



# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

## Facing the AIS Challenges Threatening Our Precious Lake

Spring Greetings Fellow Big Sand Lakers!

We hope winter treated you well and once again left you eager for the blue, healing waters and pine-scented air of Big Sand Lake!

Your Big Sand Lake Board spent the winter responding to the difficult news we received last fall regarding the confirmed presence of Zebra Mussels in Big Sand Lake. Despite our best multi-year prevention efforts, the Minnesota DNR announced in October that two adult Zebra Mussels had been discovered on lake docks, in accordance with their standard public notification protocol.

While this development is certainly disappointing, we want you to know that your BSLA Board is being as proactive as is possible.

### What we know

The location where Zebra Mussels are found is kept confidential by the DNR.

At present, there is no DNR-approved whole-lake treatment for Zebra Mussels once they are established.

### Actions we are taking

We plan to redouble our efforts to keep out other harmful aquatic invasive species, such as Starry Stonewort and Eurasian Milfoil, which are on the march in other lakes in our region.

After consultation with Aaron Anderson, Hubbard County AIS Coordinator, we decided to increase watercraft inspection hours at the public access from 1,100 to 1,400 hours for the 2026 season. While this represents a significant added cost, we believe this aggressive step provides meaningful additional protection for our lake.

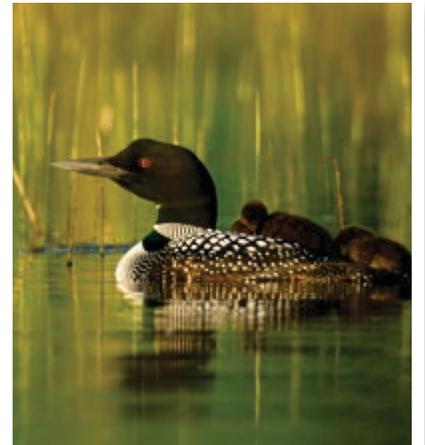
In addition, Big Sand Lake will participate in advancing AIS science. We plan to join a University of Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) genome study evaluating Zebra Mussel spread pathways and mechanisms. This research aims to improve future prevention strategies statewide. To participate, we will attempt to collect a minimum of 10 Zebra Mussel samples from recently removed docks this autumn. We are grateful that Sharon Natzel, former HCCOLA President, who holds the required collection permit, has agreed to help lead this effort. Stay tuned for updates as this project progresses.

We will continue to monitor our Zebra Mussel dock traps to assess the extent of the infestation.

The board will keep current on AIS research and management developments by staying in frequent contact with DNR officials, by active involvement with Hubbard County COLA and by monitoring MAISRC invasive species pages.

Finally, we will network and be in regular contact with, and learn from, other regional lake associations dealing with the same challenges.

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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER *continued*

## What you can do

Individual vigilance matters! Please follow the DNR guidance to:

- **Clean** watercraft of all invasive plants and prohibited invasive species.
- **Drain** all water by removing drain plugs and keeping them out during transport.
- **Dispose** of unwanted bait in the trash.
- **Dry** docks, lifts, swim rafts and other equipment for at least 21 days before placing equipment into another body of water.

## Your support matters

This spring we ask you to support our work in two important ways:

1. Renew your Big Sand Lake Association membership dues. An active and engaged association is vital!
2. Donate to the Big Sand Lake Charitable Fund, administered by the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, to recoup the cost of annual watercraft inspection and to build reserves so that we are prepared to “protect, preserve and enhance” Big Sand Lake in the future!

We hope to see you on the water and at our annual membership meeting at Pine Cone Lodge on June 20!

Catharine Williamson and Ann Hilger | Big Sand Lake Association Co-Presidents

# good neighbors

We would like to thank both Pine Cone Lodge and Evergreen Lodge for hosting our annual Big Sand Lake Meeting and Family Picnic over the years.

Dan Dyre, from Evergreen, has also been instrumental in placing the buoys in our lake, which we cannot thank him enough for participating in both in the past and in his continued efforts.

Bonnie Brand, Pine Cone, has very graciously hosted us for many years, and continues this tradition again this summer. Pine Cone Lodge has recently undergone a lovely renovation to their main lodge, which we are fortunate to be able to utilize for our annual meeting in the event of inclement weather.

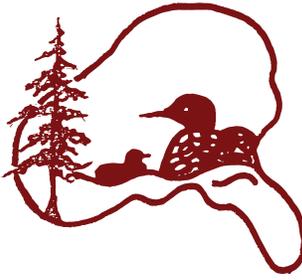
We are grateful to have such wonderful neighbors on the lake.

