

Lake-loving volunteers needed for Starry Trek 2022



Contributed / Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

Starry stonewort is a macro-algae, so it can reproduce from a single cell. Traditional methods of lake vegetation management have not been successful.

BY SHANNON GEISEN – PARK RAPIDS ENTERPRISE

Volunteers are needed in Hubbard and Beltrami counties, and across the state of Minnesota, on Saturday, Aug. 20 to participate in a search for starry stonewort – an aggressive, aquatic invasive algae that can spread easily and grows into dense mats at and below the lake's surface.

Starry Trek is an annual event where members of the public first gather at training sites to learn how to identify starry stonewort and other aquatic invasive species.

The newly trained participants then branch out to local water accesses to search for signs of the invasive species and report their findings.

Shallow Lake, Big Turtle Lake

Currently, Hubbard and Beltrami counties are hosting two of 26 local training sites around the state, according to Aaron Anderson, Hubbard County's AIS coordinator. He's an environmental specialist with the Hubbard County Environmental Services Office.

Starry Trek will be held at the Shallow Lake public access in Nevis. In Beltrami County, it will be at the Big Turtle Lake boat launch.

Starry Trek will start at 8:30 a.m. on Aug.

20, with an estimated completion time of 1:30 p.m.

No experience or equipment is necessary to participate in Starry Trek. Expert training on monitoring protocols and starry stonewort identification will be provided on-site.

While the event is free, registration is required.

The deadline is Sunday, Aug. 14. Children under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/starry-trek-2022-tickets-372928026767>.

For a full list of the sites and other FAQs, visit starrytrek.org.

For local information, contact Anderson at aaron.anderson@co.hubbard.mn.us or 218-732-2360.

Critical for control

Starry Trek is organized by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) and University of Minnesota Extension in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"This event is a terrific way for people to get outdoors, get educated about

aquatic invasive species and help protect their area lakes,” said Megan Weber, Extension educator with the University of Minnesota.

“The information we gain at this event helps researchers and managers understand its current distribution and potentially take action if new infestations are found.”

Starry stonewort was first found in Minnesota at Lake Koronis in 2015, and has since spread to 19 Minnesota lakes.

“We know that stopping starry stonewort is very important,” Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations (COLA) president Sharon Natzel said at a recent COLA meeting.

“It does outcompete the vegetation and wildlife. It does alter the ecosystems. And it can upset that balance.”

Early detection and intervention – namely, hand pulling or mechanical harvesting – of this species is critical for control.

“Hand pulling doesn’t eliminate it; it just cuts down on the mass,” Natzel pointed out. “It’s like giving it a haircut.”

Starry Trek volunteers have found starry stonewort in four lakes – Grand Lake in Stearns County, Wolf Lake at the Hubbard/Beltrami County border, Lake Beltrami in Beltrami County and Carnelian Lake in Stearns County – as well as other aquatic invasive species, like Eurasian watermilfoil and zebra mussels during this event.

Starry stonewort can reach depths as far as 25 feet.

As a result of an infestation, lake and river recreation declines, native species are choked out, fish numbers are depleted and lakeshore property values decline.

Treatment challenges

Natzel said chemical treatments only destroy part of the algae, allowing it to reproduce.

Hand pulling can result in additional patches of starry stonewort if it breaks into multiple pieces and disperses.

“Diver-assisted suction harvesting was mentioned in the case of Wolf Lake because DNR won’t be able to do another hand pulling there,” Natzel said, adding that the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe currently owns such harvesting

equipment.

She continued, “All methods are expensive, so the best thing is keeping it from getting spread in the lake.”

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, with funding from Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, is installing 22 CD3 Waterless Cleaning Systems at lake accesses contaminated with starry stonewort.

“They do have several in Beltrami now,” Natzel noted, plus one has been delivered for the Wolf Lake access as well.

“They are free to use and are available 24 hours a day.”

Depending upon the model, the cost of the system ranges from \$11,000 to \$37,000.

MAISRC works across the state to develop research-based solutions that can reduce the impacts of aquatic invasive species. A portion of the funding for this program is provided by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

Learn more at maisrc.umn.edu.

For statewide information, contact Weber at mmweber@umn.edu or 763-767-3874.

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