
THE CULLEN CURRENTS



Spring, 2026

You are eligible for \$100 reimbursement

Like more than a dozen others have done, you can receive \$100 toward the \$150 cost of obtaining a professional shoreline restoration analysis by experts from the Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District.

You may want to consider this because it's a great way to get expert information at a bargain price. Moreover, a site visit can potentially pave the way toward government cost-sharing if you move forward with a project.

The \$100 reimbursement is part of the Cullen Lakes Association's Shoreline Grants Initiative, which encourages property owners to learn about their shoreline management options and take actions that aim to benefit water quality and native habitat.

To get the reimbursement, simply go to the Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District website—www.cwswcd.org— scroll down to the “Schedule a shoreline on-site visit” link and then click on the “Book a shoreline site visit” tab. This will take you to an easy to fill out on-line form. Once you've had your visit and received your report, simply go to the Cullen Lakes Association website — www.cullenlakesassoc.org and request your check, providing at least the cover page of your site visit report. Simple as that, but book soon. The county does only a limited number of site visits per year.

This habitat improvement grants program supports the dreams of former association members who generously bequeathed money from their estates to our association. These people — Lowell and Morraine Norden and Joe and Barbara Hogan — so loved the Cullens that they entrusted the Association to put their money to good use. We believe this program honors that trust.

Curly leaf pondweed treatments coming soon

The Cullen Lakes Association has contracted with PLM Lake and Land Management Corporation of Brainerd to conduct curly leaf pondweed control (CLP) on all three lakes this spring.

As always, we won't know how many acres will be treated until the DNR issues the permits later this spring. Similarly, we don't know the precise date of treatments. That, too, will be determined by the DNR, whose decision is based largely on when water temperatures are at the appropriate level.

What kind of CLP crop is expected this year? It's hard to say. Lake expert Steve McComas, who has done about a dozen CLP surveys already this spring, reports some lakes have big crops and others don't. He said the lakes with abundant CLP are largely those that did not have treatments last year. Lakes that were treated last year are generally showing more modest growth.

McComas said while current results are mixed, there's a good chance that many lakes will experience a bumper crop of CLP this summer due to three factors. One, ice cover came late last fall. Two, snowpack was relatively light this year. Three, ice off is about a week ahead of schedule. Each of these factors favor robust CLP growth, and when all three are in place at the same time that can further increase the odds of greater abundance.

McComas, who has been doing CLP work since the 1980s, believes weather/climate conditions have changed CLP growth patterns. Back in the 1980s, he said, CLP treatments were far less common, likely due to longer and snowier winters that retarded growth. Then things began to change in the 1990s. Today, he said, significant growth is sometimes seen by as early as mid-June.

Here's what I know as we head into 2026

by C.B. Bylander, CLA president

One thing I know for sure is that you folks are great.

I say this because you continue to support the Cullen Lakes Association through membership, donations and more. Following our annual membership drive, we have 210 members and 9 associate members so far. There are still 51 people who were members last year that haven't yet paid their 2026 dues. When they have responded to the second membership mailing, we'll likely have our usual 85 or so per cent membership. That's impressive.

To your credit, you also donate generously. This year donations for aquatic invasive species control totaled just over \$43,000. This, too, is on par with previous years and is very much appreciated. We pledge to use these dollars as effectively and efficiently as possible.

What I don't know is how starry stonewort control efforts will turn out this year on Middle Cullen. No one does. It's a real wild card. What I can say is that we are positioning ourselves for the best possible outcome.

How are we doing this?

One, we recently signed a contract with Steve McComas of Blue Water Science based in St. Paul, MN. McComas is a starry stonewort removal and control expert. He will be delineating the existing infestation, scuba diving to look for additional spreading and providing us with technical guidance on algaecide treatments and more. The board considered others but deemed McComas as the premier option for our needs.

Two, we are already in conversations with a potential algaecide applicator, the Department of Natural Resources and university experts on ways to get the best control results at the most economical price. Last year, the first year the DNR allowed us to treat this infestation, applicators used a product called Komeen Descend. This product worked very well according to three different scuba divers who've scoured the lake bottom. However, we later learned this was the highest-priced product among several options. Since last year, we've queried government and university starry stonewort experts on other product options. We now know that alternate lower priced products, or a combination of lower priced products plus Komeen Descend, will likely generate similar results at a lower cost. So, we'll be headed in this direction when treatments begin this summer.

