THE CULLEN CURRENTS

Fall, 2025

Volunteer opportunity

by Debi Oliverius

Help stop the spread of Starry Stonewort! This aquatic invasive species (AIS) moves from lake to lake by clinging to boats and other watercraft, trailers, anchors and fishing gear. Just one small fragment or one tiny bulbil can start a new infestation.

A state-wide Starry Trek event sponsored by U of M was held in August of 2025 to educate and encourage volunteers to join together in identifying new breakouts of this AIS in Minnesota lakes. The Whitefish Chain of Lakes Association adopted this program and has worked to expand it to others interested in this endeavor. These volunteers are pro-active during the crucial summer months of July-September when AIS is most actively growing and spreading.

Volunteers are trained and supplied the information needed to properly identify Starry Stonewort and report its presence through an online monitoring form. A "toss" rake is required for random tossing into different areas of a body of water to assist in bringing up AIS. Of course other culprit plant invasions may also be found during this time. This photo is of a homemade toss rake made by welding two rake heads together.

If you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to Shannon Watters at Shannon@wattersedge.com!

The Cullen Lakes Association board feels it would be beneficial to our chain of lakes to have several volunteers on each lake. I will be monitoring Middle Cullen and I encourage others to join in this effort.

from the president emerita's pen

Reflections from a beaver lodge

by Ann Beaver, CLA president emerita

When I was elected to take over as president after Ed Rehwaldt back in 1999, never did I think I would still be serving in that office in 2025! Each time during those years when I suggested I step down and let someone else be president, even offering to perhaps take the hard-to-fill job of secretary instead, I would be told, "Nice try, Ann!" Finally last year, I informed the Board that I would be 80 in 2025 and they needed to find someone younger, more open to change and with new ideas to lead the lake association in the coming challenging years. The 2025 nominating ad hoc committee rose to the challenge and convinced C.B. Bylander to serve as president and John MacGibbon to once again serve as vice president. Good choices! I am confident that both will serve the lake association well in the years ahead.

The graphic and headline above is a relic from the first half of my 26 years as CLA president. When I took over from Ed Rehwaldt, I felt the need to continue his practice of having a column in the quarterly newsletter. His column was called From the Bird's Nest. He was a minister and used to sharing thoughts in a regular forum. I am a retired French teacher and not used to doing so, but I managed to put together enough thoughts and comments for a column in the quarterly CLA newsletters from 2000 to 2013. I guess that was when I decided the membership didn't need to hear from me all the time and I retired my beaver graphic.

The best thing about having been president for so long is getting to know so many of you on all three of the Cullen Lakes. Thank you for all your support through the years!

Autumn 2025 update on our starry stonewort infestation

by C.B. Bylander, CLA president

It was a gut punch when starry stonewort was discovered last May near the Middle Cullen boat ramp. Since then, the Cullen Lakes Association has worked aggressively to put the brakes on an aquatic invader that has never been eliminated from a North American lake once it has taken root.

We've followed the Department of Natural Resources' chemical treatment permitting process. We've hired the best venders available to treat the infestation with the highest doses of algaecide allowed by law. We've paid vendors to apply chemical treatments in June, July, August and October, an exceptionally aggressive effort to control the algae before it grows out of control. Finally, we're seeking ways to secure reliable funding from non-profit and government sources so that we, Cullen property owners, do not have to bear this onerous financial burden alone.

How are we doing? On the plus side, chemical treatments have had a positive effect. After the second chemical treatment in July there was a 59 percent reduction in standing biomass and an 87 percent reduction in bulbils. Bulbils are the star-shaped growth that anchors the algae to the lake bottom and are responsible for most of the algae's reproduction. Following the fourth treatment in October, test results indicate a further reduction in biomass. So, that's a win but a far cry from a victory.

On the negative side, the outside edges of the infestation have grown from one to three acres in little more than a year. That's discouraging. Frightening, really, even though the thickness of the algae and its height have declined. The expansion is primarily heading in a northwesterly direction and into water less than 10 feet deep. That's not good. It's not good because when starry stonewort grows tall in shallow water it becomes more susceptible to being struck by boat props that fragment and spread it.

