

Rice Lake Receives \$127,000 AIS Grant
Purpose is to Prevent Possible Ecological Disaster in Turtle River Watershed

The Rice Lake Association, Inc. has received a three-year, \$127,000 Aquatic Invasive Species grant from the Wisconsin DNR to begin removal of the invasive curly leaf pondweed from the lake in Mercer.

The plant was first discovered there in 2013 by Hurley High School biology teacher Diane O'Krongley. Since then, more and more plants have been observed to a point that the lake becomes unnavigable in the late summer. The greatest danger is that CLP will spread down the Turtle River and eventually into the Turtle Flambeau Flowage. CLP starts its growth cycle under the ice, reproduces rapidly and grows in water up to 20 feet deep.

CLP does not respond well to herbicides, and mowing spreads its seeds and asexually reproducing turions. The turions, which look like tiny pinecones, leave the stem, float downstream and settle to the bottom of the lake or river. They can survive for many years in the sediment before coming to life.

The Rice Lake Association, Inc. has been working on the grant for almost two years with president Bob Kary and his neighbors putting in hundreds of hours to get the required action plan and grant application exactly right. The staff of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been incredibly helpful with both local and Madison officials guiding Rice Lake's efforts.

One last unexpected requirement for receiving the grant came forth at the last moment and seemed to put the kibosh on the effort. The problem was that Rice Lake currently has no public boat landing. DNR officials were instrumental in shifting some deadlines, and the Mercer Town Board acted almost instantly to provide a letter of intent to the DNR to build a ramp this summer. Thanks to all involved, the possible one-year delay in addressing the problem was averted.

The grant is for three years. The CLP can only be removed by hand pulling and that activity needs to take place in the short period of time between when the plant is up high enough to be seen and pulled and before it begins to develop reproductive seeds and turions. The effective pulling period is about two weeks long and occurs from late May until early June.

Last year, during that time, Rice Lake and the Iron County Lakes and Rivers Alliance sponsored The Great Pondweed Pull on Rice Lake to determine the plausibility of hand pulling. Thirty-five volunteers from throughout the Turtle River Watershed participated in the test project. The results of 4 boats removing large patches of weeds was impressive with several hundred cubic feet removed in about 12 hours on the lake. The effort this year will include up to 10 boats working 80 hours. As in last year's efforts volunteers in canoes and kayaks will patrol the shallows of the lake to remove pioneer plants.

The grant includes up to \$24,000 per year to pay the CLP pullers \$15/hour for their efforts. Local high school and tribal youth have been contacted to fill the pulling jobs. Boats, tractors, and other equipment will be rented locally.

Citizens who wish to either man the boats or volunteer for support roles should contact Bob kary at treboryrak@gmail.com.