And treatments will begin this summer.

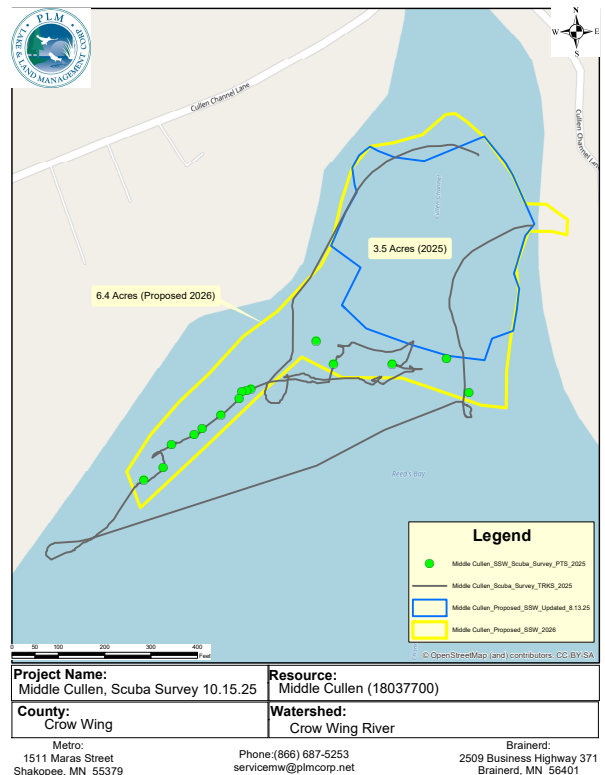
Unlike 2024, when the DNR would not issue a treatment permit, the DNR most certainly is going to provide one this year because the agency has already endowed us with a \$20,000 grant for starry stonewort control. Our lake association, like many others, applied for an AIS control grant this winter and we were among the

fortunate recipients. Applying for grants is another way we are trying to control expenses.

What follows is a bit of a rehash on starry stonewort, but I've reframed it for the purpose of building a common understanding of the problem and the board's approach to dealing with it. So, here goes.

THERE IS A PROBLEM

Starry stonewort was introduced into Middle Cullen, almost certainly by a boater, sometime before 2024. It was discovered in the spring of 2024 by the DNR just out from the public boat launch. Since then, it has spread from about one-half acre to six acres, and it appears to be spreading down the northwest shoreline across from the boat launch. The infestation will likely last forever since infestations are virtually impossible to eradicate once they reach one-half acre in size.



Despite this, our goal is clear. We strive to contain the infestation in Middle Cullen, keeping it where it is as much as possible. Our management approach is to follow the best advice that university and natural resource experts can provide. Currently, their advice is to hit it hard with federally approved and state regulated algaecides. So, that's what we'll do.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE PROBLEM IS OURS

It would be nice if this was someone else's problem. It isn't. The DNR provides technical advice and grants for controlling starry stonewort but does not do active management itself. No other state, federal or local agency is tasked with management responsibility, either. So, the burden is ours. Unlucky us.

WE ARE BEING REASONABLE, RESPONSIBLE AND SENSIBLE

Sadly, there's no instruction book that details how to remedy our situation. Starry stonewort exists in only 30 some Minnesota lakes. That's less than one percent of Minnesota's 3,500 fishing lakes. As a result, there is little Minnesota-based data on how to successfully manage this unwanted alga. Nationally, no one has come up with a cure-all, either.

Still, we believe our approach — collaborating with the DNR, seeking the advice of university and other aquatic experts, learning from other lake associations, aggressively fighting the infestation while it remains relatively small, and thoughtfully allocating your donations — is reasonable, responsible and sensible. It's about all we can do.

My sense is that we will adopt an “adaptive management” approach this year, meaning the number of algaecide treatments will be based on findings from last year's treatments, an upcoming diver survey and similar underwater surveys later in the summer that will determine density of the infestation and if any further spreading has occurred. If deemed appropriate, there may be some hand-pulling of small, scattered infestations.