If there is a silver lining—and I am keenly aware there isn't— it is this: our infestation is the subject of corporate and government research to determine if repeated high doses of algaecide can keep this relatively small infestation in check.

To learn more about this research, I spent the afternoon of September 23 on Middle Cullen with Keegan Lund and Krista Espelien. Keegan is an aquatic biologist who works for SePRO, the manufacturer of the liquid algaecide called Komeen Descend being pumped over the infestation. Espelien is a noted researcher and Scuba diver who owns an environmental consulting business in St. Paul. What follows is a brief account of what I learned. I share it so that you are up to date, too.

Basically, the DNR and SePRO want to quantify and qualify the outcomes of repeatedly and aggressively treating starry stonewort, especially in autumn when the algae puts a lot of energy into preparing for winter so it can rev up again in spring.

Lund, a former DNR invasive species specialist, explained the essence of the study this way. "The goal is to measure both the in-season reduction of biomass and bulbils as well as the end-of-season reductions," he said. "We know we can burn the top of the biomass year-in, year-out, thereby reducing its height and density, but we don't know what happens if you do a very aggressive approach for two or three years. Will this significantly reduce reproduction? That's what we want to find out."

How are they doing this work? Based on the DNR's delineation of the infestation, Espelien identified 10 specific sample sites and punched them into her GPS. She

dives at each of these sites, places a length of hollow tube about two feet long over the infection, reaches into the tube with an arm to grab all the "weeds" she can and then places them in a collection bag that she will eventually give to Lund, who follows her around in a boat. Later, back in her lab, Espelien processes what she has pulled from the bottom, which involves weighing and counting every bulbil.

Her analysis following the fourth chemical treatment was this: "Much of the biomass has been burned down. There are still some small patches of starry stonewort, but overall the treatments have been very effective in reducing biomass. The bulbil counts compared to the previous sampling are about the same. So, most notable bulbil reduction was between treatments two and three."

While Espelien was collecting samples from the lake bottom Lund and I had time to chat in the boat. What follows are a few things I learned.

*Hand-pulling is not an effective way to control starry stonewort and far more expensive than using a government-approved algaecide. Bulbils are the size of a grain of rice. Underwater visibility is rarely ideal, so it is impossible for divers to see all these tiny reproductive specks. If hand-pulling is used, it should be combined with chemical treatments to be effective. Espelien, who the next day would be working on a hand-pulling operation, agreed.

*When starry stonewort isn't controlled, it doesn't just become a nuisance, it can become a 10-foot tall or taller shag carpet. No native plants exist in it. It's too thick for fish, too. At Minnesota's Lake Koronis, property owners are spending some $200,000 a year just to use the lake … not to win the battle.

*The state legislature has allocated and additional $800,000 to the DNR's budget for aquatic invasive species prevention and control. Hopefully, some of this "new" money will be targeted at starry stonewort in general and the Cullen and Rush Lakes infestations specifically.

*Battling starry stonewort is akin to fighting a wildfire. With wildfires, it's common to make progress on the main blaze only to have wind-blown embers fly ahead to start new fires. That type of scenario plays out underwater, too.

*Research takes time. What SePRO and the DNR are learning this year (the DNR is monitoring three control lakes where no chemical treatments are being applied) will potentially influence next year's control strategy. Maybe only three treatments will be necessary next year rather than four? Maybe the DNR will modify what it allows the association to do? Maybe a lot of other things. All that's certain is that the CLA Board is taking this infestation seriously and we appreciate your contributions that enable us to put up the good fight.

Enough for now. Have a good winter.

FY 2026 Operating budget

Paul Beilfuss, Budget & Finances Committee chair

The following budget was approved by the membership at the August 9 Annual Meeting.

