

## COLUMN

## Winter opportunities to protect our shared lakes and rivers

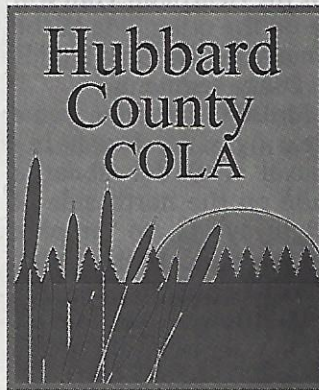
**L**ocal guessing games for ice-in dates are coming to a close.

The definition of a lake's ice-in date is ideally, according to the Minnesota DNR, when observers report the date when the entire lake is frozen over for



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the first time and the ice cover endures for the remainder of the winter. On a large lake – for example, Long Lake – determining the ice-in date requires cooperation among residents who have a bird's-eye view of the deepest part of the lake from higher banks and also next to the water's edge. The shallower portions of the lake freeze first. One person typically reports the information to the DNR after the residents collaborate on the official, ice-in date for the lake. The data is then used by several organizations and researchers to help us all better understand the effects that changing ice cover has on lake health, local wildlife and citizen lake use. Find more information at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/ice\\_in/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ice_in/index.html).



On some lakes, ice fishing has already started, with great caution. Ice fishing can provide both quiet time and also an opportunity to share an afternoon on the ice with family and friends. Ice skating and kite flying can add to the merriment for those not as interested in the actual process of catching fish. Take a few minutes, too, in order to contemplate the forests in the lake's watershed that help the water quality for the tasty fish. Appreciate the fields in the watershed that have winter cover crops. These not only utilize nutrients to help prevent spring runoff but also act as a filter for soil erosion.

This past autumn, a representative from the Hubbard County Coalition

of Lake Associations (COLA) educational team attended the quarterly ACTION Park Rapids meeting. Participating in the Education Work Group, Hubbard County COLA created a plan seeking opportunities to help educate lakes area youth on ways of protecting our important shared local resource – our lakes and rivers. The ACTION Park Rapids quarterly meeting has helped us reach out to potential partners interested in collaborating with us on this educational plan. Find more information here <http://parkrapids.com/actionparkrapids>.

Hubbard County COLA would like to reach out to all of you in our lakes area to see if you can think of ideas or ways our education team could work with you, in partnership, to help enhance your groups' understanding of ways to protect our area lakes and rivers. Perhaps you lead a group of youth and want a fun group activity that promotes understanding of water wildlife or a project that helps promote understanding water quality. Perhaps you are part of an organization that could benefit from learning more about data available on our area lakes. Let's figure out ways together to be even better at protecting our important shared area resource – our lakes and rivers! Send your potential ideas to [hccolamn@gmail.com](mailto:hccolamn@gmail.com) or call Sharon Natzel at 763-355-7908. Look for our community education course for adults, too, this spring.

Members of the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations write a monthly column in the Enterprise addressing water issues in the region.