WE'RE LISTENING, AND WE NEED AND WELCOME YOUR HELP

The CLA board has done a lot of listening during the past two years as we educate ourselves on options, opportunities and more. If you've got thoughts, you're welcome to share them. Feel free to contact a board member or speak your mind at our annual meeting in August.

Clearly, you've already been a great help by making generous donations. We thank you for that, immensely.

But we need to do other things, too. More than ever, we ask:

*Make sure you don't transport aquatic vegetation from Middle Cullen to Upper Cullen, Lower Cullen or elsewhere in Middle Cullen via boat props, lower units, weedy anchors, weedy fishing lures, weedy fishing nets, etc. Starry stonewort can spread through fragmentation. This means if you pull up a “weedy” starry stonewort-laced anchor here and drop it there, you can be spreading the stuff. The same is true with casually removing starry stonewort from a lure and pitching it back into the lake at a different location.

*Keep an eye out for starry stonewort along your lakeshore. You can use the ID card we mailed you in November to identify it. If you find it, or even think you find it, contact a board member.

*If you are so inclined, you can become a volunteer invasive species early detector. Detector training is provided through the University of Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center. A free training seminar is set for June 5 in Cass Lake. Call Cass County to sign up. Otherwise, there are on-line learning options, too. It would be great if we developed some local AIS expertise around the Cullen chain.

Well, that's enough. I hope this has been helpful. Have a great spring and summer.

Starry stonewort alert sign coming to Middle Cullen

A sign that alerts boaters that a starry stonewort infestation is located just out from the dock at the Middle Cullen boat launch is scheduled to be erected this spring.

The sign, created by the Cullen Lakes Association, will be located just south of the boat ramp on private property owned by the Boberg family, who generously are allowing us to erect the sign.

The Association is doing this because we don't believe the Department of Natural Resources' Aquatic Invasive Species signs do an adequate job of informing the public about the threat. The DNR has two signs at the access. One is an older sign that doesn't mention the infestation that was first noticed in 2024. The other, a much smaller sign down by the dock, features a drawing of the algae but the image and related text are so small you must get off the path to make sense of it.

The CLA's sign, which will be about four-by-eight feet in size, will do more. It will inform boaters the infestation is just out from the dock and that they should avoid “weeds” when motoring out into the lake. It will also feature a color photo of what starry stonewort looks like.

Further, the sign will urge boaters to remove vegetation from their lower units before traveling to Lower Cullen, Upper Cullen or anywhere else on Middle Cullen, because this unwanted form of algae can spread from fragmentation. This is a key message because the CLA's goal is to contain the infestation in Middle Cullen and, as much as possible, contain it where it currently is.

Lastly, the sign will encourage boaters to help support the CLA AIS control by donating to our organization. The sign will feature a QR code that will take folks to our Zeffy site, where they can make an on-line donation.

Who knows how many people will contribute? Maybe none. But if some do, that will be great. As you well know, we property owners donate thousands of dollars annually to fight unwanted lake invaders, and if others want to joint the cause, well, that would be a good thing. If they do choose to do this, they now have an easy way to do it with their phones,

A little Cullen Lakes history trivia

The first Cullen Lakes property owners guide was prepared in 1990 by Luther Brown, Middle Cullen, using Crow Wing County property records. The narrative on the guide stated that the lake maps were prepared by the Minnesota Department of Conservation (now the Department of Natural Resources) in 1959 and revised in 1968. One guide per family was provided free to dues-paying members and they could obtain additional copies for \$2 each. Non-members could purchase copies from the lake association for \$5 per copy. The guide was copyrighted in June, 1990. The 1990 map/guide was updated in January, 1998 by Ann Beaver, Lower Cullen, using Crow Wing County property records. She has updated it every year since then and it is provided free to members of the lake association.

The lake association was formed in late 1982 as the Cullen Lakes Property Owners Association (CLPOA). The name was officially changed in 2000 to the Cullen Lakes Association (CLA) when association membership was extended to family members of current Cullen Lakes property owners, former lakeshore property owners, and owners of property in the lakes' watershed.

