

The following are the reasons why a Hubbard County-based Lake Association may consider joining the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations (HC COLA) in Q&A format – version 5-6-2021:

HC COLA Mission: To protect and enhance the quality of our lakes and rivers, preserve the economic, recreational and natural environmental values of our shorelands and promote the responsible use of our waters and related habitats. HC COLA's mission enhances, promotes and protects the interests of lakeshore property owners, lake associations, local government, the general public and future generations.

Values:

- Collaboration among our members
- Open and honest communications
- Leadership, as an organization and as individuals toward increased citizen awareness and education
- Active, engaged volunteers

1) What were the major motivations you considered in forming a COLA?

i. Information about the formation of Hubbard County COLA (HC COLA)

1. HC COLA was formed in 1988 to give lakes in Hubbard County a stronger voice for lake protection rather than individual lakes acting alone.
2. Common motivations for the formation of lake associations / COLA's are often based on potential threats that are happening on your lake(s).
 - Several such developments were instrumental in the formation of HC COLA with proposed developments on area lakes including Little Sand, Potato and Fishhook Lakes.
 - Also Water Quality Monitoring was an early focus of HC COLA, beginning in 1997 and continues today. In 2022 we will celebrate 25 years in RMB Environmental Lab's Lakes Monitoring Program. In 2020, HC COLA produced water monitoring reports on the past 10 most recent years for 41 Hubbard County lakes; reports [here](#).
 - More recently the issues of AIS introductions and broader watershed opportunities have become more important as well as the need to collect data to inform discussions (e.g. AIS watercraft inspections, aquatic vegetation surveys, zebra mussel monitoring, etc., all by volunteers).
3. Early HC COLA was also very active in the development of the Shoreland Management Ordinance in Hubbard County. We continue to provide input during public hearings on proposed modifications.
4. In more recent years, HC COLA has also been active with State initiatives working on shoreland standards updates. HC COLA was instrumental in state aid for county AIS funding through Senator Rod Skoe and Representative Roger Erickson. A past-president of HC COLA has served on the DNR AIS Task Force.

b. What sold your lake association members to join the COLA?

i. Reasons / benefits that encouraged lakes to join HC COLA included:

1. Stronger, unified voice.
2. Citizen involvement in the development of the Shoreland Management Ordination / regulations.
3. Area lake residents felt strongly about protecting Hubbard County lakes.

4. Water quality / monitoring were key factors in engaging lakes to join HC COLA.
5. Even way back when in the early HC COLA days.....lakes were involved in lake management planning. This continues as lake associations review and update their lake plans.

c. Are there additional advantages you've identified from joining the COLA?

- i. Of course today....the threat of AIS looms largely and HC COLA has been very active in AIS prevention and early detection. HC COLA established and implemented a county-wide protection plan 2012 which has now evolved through partnership first with Hubbard County SWCD. In 2015-16 the program transitioned to Hubbard County Environmental Services with the help of HC COLA as state funds helped provide county-wide support. The program is managed currently by the Hubbard County Environmental Services, Environmental Specialist with AIS focused responsibilities. We created an ["Eyes on the Water"](#) program which began in 2016 to encourage lakeshore owners to be early detectors which has proven to be an effective way of stemming subsequent spread of AIS to other lakes.
- ii. HC COLA is a member of Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates which works at the legislative level. Information is provided to our members for input, action and are encouraged to subscribe too.
- iii. We are also a member of Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations (MN COLA) at the state level and one of our members is serving as a volunteer on the board of MN COLA.
- iv. HC COLA is a member of Conservation Minnesota which helps host an every-other-year Water Summit along with other sponsors.
- v. We stay on top of the actions / efforts of the MN AIS Research Center and promote volunteerism by HC COLA members in the annual Starry Trek in partnership with MAISRC, UMN Extension, and Hubbard County Environmental Services.
- vi. At a local level, HC COLA is a member of the Park Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce and also the Downtown Business Association. We work with these organizations to promote AIS prevention techniques in messaging / maps, etc. For the 2013 Governors Fishing Opener (we still had ice on the lakes ☹️), HC COLA volunteers were involved in the Children's MinnAqua program coordination in the school year and for the Kids Fishing event plus the downtown activities for the community picnic. The 2019 HC COLA Chili Challenge entry "Lakin' It Easy" brought in \$2,130 thanks to 15 lakes who donated that year. 2019 helped bring our total over the 8 years that HC COLA participated to nearly \$20,000 for the Food Shelf!
- vii. HC COLA is a 501(c)(3)
- viii. We also have the Northwest Minnesota Foundation Hubbard County COLA Charitable Fund. This is an endowment fund from which we started providing annual grants from in 2019. The grant rounds now end April 15th and funds provided by June 1 for the project implementation. Read more about the HC COLA Charitable Fund and Grant process [here](#).
- ix. Healthy lakes & rivers partnership - lake management planning
- x. Continued to pursue a stronger voice in lake protection issues.
- xi. Shared opportunities for educational programs with Hubbard County UMN Extension Service, DNR, MPCA, Hubbard County SWCD, plus variety of speakers and topic areas at HC COLA Meetings and local speaking engagements too; for example, AIS Detection Training, Rotary presentations,

