Lower and Middle Cullen has changed their recreational use of the lakes. Most often mentioned was having to wear water shoes when in the water. Also frequently mentioned were having to buy boat lifts to keep equipment out of the water when not in use, no longer swimming/playing on the sand bar where the stream enters Lower Cullen, and having to clean mussels out of the beach and shoreline area before using them.

### Section 3: Use of the Cullen lakes

\*Non-motorized watercraft used on the lakes are: kayaks (66% of respondents), stand up paddle boards (50%), canoes (44%), paddle boats (37%), row boats (15%), sailboats (7%), and only one windsurfer.

\*Watercraft of 40 HP or less reported by respondents were fishing boats (43%) and pontoons (23%).

\*Watercraft of more than 40 HP were recreational boats (23%), pontoons (46%), fishing boats (26%), personal watercraft (10%), and 4 wake boats.

\*The three most popular recreational uses of the lakes are difficult to know for sure, as many people simply checked activities instead of ranking them 1, 2, or 3. Based on respondents who ranked the activities, the three most popular are fishing, swimming, and pontoon cruising.

\*Swimming/wading/playing in the water was the most frequently mentioned activity at the lake (86% of respondents), followed by pleasure boating in a motorized craft and fishing (81%), hiking/walking (68%), kayaking (61%), tubing, waterskiing, knee boarding, etc. (58%), bird watching/observing nature (56%), and stand up paddle boarding (54%).

\*Opinions about the quality of fishing on all three lakes were split fairly evenly between "stayed about the same" and "not as good".

## Section 4: The lake association

\*25% of respondents said they generally attend the annual meeting. The most common reasons given for not attending are not being at the lake at that time and family activity conflicts.

\*A wide variety of suggestions were made for topics to be covered at the annual meetings and possible ways to improve the meetings. These suggestions will be discussed by the Board of Directors and considered when planning future annual meetings.

\*Activities other than the annual membership meeting that CLA might host received the following support: educational speaker/event (42%), social event (25%), food centered event (21%), music centered event (25%), and gathering at a local tap house (23%). The best times to hold any additional events varied greatly and cannot be summarized.

\*There was far too much variety in the comments made as to what CLA is doing or should be doing to serve its members to be consolidated or summarized here. Comments were constructive and they will be discussed at upcoming Board of Directors meetings.

\*53% of respondents said they have visited the CLA web site. Comments by those who have visited the site were very positive and a several good suggestions were made for improving the site.

\*21% of respondents said they have visited the CLA Facebook page.

\*98% of respondents said they read the CLA newsletter (The Cullen Currents). Many good suggestions were offered for future newsletter articles.

\*70% of respondents prefer voluntary tax-deductible donations as the means of acquiring the necessary funds for future treatment of aquatic invasive species. The least preferred means of doing so was the formation of a Lake Improvement District. A fund raiser and a dues increase dedicated to AIS were tied for second and third place but neither received anywhere near the support as the voluntary tax-deductible donations did.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to respond to the survey. Your input is invaluable!

### Next steps

\*The CLA Lake Management Planning (LMP) Committee will review the results of the survey and make appropriate draft updates to the Lake Management Plan.

\*The LMP Committee will provide the CLA Board with its draft of the 2025 Lake Management Plan update ahead of the June 14 board meeting and the Board will discuss the recommended changes at that meeting.

\*The Plan update will either be adopted by the Board at its June 14 meeting or suggested changes will be made to the Plan and it will be brought before the Board for its adoption at the July 12 board meeting.

\*The Board-adopted 2025 update of the Lake Management Plan will be included in the summer newsletter for CLA members to review.

\*The 2025 Lake Management Plan will be brought before the CLA membership at its August 9 annual meeting and the membership will be asked for its vote of support for the Plan.

## **Mea culpa!**

by Ann Beaver

Shortly after receiving the 2025 Property Owners Map/Guide in January, several people contacted me to let me know their names were misspelled on the map. I checked it out and found that not just several names are misspelled, there are many. My bad!

During the late winter of 2024, a longtime employee at the printing company we use volunteered to convert all the hand-printed names on the map to computer-generated names. He did so at no expense to CLA. I was very appreciative.

Unfortunately, I failed to proofread the names before having the 2025 map/guide printed. The misspellings are so numerous that I decided it would be best to wait until

the 2026 map/guide to make all the corrections and in the meantime apologize to all for the mistakes. So, mea culpa for my carelessness. Names are spelled correctly on the alphabetical list of property owners, however.

### ***Currents on the Cullens***

#### **Deaths**

Laura Ringold — Lower Cullen (L35)

Dan Hurley — Lower Cullen (L65)