CLPOA records show that in 1983 there were 19 Upper Cullen property owners, 7 of whom were association members (37%). There were 107 Middle Cullen property owners, 54 of whom were association members (50%) and there were 135 Lower Cullen property owners, 76 of whom were association members (56%).

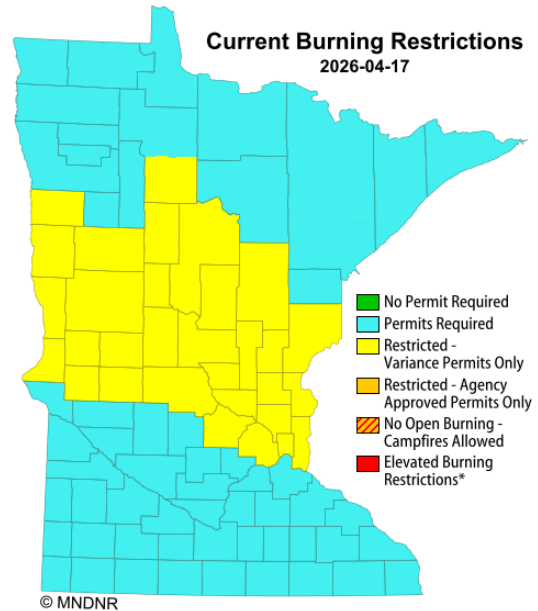
Although it's a bit like comparing apples to oranges because CLA's current records include multiple owners of the same parcel, but in 2025 out of 303 known potential members of the lake association, 262 were members. That's 86%!

In 1990, Upper Cullen had 26 lakeshore parcels, one of which was owned by Crow Wing County. In 2026 there are 35 parcels, three of which are owned by the county. In 1990, Middle Cullen had 75 lakeshore parcels, including one owned by the MN DNR. There was also the DNR's public access. In 2026 there are 137 parcels, including the two owned by the DNR, plus the privately owned villas within Wilderness Resort. In 1990, Lower Cullen had 111 lakeshore parcels plus the DNR's public access. In 2026 there are 131 lakeshore parcels, plus the public access and the privately owned townhomes within Good Ol' Days resort.

Comparing parcel ownership in 1990 and 2026, six Upper Cullen parcels remain in the same ownership. Middle Cullen has 35 and Lower Cullen has 43 in the same ownership. However, this information is likely not 100 percent accurate, because a parcel could easily be in the same family's ownership but under a different last name.

Spring burning restrictions are in place

In effect when this newsletter went to print, spring burning restrictions are in place 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.

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

Save the date!
CLA Annual Meeting
Saturday, August 8

CLA membership update

by Lora Graumann

As we head into spring, we're excited to share that our lakes association continues to thrive. As of mid April, we have 219 paid members, including nine associate members who are former owners, family members of owners, or owners of property within the Cullen Lakes watershed. There are 51 members from last year who haven't yet paid their 2026 dues.

Membership letters for 2026 were mailed in late November and a second notice was sent at the end of March to those who had not yet responded. We truly appreciate the strong participation and ongoing support we've received from our members.

New this year, we're 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. Of course, dues and donations can still be mailed to CLA, P.O box 466, Nisswa, MN 56468.



Your continued membership and generosity play a vital role in protecting and preserving the beauty and health of our lake community. We are sincerely grateful for your commitment and look forward to another active and production season together.

Note from the newsletter editor: 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.

Currents on the Cullens

Correction

The winter 2026 newsletter incorrectly listed the death of Charlie Kriewald as Ray Kriewald. We apologize for the error. Charlie R. Kriewald died in late December of 2024. He was also known as Ron.



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.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) management donations update

The CLA Board of Directors would again like to thank all who have contributed thus far to the 2026 AIS treatment fund.

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

*178 property owners and family members have made a CLP donation. There are 219 paid CLA members so far this year, so that's 81%.

*62 contributions were the \$275 suggested in the membership mailing.

*20 contributions were more than the suggested \$275.

*Contributions have ranged from \$25 to \$1,000.

*Contributions total \$43,075.

THANK YOU!

2026 Ice out dates

These are the ice out dates reported to us:

Upper Cullen — Thursday, April 16
Middle Cullen — Thursday, April 16
Lower Cullen — Thursday, April 16