Headwaters Center for Lifelong Learning on water quality, Edward Jones Monthly Coffee Hour, Chamber of Commerce “Morning Buzz” Breakfast Mtg, County Fair – Environmental Education Building Booth, Northern Pines Camp – 4H Event, etc.

- xii. HC COLA provides \$1200 annually to Hubbard County SWCD for the Freshwater Festival for educating area 6th graders. A number of HC COLA members volunteer also for the day.
- xiii. The Restore the Shore program through the partnership with the HC SWCD allows HC COLA members to purchase smaller amounts of trees / plants in autumn for May delivery. HC COLA volunteers help HC SWCD package the Hubbard order in turn.
- xiv. HC COLA volunteers called “shoreland advisors” are trained in coaching on shoreline restoration options such as buffers and rain gardens and consult one-on-one with property owners for free.
- xv. HC COLA meetings have educational topics shared monthly. Using Zoom technology for virtual meetings since 2020, we will continue to provide a virtual option; in-person available in 2022.

d. How is the COLA funded?

- i. Membership dues (see the by-laws in “Organization & Strategy on our website [here](#) / scroll down)
 - 1. Dues for HC COLA were determined by lake association membership.
 - a. Initial dues payable to HC COLA from lake associations were based on \$2 per lake association member.
 - b. More recently dues were increased to \$4 per lake association member.
 - c. Dues structure also includes a maximum dues payment of \$600 for larger lakes with greater than 150 members.
 - 2. As part of HC COLA’s strategic plan.....strategic action #8 was identified to “address multiple revenue streams” which included strategies such as:
 - a. Seeking outside grants to leverage dollars for HC COLA programs
 - b. External donations to HC COLA 501(c)(3)
 - c. External donations to Northwest Minnesota Foundation – HC COLA Charitable Fund

e. Membership:

- i. **How many lake associations are part of your COLA? (Both as a number as well as a percentage of available lake associations).**
 - 1. HC COLA currently has 30 lake associations with 42 lakes who have approximately 2500 individual members.
 - 2. We probably have 2 to 3 other lake associations that are not HC COLA members. We have one lake in the northern part of the county that is part of BCLARA (Beltrami County) (<http://bclara.angelfire.com/index.html>) 1 LA that is a member of both BCLARA & HC COLA.
 - 3. Our percentage ratio of eligible lake association is very high so overall, we are doing quite well regarding membership.
 - 4. We have a number of lakes that do not have a formal lake association. We offer a grant to a new county lake association once the organization has proper credentials established both with the State of MN and federally. It is not a requirement to join HC COLA for the grant.

ii. Does membership impact the ability for a lake association to act autonomously?

1. No.....we have many lakes with strong associations, engaged leaders and active members that are good stewards for their lakes. Numerous lakes have been involved in the Healthy Lakes & Rivers Partnership and have Lake Management Plans (17 lakes with LMP's). Many of these lakes are great role models for our less active lakes.
2. Through some of our excellent lake associations, HC COLA is fortunate to have some very passionate, dedicated lake leaders that step up to volunteer for HC COLA.
3. Of course, we have some lakes that are less active and they are very challenging to engage.

f. How often do you meet? Are there other ways you connect besides meeting in person?

- i. HC COLA generally meets 9 months a year; February - October
- ii. Our executive committee is moving toward quarterly meetings with a focus on strategic objectives.
- iii. As determined in our bylaws:
 1. Our executive committee can hold electronic conference meetings if needed.
 2. We can take action without meeting.
- iv. Bylaws – HC COLA bylaws were updated in 2011 with assistance from a retired attorney who served then on our executive committee.

g. What is your organizational structure?

