

THE CULLEN CURRENTS

Winter, 2026



Important notice to all Cullen Lakes property owners

Areas of the aquatic invasive species curly leaf pondweed (CLP) will be treated this spring, weather conditions and DNR permitting, in all three Cullen Lakes using the DNR approved herbicide Aquathol K. This will be the 17th year since CLA began its efforts to manage nuisance areas of CLP.

If you DO NOT WANT this treatment to take place within 150 feet lakeward of your shoreline, YOU MUST NOTIFY the Cullen Lakes Association in writing via U.S. mail (PO Box 466, Nisswa, MN 56468) or email (cullenlakesassociation@gmail.com) no later than April 1, 2026.

If you have an irrigation system for your yard that uses lake water, you should have it turned off until a week after the CLP treatment has taken place. The exact timing of the treatment is hard to predict, since it is dependent on spring ice out and the lake water warming into the 50s. If you want to be notified of the treatment date(s), please email Pete Miller (petemiller55311@gmail.com) and let him know.

CLA membership

by Lora Graumann, Membership Committee, chair

We are excited to share that our Lakes Association continues to thrive! As of [January 15](#), we have 114 paid members, including four associate members who are former owners, family members of owners, or owners of property in the Cullen Lakes watershed. Membership letters for 2026 were mailed in late November to allow those wishing to make a Qualified Charitable Donation (QCD) from their IRA before year-end or to make a donation for the 2025 tax year. New this year, we are

pleased to offer the convenience of paying membership dues and donations online. If you would like to pay online, please visit <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/cullen-lakes-association-2026-dues> or scan the QR code below. Your ongoing support helps us protect and preserve the beauty and health of our lake community, and we are truly grateful for your continued participation and commitment—thank you for being an essential part of this important work!



Curly leaf pondweed (CLP) and starry stonewort (SSW) management donations update

The CLA Board of Directors thanks all who have already contributed to the 2026 CLP/SSW treatment fund. The very positive response is impressive.

Here are some of the statistics as of January 15:

- *98 property owners and family members have made a CLP donation. There are 114 dues paying CLA members so far this year, so that's an impressive 86%!
- *36 contributed the \$275 suggested in the membership mailing.
- *12 contributed more than the suggested \$275.
- *Contributions have ranged from \$25 to \$1,000.
- *Contributions so far total 23,050.

We are thankful for all donations, no matter the amount! If it were not for the generous donations of our members each year, the lake association would quickly run out of funds for CLP/SSW management and the lakes would become less suitable for boating, fishing, and water sports.

An update on our lake association

Hi. This is C.B. Bylander, president of our lake association.

I thought I'd share what I know, so here goes.

One, thanks to all who have already renewed memberships, donated to the aquatic invasive species control or both. Your support and generosity are deeply appreciated. It makes the Cullen Lakes Association what it is, a highly respected organization in the Brainerd Lakes Area.

Two, I want to give a special shout out to those who used Zeffy to renew your membership. To date, we've collected some \$5,000 via this safe, secure and fee-free fundraising platform. The association's board of directors agreed last fall that we should make becoming a member easier because check-writing and snail mail are becoming such things of the past. So, board member Lora Graumann investigated online payment options, determined Zeffy was the best for our small non-profit and here we are, downright modernized. I found Zeffy to be a breeze, which is saying something for a geezer who frequently forgets passwords and usually gets error messages when forced to complete lengthy online forms. It will be interesting to see how many folks use Zeffy next year.

Three, to control AIS expenses we have again applied for grant funds from the DNR for both curly leaf pondweed and starry stonewort control. Will we receive grant funds? Who knows? We'll find out later this winter or spring. However, I am optimistic that we'll see some dollars. I say this because the DNR made more grant funds available in 2026 and starry stonewort control is a priority, specifically infestations near boat launch sites. We fit that bill. So, there's hope.

Four, speaking of starry stonewort, the board will be exploring different algaecide options in the months ahead, especially those with a lower cost yet equal efficacy to what we used in 2025. We want your dollars to go as far as they can, and getting the best bang for your buck is part of that commitment.

