

New online tool ranks Hubbard County lake health



Contributed / Craig Bihrlé

Hubbard County residents can look up lake quality information on a new online database called the Watershed Health Assessment Framework for Lakes.



Hubbard County is an exceptional area when it comes to healthy lakes.

That's the first impression from Wade Massure, Park Rapids area fisheries supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), following the recent release of a new online lake information database called the Watershed Health Assessment Framework for Lakes (WHAF).

The WHAF basically provides a scorecard for lakes across the state using close to 30 measurement criteria to assess water quality, biology and hydrology.

Researchers from the DNR, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and others collected the data over the past few years. The DNR published the database in mid-January, giving everyone access to a numerical ranking for their favorite lake.

For instance, Hubbard County has nearly 90 lakes, separated into three different watersheds, included in the WHAF. Each gets a score in the three categories, plus an overall composite score. The highest composite score in Hubbard County is 80, achieved by 11th Crow Wing, Lord, Skunk, Wolf and Spearhead lakes.

The lowest composite score is 55, for Duck, First Crow Wing, Portage, Alice, Grace and Paine lakes.

Even those lower scores, however, are not to a point where they present a major concern.

"We really don't have a bad lake," Massure said, adding that compared to some other parts of the state, "we've got a great group of lakes up here."

But that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement, and the measurements provide focused insight into what parts of what lakes could benefit from available programs or practices.

One of the key indicators, Massure said, is the Score the Shore metric included in the hydrology category. To compile this score, observers inspect a lake's shoreline, noting the number of mowed lawns, tree removal or areas that maintain adequate riparian buffer zones.

A low or moderate Score the Shore number, Massure says, "means there is more disturbance along the shoreline than we would like to see ... and that's one thing that we can help out with as well."

Water clarity is another measurement that warrants a close look, as does fish community quality, which is a relative measurement of fish species diversity and health.

As an example, Massure said that if a lake has a lot of bullheads, or stunted fish populations like sunfish or perch, it will have a lower score.

Phosphorous load also warrants a closer look, as phosphorous is a nutrient that's needed for plants and algae to grow, but too much of it accelerates plant growth and spread.

"If you get an overload of phosphorous, that's when your lake turns green (from algae blooms)," Massure said. Fortunately, he added, Hubbard County has not yet had any real reports of bluegreen algae.

Now that the initial assessment is complete, each of the surveyed lakes has a benchmark score that will provide a valuable comparison when the data is updated in future years.

"This is the first iteration of it," Massure said. "It's a great tool for anyone who really wants to get a better understanding of their lake."

The WHAF for Lakes can be accessed by searching for a particular watershed (arcgis.dnr.state.mn.us/ewr/whaflakes), exploring watershed health with the WHAF Map (arcgis.dnr.state.mn.us/ewr/whaf2), or using the DNR's LakeFinder page (mndnr.gov/lakefind).

Links to specific Hubbard County lake information is available on the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Association website at <https://www.hubbardcolamn.org/index.html>.

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