

February 3, 2021

Dear ICLRA Members and Friends,

Through this year of no meetings we have actually been quite busy. The last time any number of us were together was at the Great Pondweed Pull on Rice Lake in June.

Long before that we and the Rice Lake Association have been working to get the Wisconsin DNR to help resolve the looming ecological disaster that is the Curly Leaf Pondweed infestation there. The Rice Lake people have spent hundreds of hours on writing a lake management plan and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) grant application. We are now at a crucial point. Since 2013 the Rice Lake Association has been attempting to stop the spread of the plant in cooperation with the Wisconsin DNR, and the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department. Because of Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine, Rice Lake property owners are restricted in their efforts.

Eight years ago curly leaf pondweed (CLP) was identified in Rice Lake in the Town of Mercer. CLP is an invasive aquatic plant which is fast-growing and difficult to eradicate, once established. In the past 3 years the plant has taken over much of the lake making boating next to impossible. CLP does not respond to poisoning. It cannot be mowed because that just spreads the plant. The only option for removal is hand pulling. As you probably know, in June of 2020 a pilot program of pulling was accomplished. With just three main boats on the lake for about 12 hours, tons of the weed were removed. Smaller boats were assigned to search and destroy pioneer clusters. The results were very encouraging, and we learned a lot in terms of what is needed looking ahead. Hand pulling on a larger scale, with more effective processes and tools is the path forward, however, that will not be cheap, and it cannot be accomplished with volunteers.

The danger for Iron County and The Town of Mercer is that, because of the density of CLP in Rice Lake, the seeds and asexual reproduction Turions are on their way down stream to Pike Lake, Lake of the Falls and the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage. In 2020 plants were identified and removed from Pike Lake, but the Turtle River keeps on flowing and the plant germs keep coming. If CLP gets into the shallow Flowage, within a few years large sections of that water body will be choked with weeds, forever changing the "Crown Jewel of the North." Further, with the current heavy boat traffic there, the plant will surely be spread to many other lakes in Southern Iron County. Sadly, every day that passes, this tragedy becomes more likely. The removal effort, crafting of a lake management plan and grant applications have been very expensive and time-consuming and have been met with seemingly endless barriers. Finally, in 2019 and 2020, through extensive cooperation from the DNR, progress has been made in the quest for the AIS management grant. The grant was carefully crafted with help from local and state-level DNR staff. Final application papers for the \$127,000-three year grant were submitted in November Of 2020. All deadline dates and known requirements were met.

Today, February 3rd, the DNR is scheduled to do final review and ranking of all grant applications. On February 10th the state-level grant committee will choose the grants to be funded.

Unfortunately, on January 22nd, the Rice Lake Association received an email from the DNR saying that the grant was not to be considered because Rice Lake does not have a public boat landing. Failure to notify the Rice Lake Association of this requirement was an oversight by the DNR staff in their guidance.

However, the DNR has issued an informal time extension to correct the grant's problem. It is our understanding that the grant application has been resubmitted for ranking with the proviso that the Town of Mercer submit a letter of commitment to acquire the ownership of a surveyed public access lot and to construct a boat landing this coming summer. This letter must arrive at the DNR before February 10th for the grant application to be considered for final approval.

(Of course, if the grant is denied, the Town would be under no obligation to acquire the property or build the ramp.)

Tomorrow, February 4th, the town board will meet at 5:30 at the Mercer Community Center. Consideration of the proposal to write a commitment letter is on the agenda. If you could either attend the meeting in person or via Zoom, or send an email of support to the town (at tomiron@centurytel.net) it would be greatly appreciated. The Zoom link can be found on the town website (tomorrow).

As of this writing we do not know of the ranking of the grant proposal. We will update you as we learn more.

Best regards,
Richard Thiede
(714) 476 2881
Secretary, Iron County Lakes and Rivers Alliance, Inc.
(A 501c3 corporation)

The Town of Mercer website can be found at <https://www.townofmercer.com/>