



SYBIL LAKE NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025 Issue

Another mild winter with little snow led to an early spring. Temperatures in the 90's this week, makes it feel like we skipped right over May. Warm and windy for The Opener this past weekend, hopefully the wind didn't keep you off the water. A lot of activity in lakes country over the past few weeks, it seems many are taking advantage of the warm weather and getting an early start on the summer lake season. Here's to sunrises and sunsets, warm days and cool evenings family, friends and another wonderful summer at our little slice of heaven.

2025 ICE OUT

Official ice out on Sybil this year was April 14th, last year was April, 4th. The winner of this year's "Guess the Ice out Day" competition was again Ice King John Reike, who retains the crown for another year. Pure luck? One with nature? Or has John taken a deep dive into ice out data analytics? Congrats John whatever system you have, it's working!

4TH OF JULY BOAT PARADE

Decorate your watercraft and join your friends and lake neighbors for the 4th of July boat parade! We'll start at 11:00 am at the point at Bylanders and make our way around Sybil. Gather whoever is at your place and join the parade or enjoy from shore.

SYBIL LAKE PICNIC

Good food, cold drinks, good friends, games, music. Sound fun? It is! The Sybil Lake Picnic is always a highlight of the summer. Keep an eye out for a message once date/time is finalized.

OTTERTAIL COUNTY COLA

The Sybil Lake Association is a long time member of the Otter Tail County Coalition of Lake Associations. The purpose of OTC COLA is to "facilitate cooperation among member lake and river associations and to assist in fostering wise use of the lake and river areas in Ottertail County." OTC COLA is sponsoring a Lake Stewardship Symposium **May 31, 2025 9:00-3:00 at Thumper Pond Resort in Ottertail.** Open to all lake property owners with topics to include: Aquatic Invasive Species, Vacation Home Rentals, Shoreline Restoration. Register by scanning the QR code.



LAKE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

An engaged and informed lake association benefits everyone. One of the best ways to keep up with all things Sybil is by attending the Sybil Lake Association Annual Meeting. The 2024 lake association annual meeting will be:

**Saturday, June 14, 11:00AM
at the Vergas Community
Center.**

It's a great opportunity to connect with lake neighbors, engage in conversation, and learn how we can work together to keep Sybil the wonderful place we all love and enjoy.

SYBIL LAKE WEBPAGE

The Sybil Lake Association (SLA) now has a webpage. The site has information about Sybil Lake, the Vergas area, and links on how to get involved. You can find the Sybil Lake newsletters, events and ways to contact SLA board members. There are also links to to other organizations that monitor and advocate for our waterways.

sybillake.org



FISHING OPENER RAIN OR SHINE, SNOW OR ICE?

Back in the day the opener was a big deal. Not quite as important as deer season but almost. A lot of people moved to the metro area for employment opportunities in the 50s. Many of these small-town guys were anglers ready to go when the fishing season opened. My dad Ken was one of them. It was back to Vergas and a stop at the Sportsman's center, now Vegas 66, to make a plan for the Saturday event. Jim Mistelske, often dad's partner, was founder and owner/operator of the shop which included a retail and wholesale complete bait business. Minnows were the most common bait for walleye at the time and minnows Jim had. Creek chubs were the bait of choice as they were really tough and active. After a few brews and some BS the plan was set to go to Sybil on Saturday when Jim could leave the store when things slowed down.

So the story goes from my dad's memory and now from my recall of his story here goes:

Given that the ice was not completely off the lake they decided to fish from shore and chose the island by the channel between big and little Sybil. The water level at the time was quite low and therefore hip boots were adequate to walk out to the island from the west. There wasn't too much development at the time so they took Jim's International 4x4 as close to the lake as they could. Once at the lake it was easy to cross the island to the east side and take a look. Well, the ice sheet blew across the lake almost to the island with about 20 feet of open water between shore and the island. Given they did not have another plan to go to another lake, fishing was ON! As the story goes, they threw on a hardy chub on the hook, cast out with their level wind reels and dropped the minnows on the edge of the ice. They then inched the bait into the water and low and behold caught several walleye. The truth as to the number I can't recall. The love of opening day, the anticipation, the times gone by and fishing with a friend is what it is all about.

—Kit Nelson

TRUMPETER SWANS RETURN TO MINNESOTA

In the 2024 Sybil Lake newsletter, you read about the comeback of bald eagles. I believe the trumpeter swan has a story that may be equally as amazing. What many readers may not know about the swan's remarkable recovery is the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, located about 35 miles north of Sybil Lake, played a huge role in the trumpeter swan's success story. You will learn more about that later.

