

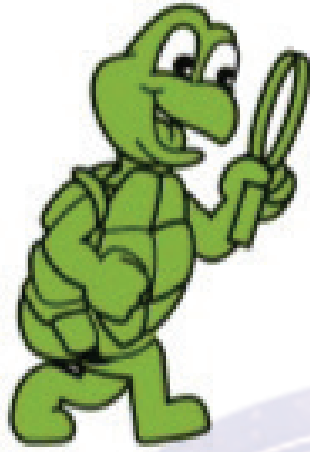
Itasca County Resident Strives To Engage Neighbors With A Unique Approach

Many of the lakeshore residents on Itasca County's 2,100-acre Turtle Lake have been participating in an AIS monitoring program this summer that's not only good for the lake, it's fun and rewarding as well.

Conceived by lakeside homeowners Cecilia "Cec" Riedman and her husband Steve Long, the "Eyes on the Lake" program encourages residents to take some time once a week to walk their docks and shorelines and look for anything new and interesting growing in or near the water. That includes, but isn't limited to, aquatic invasive species. Photos sent to Riedman, along with pertinent details about the find, are published in her Our Lake, Our Legacy newsletter and weekly email for all to see, learn from and enjoy.



Cecilia "Cec" Riedman and her husband Steve Long on one their weekly walks along shoreline.



EYES ON THE LAKE

”One person involved in the program, with three young kids, recently sent a picture of a monarch caterpillar on a swamp milkweed plant along with the simple caption; ‘Look what we found on our lakeshore,’” said Riedman. “That’s something we can share, and hopefully get other folks to go look for swamp milkweed or monarchs on their property.”

Sharing a photo of a butterfly larvae isn’t exactly AIS focused, but it’s not supposed to be. “Our aim is to get people engaged,” Riedman explained, “engaged with the program, engaged with the lake, engaged with each other.”

Riedman has a biology degree, specializing in freshwater ecology, from the University of North Dakota, but followed another path soon after graduation. She and her husband settled in at Turtle Lake in 2013 after she retired from the Coca-Cola company where for much of her 33-year career there, she was a regional quality-assurance specialist and technical rep for all the bottlers in her area. A position that no doubt helped hone her skills in motivating people.

She got involved in AIS detection, she says, “When one of our neighbors who was really involved in water quality issues started getting me into things on Turtle Lake. Steve and I became AIS monitors in 2017, but it was on an individual level. Then when zebra mussels were discovered in an adjoining lake we knew it was time to get serious—and that we couldn’t do it alone.

“We had to come up with ways to get people engaged in this,” she continued. “The first was just some educational things and people immediately started to grab on to it. Then we started using the simple little zebra mussel traps—simply a piece of PVC pipe you put in the lake and check it once a week. A lot of people jumped on that, too.”

Now, in its debut season, roughly a quarter of the lakeside residents are signed up for and participate in the Eyes on the Lake program, and the

number continues to grow as word spreads through the newsletter and emails, and from mouth-to-mouth.

The program's larger goal, of course, is to have as many people as possible on the lookout for invasive species—especially zebra mussels, and a more recent threat, starry stonewort. “Turtle lake has more than 20 miles of shoreline, and there's no way we can monitor it all every summer. Our thought was that, if we can teach people enough about invasive species that could be in the lake, or at least enough to send a picture if they're not sure about the identity, we might ID something in the early stage that wouldn't be able to otherwise.”



At our volunteer event “Starry Trek”. This captures the curiosity we try to inspire in others.

Newsletters and emails are filled with AIS identification tips and other information. But before social distancing became the norm, there was hands-on training, too. “For example, the Minnesota AIS Research Center holds an annual program called Starry Trek, encouraging people to look for starry stonewort,” she explained. “Instead of simply handing out materials to volunteers, we did a lot of work up front explaining exactly what they should look for. Then, afterward we got

together to dig into the samples people collected—compare them to the AIS Identification Guide. It was all greatly educational, but very casual. And people had fun.

“We use other incentives, too,” she added, “like some sort of reward for being a good watcher—maybe a copy of the Research Center’s AIS Guide. You can see it online, but a hard copy is a prized possession around here.”

On other occasions people might receive a t-shirt emblazoned with the Eyes on the Lake logo—a turtle caricature holding a magnifying glass—or some other small gift. “It’s all in good fun, and people enjoy it.

What started out as a personal effort by people with a knowledge of biology and a desire to protect a precious resource has evolved into something bigger. Riedman and her friends now work in cooperation with the Turtle Lake Association as well as the AIS Research Center’s Lake Ambassador program, which guides boaters in the proper techniques for inspecting watercraft at public landings.

“Cec is an amazing person, and a great motivator,” said Richard Rezanka, DNR Northeast Region AIS Specialist. “She thinks out-of-the-box and has done a wonderful job of getting a lot of people involved in protecting Turtle Lake.”

This information is produced and distributed by the Mississippi Headwaters Board in an effort to motivate everyone to protect our natural resources. A recreation based lifestyle is part of our MN Traditions and is only preserved when we protect our aquatic resources from invaders such as zebra mussels and Eurasian milfoil. To support Minnesota Traditions join us on social media here

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PROTECTING THE FIRST 400 MILES