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Association News

A newsletter for the Association for the Preservation of Clear Lake

Summer, 2005

Join Us for the Annual Picnic

The Association for the Preservation of Clear Lake will be holding our Annual Picnic on Friday, August 12th at the Clear Lake State Park at 6:00 PM. Please come and join us to learn about important actions being taken to improve Clear Lake. The picnic will again feature excellent food and updates from lake restoration officials. Cost of membership to the Association is included in the $10 ticket price. Ticket request forms will be mailed shortly. Tickets will also be available at the Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce.

Busy Construction Season Planned for 2005

This year will mark the 10th anniversary of the CLEAR Project. We will celebrate by having a busy construction season, as many projects are slated for installation in 2005. In agricultural areas, 50 acres of land in the watershed have been restored to native vegetation and two terraces totaling 6,000 feet have been repaired so far this year. A total of 100 acres at three different sites are scheduled to be restored to wetlands this fall after the crop season. When completed, the acres enrolled in a wetland restoration program will total almost 500 since the project began. Additionally, over 1,400 acres in 2005 have been enrolled in a program to more efficiently manage nutrient and pesticide application.

Storm water improvements in developed areas also continue to be a priority, as two more infiltration systems and a rain garden will be installed at the City Beach location this summer. Additionally, engineering is being completed at 6 more potential storm water improvement sites with the goal of all sites constructed by the end of 2006. The Parks and Recreation Board is also considering a porous pavement and rain garden project at one of the public approaches in Clear Lake.

A few construction activities on the lake itself are currently occurring also. A 400 ft. shoreline stabilization project was completed near Redeemer Lutheran Church early this year, and another 300 ft. stabilization project at Lynn Lorenzen Park is planned for completion this fall.

As important as these construction activities are, it is also vital for all landowners to continue utilizing “lake-friendly” lawn care practices and making everyday choices which improve water quality. These choices include using a no-phosphorus lawn fertilizer (the middle number is 0); not depositing grass clippings, yard wastes, and other contaminants onto the streets; and cleaning up after pets.

We hope you take the time to enjoy recreating at Clear Lake this summer and take notice of the restoration activities being completed to improve our lake.

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Efforts to Reduce Bacteria Levels at Clear Lake State Park Continue

Until Clear Lake beaches test low for bacteria levels on a consistent basis, our lake will continue to be viewed by some as unsafe and undesirable for recreation.

Two State Park beaches at Clear Lake are monitored on a weekly basis for E. coli bacteria levels: McIntosh Woods and Clear Lake. No tests have exceeded the 235 cfu/100 ml standard set by the State Health Department at McIntosh Woods beach for more than three years. However, E. coli counts at Clear Lake State Park beach have tested high on occasion during the swimming season for the past several years.

The reason for the difference in bacteria levels at the beaches is tied directly to the difference in the land use of the drainage areas of the beaches. Simply put, the more bacteria sources there are in the land that drains to the beach, the more potential there is for bacteria entering the water. McIntosh Woods beach has a very small drainage area consisting of only a small amount of park land and the beach itself. The only time high levels at the McIntosh Woods beach were seen was when the beach was used heavily by geese several years ago.

The drainage area for the Clear Lake beach is much more diverse, consisting of residential areas, agricultural areas, pasture, and park land. High bacteria levels are often found in storm water runoff from developed areas. The sources of bacteria are most often pet and wildlife waste on impervious surfaces. Agricultural sources include faulty septic systems and livestock waste.

Several efforts have been made in the last year in an attempt to reduce bacteria levels at Clear Lake State Park. Sanitary sewer lines near the State Park were investigated and minor repairs were made. Private septic systems in the area were researched and it was determined all are no longer in use. A pet waste bag dispenser has been installed near the beach in a heavily used area for dog walking. Despite these efforts, the bacteria problem was not solved.

Because a solution had not yet been found, this past winter the Association for the Preservation of Clear Lake entered into a partnership with the IDNR, City of Clear Lake, and Cerro Gordo County. The partners hired Bonestroo Rosene Anderlik & Associates to determine potential remedial actions for a stream that outlets near State Park that is a likely source for high bacteria levels at the swim beach. Treatments to the stream itself were assessed, but no feasible alternatives for bacteria treatment were found. Therefore, the primary recommendation from the assessment was to alter land use practices near the stream.

The report specifically identified a horse pasture near the stream as having a high potential for bacteria (and phosphorus) loading. Armed with this information, our Association members contacted the owner of the horses to determine if the owner would be willing to lease the land to see if bacteria levels in the stream and at the beach decrease when the horses are removed. Although discussions with the landowner took place in early spring, an agreement with the landowner has not yet been reached. Efforts to reach an agreement will continue.

Due to the many potential sources and the great prevalence of bacteria in the environment, solving this issue will not be easy. However, attempts to eliminate potential sources will continue to be made in an effort to reduce bacteria levels at the Clear Lake State Park swim beach.

E. Coli bacteria

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW - 2005:

The Lake Restoration Fund:
The Lake Restoration Fund (LRF), primarily used for dredging projects, has been held stagnant at $1 million dollars for the past few years. This level of funding is simply not enough for the state to perform new dredging projects. Therefore, lake associations and environmental groups lobbied for an increase in funding for FY'06. Our Association had lobbied for a $200,000 line item increase for Clear Lake to be used as matching funds needed to continue partnering with the Corps of Engineers on lake restoration efforts. Our local legislators opposed using the line item approach, stating it is not a good policy to set, but did support our request of $200k to come from the overall LRF budget. However, at the very end of the session, the LRF was increased from $1 million to $1.9 million due largely to line item increases for other lakes. For example, $500,000 of the new funding was designated to go specifically to projects at Lake Cornelia and Five Islands lakes. This left an increase of $400,000 in new, unallocated funds. The increased funding is a step in the right direction, but it is unknown how much will go towards efforts at Clear Lake.

Boat Registration Fee Increase:
Boat registration fees in Iowa have not been increased for the past 20 years. That will change starting in July when all classes of watercraft will be charged additional fees upon registration renewal. Lake Associations from around the state had been lobbying for the increase to help pay for improvements to our lakes. Our Association had requested to local legislators that some of the new revenue go toward lake restoration work. However, a stronger contingency from the Okoboji area successfully lobbied for the funds to go entirely towards water safety and invasive species control.

New Water Quality Grant Fund:
The Governor and State Legislature enacted a new $5 million water quality grant fund for 2005. The grant can be used for a variety of water related projects. A diversified panel of environmentalists, agricultural businesses, private industries, government agencies, and legislators will determine which projects are funded.