

Learning from past ‘lake’ mistakes

It’s a benefit to all when a person can admit to mistakes and help prevent others from making the same ones. When Curtiss Hunt and his wife, Janet, moved to their lake home full time in 2015, he said they “promptly broke nearly every water quality rule in the book.”

“We were unaware that 33% of all lakes in Minnesota are unswimmable, unfishable, and unrecoverable and we set out in our ignorance to increase that percentage,” said Hunt in a 2018 confession for The Sentinel, a newsletter of the Long Lake Association in Beltrami County. Hunt, who is president of the Long Lake Association, and fellow members now work diligently to protect Long Lake which is located on Hwy. 20 northeast of Bemidji. They also share what they have learned with other lake associations and lakeshore owners.



Zachrie Gutknecht, Clean Water Specialist, Beltrami County Soil & Water Conservation District, explains to Long Lake residents that they live beside a ligotrophic lake with a forested watershed which helps to keep it clean and clear.

What Hunt outlined in his “confession” were: building a campfire on the shore, lake hopping, performing damaging watercraft maneuvers, disturbing wildlife, fertilizing with phosphorus, trespassing, salting the

water, bugging boat launch owners, and having inadequate contact with newcomers to the lake.

Campfires on the shore produce wood ash full of phosphate that can flush into the water. A lake with high phosphate disturbs the natural “immune” system and makes the lake more vulnerable to an attack of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Family practices of cruising to other lakes and relaunching into Long Lake during the same season also holds the potential of spreading AIS. Water recreation activities may produce waves that can damage beaches and disturb waterfowl nesting sites. Irresponsible jet skiers and boaters could annoy nesting birds and cause them to abandon their nests. While Minnesotans have unrestricted access to surface water, they must respect private shores. Salt from roadways and water softeners finds its way into the lakes, sinking to the bottom and staying there affecting aquatic life.



An example of Long Lake's clear water, explained by Zachrie Gutknecht, Beltrami County Soil & Water Conservation District.

Long Lake has no public access which makes it just a little easier to follow the Long Lake Pledge: “To keep our lake free of invasive species, I pledge to never put anything in Long Lake that has been in another body of water since the last deep freeze.” The association has developed

a system working with certain property owners to share access to their ramps under specific conditions. “The association also creates an annual list of boat trailer owners willing to lend their equipment,” said Hunt. “This keeps AIS from sneaking in through commercial vendors.”

While three lakes in Beltrami County have found zebra mussels, the big concern now is starry stonewort, according to Bruce Anspach, AIS lakes technician with Beltrami County Environmental Services. Anspach said six county lakes are infested with starry stonewort. Starry stonewort is a fast-growing grass-like form of algae not native to North America. It can be distinguished from other grass-like algae by the presence of star-shaped bulbils. It can interfere with recreational and other uses of lakes because it can produce dense mats at the water’s surface. It is mostly spread by the use of water-related equipment (boats, trailers, lifts, etc.) that was not properly cleaned.



Long Lake residents not only care about their lake, but they participate in the “Adopt-A-Highway” program, such as in spring 2019. An average of 10 volunteers gather eight bags of trash twice per year.

“This one stresses me out,” admitted Anspach, who focuses much of his work on educating the public about AIS. By keeping track of property transfers, he is able to send letters informing new owners about AIS and

the state laws regarding installation and removal of docks and lifts. Beltrami County currently has only one decontamination unit to flush boats, trailers and water equipment (located behind Target in Bemidji). Anspach's goal right now is to find a partner to provide a good location for a hot water station.

"We want people to flush out equipment with hot water," Anspach said. "If they find nothing, good; if they do, they need to use the decontamination unit." "It is important to be persistent but always be humble when educating or attempting to change existing practices ... that are harmful to the health of our lake," noted Hunt. "Awareness can change behavior. The Long Lake Association continually brings AIS to the forefront to new and existing residents. Simple put, we don't know what we don't know. Getting residents to buy into the 'one boat, one lake' philosophy is key." "Overall, people are getting a lot better at best management practices," said Anspach.



An autumn view of the small unnamed island that graces Long Lake.