## EVERGREEN LODGE



## PINE CONE LODGE





## *Building the Resources That Protect Big Sand Lake*

After the initial shock of Zebra Mussels being discovered in Big Sand Lake last fall, your Charitable Fund Committee has come to an important conclusion: the work we do to protect, preserve, and enhance Big Sand Lake and its environs is more important than ever. And we want you to know — we are not daunted.

Each spring we reach out to our members to request your support of the Big Sand Lake Charitable Fund, administered through the Northwest Minnesota Foundation. Your generosity has made it possible to fund watercraft inspections at the public access — one of the most important tools we have to help prevent the introduction of additional aquatic invasive species.

Will you consider contributing again this year?

To date, the Charitable Fund has supported 1,100 hours of inspection each summer while also building reserves for future lake protection needs. While we have always known that watercraft inspection is not a perfect prevention method, it remains the most effective tool currently available.

Now, with renewed urgency to prevent further AIS threats — including Starry Stonewort and Eurasian Watermilfoil, which are impacting nearby lakes — the BSLA Board has decided to double down on prevention efforts.

For the 2026 summer season, inspection hours will increase to 1,400 hours, at a total cost of \$23,700.

We respectfully ask for your help in meeting this expanded goal. Every gift, large or small, directly supports the protection of Big Sand Lake.

### **How to Give**

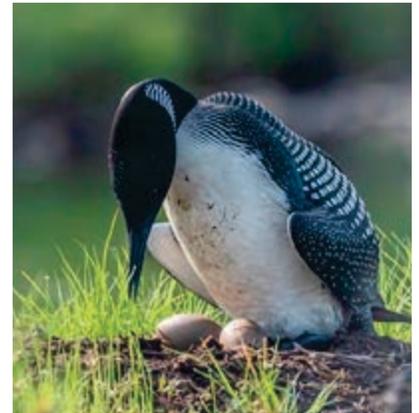
Donations to the Big Sand Lake Charitable Fund may be made:

- Online: Visit [bigsandlake.org](http://bigsandlake.org) and click the yellow donation button
- Mail a check in the enclosed envelope to: Northwest Minnesota Foundation, 201 3rd Street NW, Bemidji, MN 56601. *Please specify that your gift is for the “General Spendable” portion of the Big Sand Lake Association Charitable Fund.*

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to Big Sand Lake. Together, we can remain vigilant and proactive stewards of this special place.

Your Charitable Fund Committee

Ann Hilger, Chris Hilger, Linda Daugherty





## *Your Big Sand Lake Association: Maintaining a Vibrant Lake Community*



The Big Sand Lake Association Board conducts many important activities to “promote and maintain the environmental, economic, and recreational protection of Big Sand Lake,” and to make it a safe and wonderful place to own a home or cabin!

Stay engaged by paying your annual dues!

Your membership dues are used to maintain the [bigsandlake.org](http://bigsandlake.org) website, distribute newsletters, maintain a member directory, host the annual member meeting, conduct lake water testing, maintain properly placed buoys on the lake, coordinate social events, maintain our membership in Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations, and so much more.

Annual dues to pay for the activities of the Big Sand Lake Association are set at \$50 for members/property owners, and Associate Member dues are \$20 per year for family, friends, and non-property owners.

### **How to Renew**

- Dues can be renewed on the [bigsandlake.org](http://bigsandlake.org) website under the membership tab
- Mail a check in the enclosed envelope to:  
BSLA  
P.O. Box 181  
Park Rapids, Minnesota, 56470

Thank you for your participation and membership!

Your Big Sand Lake Association Board of Directors

Catharine Williamson  
Ann Hilger  
Barb Billing  
Colleen Carter  
Bryce Craig

Wick Corwin  
Mike Cziok  
Mark Kalvoda  
Jo Kilander  
Steve Kimpton

Linda Lee  
Rich Provinzino  
Justin Young



# Zebra Mussels



Key Takeaways from an article by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC): “Living with Zebra Mussels”.

You can learn more about their research on their website: [www.MAISRC.umn.edu](http://www.MAISRC.umn.edu)

## 1. Ecosystem Impacts

- Zebra mussels filter huge amounts of water, removing plankton and shifting nutrients to the lake bottom.
- Water clarity increases, but this reduces food for small fish and allows more sunlight to penetrate.
- Aquatic plant growth expands, benefiting both native and invasive plants—often worsening invasive species like curlyleaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil.
- Harmful algal blooms become more likely, especially blue-green algae and filamentous algae like *Cladophora*.

## 2. Effects on Lake Use

### Swimming

- Sharp shells can cut feet; most people adapt by wearing water shoes.
- Mussels accumulate on ladders, rocks, and beaches—often requiring scraping or raking.

### Fishing

- Increased clarity changes fish habitat and predator–prey dynamics.
- Conditions tend to favor pike, muskie, and bass.
- Walleye are negatively affected—first-year fish grow more slowly and are more vulnerable to predation and winter stress.