Five, I wrangled an invitation to the recent Department of Natural Resources Roundtable in the Twin Cities. The Roundtable is a day-long gathering of about 400 people, largely conservation organization leaders, lawmakers, top DNR staff and biological experts, including University of Minnesota AIS researchers. I rubbed elbows with just about anyone who I believed could advance our cause for sustaining and preserving the Cullens. Sadly, the more I met with experts the more it became clear that containing starry stonewort is an out-sized challenge. There is no silver bullet. The algae grows. It produces tiny star-shaped bulbils. The bulbils, the reproductive mechanism,

find their way into the sediment, which acts as a protective shield against the algaecide that drops from above. Most bulbils survive even though strands of algae that rise from the bottom don't. The surviving bulbils are next year's problem. While this is admittedly discouraging, know that our board is far more informed about starry stonewort control than we were when it was first discovered in Middle Cullen two years ago. We are committed to learning as much as we can and doing what makes biological and economic sense.

Six, as part of the commitment mentioned above, the board will be looking at ways to tap into a new Minnesota DNR Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grants Program. In 2025 the Legislature allocated more than \$28 million in lottery proceeds to this program, with some yet to be determined dollar amount going towards AIS control. At this point, it's uncertain how we would use the grant program, but this new potential revenue source is on our radar. It's also on the radar of other lake associations. Because of this, the new grant funding might be an opportunity for broad collaboration in the Brainerd Lakes Area to better protect the Cullens from unwanted infestations and for other lake associations to do the same. Frankly, if you live in this area, you have good reason to be wary about boats leaving Middle Cullen and Rush Lake, where two of the state's 33 starry stonewort infestations are located. The starry stonewort that was brought to Middle Cullen and Rush Lake is now a very real threat to other nearby lakes.

Seven, one of the things that has become increasingly clear in the battle against starry stonewort is the importance of early detection. Options to control the darn stuff shrink as an infestation grows. For that reason, some lake associations are investing heavily in vegetation monitoring near boat launch sites and encouraging property owners to be on the lookout for starry stonewort at the end of their dock or lakeward from their property. Basically, the citizen monitoring involves attached a rope to a rake, throwing the rake into the water, pulling it back and evaluating the haul, specifically looking for tiny star-shaped bulbils. You can get a sense for what the bulbils look like by reviewing the starry stonewort identification card sent to you in December as part of the membership mailing. The Whitefish Area Property Owners Association is a strong believer in early detection. They pay a contractor to monitor areas near 37 boat launch sites on the chain. Our board will be discussing early detection options at its next meeting. If you are interested in volunteering to lead or help with an early detection effort, please go to the Cullen Lakes Association website and send us a message or reach out to a board member. Of the 33 starry stonewort infestations in Minnesota, eight were discovered because people were actively looking for them.

Eight, this is just a quick reminder that back in 2023 state law changed and it is illegal to leave any trash, litter, cigarette butts, offal or human/pet waste on or under the

ice. The law requires everything to be contained and removed with you in a secure container attached to your shelter or vehicle, with fines up to \$100 for violations. The law was passed, in part, because of the rise of ice fishing wheelhouses and the related litter that can accumulate after several days of fishing. This became an issue, especially on the state's largest lakes, where whipping winds would blow garbage set outside of wheelhouses for miles and miles. The takeaway from the law change is this: If you're going fishing, have a plan for your garbage.

Well, that's enough for now. I'm tired of writing. You're likely tired of reading. But we'll stay in touch. Enjoy the rest of winter.

Minnesota DNR proposes to reduce statewide walleye limit from 6 to 4

from a DNR news release

Minnesota anglers would be able to keep four walleyes instead of six in a proposal by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to update a statewide inland water walleye fishing regulation that's been in place since 1956.



The rule change, if approved, would go into effect March 1, 2027. The current regulation of one walleye over 20 inches in possession would remain in place.

Over the last 70 years that the current limit has been in place, many factors have changed, including climatic conditions, invasive species introductions and fish-finding technologies. The Minnesota DNR is inviting comments on the proposed rule changes until 4:30 p.m. Thursday, March 5.

People may submit comments by:

*Email to fisheries.rulemaking.comments.dnr@state.mn.us. Please mention "walleye limit" in the subject line or body of the email.

*Phone to the Minnesota DNR at 651-259-5235.

*Mail to Fisheries Rules and Regulation Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155.

