

LAKE MINNIE BELLE MESSENGER

A Newsletter from the Lake Minnie Belle Improvement Association

Winter 2020

Zebra Mussels

As you may have heard, Zebra Mussels have been discovered in Lake Minnie Belle. We want to provide you with as much information as possible, in a timely and factual manner.

The Lake Minnie Belle Improvement Association Board of Directors are disappointed and understand this is terrible news to everyone that enjoys the use of the lake. As a Lake Association, we have been very proactive in the prevention of Aquatic Invasive Species. Minnie Belle has an AIS action plan, and will be following it, and work with the Meeker County AIS Coordinator to put plans in place to combat the Zebra Mussel population. We plan to do everything possible to limit the spread.

There is a lot of research being done at the state level to find solutions to combat Zebra Mussels, and Mother Nature will certainly be involved!

Some of the action items taken so far:

The Meeker County AIS Coordinator is planning a survey to determine the extent of the population. Hopefully by mid-October we will know if a survey can be completed this year.

The survey will drive obtaining a permit to treat the lake. We will strive for treatment yet this year. If treatment is not feasible this year, the survey will help prepare for 2021 budgeting, permitting and planning to treat. This also includes 2021 plans for the decontamination station that already is in use at other area lakes.

Meeker County AIS has a direct response fund to help with the treatment process, which will be available to Lake Minnie Belle.

The treatments are experimental, so no guarantee on effectiveness, but again as a Lake Association we will explore what is available and safe for the lake.

This is not the time to stop our efforts to prevent AIS from entering or leaving Lake Minnie Belle. We plan to continue inspections at the main DNR landing, and as a reminder Clean, Drain and Dry your watercraft. Also lakeshore owners should inspect their docks and lifts as they take them out for the season, and report any potential zebra mussels to your Lake Association Board of Directors.

Optimistically, we did catch the infestation in the early stages. Your lake association has donated many volunteer hours and resources trying to prevent the spread of AIS in our lake and other lakes. As far as we know, there is no Starry Stonewort in Lake Minnie Belle. The lake has been surveyed, and no Starry Stonewort has been found.

We do not know how the Zebra Mussels will specifically affect Lake Minnie Belle, but as we learn more in the coming months we will keep you informed.

Thank you,
Lake Minnie Belle Board of Directors

2020 Annual Meeting Recap

The LMBIA annual meeting was held on Saturday, July 18th at 10:00 am at Beckville Church picnic grounds. This was a change of venue due to the COVID pandemic and the need for social distancing. We had a nice turnout with 40 members present. The weather also cooperated nicely for us this year.

Housekeeping items of the secretary and treasure report were reviewed and approved. We then turned our attention to the election of board members. 2 current board members whose terms were up elected not to run again. We would like to thank Robert Hantge and Kristi Ties for their years of service to the lake board. It is much appreciated. 2 current board members elected to run again for another 3 year term, Don Kotila and Karen Peterson. We had one name on the ballot, Rob Krueger. We still have one open board position available. A unanimous ballot was cast for the slate of candidates and all were elected to the board. If anyone has an interest in being on the lake board, please let any board member know.

We do meet on the 4th Tuesday of every month and we would welcome all with an interest in serving.

The topics of discussion were then addressed. Don Kotila gave a recap of the zebra mussel trap project as well as the Starry Stonewort dive and trek events. He also recapped the weed treatments that have been done on the lake this year. We treated 2.7 acres of curly pond leaf and 6 acres of Eurasian milfoil. We will continue to monitor these invasive species and treat them as allowed by the DNR.

Julene Schatz gave an update of the DNR landing boat inspections done to date. Inspections at the landing started on May 8th, opening fishing and will continue daily until Labor Day. We have grant money to cover part of the week, but the lake association is covering the cost of the remainder of the days. 1,679 boats have been inspected with 529 seen during the week and

1,168 on the weekends. Look for the updated report for the whole summer here in the newsletter as a separate article.

Stan Kittleson gave us a recap of the water quality report and Limno-pro lake study of plant life. We currently have 17 native species of plants growing in the lake. These can not be treated. The full Limno-pro report is on the website if you would like to read the full report.

