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## COLA: Accomplishments, challenges for Hubbard County lake associations



Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations members are working to maintain summer scenes like this for all to enjoy. Contributed/ Craig Bihrlle



By **Craig Bihrlle**

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 Opinion

This fall, for the first time, members of Hubbard County's Coalition of Lake Associations (COLA) compiled a recap of their organization's accomplishments from the past year, along with a list of challenges to address in the year(s) to come.

When all these lists were pulled together, representatives of the county's 31 lake associations could see what accomplishments and challenges they share, and which are specific to their body of water.



Tom Waterman on Long Lake, near Park Rapids, helps out with aquatic plant monitoring. No invasive species were detected among the native plants during this survey in 2022. Contributed/ Sharon Natzel

Here's a summary of some of the common themes for Hubbard County lake associations as the 2023 fishing and boating season approaches.

## **Accomplishments**

- Several lake associations that are part of COLA indicated they had success in attracting new members, and some also saw increasing volunteer participation by members.

Some of thoughts on why this might have occurred included providing online sources for paying annual dues, improving internal communications, scheduling more social events, and turnover in lake property ownership.

Some lakes have more than 80% of shoreline property owners who are association members, while others are less than 50%.

- Many associations have volunteers called loon liaisons who monitor numbers of loons on their lake, nests established, nest successes and survival of young loons to fall. Members typically take great pride in helping with this monitoring effort.
- A couple of lakes have had success in battling aquatic invasive species (AIS), such as Eurasian watermilfoil and curly leaf pondweed. The key is having engaged lake association members who contribute time and effort beyond their annual dues.
- Some associations listed roadside clean-ups as annual accomplishments. These basically involve picking up litter along county highways and other roads that wind along the lake.
- At least one lake had a much-improved participation in the “Restore the Shore” tree-planting program, with eight owners ordering 165 trees in 2022 compared to one tree ordered in 2021.
- One association created a boating guide with the theme of “How to be a good neighbor to others on the lake,” which was distributed to property owners, resorts and a campground, and was reportedly well received.
- Early detection of any new AIS infestations is a challenge, but there is also an accomplishment here as members at many lakes are involved in helping survey lakes by putting out and checking devices, such as zebra mussel settlement samplers. A couple have added spiny waterflea plankton nets, and many volunteers also participate in an organized search for starry stonewort and other invasive plants.

## Challenges

- Increasing boat traffic is noted as a challenge at many lakes. This includes safety concerns related to more boats on the water, increased wave/wake action damaging shorelines, and greater likelihood of AIS transport with more boats coming and going through boat ramps. Determining the best ways to help people learn more about those issues is a work in progress.
- Preventing the spread of AIS is an ongoing challenge.

- While some associations are increasing memberships and volunteer efforts, others are encountering challenges in retaining members and having enough people members willing to volunteer for officer/board positions.
- Maintaining a good lake ecosystem is a challenge. Shoreline restoration projects are drawing interest on some lakes, but not much on others.

For more information, email [hccolamn@gmail.com](mailto:hccolamn@gmail.com) or check out the HC COLA website at [www.hubbardcolamn.org](http://www.hubbardcolamn.org).

**Members of the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations write a monthly column in the Enterprise regarding water-related opportunities in the region.**

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