



The Advocate

Summer, 2019

President's Message

LARA = Lake Acronym Requires Attention

by Phil Hunsicker

Dear LARA Supporters,

Like the rest of the world, those of us who live on lakes are confronted by what seems like a never-ending stream of acronyms. You have to stay on your toes to keep up with them. Ours are things like AIS, LARA, COLA, DNR, MPCA, MAISRC (Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center), NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard), BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything), and one of my favorites – CAVE (Citizens Against Virtually Everything). Another acronym has reared its head recently, and many of us are taking notice: VRBO. This stands for Vacation Rental By Owner, which turns residential lakeshore properties into commercial money-makers, sometimes at the expense of neighbors and the health of the lake. Not all VRBOs are bad, but the bad ones certainly get noticed and talked about. In this addition of the LARA electronic newsletter, we have an article about one man's effort to get that acronym in the ears and on the lips of our Crow Wing County Commissioners. LARA recently wrote a letter to all five of our county commissioners about our concerns with the lack of regulations of VRBOs operating in the county. We heard back from one commissioner – Bill Brekken – who would like to meet with us and discuss the issue. None of the other commissioners responded – not even with a short, “thank you for your concern” email. Members of the LARA board will meet with Commissioner Brekken and report back out to our membership. Stay tuned.

What follows is the letter we sent to the five commissioners. If you have an opinion on this issue/acronym, please contact your county commissioner and encourage him/her to do something. Other counties have. Why hasn't Crow Wing County?

Dear Commissioner,

As you know, the Crow Wing County Lakes and Rivers Alliance (LARA) represents the interests of approximately 35 dues-paying lake associations in Crow Wing County. They all care about the health of Crow Wing County's lakes and the lands that surround them. The work that LARA's volunteer board of directors does is largely based on the expressed needs of our member associations. We work for them, and lately, we have been hearing a lot of concern with Vacation Rental by Owners (VRBOs).

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VRBO is a relatively new phenomenon, and local governments like Crow Wing County have been trying to catch up to them in their regulatory processes. The problem is that entities like VRBO and Airbnb allow lakeshore homeowners to turn their residentially zoned properties into commercial money-makers, often at the expense of neighbors and the health of the lake. Septic systems that were designed to accommodate a family of five or six are now being overwhelmed by groups of 15 to 20 or more. Throughout the summer, renters try to get the biggest bang for their lakeshore vacation buck, so in addition to maxing out the available bedroom space, they set up additional sleeping accommodations in the form of tents, recreational vehicles (RVs) and fish houses. This is no longer a residence; it is now a hotel that has many more guests than it has accommodations.

In short, it is a problem that is only getting bigger the longer the county refuses to deal with it. It is a problem for neighbors, who shouldn't have to put up with the bad behavior of a lot of strangers every weekend, and it is a problem for our lakes, which may be receiving more unwanted nutrients from overwhelmed septic systems that were not designed nor permitted for this kind of use.

Not all VRBOs are a problem, but because of the bad ones, we need to have rules in place so that all VRBOs know what is acceptable and what is not. In the past, the Crow Wing County Board has not shown any interest in regulating VRBOs for fear of infringing on private property rights. What about the property rights of those living next door? What about the property rights of everyone living on that lake whose property values depend on maintaining good water quality? Let's be clear – we are not talking about homeowners having a large number of friends and family members over for a celebratory gathering. We are talking about residential properties being used for commercial purposes (i.e. to make a lot of money) and the homeowner is nowhere on site.

Other communities in Minnesota have begun to find reasonable ways to regulate these businesses –through the conditional use permitting process or through the creation of new ordinances that allow the practice of VRBOs, but also ensure their compatibility with surrounding residential land uses. Crow Wing County should look at what these forward-thinking communities have done: the cities of Pequot Lakes, Lakeshore, and Duluth; also Stearns County, Aitkin County, Mille Lacs County, Otter Tail County and Douglas County. The ordinance crafted by Douglas County sets reasonable standards that balance the economic benefits to local tourism with the concerns of nearby neighbors. Here is a link to the Douglas County ordinance: <http://horizonpublichealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Douglas-County-Private-Vacation-Home-Rental-Zoning-Ordinance.pdf>

The Douglas County ordinance sets reasonable limits for occupancy, capacity, parking, and noise. In addition, money generated through permitting fees should be enough to cover costs associated with monitoring and enforcement. This could be a model for a new Crow Wing County ordinance whose time has come.