Julene gave an update of the finished MBO 1 project and the subsequent problem with the Sucker Creek culvert. These seem to be in good working order at this time and hopefully will remain so for many years into the future.

Karen Peterson discussed the MBO 9 project that she and the board will be working on for the next large project. This involves erosion issues on the south side of the lake. This will involve coming to some type of agreement with the land owner and the CRP program. She is working on a grant to help with the funding. This is an ongoing project for the board.

The agenda items were all covered, so we then addressed questions from the members in attendance. Discussion was held in reference to the east and west township landings. Kristi Ties had gone to the Township board with statistics of how much traffic was flowing through these landings. It was a township board decision to continue with the lock boxes at these 2 sites and encourage everyone to use the DNR landing to prevent the spread of AIS into the lake. We had a concern from a lake resident about an intersection that was becoming difficult to see due to large tree branches. He was directed to the Township board chair to address this problem.

The full minutes will be available on the website for those wishing to see the full recap. The board thanks those members who took the time to come to the meeting. We appreciate your support and look forward to working on your behalf for the goals of the lake board.

DNR Update

by Julene Schatz

Many of you may have noticed that the DNR has been busy this summer on our lake. I reached out to Scott Mackenthun from our governing office to address a few issues that affect our lake. Many of you have noticed that the DNR fishing pier is no longer on the lake. This is what Scott had to report regarding this project:

- **Fishing pier.** The pier had exceeded its end of life expectancy. It had been positioned on the north shore of the lake adjacent to the Aquatic Management Area. Our Fisheries office was doing our best to maintain this recreational opportunity by moving it into place in the spring and leaving it overwinter in the northwest lagoon, a departure from the usual model of Parks and Trails division caretaking access and shore fishing infrastructure. As the COVID19 pandemic hit in spring, our work was greatly curtailed to only approved field staff and approved activities, limiting us to tasks that could follow social distancing guidelines. After some time passed, we finally got authorization to move the pier and the decision was made to remove it from the lake. The Aquatic Management Area is a wonderful resource with both a small chunk of prairie and some wooded riparian shoreline. There is a trail that leads down to the water's edge, however as our fisheries staff size decreases, maintaining a trail and bridges is not something we can continue. The AMA location is not Americans with Disability Act accessible, so a larger review of where a replacement pier might go should be considered. It's too early to say whether or not there will be a pier replacement, but if there is it won't be at the AMA location. Bridge infrastructure on the AMA will weaken and create a safety hazard, as has already occurred at Dunn's Lake AMA. For this reason, the bridges are likely to be removed at some point in the future. The Minnie-Belle Aquatic Management Area is likely to be similar to Wildlife Management Areas, where dispersed recreation is recommended. Aquatic Management Areas, by statute (84A.05subd14) must protect valuable habitat or provide angler habitat, and the Minnie-Belle AMA does both, although anglers are going to have to be more independent in accessing the lake in the future without aid of a mowed trail.

There has been netting activity going on around the lake at various times this summer. When asked about this Scott replied as follows:

- **Standard survey for Minnie-Belle.** Survey frequency has bumped up from every 5 years to every 4 as Minnie-Belle is one of our highest priority fisheries. Survey was usually situated in June, but after some internal review about the nature of representative sampling and seasonality, a move to later in the summer was warranted. This year with COVID social distancing rules in place, we did not lift trap nets as they required our staff to lift the metal-framed nets in unison boatside. Instead, only gillnets were set and retrieved. Walleye catch looked good, as did the northern pike. We'll have better comparisons to make within the lake as we build up more data over time.
- **Walleye genetics.** While still early in the process, we are sending some Minnie-Belle fish into our geneticist for strain analysis. Minnie-Belle gets stocked with walleye fingerlings and has for some time, but there has always been a small amount of natural reproduction. Our local aim is to move all the stocking done to as local a strain type as is possible, which preliminary data from other sites in southern Minnesota shows better performance in terms of survival. The local strain for Minnie-Belle would be something that ties into the local Crow River Watershed. It's going to take time to get this goal accomplished by building hatchery capacity and a genetic broodstock that is capable of meeting the needs. Minnesota has largely used an "economy of scale" approach with respect to southern Minnesota, meaning we've relied on northern egg take stations (outside watersheds and strains) because they could fertilize millions of walleye eggs for hatcheries in a short amount of time. However, if our local strain fish perform better, they may provide a better return on investment from a local egg take.
- **Quality Bluegill Initiative.** Minnie-Belle is one of a few local lakes we are considering for a special sunfish regulation with a reduced bag limit, because it does have some larger sunfish and a history of producing larger sunfish. We are still collecting data for consideration of such a regulation; there would also have to be an open house style public meeting to accept comments on a proposed regulation, similar to what was done with the northern pike regulation in place on Minnie-Belle. To learn more about the Quality Bluegill Initiative, check out this DNR webpage: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fish/sunfish/index.html>. You can already provide comments on the Quality Bluegill Initiative bag limit reductions in that link.