### Boats, Docks & Lifts

- Boats left in the water can suffer engine damage from mussel buildup.
- Keeping boats on lifts and trimming motors out of the water helps prevent colonization.
- Removing docks/lifts each season prevents heavy buildup.

### Irrigation Systems

- Mussels can clog intake screens and pipes, requiring filtration upgrades or more maintenance.

## 3. Why Vigilance Still Matters

- A newly infested lake can still prevent becoming the source of future infestations.
- Zebra mussel populations often stabilize over time, but impacts worsen when combined with other invasive species like spiny water flea or starry stonewort.

## 4. Prevention Reminder

- Zebra mussels attach to nearly any solid surface, and their larvae survive in small amounts of water.
- Always clean, drain, and dispose when leaving a lake to prevent spread.

Excerpts from: “Got Zebra Mussels, Now What?”, Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, [www.MAISRC.umn.edu/zebramussels](http://www.MAISRC.umn.edu/zebramussels)

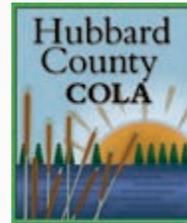
### Keys to identification

- Stripes are generally in zigzag pattern
- Pattern is variable; some may lack striping altogether and can be solid tan or brown
- Have a flat edge and won't topple over when set on it
- Shells form straight line when closed
- Range from 1/5 of an inch to 2 inches

### Who should you call?

- If you're looking for a zebra mussel removal company or a dock installer, find an operator who is a MNDNR-certified Lake Service Provider. The MNDNR maintains a searchable, location-specific database of certified providers on its website.
- Some zebra mussel mitigation activities require permits from the MNDNR. Before undertaking any projects, contact your local MNDNR AIS Specialist.
- The Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center is working toward solutions for all aspects of the zebra mussel problem, from reducing the risk of spread to improving population management methods to finding eradication tools. Visit the MAISRC website or contact Center staff for more information.

# HC COLA's "Restore the Shore" Program Highlight ~ Steve Kimpton



The Hubbard County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) now offers landowners in the county the opportunity to purchase 10 diverse bare-root trees (called "packs"). There are 11 different "pack" types, with a wide variety of species to select from. Individuals that place an order will need to pick up their own order at the Hubbard SWCD office in Park Rapids on Fri 5/1/2026 from 10 AM to 6 PM or Sat 5/2/2026 from 10 AM to 2 PM.

Online ordering can be done through the Hubbard SWCD website (<https://www.hubbardswcd.org/>) with credit card payment.

You may print and fill out the order form found at (<https://www.hubbardswcd.org/>) and mail it to the Hubbard SWCD along with your check, or hand deliver your order and check to their office (address on the form). Plant the bare root trees in the ground promptly.

This program is a partnership between the Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations (HC COLA) and the Hubbard County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

## HC COLA 2026 Meetings with speakers / topics (*everyone is welcome to attend*)

Meetings are held on the last Thursday of the month at 6:30 PM at Northwoods Bank in the lower level Community Room.

### March 26, 2026

Jake Shaughnessy, Watershed Planner / Coordinator, Hubbard County Soil and Water Conservation District (HCSWCD), will discuss the Lake Protection Program called "Lake Stewardship" that the HCSWCD has available. Learn how your lake association can participate.

### April 30, 2026 - Updates from:

- 1) Aaron Anderson, Hubbard County Environmental Services, Environmental Specialist will bring us up to date on the details of the 2026 AIS Prevention Program.
- 2) Gina Kemper, Invasive Species Specialist | Ecological and Water Resources, MN DNR, Northwest Region will share information on species of concern.

May 28, 2026 - To Be Determined

June 25, 2026 - To Be Determined

July 30, 2026 - To Be Determined

Aug 27, 2026 - To Be Determined

Sept 24, 2026 - To Be Determined

### Oct 29, 2026

Aaron Anderson, Hubbard County Environmental Services, Environmental Specialist will provide an AIS Prevention Program Recap of 2026 and Plans for 2027.

## SHORELAND STEWARDSHIP



- WICK CORWIN

Shoreland stewardship is a critical concern for all of us. Water quality and clarity are strongly influenced by human activities on the adjacent land. Although runoff is one source of that water, this is also the predominant source of harmful nutrients and pollutants. There are steps we can take to reduce these adverse impacts. Creating or maintaining a vegetation buffer on your shoreline is a great example. Rain gardens designed to collect runoff before it enters the lake are another.

The detection and control of aquatic invasive species has become one of the association's highest priorities. The association is also concerned with land infestations. Two examples from a very long list, are tansy (<https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/common-tansy>) and buckthorn (<https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/common-buckthorn>), both of which are spreading rapidly in this area. Once they become established, infestations are almost impossible to eradicate. Early detection and control are the keys to success.