Factors the DNR considered in proposing this limit change:

*Peer-reviewed scientific studies continue to show that system changes related to climate and invasive species have been detrimental to walleye populations and more conducive to other species, such as bass, in northern temperate lakes like those in Minnesota.

*Ice fishing has exploded in popularity, as evidenced by more than 3 million hours of fishing effort in the winter of 2019 on Mille Lacs Lake and Lake of the Woods.

*Technological advances have changed everything from fishing line to mobile ice fishing houses. Anglers have become more effective at catching fish, especially due to recent advances in fish-finding electronics.

*Social media postings allow today's mobile anglers to move to where the fish are biting much more easily, potentially depleting localized walleye populations.

*All but two (Cass and Winnibigoshish) of the state's 10 largest inland lakes, which produce about 40 percent of Minnesota's annual walleye harvest, already have a lower limit. Lake of the Woods, Kabetogama, Leech, Pepin, Rainy and Vermillion lakes continue to be destination fisheries, despite a lower walleye limit.

*All surrounding states and provinces — and Minnesota's border waters with them — have walleye daily limits fewer than six.

*The change would simplify regulations and cause less confusion by providing walleye regulation consistency across most Minnesota lakes. The DNR would retain, through its special regulations process, the ability to offer higher limits on lakes where greater harvest is needed to bring the fish community into balance.

Winter bird feeding tips

It is relatively easy to plan for winter bird feeding in Minnesota and other cold states. There are three main choices of food: large seeds, small seeds, and suet.

Large seeds include black-oil sunflower, striped sunflower, safflower, peanut, shelled corn, ear corn and cardinal mixes that contain sunflower, safflower and peanuts. Cracked corn is so attractive to house sparrows and starlings that these seeds are not recommended, however.

About 80 to 90 percent of seed used in Minnesota is comprised of black-oil sunflower seeds and cardinal mixes. These have the greatest appeal to the broadest variety of winter birds and contain a high energy content.

If you provide sunflower seed, you may want to try sunflower hearts to avoid the mess that occurs in spring when you discover several inches of sunflower seed hulls under your feeders.

Many wintering birds benefit from the high energy nutritional benefits of suet, suet mixes, and peanut butter.

It is also important to provide water for birds. This can be done using a birdbath with a heating element.

Crow Wing SWCD Tree and Plant Sale plants, trees, seeds, grasses

Ordering for the Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District's annual tree and plant sale is now open.

Order online: cwsxcd.org/shop or
by phone: 218-828-6197

Dealer alert: Buy 9 bundles of red pine, white pine, or white spruce and your 10th bundle is free!*

Orders will be accepted through March 31. For best selection of trees, shrubs, plants and seed mixes, be sure to order early. Orders can be picked up April 30-May 1 at the Crow Wing County fairgrounds.

(*Tree species cannot be combined to get the "Buy 9 get the 10th free" deal.)

Welcome to the DNR EagleCam!

This wildlife camera follows a pair of bald eagles during their breeding season. Minnesota has one of the largest bald eagle populations in the lower 48 states. This pair's nest is located near the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities area. Watch their story unfold. (Note: there is no audio with this camera at this time.)

To access the DNR EagleCam, visit the DNR website, dnr.state.mn.us, and search "eagle cam". In addition to watching the EagleCam video, you can watch a video of the camera's installation and view photos of the installation.

Bald eagle nests are commonly 6-8 feet across and usually weigh several hundred pounds. Eagles add on to their nests every year.



The last time the MN DNR's Nongame Wildlife Program surveyed bald eagles in Minnesota was 2005. At the time, the survey identified over 800 active nests across the state, as well as 32 nests with adults present, and 464

inactive nests. Those numbers have likely increased over the last 20 years.

Bald eagles are active year-round in Minnesota. Winter is a great time to see them along open water where river/stream currents prevent the water from completely freezing. It is also the start of their breeding season, so they are also active around their nests.

Bald eagles usually lay 1-3 eggs in January. Incubation lasts about 35 days from the laying of the last egg. Both parents participate in nest building, incubating the eggs and caring for the young after they hatch, switching off throughout the day. It is typically the female who spends the night on the nest.