After Labor day we had a series of orange markers placed on the north side of the lake. I again reached out to Scott for clarification of them. His response follows:

The nets are part of a yellow perch survey with experimental gears.

Minnesota's yellow perch are being underreported in standard gears used by MN DNR Fisheries. Basically a standard lake survey trap net and a standard survey gill net each have, at the smallest, $\frac{3}{4}$ " openings. So any fish that is small enough to swim through those meshes does so. Minnesota went to standardized gear in like 1967 (gotta double check that date), but impacts to perch could have already been occurring before that date.

What people are seeing are the buoys for an experimental gillnet with smaller mesh sizes. We are finding lots of yearlings and young-of-year perch. There are a couple hundred lakes around the state (four in the Hutchinson Management Area suite of counties) that are part of a larger study on the efficacy of these smaller mesh nets. What we have seen in the first couple years is that we are missing the small perch in our standard gears and yellow perch are reaching sexual maturity at younger sizes and ages as a compensatory response to predation. It's really not too surprising an outcome considering how many lakes are managed for predators, like black bass, walleye, pike, muskie, etc. The 1967 date is significant only in that we may have never observed an average size of perch decline because we never picked up on what was really in the lake once we started with standardized gears that were too large.

The reason for balance in predator and prey is well explained in this short video done by my colleague Doug Schultz up at the Walker office: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUeTozICBY> Minnie-Belle has never been a historic perch factory and we're not likely to change management to make it so. At present it's a diverse multi-species fishery with excellent opportunities for a little bit of everything and a special regulation for medium to large pike. While the perch have and will continue to run small, they are a part of the forage puzzle with suckers, spottail shiners, and other species that provide the fuel for great bass, pike, and walleye fishing.

In some places where anglers target big perch and they are a bigger player in the fishery, like our large walleye lakes (e.g. Mille Lacs, Leech, Lake of the Woods, Winni, Red, etc.), the size decline has been captured historically, even with reduced bag limits. It is interesting information but it's going to take some time for us to put it into context, potentially adapt the gear for future use, and much much further down the road, derive some sort of index. The gears of science turn slowly, at least in biology when you need big samples on a statewide level over a long enough period of time.

Thanks for writing,
Scott Mackenthun
Area Supervisor | Hutchinson Area Fisheries
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Email: scott.mackenthun@state.mn.us

Annual 4th of July Boat Parade

Amidst the lockdowns and quarantine's, our boat parade went on without a glitch this year. As usual boats lined up at the West lagoon and headed around the lake décor and all. While we missed our fearless Leader, Wally Pikkal, folks knew just what to do. See you next year, same date, same time, July 4th, 1pm West lagoon.



Decontamination / Wash Stations

In the Spring newsletter, we included an article about decontamination stations for boats that would assist in keeping our lake free from unwanted invaders, such as Eurasian Water Milfoil, Curly Leaf Pondweed, Zebra Mussels and Starry Stonewort, by washing the boats prior to launching in the lake. We also stated that there was a lot of unknowns and questions that needed to be answered so we could better determine if this would be a good fit for our lake.

During this past summer, we learned that there are number of these units being operated in conjunction with the MnDNR at lakes that presently have Zebra Mussels and/or Starry Stonewort. They are trying to stop the spread of these invaders. We have to wonder; would it not be better to have an operational unit on a lake that is trying to prevent unwanted invaders?