- i. Our organizational structure is under Organization & Strategy on our website [here](#) – just scroll down
- ii. Our executive committee is comprised of our officers (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and past president) and at least 3 members of HC COLA Lake Associations approved by the Board of Directors.
- iii. Our HC COLA Board is comprised of an HC COLA Representative from each lake association and the President, the Vice President, the Secretary, the Treasurer and the immediate Past President of HC COLA. An HC COLA Rep may have an Alternate also. Lake Association Presidents are encouraged to attend HC COLA meetings also. Each lake association has 1 vote on HC COLA board action items.
- iv. Our committees include: Finance, Charitable Fund Advisory, Membership, Communications, Planning, Government Liaison, Restore the Shore Program, Education Program, Lake Monitoring Program, and Aquatic Invasive Species Operating Team and also may include sub-committees formed for a particular need from time to time.

h. What is your leadership structure? How much time do they dedicate to the COLA?

- i. Leadership/ Executive Committee (as noted above and on our strategy map) and as noted in bylaws
- ii. Officers (see above) and in bylaws.
- iii. Volunteer time – Our leaders are very active and do what's necessary to accomplish our goals.

i. How does the COLA make decisions? If by vote, who has a vote?

- i. Each lake association has one vote. If lake association is made up of multiple lakes, they can have a representative for each lake. However, they still only have one vote – per bylaws on our website.

- ii. The member votes are made by the HC COLA Rep / Alternate Rep or the Lake Association President in absence of the Rep. A roll call vote is taken for contentious issues.
- iii. Leadership / Executive committee may act on behalf of the HC COLA Board. Refer to bylaws for specifics.

j. How does the COLA resolve disputes and reach consensus?

- i. The HC COLA Board may close meetings to the public for contentious issues.
- ii. Announce plan to close meeting to public in advance.
- iii. Closed meetings only for HC COLA Reps, leadership / executive members.
- iv. Contentious votes are taken by roll call.
- v. We have very few disputes / or contentious issues but they do happen.

2) History

a. What consistently has worked for your COLA? What hasn't?

i. What's worked

- 1. Meeting logistics
 - a. Agenda format, written committee reports – placed on website
 - b. Programs / speakers – [presentations](#) available on our website for reference
 - c. Registration for lakes in attendance
 - d. Social time virtually following the meeting
- 2. Water quality engagement
 - a. Economics & water quality / connection between property value and water quality
 - i. Study on water-influenced property values / revenue in Hubbard County.
 - b. Lake assessment / water monitoring.
- 3. AIS – very effective program
- 4. Healthy lakes & rivers partnership – 17 lakes participating.
- 5. Development of Hubbard COLA's story
 - a. Worked with Action Media (Michael Goldberg) to enhance our communication network and public image.
 - i. Messaging / personalize HC COLA
 - b. Protect the value of our property by protecting lakes / water quality.
 - c. Protecting lakes is a shared interest because lakes belong to everyone.
 - d. HC COLA is pursuing the public interest in protecting our lakes.
 - e. Big picture / HC COLA's mission (our mission aligns with Hubbard County Shoreland Management Ordinance....purpose)
 - f. Shoreland management ordinance updates.
- 6. Volunteers / membership
 - a. Success & challenge
- 7. Leadership – effective but challenging
- 8. Relationship with county leadership / decision makers (success and challenge)
 - a. Effective relationship with townships

Lake Emma Township (a model for other townships)

The Lake Emma Township Healthy Lakes Partnership Grant Program has served as an impetus for other townships to provide financial assistance for AIS prevention on Hubbard County lakes.

9. Engaged committees
10. Work with shoreland management ordinance
11. Partnership with Hubbard County water plan and One Watershed One Plan development
12. HC COLA participation in Hubbard County Food Shelf Chili Challenge for eight years.
13. HC COLA participation in Action Park Rapids and Volunteer Heartland for a few years.
14. HC COLA sports sale for a few years.

ii. What has been challenging?