We suggest the county invite the Douglas County Land and Resources Management Director, Dave Rush, to attend a Crow Wing County Board public meeting to discuss their ordinance and how Crow Wing County could adopt something similar that addresses common complaints about unregulated VRBOs.

LARA responds to the concerns of its constituents. Our elected leaders should do the same. It's time for this county to create a reasonable ordinance that regulates an industry that is currently operating with no rules, and taking advantage of that fact.

Sincerely,

The LARA Board of Directors:

- Phil Hunsicker (Co-President of LARA and representing Red Sand Lake)
- Mike O'Brien (Co-President of LARA and representing Lower South Long Lake)
- Sandy Holm (Vice-President of LARA and representing Horseshoe Lake)
- Ann Beaver (Secretary and Treasurer of LARA and representing the Cullen Lakes)
- Tom Beaver (Representing the Cullen Lakes)
- Jodi Billy (Representing Pelican Lake)
- Nick Bernier (Representing Mission Lake)

Summer greetings from the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC)

What we've been up to:

- *Created a zebra mussel research fellowship to work on in-lake control and kicked off new research to evaluate the effects of copper on zebra mussels and identify non-target impacts.
- *Installed the Whooshh fish removal system to remove common carp from Long Lake, the first time this unique tool has been used for invasive species removal.
- *Conducted field work to determine what fishing gear is most at risk for spreading spiny waterflea to other water bodies.
- *Found that first-year walleye growth is reduced in the presence of zebra mussels and spiny waterflea. Understanding these food web changes will improve management of walleye populations going forward.
- *Collaborated with three counties to pilot test a new watercraft inspection model that will optimize the use of limited resources.
- *Released a detailed management plan for 12 regions of Minnesota to support strategic, coordinated control of invasive *Phragmites*.

Plus, we're launching ten new projects this summer that are looking at the economic impacts of AIS, how climate change factors in, encouraging native species recovery, and new, innovative techniques for control. Catch up on everything at www.MAISRC.umn.edu.

Our lakes, rivers, and wetlands define the beauty of Minnesota, and protecting these public waters for generations to come is at the core of what we do. AIS can seem unstoppable, but we believe that with the right tools and knowledge we can control and even reverse this growing trend. MAISRC uses scientific rigor, and independent voice, and an interdisciplinary team to solve complex problems that start in Minnesota and have national impact. We see every day that incremental steps lead to big wins -- solutions are within reach. We need the support of people -- like you -- who are dedicated to finding solutions and preserving the health and vitality of lakes, rivers, and wetlands for generations to come.

Ways other than dollars to get involved:

Brush up on your AIS identification skills. It's easy with a copy of our AIS ID Guide! It features dozens of invasive plants, invertebrates, and fish, as well as their native lookalikes. It's printed in full color and on waterproof paper, so you can take it out on the lake with you! Available at www.umn.edu/AISguide.

Participate in Starry Trek. Mark your calendars for August 17! Starry Trek is a statewide event focused on searching for one of Minnesota's newest aquatic invaders, starry stonewort. This free, family-friendly event is a great way to get outdoors, learn more about AIS, and help protect your area lakes. More details at StarryTrek.org.

Join us for the AIS Research and Management Showcase. Learn about all the exciting work going on at the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center! Join us in St. Paul on Wednesday, September 18 for a day full of informative talks, hands-on demos, lab tours, a reception, and more. This is your best opportunity to learn about the latest findings in AIS research, useful management tools, and get an inside peek into our state-of-the-art lab. Further details will be posted at www.MAISRC.umn.edu.

CWEPA Find grant update

Due to the lack of applications for the CWEPA Fund grant the last few years, LARA's CWEPA Fund Advisory Committee consulted with Don Hickman and Kate Bjorge of the Initiative Foundation (I.F.) regarding other options available for the use of the CWEPA Fund's annual investment interest. With the approval of the LARA Board of Directors, the Advisory Committee requested the Fund be reclassified to a Designated Fund. What this means is that an annual grant will be awarded to LARA as long as the organization continues to exist and its mission supports the purpose of the Fund. The 2019 grant was \$3,400.