This past boating season, we had over 250 boats enter our lake that came from lakes that had either Zebra Mussels or Starry Stonewort. This information is from the logs kept by our boat inspectors.

We have contacted the MnDNR regarding these units and have found that the DNR partners with varying local units of government such as counties, cities and townships by employing inspectors alongside these decontamination units. Presently there are over 25 in use here in Minnesota.

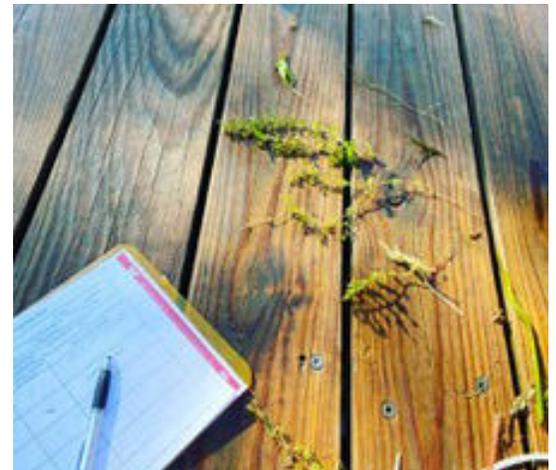
Unfortunately, State Statues do not allow the DNR to grant this authority to lake associations, but we could see if the local government units would be interested in partnering with us in starting a program. There are a number of questions that still need answers and we are trying to get these answers, as well as finding out what all of the rules and regulations and costs are needed to be included in such a program.

We plan to work on this during the winter months and have a better understanding as to what is required and if we should continue with this program or not. Hopefully, our Spring newsletter will have the information we all need.

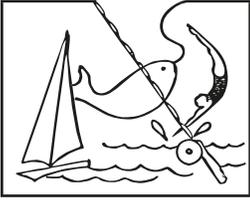
One thing we do know, is that it only takes one watercraft to infect a lake, and we know of 250 of them this past season that had the potential to do damage.

Starry Trek 2020

In August Julene, Kristin and Kristin's daughter Kali, participated in the Starry Trek in Meeker County. Starry Trek is a statewide event focused on searching for one of Minnesota's newest aquatic invasive species, starry stonewort (and other invaders). Starry stonewort is an invasive algae that was first found in Lake Koronis in 2015 and has since spread to 14 Minnesota lakes. There were over 200 participants that surveyed 292 public accesses on 238 water bodies across Minnesota. Thankfully, we did not find any in Lake Minnie Belle. This was a fantastic event that is free to anyone wanting to participate each year in August. Ongoing research and data is available to you anytime: <https://www.maisrc.umn.edu/starrystonewort-research>.



In an effort to be more cost conscious, this newsletter is printed in B/W. To see the color images for all photographs, check out our website, www.lakeminniebelle.org/newsletters.



LAKE MINNIE BELLE
IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
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Check Us Out!

LMBIA website:
www.lakeminniebelle.org (under construction)

LMBIA on facebook:
www.facebook.com/lmbia

LMBIA Email:
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DNR website:
www.dnr.state.mn.us

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Board meetings are held the 4th Tuesday of each month (except December), at the Bonfire Bar & Grill at 7:00 PM.

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New, Yet Old

As the newest member of the LMBIA Board, I should introduce myself. I am Robert Kruger. I had planned to be the surgeon here in Litchfield but ended up in Willmar for 34 years. Now retired, we can live at the lake and serve on the LMBIA board.

The OLD part is that we, the Kruger's, have been members of LMBIA since the beginning. The Kruger's on Lake Minniebelle date back to 1861, when essentially the East side of the lake was part of the Kruger Homestead Farm. Yes, my great and great great grandparents spent the winter of 1862 in the Forest City Stockade, due to the Native American Uprising. That's about as OLD as it can get for Minnesota.

My wife Bonnie and I enjoy the lake and so do our combined five children's families with 13 grandchildren. We will work hard to preserve the greatness of Lake MinnieBelle for the next generations. That's what the LMBIA is all about.

Rob Kruger