

The Sullivan Lake Improvement District Success Story

The Sullivan Lake Improvement District's (SLID) efforts to control curlyleaf pondweed tells two success stories from which others can learn. The first is how a well-planned, long-term project on this northeast Morrison County Lake has been able to keep the invasive species at bay. The second is how a reliable stream of resources for the district has made it possible.

“A proposal to establish a Lake Improvement District (LID) was made to the county in 2005,” said SLID Chairman Kurt Kocur, “as a response to the lake’s growing problem with pondweed.”

SLID contracted to have the vegetation surveyed in the 1,200-acre lake, then began treating the hotspots, he explained. Over the years, with periodic surveys and annual treatments, the population of curlyleaf pondweed has shrunk considerably.



Curlyleaf pondweed has diminished by 41 percent since the Lake Sullivan Improvement District began contracting with PLM Land and Lake Management Corp. to make annual herbicide treatments.

“In the beginning we were treating 92 acres of pondweed, and when I became chairman five years ago it was down to 52 acres; today we’re dealing with a little more than 38 acres in three areas of the lake.” Native plants have repopulated several spots where repeated herbicides treatments eradicated the invasive weed, he further explained.

Lake Improvement District

Among the chief reasons for the Lake Sullivan program's sustainability and success is that it's been managed by a Lake Improvement District, a local unit of government that can draw upon resources that aren't available to private organizations or associations.

“What it boils down to is money, quite honestly,” said Kathleen Metzker, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Land Use Hydrologist and LID Administrator. “Each district is financed by a fee or levy that the county or city collects from every resident within the boundary of the district. LIDs are also eligible for other resources, such as different types of grants and cross-sharing partnerships with other government entities.”

One such revenue source the Sullivan LID draws upon, for example, are funds donated through charitable gambling, added Kocur.

“A LID can be established when a lake has a problem,” Metzker went on, “or when people reasonably foresee that it may develop some type of problem in the future, and they want to take steps to address it.”

There are 56 active LIDs in Minnesota today, according to the hydrologist, each one established by resolution of a county board or city council, and with an appointed board or committee as well as a set of bylaws that outline the district's boundary and the scope of its authority.

Bylaws created for a prospective LID set the parameters under which it can operate. Possible programs and projects are listed in Minnesota statute and rule, and include the right to implement water monitoring programs, undertake research projects, conduct programs of water improvement and conservation, regulate water surface use, maintain public beaches, docks and other public facilities, and serve as the local sponsor/recipient for state and federal projects or grants.

The provisions, however, are that a LID can only be proposed for a lake with public access, and that the LID must operate in compliance with DNR and other agency and local permits and policies required for specific lake management projects.

While a county board or city council can resolve to establish a LID on its own, most districts are formed as the result of a public petition—which the board or council can grant or deny after a public hearing process. If approved, a LID operates under the umbrella of the county or city parent government.

The DNR acts in an advisory capacity only, according to Metzker. “Our formal role is to review boundaries that are being proposed for the LID and comment on whether those boundaries are adequate to address whatever problems the district is being created to address,” she explained, “and we offer as much technical advice and expertise as we can to help them succeed.”

While the advantages and benefits of managing a lake through a LID are real, the decision to create one should be deliberate. “It’s important to remember that in creating a LID you’re establishing a unit of government, and that shouldn’t be taken lightly,” Metzker advised. “People must first understand what a LID is, and what its responsibilities entail. They should also have a firm grasp on the problems their lake is facing.”

Talking with other people who have already gone through the process is also a good idea as they can offer advice and insight gained from real-life experiences. “Finally,” she concluded, “make sure you have a good relationship with your county or city government because you’ll be working with them for the rest of existence.”

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