In more general terms, the relative abundance and diversity of nature is certainly a large part of what makes our time on Big Sand so enjoyable. Although some adaptable species have thrived in our presence, many others have shown precipitous declines. Here too there is much opportunity for individual action.

This is a very cursory overview of some issues and concerns. None of them are new and some have been addressed in the past. My hope is to renew interest, increase awareness, and prompt discussions, welcoming any volunteers as well.

# In Memory

Memories made of friends  
forever in our hearts



Cynthia Cizmek Jones – August 14, 1946 - January 2, 2026

Ellis and Cynthia moved to Big Sand Lake in 1995. Cynthia wasted no time and immediately became involved with the lake association. Cynthia found herself playing a significant role in “jump starting” the Big Sand Lake association. Around the late 1990’s, our association had fallen to around 30 or so members. Cynthia organized a resident picnic, taking place at Pine Cone Lodge. The gathering was well attended and launched a strong upswing in our membership.

Cynthia served on the BSLA Board and as Treasurer from the late 1990’s - 2013. Cynthia was an active voice bringing many good ideas for the promotion and longevity of our organization.

The Big Sand Lake Association will be forever grateful for Cynthia’s passion and years of dedicated work.



Susan Marie Steffen – January 12, 1945 - November 4, 2025

John Kenneth Steffen – January 7, 1944 - November 4, 2025

John and Susan Steffen, Big Sand summer residents since 1980, passed away in November 2025. They are fondly remembered by family, friends and neighbors on Gladwin Drive, formerly known as Iowa Beach Road. Spending time at Big Sand became a dominant part of John and Susan lives. Their daughters, Elizabeth (Ellie) Steffen Scheler and Christine (Chrissy) Steffen and their families will carry on this important tradition.

*BSLA commemorates residents known to us who have passed away since our last communication or during the last year. We apologize for any omissions. Family members and friends are encouraged to notify us and submit an article about the individual’s life and connection with Big Sand Lake for publication in the Big Sand newsletter. Please contact us at: [admin@bigsandlake.org](mailto:admin@bigsandlake.org).*

*If you wish, memorial donations may be made to the Big Sand Charitable Fund.  
A link for donating is on our website, [www.bigsandlake.org](http://www.bigsandlake.org).*

## Big Sand Lake SOCIAL COMMITTEE



Jo Kilander

As I have said before, it is such fun to serve as your Big Sand Social Chair along with Barb Billing. Our goal is to provide as many opportunities as possible for you to get to know your neighbors on the lake. To this end, we strive to offer a varied mix of ladies and couples’ events throughout the summer and early fall. Ladies’ socials are typically on Monday - either for coffee or late afternoon Happy Hours and couples’ events are held on the weekend so that those who need to travel back and forth each weekend can join us. Although most dates are not yet set in stone, we are planning two ladies’ events in June – our annual coffee at Muskie Waters and a happy hour. The one date that is set, is the annual Big Sand Lake Picnic, which immediately follows the Big Sand Lake Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 20, at our beloved Pine Cone Resort.

July will feature our traditional 4th of July Boat Parade and a mixture of get togethers. Liz and Steve Quaday have graciously agreed to host a couple’s event on a Saturday in August. We will attempt to schedule a visit to the Nemeth Art Center followed by a lunch downtown, which has been a favorite over the last few years. The Annual Chuck Fenton Golf Scramble and Taco Br Social at Headwaters Golf Club is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, September 12, 2026.

Barb and I welcome your ideas for events that you would like for us to facilitate, or even better, one that you would like to host! Please call or text either of us with your input or questions.

Lastly, we would like to thank Linda VanBruggen for organizing winter activities for those residents that are lucky enough to live on the lake year-round.

JO KILANDER  
651-261-1149

BARB BILLING  
701-361-9871

## MENS SOCIALS

*New this Summer*



Men’s Coffee  
Get Together.  
The 2nd and 4th  
Friday at Bella  
Cafe 9 am



P.O. Box 181, Park Rapids, MN 56470

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# BSL 2026 CALENDAR

## ANNUAL MEETING / FAMILY PICNIC SATURDAY, JUNE 20, PINE CONE LODGE

**10:00AM REGISTRATION**  
(Coffee/Treats/Socializing)

**10:30AM ANNUAL MEETING**

**NOON FAMILY PICNIC**

This annual event is a wonderful time to socialize with your fellow Big Sand Lake residents and to learn of the current activities and plans for the lake association.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**



### SOCIAL MEDIA

Check out the Big Sand Lake Association Facebook page and Instagram for Big Sand current events, photos and area happenings. For easy access, click on the Facebook and Instagram icons located on the right hand column on the homepage at [www.bigsandlake.org](http://www.bigsandlake.org).