Income	
Membership Dues	$ 6,200
Donations (Curly-leaf Pondweed)	44,000
Interest income	500
Total Estimated Income	**$50,700**
Expenditures	
Administration Committee	
Annual Meeting:	
Supplies, Postage, Printing	$300
Food	75
Board Meeting Room Donation	165
LARA Membership	75
Soteroplos Scholarship	250
MN Lakes & Rivers Advocates Membership	200
Guest Speaker	300
	$1,365
Water Quality Committee	
Water Quality Monitoring	**$1,000**
Education Committee	
Map/Guide Update	$ 300
Newsletter Postage	500
Newsletter Printing	900
Web Site Management	600
Special Sessions/Seminars/Workshops	300
	$2,600
Aquatic Invasive Species Committee	
AIS Annual Control	**$60,000**
Membership Committee	
Supplies and Printing	$250
Postage	485
New Owner Packets	25
	$760
Total Committee expenses	**$65,725**
Other	
Board Liability Insurance	$900
Miscellaneous	225
	$1,125
Total Expenditures	**$66,850**
Proposed FY '26 operating budget increase over FY '25	**$19,475**
FY '26 Estimated income less estimated expenditures	**($16,150)**

Editor's note: Following are the committee reports that were presented at the 2025 Annual Meeting.

Administration Committee
Debi Oliverius, chair

The administrative committee had a busy season preparing for the 2025 annual meeting as a new venue is being utilized. The committee worked together with onsite visits, planning of family friendly lakeside activities, refreshments and organizing an informative presentation and business meeting details. Pete Miller, CLA board member, agreed to present current information and treatment regarding the invasive species, Starry Stonewort. The committee sent out 314 mailers this year to give the details of this meeting. This is an increased number as it was decided by the CLA board to include non-CLA members who are Cullen Lakes property owners in an effort to increase membership. A future goal for the administration committee is to review and update the policies and procedures of CLA, bringing them current.

Aquatic Invasive Species Committee
Pete Miller, chair

We refer you to the summer newsletter for more detailed reports on AIS in the three Cullen Lakes. As to curly leaf pondweed (CLP), the DNR allowed 11 acres to be treated. The treatments were done in mid May and were effective on the 11 acres. However, CLP had a robust growth year due to the lack of snow cover last winter. Mid-season surveys were done in June and found over 60 acres of actively growing CLP. We will use this survey to plan for next year's treatment request to the DNR, which will certainly cover a much larger area than this year.

Regarding the newly discovered starry stonewort (SSW) found in Middle Cullen, it is currently located in a 3 acre area in approximately 10-15 feet of water directly out from the public landing. Fortunately, it has not been discovered anywhere else in the Cullen chain at this time. SSW treatment on MC is part of a year-long study being conducted by the DNR. Rush Lake also has SSW and is part of the study. The CLA board has committed to three treatments of SSW on MC this year and has applied for grant funding to complete a fourth treatment. Two treatments have occurred already (June and July) with the third scheduled in August and hopefully a fourth treatment in September. The goal of this DNR study is to complete 3-4 successive treatments with an ample amount of copper sulfate to determine if aggressive treatment will not only control SSW but eradicate it. The first treatment in June was effective in controlling the spread but it has continued to grow. Another monitoring survey is scheduled for early August. CLA has budgeted over $30,000 for SSW treatments.

Budget and Finances Committee
Paul Beilfuss, chair

The Budget and Finances Committee prepared a proposed FY'26 operating budget to present to the membership for its suipport during the annual meeting on August 9, 2025. The fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following calendar year. Please note that the proposed FY'26 operating budget presents a $16,150 deficit (expenditures greater than income). There is an adequate "rainy day" fund balance to offset the deficit due to the generosity of the membership. There is a $20,000 increase in expenditures to treat and control aquatic invasive species. Excluding the significant increase in treatment and control of aquatic invasive species in the proposed operating budget, the actual proposed expenditures are $525 less than the approved FY'25 budget. The committee developed improved internal audit procedures and was able to reduce the board's liability insurance premium. Work will continue on records' retention, a review of investments, and implementation of improved procedures for an internal audit.

