

To those concerned about the status of the Rice Lake Association (RLA) Curl y Leaf Pondweed (CLP) pulling project:

First, the goal of the three year project is to remove as much CLP from Rice Lake as possible in order to achieve the **purpose** of the project which is to, literally, save the downstream lakes and the 13,000 acres of the Turtle Flambeau Flowage. CLP is a very aggressive aquatic invasive species capable making shallow (8 feet or less) water bodies useless for aquatic activities.

Here is a summary of that project – through the years:

- In January of 2021, after two years of working toward a grant to remove the threat of CLP in Rice Lake and downstream waters the grant was approved. Shortly thereafter, RLA was told that the grant could not be funded because there was no public boat landing on the lake.
- The DNR has been aware of the increasing CLP problem in Rice Lake and the threat to the Flowage since 2013.
- There is public access to the lake owned by the Town of Mercer.
- The lake is not appropriate for watercraft larger than those which can be launched there on the current public access parcel.

When RLA was informed of the need of public access it was discovered that the access parcel had never been titled by the Town of Mercer. It was being maintained by neighboring lake residents. The lot was subsequently surveyed, registered and titled. The town committed to building the “minimal” access as required by the DNR. The cost to the town for an “improved” boat landing was estimated to be \$45,000 The DNR agreed to fund the AIS project per the grant terms with the proviso that the landing would be built during the coming construction season.

Then, the project went forward. The people of RLA did EVERYTHING required by the grant. They:

- Conducted organizational meetings, did research on CLP removal methods, conducted a 2 day methods testing program (in 2020), all of which took hundreds of hours of volunteer time.
- Procured equipment to remove the CLP.
- Advertised, interviewed and hired employees to conduct the work.
- Recruited volunteers from throughout the watershed and local Native American Tribes.
- Obtained the necessary EIN, licenses and workman’s comp and liability insurance.
- Rented boats, motors, bathroom facilities, trucks, trailers and tractors.
- Carried out the 10 day “pull” in late May and Early June which resulted in the of removal of 44 tons of CLP from the lake with pulling concentration in the heavily populated river outlet channel towards the Flowage .
- Served lunch each day for the workers and volunteers and found lodging for some.
- Cleaned of all boats and equipment before and after the removal.
- Organized and co-sponsored and funded 3 public educational programs at the Pines Restaurant in Mercer:
  - “Wolves and Watersheds” with Adrian Wydeven (WDNR retired).
  - “Shoreland Zoning – Why We Have It and What You Can and Can’t Do as Riparian Owners” with Erica Roeder and Gerry Nasi (Iron County Zoning).
  - The Value of Lake Associations (Cancelled due to COVID spike)
  - Over 200 people attended the two programs.
- Tracked all activities, expenses and volunteer hours.

RLA paid the resulting bills for services (including a \$12,000 before and after professional plant survey.)

Again, the RLA did **everything** that was required by the grant at the schedule of the grant documents and everything that was under their control and was under the impression that the boat landing construction was going forward.

Then came a copy of a letter from the DNR addressed to the town of Mercer dated October 6<sup>th</sup> stating that there was no suitable site for a boat landing on Rice Lake.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> the RLA received a letter from the DNR stating that since there was no acceptable site for a boat landing on Rice Lake that the RLA was to return the \$23,700 advance grant payment and that the other expenses authorized under the grant (about \$18,000) would not be reimbursed by the DNR.

Since that date the RLA has been appealing to officials at various levels of the DNR, working with a consultant familiar with DNR regulations and with our state senator to resolve the situation. The state regulations (NR 193) is clear that in extenuating circumstances that a waiver to the landing requirement may be waived. See also NR 193.65(4).

We feel that saving the Turtle Flambeau Flowage qualifies as an extenuating circumstance.