

Partnerships Streamline Paths To Success In Sherburne County

In 2017 the Sherburne County Coalition of Lake Associations (SC COLA) was formed, and in the short time since has become an information conduit, recruiting partner and a source of leverage for its member associations, as well as a consistent voice in outreach and education and in partnerships with outside agencies.

“The goal was to create efficiencies,” said Patrick Plant, SC COLA Chair, “efficiencies in everything from working together to consolidate contracts and services, to community outreach and education—which is primarily focused on AIS prevention these days—to simply sharing best practices—letting others know about something that worked well in a certain situation.”



Collaborative Partnership: The Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District and Coalition of Lake Associations also co-host and promote the county’s annual Starry Trek event, designed to teach people how to identify starry stonewort.

Nine lake associations, representing 13 bodies of water in Sherburne County, make up the SC COLA, according to Plant, whose background in group development was helpful in unifying all parties. “We distributed a questionnaire to other existing lake associations and did



SC COLA Chair Patrick Plant speaks at the organization's first annual meeting.

live interviews,” he explained. “We basically asked each about things they thought worked well for their members—and what maybe didn’t work so well. We wanted to establish a benchmark from which to start.”

Dan Cibulka, Sr. Water Resource Specialist with the Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District(SWCD), was part of the original exploratory team. “One of the things that also stuck out in my mind is that some of the people who would be active in the COLA are already active within their own lake association. So, even though a COLA might be a great idea, it’s all voluntary, so how much can we expect them to give additionally towards the COLA. It’s something that any group who is thinking about establishing a COLA should consider in the planning process.”

Working with Cibulka, Plant and representatives of other SC COLA lake associations developed mission and vision statements that all prospective member associations could support.

“Then we developed the primary strategies we use to achieve that mission and vision,” Plant added.

Along with sharing valuable experience and ideas, the member associations have collaborated on a number of projects focused on the practical aspects



Dan Cibulka and Andi Bumgarner, with the Sherburne Soil and Water of lake management. Among other efforts, they cooperatively built and distributed rake kits used to survey aquatic plants, marshaled volunteers for zebra mussel veliger monitoring and held a training session for AIS Watercraft Inspectors jointly sponsored by the SWCD and Big Lake Community Lake Association.

“The SWCD has been an important part of all these programs, in fact,” Plant added. “It paid 75% of the materials cost for the rake kits and provided the tow nets for veliger monitoring.”

Going forward, the SC COLA has additional plans in the works. “Right now we’re focusing on building upon our Business Sponsor Campaign,” said Plant. Adding that the extra clout that working collectively provides makes it a little easier to attract sponsorship and advertising dollars that can be used to achieve the association’s goals.

The organization also recently established an AIS Early Detection Rapid Response Task Force. “Its goal is to develop a universal action plan, as well as pursue agreements on the roles and responsibilities for local government and lake associations so we’ll all be better prepared when any new AIS challenge occurs.”



The SC COLA also maintains close ties with local law enforcement. Here Sheriff's Deputy Cole Petroske speaks to the group.

John Heywood, an English poet and playwright in the 1500s, wrote: "Many hands make light work" in reference to how shared toil lightens each individual's burden. In the case of the Sherburne County Coalition of Lake Associations, it also increases the benefits reaped by each of its member organizations.

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