Education Committee

C.B. Bylander, chair

The Education Committee continued to produce the quarterly newsletter, maintain and update the association's website and post information on Facebook. The newsletter is by far the association's most effective communication tool. Ninety-eight percent of association members read the newsletter, according to the 2025 survey of members. Credit Ann Beaver, our association's president, for the high readership. She writes many of the stories and handles printing and distribution. The member survey also indicated 53 percent of members have visited the association's website and 21 percent have viewed Facebook posts.

Members are encouraged to visit the website for updates on the starry stonewort infestation on Middle Cullen. The home page features a tab that takes you to the latest information on algaecide treatments, growth status and more.

The Education Committee is continuing to partner with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources by reporting loon population numbers. It also partners with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency by supporting the "Get the Lead Out" campaign. The Get the Lead Out campaign encourages anglers to switch to non-toxic jigs and lures which do not have a detrimental effect on loons, swans and certain other wildlife.

The committee is also exploring the idea of erecting a starry stonewort awareness sign on the Boberg property just south of the Middle Cullen public access. This location, which the Bobergs have generously offered, abuts the boat ramp and is just inland from the three-acre infestation of this unwanted aquatic invasive species. The goal is to provide more detailed and helpful information to anglers and boaters using the Department of Natural Resources launch site. While it is true that the DNR has a two-by-two inch decal on an invasive species sign on its property that signifies starry stonewort is in the lake, there is no information to alert boaters that the infestation is right out from the dock, it's spreading, this form of algae is virtually impossible to eradicate and their effort to help stop the spread will be greatly appreciated.

Environmental Issues
John Maguire, chair

Wake boats offer owners a recreational outlet and they have a right to be on the lakes. However, some lake users have expressed concerns that the large wakes often create a safety concern for watercraft including kayaks, canoes, small fishing boats and such. Currently there is no Minnesota state law regarding wake boat use. If you are a wake boat user, please be courteous towards all other watercraft on the lake.

Fisheries Committee
C.B. Bylander, chair

Nothing to report this year. The Department of Natural Resources did not propose or enact any fishing regulation changes for the Cullen Chain. The DNR last surveyed the fish population in 2021. It will be a year or so before they do it again. Good luck fishing.

Lake Management Planning Committee
Ann Beaver, chair

Early in 2025 the committee revised the CLA Property Owners' Survey and mailed it to one person of each member property on the three Cullen lakes. The surveys returned by the April 1 deadline were tallied and the highlights of the survey results were printed in the spring newsletter. All members of the committee received the detailed survey results which were then used to update the existing Lake Management Plan. This updated LMP was then shared with the entire Board and was approved at its July 26 meeting. This fall the committee will update the committee responsibilities needed to successfully carry out the goals, strategies and actions of the LMP and all members of the Board will receive a copy of the 2026 LMP and its supporting documents.

Membership Committee
Lora Graumann, chair

We're pleased to share that our lake association continues to thrive. As of July 22, 2025 we have 247 members, of which 12 are associate members family members of property owners/former property owners) and 3 are complimentary members (new property owners).Your ongoing support helps us protect and preserve the beauty and health of our lake community. We are truly grateful for the continued participation and commitment of our members — thank you for being an essential part of this important work!

Nominating Committee
John MacGibbon, chair

The CLA Board currently has 13 members — 6 from Lower Cullen, 6 from Middle Cullen, and 1 from Upper Cullen. The CLA bylaws require the board to have at least 12 and no more than 18 members. Of the current members, 7 terms are ending as of the 2025 Annual Meeting.

The Nominating Committee presents the following names to the CLA membership for election to the Board of Directors (two-year terms):

Paul Beilfuss, Lower Cullen
Lora Graumann, Middle Cullen
Patty Hicks, Middle Cullen
Joel Knutson, Middle Cullen
John Maguire, Middle Cullen
Debi Oliverius, Middle Cullen
Randy Steenholdt, Middle Cullen

and Mark Best, Middle Cullen, to an initial one-year term.