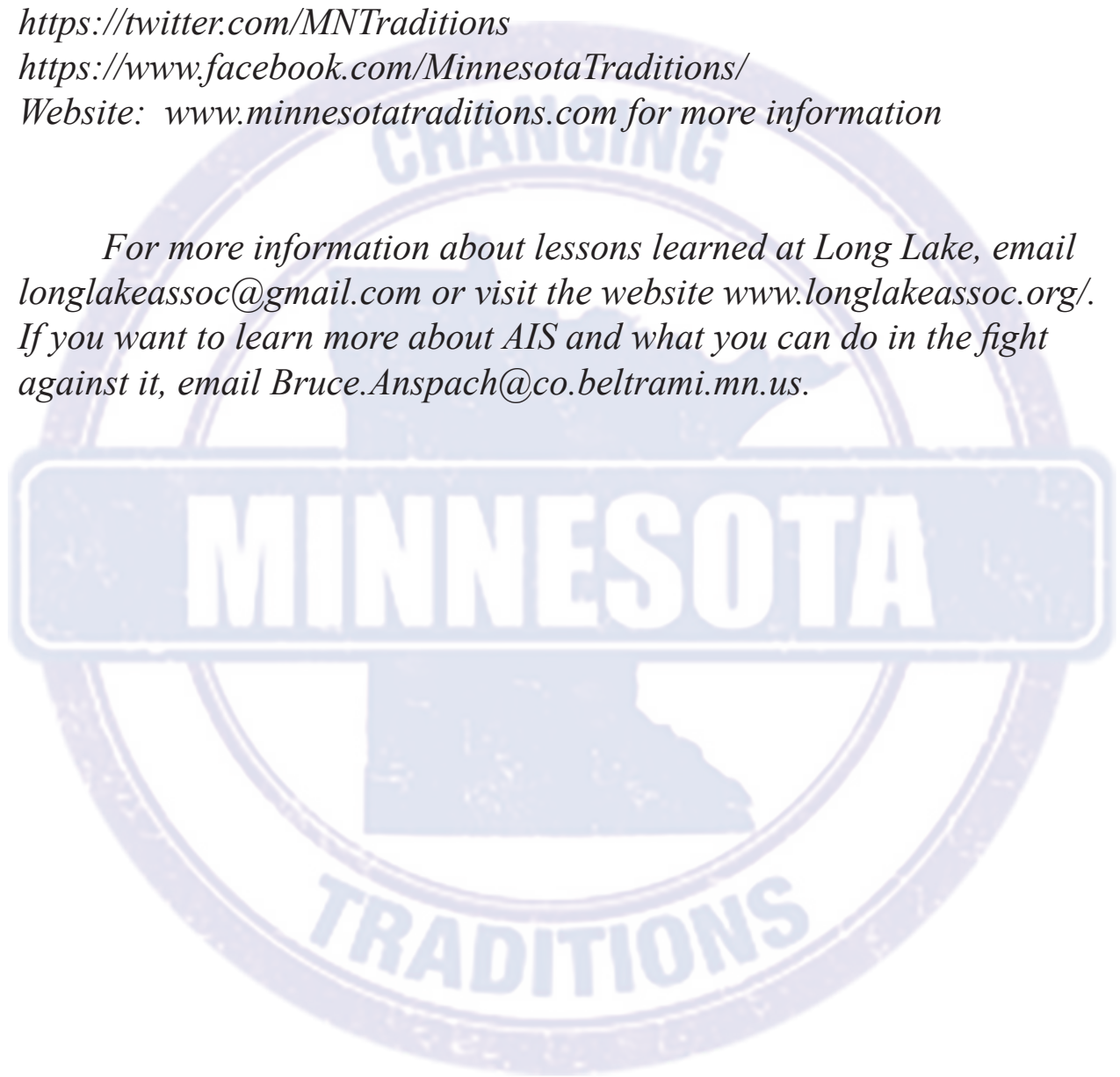
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For more information about lessons learned at Long Lake, email longlakeassoc@gmail.com or visit the website www.longlakeassoc.org/. If you want to learn more about AIS and what you can do in the fight against it, email Bruce.Ansbach@co.beltrami.mn.us.



PROTECTING THE FIRST 400 MILES