1. Public image
2. Stainable funding for AIS
3. Developing HC COLA new leaders
4. Lake management planning updates - the capstone found that the original LMP's were gathering dust in many cases and weren't being utilized by many LA's – so we re-initiated the LMP conversation with training on the value of LMP and how to update in 2016
5. Recruiting additional Lake Associations to join in our HC COLA.
6. Communication with lake residents

b. What are your HC COLA successes?

i. Success

1. Our people (passion, dedication, commitment)
 - a. Our leaders are champions for our lakes in Hubbard County. They are willing to “give” what it takes to get things done. To emphasize our vision.....”HC COLA is the leader in protecting Hubbard County lakes and rivers”.
2. AIS – Hubbard County may have less AIS like Zebra Mussels, Eurasian Watermilfoil, Starry Stonewort than some counties with the exception of Curly Leaf Pondweed & Faucet Snails.
3. Water quality engagement
 - a. Water quality monitoring
 - b. Lake protection
 - c. Habitat / shoreline protection
4. Partnership with Indiana University Capstone Studies:
 - a. Increasing lake association sustainability – a key finding was a better focus on engaging a broader range of people at both the cola and LA level. Methods to accomplish included more emphasis on the [HC COLA website](#), engagement of more people through social media, etc. Also, streamlining the organizational structure to focus on the most important things to be accomplished, cannot be all things to all people.

- b. Enhancing HC COLA lake monitoring program – Capstone found that HC COLA’s program was definitely a top-tier program in MN! Improved focus on consistency across all LA’s was 2016 HC COLA theme. Clearly define the minimum expectation from each LA. Communications via surveys of what everyone is doing and sharing the results is important. Strengthen relationships with cooperating state agencies and private labs.
- 5. Government liaison – helps impact political action (local & state level) within the 501(c)(3) guidelines
 - HC COLA instrumental in state aid for county AIS funding through Senator Rod Skoe and Representative Roger Erickson
- 6. Shoreland management ordinance reform / updates
- 7. Healthy Lakes and Rivers Partnerships
 - a. Lake management planning - has helped with major accomplishments over the years. Requires focused volunteer energy.
- 8. Ken Grob – MN Waters Volunteer of the Year & served on the Governor’s AIS Task Force
- 9. Annual initiatives:
 - a. Children’s freshwater festival for 6th graders
 - b. Restore-the-Shore program / Shoreland Advisors
 - c. Eyes on the Water survey – Early Detection

ii. **Challenges?**

- 1. Leadership succession plan
- 2. Broader funding sources for AIS
- 3. Challenges with youth programs/engagement –Fishing and lake protection can go hand in hand.
- 4. Stronger engagement with AIS coordinators / AIS monitoring teams for each lake.
- 5. Communication with lake residents

3) Purpose and Work

a. How do you leverage your combined power (purchasing/political/influence/etc.)?

- i. Positive relationship with local government including townships, county commission, board of adjustment / planning commission, soil and water conservation district, local / state agencies such as dnr, mpca, etc.
- ii. We have developed a much closer relationship with the County leaders (County Board and Environmental Services) and this has led to much stronger support by the County on lake protection issues.
- iii. Strong local partnerships with state agencies. (dnr)
- iv. Active participation with environmental / conservation groups like Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates, MN COLA, etc.
- v. Active participation with local organizations such as Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association, ACTION Park Rapids, Volunteer Heartland, etc.

- vi. Good relationship with local media; a HC COLA column was implemented beginning in 2017.
- vii. HC COLA water samples are processed by RMB Labs on one weekend per month May – Sept and cooler shuttle service to lab is provided by HC COLA volunteers

b. Do you have a COLA management plan or action plan? How is it structured? How did you create it? How often do you update it? What are your success measurements?

- i. We have our strategic management plan – see our website – [Organization & Structure](#) section
 - 1. Strategy map – one page dash board / road map / with mission / visions / values and strategic actions.
 - 2. HC COLA committees with strategy statements and strategic actions.
 - 3. We created our strategic plan in 2010 with volunteers (approx. 50+ **participants**) from our area lakes, local organizations, agencies, etc. Attending a full day work session. We were assisted by a professional strategic planner that lived on one of our area lakes. His work was pro-bono. We review it periodically and update it as needed.
 - 4. How do we measure success: we generally try to identify our accomplishments on an annual basis? HC COLA has been a highly successful organization with numerous accomplishments over the years. See the committee reports, for example from 2020 [here](#).

c. What are the projects you are working on – Goals and Priorities?

[These are the accomplishments for 2020 and Goals for 2021](#)

You can check out our Communications → Committee Reports for this type of information by Year at www.hubbardcolamn.org