Water Quality Committee
Ann Beaver, chair

Committee members Denise & Eric Whitson (Lower Cullen), Debi Oliverius (Middle Cullen) and Matt Galles (Upper Cullen) are taking their water samples (analyzed by AW. Laboratories for chlorophyll *a* and total phosphorus) and Secchi disk readings (water clarity) monthly June through September. Unusually cold weather prevented the usual May testing and we hadn't yet found a new Upper Cullen water tester to replace the retiring Denny Opsahl. The results of the first two months of testing show the lakes' water quality is holding steady, with water clarity improving in Lower and Middle Cullen due to the diet of the zebra mussels present in those lakes. The negative of this improved water clarity is greater aquatic vegetation growth because the plants get more sunlight. All the more reason to do all we can to prevent nutrients on our lakeshore from running off into the lake and thus fertilizing the aquatic vegetation.

CLA Committees — 2025-2026

Administration
Debi Oliverius - chair
Ann Beaver
Ryan Kennedy
Patty Hicks

AIS
Pete Miller - chair
Paul Beilfuss
C.B. Bylander
Joel Knutson
Carol Lindahl

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

Communications/Education/ Partner Relations
C.B. Bylander - chair
Ann Beaver
Mark Best
Ryan Kennedy
Carol Lindahl
John MacGibbon

Environmental Issues
John Maguire - chair
Ann Beaver
Patty Hicks
Randy Steenholdt

Fundraising/Membership/ Community Building
Lora Graumann - chair
Mark Best
Patty Hicks
John MacGibbon
Randy Steenholdt

Water Quality Testers
Eric & Denise Whitson (L)
Debi Oliverius (M)
Matt Galles (U)
Ann Beaver - coordinator

CLA officers
President - C.B. Bylander
Vice president - John MacGibbon
Secretary - John Maguire
Treasurer - Carol Lindahl

Webmaster — C.B. Bylander
Facebook page manager — Ryan Kennedy
Newsletter editor — Ann Beaver

Currents on the Cullens

New owners
Anthony & Kristin Newton, Lower Cullen (L25)
Matt & Lisa Haviland, Lower Cullen (L79)

Deaths
Eric Boberg, Middle & Upper Cullen (M68, U1)
Bruce Galles, Upper Cullen (U8)
Phil Reichenbach, Middle Cullen (M22)
Pam Utter, Middle Cullen (M4)

Year end report
(fiscal year ended 9/30/25)
by Carol Lindahl, treasurer

Income	
CLP Donations	$45,718.37
Membership Dues	6,500.00
Interest	500.77
General Support Donations	25.00
Merchandise Sales	55.00
Grants	19,120.00
Donations for Annual Meeting expenses	1,153.00
Memorial donations	295.00
Total	**$73,367.14**
Expenses	
Administration Committee	
Annual Meeting/Supplies	$ 407.40
Tent, bounce house, toilets	1,253.27
Room Use Donation	165.00
MN Lakes & Rivers Membership	200.00
LARA Membership	75.00
Soteroplos Scholarship	250.00
Sub Total	**$2,350.67**
AIS Surveys/Treatment	**$54,280.50**
Water Quality Monitoring	**$756.00**
Education	
Guide/Map Update	$279.64
Newsletter Postage/Labels	379.31
Newsletter Printing	800.44
Special seminars	0.00
Web Site Management	778.96
Sub Total	**$2,238.35**
Membership	**$706.97**
Other	
Board Liability Insurance	$848.00
Misc.: Postage, PO Box	197.63
Transfer to Legacy Fund	0.00
Lake Management Planning	564.87
Shoreland grant program	300.00
Sub Total	**$1,910.50**
Total	**$62,242.99**
Current Assets	
Checking Account	$ 5,467.79
Business MM — General Fund	132,092.08
	$137,559.87
Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation Investment Funds	
CLA Legacy Fund (as of 8/31)	$109,483.12
CLA Activities Fund (as of 8/31)	$146,092.13

Eighty Years of Memories On Lower Cullen Lake

by Stanley B. Ringold, from memories he shared at the 2011 CLA Annual Meeting, reprinted from the winter 2012 newsletter

In 1910, James Harry Ringold, 45 years old, and Edward Kissinger bought one quarter mile of Lower Cullen Lake lakeshore. We don't know if they saw the property before buying it or bought it sight unseen. Two cabins on the lakeshore, now owned by the Johnsons and the Howes, were probably built in 1913.

