

## Crow Wing County Takes Aim At Starry Stonewort

Members of a dozen lake associations in Crow Wing County recently doubled down in their efforts to keep watch for invasive starry stonewort in county waters, according to Environmental Services Coordinator Nicole Erickson.

The county boasts 400 lakes, she says, none of which are currently infested with the bushy, bright-green macro-algae. “But we’re considered a high-risk area because it’s been found in counties all around us, and because we’re a popular destination among fishermen and pleasure boaters,” she explained.

Because early detection of starry stonewort is vital to a successful management program, the U of M’s Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) sponsors the annual “Starry Trek.” During the statewide event volunteers are trained in plant collection and identification techniques and sent out to monitor selected public landings. You can volunteer to help these early detection efforts every year in August.



Erickson’s pilot program expands on the Starry Trek framework. “We decided to switch it up,” she said. “Instead of targeting individual volunteers, we wanted to get lake associations involved and offer a monetary incentive each association can use as for AIS prevention and protection,” she explained.



The new program allows lake associations to receive \$200 for each public boat access they monitor through the prime sampling months of July, August and September, she explained. Because areas near public boat ramps are typically where invasive species gain a foothold in a water body, sampling these areas is a requirement. Monitors will also be encouraged to take samples near private boat ramps, such as near resort accesses, as well as other suggested sites.



*Members of various Crow Wing County lake associations receive hands-on training in aquatic plant identification as part of the push to keep starry stonewort from gaining a foothold in local waters.*

The incentives, provided through county AIS funds, she added, could be used to defray the cost of sampling and sampling equipment, or be put toward community outreach and AIS education. Whatever suits the association's needs to protect our lakes.

During a pre-program training session, members of 12 Crow Wing County lake associations learned proper sampling protocols and how to recognize starry stonewort as well as native plants and other invasive species. "We identified a lead sampler from each association who will be in charge of monthly monitoring of required and suggested sites on their lake in throughout the entire sampling season."

Each month the associations will send a report to Erickson, who in turn will work with the DNR to confirm the identity of any suspected infestation and formulate a management/eradication plan.

“Our primary goal with this program is to stay a step ahead of starry stonewort in Crow Wing County,” Erickson concluded, “and I have high hopes for its continued success. Many lake associations are very passionate about protecting our waters, and if we can get people involved each year—that gets more eyes on the water, which is always better.”

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