

Dear ICLRA Friends and Members,

This is very difficult to write. First, it is a very emotion-filled subject for me. Second, the situation is unfathomable. The following document is a bit too long, so if you want to form your own impressions, just read the attached final, final letter from the state to the Rice Lake Association (RLA) dated Friday, February 10<sup>th</sup>. But, here goes. I'll try to make it as short as possible.

### **The Problem**

Rice Lake in Iron County, Wisconsin is a shallow 110 acre lake, part of the Turtle River Chain. It is infested with a very aggressive Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), curly leaf pond weed (CLP). The CLP is moving steadily downstream into other lakes and eventually to the 12,000 acre Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and beyond.

The RLA received state grants in 2020 and 2021 to remove CLP from Rice Lake, Pike Lake and the Turtle River between the two lakes. The 2021 grant was for three-years and \$127,000. In 2021 the RLA removed 44 tons of CLP and cleared about 24 of the most infected acres of Rice Lake.

At the beginning of 2021 the RLA was informed by the state that a public boat landing was a requirement for grant funding. The Town of Mercer agreed to build a landing at an estimated cost of \$45,000.

Four months after the early June 2021 removal project was completed the Town of Mercer was informed by the state that there was "no acceptable site" for a boat landing on the lake. In November the RLA was informed that since there was no site, the \$23,700 advance payment they had received and spent must be returned to the state and that the additional \$18,000 in RLA out-of-pocket expenses would not be reimbursed.

A series of appeals to various state agencies and legislature ensued. The attached letter ended the appeal process.

### **Now What?**

Really briefly, the RLA had hoped to continue even without state support but the requirement to return all but about \$375 of the \$23,700 payment plus the prospect of raising at least \$30,000 per year for several years seems to be impossible for the 15 families on the lake who are members of the RLA.

But, miracles happen and perhaps the plants will decide not to float downstream anymore and perhaps when they reach "The Jewel of the North" they will decline membership in the plant community there.

### **Unfathomable?**

The RLA, in its appeals, asked for a variance in the boat landing requirement as allowed in law in Wisconsin NR193.20. The variance has been denied and the grant cancelled.

**In none of the correspondence from the state has a written reason been given for the denial of variance.**

The logic in the denial letters seems to be: “We didn’t tell you that a boat landing was required. Then we did tell you that a boat landing was required. You (Town of Mercer) agreed to build a boat landing. We determined that a boat landing was not possible (mucky lake bottom). We are denying a variance to the requirement for a boat landing because you don’t have a boat landing. Therefore, we want our money back.”

Of course that is mind-boggling.

Verbal (non-written) reasons have been given by various state officials:

**“We have limited funds and it is our job to see that our citizen’s money is spent wisely.”** Oh boy. “The Town’s public access site is unacceptable because it has about 400 square feet of “wetland soils” (not wetlands) in it. Can’t sacrifice that just to save a 12,000 acre paradise.”

**“If we give the RLA/Turtle River Complex a variance, we will have to give variances to anybody who asks for one.”** The RLA’s legal consultants say that is absurd.

**“The AIS will probably get into the Flowage from some guy’s anchor anyway.”** The RLA’s environmental advisor says, “Well, then, by that defeatist logic, all state lake management and AIS programs should be dissolved.”

**“You guys poisoned the well.”** Is the state saying they were just kidding when they asked for their money back? Are they mad because, in frustration, the RLA got snippy and wrote letters to the editor? Not Nice! Honest to god, the poisoned well sentiment was expressed by a state staffer! (minus the just kidding and other parts)

The whole thing seems crazy. Did we mention that requiring a public boat landing on a lake choked with an aggressive AIS is, well, nuts? Since November, the RLA has had suspicions that, because this whole thing makes no sense, something else must be going on.

I can’t go there except to say that **the State of Wisconsin has a \$4,000,000,000 budget surplus!**

Discuss among yourselves.

Sincerely,

Dick Thiede

Secretary, Iron County Lakes and Rivers Alliance, Inc.