When Harry and Edward recorded the deed for the property in late 1910, the property looked far different than it does today. It had been logged 10-20 years earlier and then probably burned over, for fires often followed the logging. Thus the trees were small and there were more aspen and birch than there are today. These gradually disappeared, as the folks preferred them for cooking fires and heating, resulting in the preponderance of pine today. The lake was much shallower than today, with a sandy beach all along the east side.

My earliest memories are of the times about 20 years later, in the 1930s. Automobiles had become more affordable for my parents and I recall riding back and forth with Mother on the old ice road to get produce and milk from the Mattson, Halverson, and Lindstrom farms east of us. Early on, we would drive to the lake early in the summer and Dad would take the train back to St. Paul so mother would have transportation at the lake. He would then commute by train for part of the season.

There was an ice house between and east of the two cabins used by both families for their refrigeration. It was about 12 feet square with a rustic carport on either side. The local farmers would fill it with ice each winter, when they used the ice road for access to the lake to replenish their own supplies of ice. Sawdust was used for insulation against the summer's heat, with a layer between each course of ice and a thicker layer spread over the top. My brother Garry and I were responsible for keeping the wooden refrigerator supplied with ice. Near the back steps was a small bench with a water pump next to it where we would clean the ice before putting it in the box. We were also charged with keeping the wood boxes supplied, one for the kitchen cook stove and one for the heating stove in the front room. The latter box was outside; a door was cut in the wall and gave access to the wood box.

My sister Jean, Garry, and I had many adventures: rowing the boat over to the resorts on the south end of the lake and walking to town on the railroad tracks, hiking a narrow old trail through the woods to town, stealing watermelons at night from Lindstrom's farm (and being scared to death one night when he heard us, hollered, and fired his shotgun into the night sky -- we thought we were dead for sure!).

Tin cans and bottles were rinsed out and saved until enough accumulated to make a boat trip out into the lake and dump them in. Good for fish habitat, Dad said. Mother washed clothes in a big galvanized tub, using a plunger to squeeze out the dirt and rinsing them in the lake. We caught all our own fishing bait, seining for minnows. The two plagues of summer were sun burn and poison ivy.

Everyone had wooden boats back then and they required a good deal of care and maintenance. Each spring our boat was painted, then put in the lake and allowed to soak up water to eliminate the many leaks before it could be used. We had no motors -- oars moved the boat. I have been fond of rowing ever since.

In Nisswa, slot machines were legal and were found in many of the stores. In one was a penny machine with a small stool in front of it so we little kids could reach the handle and lose our allowance. The train depot was a busy and fascinating place for me, all wooden floors and walls and a smell of its own and many coats of paint, to the point that the windows let in only half the light they were designed for. We could hear and just barely see the train from our cabin as it ran along the southwest shore of the lake. In my mind I can still hear the engine's whistle in the dark of the night.

The cabin was where we stayed on our first duck and partridge hunting trips, just Dad, Garry, and me. No women to look after us. We would arrive in the dark of a Friday night and get the wood stove fired up. Early in the morning Dad would chase Garry and me from our warm beds, still in the dark, fry up a breakfast and fix a lunch, and we were off to Pelican Lake for ducks. We learned to love the sights and sounds of flocks of ducks, the smell of the marshes, and patience when the skies were empty.

This place, these people, these cabins, have been a central part of my life, and all our lives. We are so fortunate that Grandpa, a century ago, wanted a place in the woods on a lake. If he had only known what a treasure he left for all those who followed!

Editor's note: If your family has been on the Cullen Lakes for a number of years and are willing to share your history, please send it my way for use in a future newsletter. Numerous people have talked to me through the years about their family's history on the lakes and many others have commented on how much they enjoy reading about family histories in the newsletter. You don't have to be a gifted writer to share a family story that others will enjoy reading. Please take the time this fall or winter to reminisce and put your memories on paper. Then send them to me to include in a future newsletter.