This grant money is kept separate from LARA's other assets and may be used only for things that fit the purpose of the Fund, which is to provide operational support to projects, programs and activities that lead to the protection, restoration, and preservation of natural resources and environmental assets within Crow Wing County.

There will no longer be any advisors to the Fund and the I.F. will continue to manage the Fund. LARA will use the annual grant to support Crow Wing County projects and initiatives that meet the purpose of the Fund. LARA will have the ability to retain money not given to qualifying projects any given year and thus increase the amount available for future use. This is something it couldn't do under the former fund designation.

If you are aware of any projects in Crow Wing County that might qualify for such funding, please notify one of LARA's co-presidents: Phil Hunsicker, phunsicker@q.com or Mike O'Brien, mikeobriens@gmail.com.

2019 LARA membership

The following lake associations are members of LARA as of July 31:

Bass Lake Association	Lower South Long Lake Improvement Association
Bay Lake Association	Mission Lakes Association
Clamshell-Bertha Lakes Association	Pelican Lakes Conservation Club
Crow Wing Lake Association	Pelican Lake Association of Crow Wing County
Cullen Lakes Association	Portage Crooked Lake Improvement Association
East Twin Lake Association	Rabbit, Clinker and Cuyuna Lake Association
Edna Fawn Lakes Association	Red Sand Lake Association
Emily Lakes and Rivers Association	Roosevelt and Lawrence Area Lake Association
Fifty Lakes Association	Ross Stark Twin Lakes Association
Friends of Lower Hay Lake, Inc.	Upper Hay Lake Association
Gull Chain of Lakes Association	Upper South Long Lake Improvement Association
Horseshoe Lake Association	Velvet Lake Association
Lake Edward Conservation Club	Whitefish Area Property Owners Association
Lake Hubert Conservation Association	White Sand Lake Association
Lougee Lake Property Owners Association	

If your lake association would still like to join LARA this year, dues are based on association membership: 1-50=\$25; 51-150=\$50; 151-300=\$75; over 300=\$100. Checks can be sent to LARA Membership, P.O. Box 53, Pequot Lakes, MN 56472.

Public Open-space Meeting on Angling, AIS and Access to Minnesota Lakes and Rivers

Event details

You are Invited - Please Join the Conversation

In the land of 10,000 lakes, the ways we use and share our lakes and rivers impacts you, your neighbors, and your local communities. You are invited to come and talk with local residents, lake associations, anglers, and others interested in enjoying and protecting Minnesota's lakes and rivers.

Conversations will focus on public access to Minnesota's lakes and rivers, providing excellent recreational fishing, and stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Come to one of our three August events

We are hosting three events this summer. These gatherings will be different from many other public meetings. There will not be presentations by DNR Staff. The people who come to these events will set the agenda and lead the discussions.

There will be conversations among local residents, lake associations, and anglers focusing on use and protection of our lakes and rivers. We will discuss how local communities can work together better to address shared concerns.

Meeting Times and Locations

Thursday, Aug 1: Alexandria High School, Alexandria

Saturday, Aug 10: Central Lakes College, Brainerd

Thursday, Aug 15: Monticello High School, Monticello

Doors will open at 9:30 a.m. and the events will begin at 10:00 a.m. The events will end no later than 4 p.m. Lunches will be provided at no cost.

*** Please pre-register online at event website link on the sidebar to help us plan logistics and lunch.**

*** Share and invite others to join the conversation!**

Events are sponsored by the Minnesota DNR and Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee, to:

- 1. Bring together local residents, lake associations, and anglers to talk with each other about how public access to and protection of our lakes and rivers impact local communities, and how we can all work together better to provide access and protect our lakes and rivers.*
- 2. Learn what local residents, lake associations, and anglers think needs to be done to address important issues related to angling, public water access and AIS to local communities.*

Please come - Set the agenda - Join the conversation

Location

Central Lakes College, Brainerd

Date

Aug. 10, 2019

Time

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Directions

Central Lakes College 501 W College Dr Brainerd, MN 56401

More Information

Contact April Rust at 651-259-5706 or by email at april.rust@state.mn.us.