Hatching begins when the first egg has a "pip", or small hole in the egg. Chicks are born with an egg tooth on their beak that helps them break out of their shell. The young eagles began to fly at three months of age (late May through early July). Four weeks or so after they have learned to fly, the young eagles leave the nest for good.

Bald eagles don't get their iconic "bald" head until they are five years old. As they age, their feathers transition from brown, to a mix of brown and white, before finally settling into their adult plumage.



Number of electronic newsletter recipients is increasing!

From fewer than 100 recipients of the electronic newsletter just a few years ago, there are now 161 people receiving it this month! Last fall we only sent 116 newsletters via U.S. mail.

What are the advantages of receiving the newsletter electronically?

- *You get the pictures/graphics in color!
- *It is easy to share with family and friends!
- *With the cost of postage and printing going up almost yearly, you are saving CLA money that can be used for other initiatives.

Cullen Lakes water quality report

by Ann Beaver, Water Quality Committee chair

The water quality of a lake is determined by sampling three parameters May through September (although bad weather prevented testing in May last year): water clarity (Secchi disk reading), total phosphorus (TP), and chlorophyll *a*. A lake is then categorized as oligotrophic (clear), mesotrophic (moderately clear), eutrophic (green), or hypereutrophic (very green). Most lakes in the Brainerd Lakes area are categorized as mesotrophic.

Through the years, **Lower and Middle Cullen Lakes** have consistently fallen into the **mid mesotrophic** range. Their water clarity is very good for lakes in this area, their total phosphorus is usually in the low part of the range, and their chlorophyll *a* is also usually in the low part of this range. Over the same time period, **Upper Cullen** has fallen into the **high mesotrophic** range. Its water clarity is in the low part of the range; its total phosphorus is usually in the middle of the range, and its chlorophyll *a* is usually in the high part of the range. Once again, this year's water testing results were fairly consistent with those of past years.

There are a lot of factors and variables that affect water quality, however, so what we look for over the years are any trends that become evident. One trend that is becoming obvious is that Lower Cullen's zebra mussels have been present long enough to be making the water quite a bit clearer and Middle Cullen's zebra mussels have begun to do the same. That's not all good because it allows sunlight to penetrate deeper and thus can cause more plant growth. The table below shows this year's data as well as the average over the last ten years.

For Secchi disk readings **a high number is desirable**. For Chl. a and TP **a low number is wanted**.

Upper	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	2025 aver.	previous 10 yr. aver.	Typical for ecoregion
Secchi (ft.)		6	10.5	9	6.5	8	9.5	8 to 15
Chl. a (ug/L)		5.4	8	13	26	13.1	8.6	max. of 14.5
TP (ug/L)		20	22	17	36	23.8	20	14 to 27

Middle	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	2025 aver.	previous 10 yr. aver.	Typical for ecoregion
Secchi (ft.)		14	15.5	16	16	15.4	13.1	8 to 15
Chl. a (ug/L)		4.8	2.1	1.6	2.7	2.8	4.2	max. of 14.5
TP (ug/L)		14	33	15	8	18	13.7	14 to 27

Lower	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	2025 aver.	previous 10 yr. aver.	Typical for ecoregion
Secchi (ft.)		21.5	17.5	16	16	17.8	14.6	8 to 15
Chl. a (ug/L)		3.2	3.2	4.3	4.3	3.8	4.3	max. of 14.5
TP (ug/L)		10	13	18	16	14.3	14.5	14 to 27

I want to thank our water quality monitors (and family members who often help them) for their dedication to the job: Matt Galles, Upper Cullen; Debi Oliverius, Middle Cullen; and Denise and Eric Whitson, Lower Cullen.

Currents on the Cullens

New owners

Brown's Bay LLC — Lower Cullen (L72h)
 John Culbert — Lower Cullen (L72i)
 Jason Frahm — Middle Cullen (M104)
 Elissa Kapala — Middle Cullen (M46)
 Michael Conlin — Middle Cullen (M5)
 James Utter — Middle Cullen (M4)
 Daniel Wallin — Middle Cullen (M52)

Deaths

Ray Kriewald — Middle Cullen (62)

Save the Date!
CLA Annual Meeting
Saturday, August 8

9:00 a.m at
Lutheran Church of the Cross,
Nisswa (location tentative)