About Trumpeter Swans

In the past few years, you may have seen trumpeter swan sightings in area farm fields and wetlands in and around the Sybil Lake area. Last summer I watched a pair swimming on Sybil Lake. Trumpeters are an impressively large and beautiful waterfowl. They have an all white body, short black feet, a large strong black bill, and a face that is partially black. Males can have a wingspan of nearly 10 feet and they weigh more than 26 pounds. Swans usually mate for life and a breeding pair will raise 4-6 babies, called cygnets, every year. Of the native waterfowl in North America, they are the largest and heaviest flying bird. Like loons, swans need a running start to take flight. Their flapping wings and short powerful legs sound like galloping horses as they generate speed for take off. They often fly low and make a distinctive brassy trumpet sound while flying. I saw the pair mentioned earlier take off from Sybil Lake and it was a sight and sound to behold.

Almost a Swan Song

According to the The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service trumpeter swans disappeared from Minnesota in the 1880's. They once nested over most of North America, but by the early 20th century trumpeters were nearly driven to extinction. Unlike bald eagles whose demise was caused mainly by DDT, a man-made chemical used to control grasshopper infestations, the large swans were prized for their meat, feathers, and skins. These majestic birds faced relentless hunting pressure in North America during the fur trade era and the early European colonial period. By the early 1930s, a study by the U.S. Biological Survey revealed that less than 70 trumpeter swans were known to exist south of Canada.

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Tamarac to the Rescue

This is where the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge comes into the story. Tamarac was established in 1938 by the federal government as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. However, it wasn't until nearly 50 years later that state biologists from Minnesota and members of the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge released several young adult swans to a small pond called Jim's Marsh. The introduction of those swans in 1987 is considered the beginning of the Minnesota trumpeter swan story.

Sound the Trumpets

Fast forward to today: there are more than 50 successful nesting pairs in the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge and an estimated 17,000 birds around the state. The comeback of the trumpeter swan has been described as one of the most successful restorations of a once-endangered wildlife species. It is an example of a conservation program that successfully prevented the loss of one of America's greatest birds.

Learn more about Tamarac and Swans
Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge is a short drive from Sybil Lake and well worth a day trip. It has an accessible visitor center that offers views of the marshes, swans, and other wildlife. The visitor center features a Discovery Center with many learning activities including nature trails, interactive displays, and an interpretive history of the refuge. You can also drive through the preserve and learn about diverse Minnesota ecosystems.

The center is open seasonally May 15 to October 15.

For more information:
(218) 847-264
35704 County Hwy 26
Rochert, MN 56578
fws.gov/refuge/tamarac

—Marv Leier, Sybil Lake board member



MINNESOTA AIS PREVENTION AID

Since 2014, Minnesota's county Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid (AISPA) has been a game-changer in invasive species prevention, earning national recognition for its efficiency and impact. By directing funds to local governments—those closest to the problem and most motivated to act—AISPA has delivered unmatched results.

Local investments:

AISPA is Minnesota's most effective local prevention effort. Beyond the annual funds, AISPA leverages an additional \$6.2 million in local contributions and 1.2 million volunteer hours from lake associations every year.

Stopping the Spread:

Minnesota has dramatically slowed AIS spread, outperforming other states. In Michigan, starry stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*) infested nearly every inland lake in the Lower Peninsula within a decade—but in Minnesota, only 30 lakes have been affected in the same timeframe.

Powerful Partnerships:

The AISPA is one of the most exciting examples for the power and cost effectiveness of public/government partnerships. Counties report metrics while working directly with local and engaged stakeholders.

Protecting our Water Legacy

Every dollar spent on prevention saves \$100 in future management costs. AISPA has enabled local governments to establish long-term prevention plans, securing Minnesota's waterways and saving billions in future management costs.

Annual Impact

Inspections & Decontaminations ~60%
\$4.3M invested across 38 counties to hire 600+ inspectors, covering 180,000 hours and 335,000 inspections
2,000+ decontaminations at 768 accesses on 625 water bodies

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Local lake associations contributed an additional \$5M for extended inspection hours

Control & Rapid Response ~25%

\$2.5M spent annually on control & rapid response, leveraging an additional \$587K from lake organizations for invasive plant management

AIS surveys conducted on 641 lakes, with management actions taken on 187 water bodies

Education & Outreach ~8%

\$350K spent on public education campaigns with nearly 13,500 children taught about AIS throughout close to 300 events.

Outreach included 500 social media posts seen by nearly 200,000 followers and the “How Well Do You Know MN?” AIS video series that received over 1 million impressions.

Jeff Forester, Executive Director 612-961-6144

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SUSTAINING OUR LAKES, ONE PROPERTY AT A TIME: A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

By Lily Carr, Lake Steward Coordinator

Welcome to January in the land of 10,000 lakes!

In my corner of Minnesota, pond hockey season is in full swing. A brave few take the plunge into the icy waters of Cedar Lake through a hole cut in the ice. Others huddle in cozy ice fishing huts, hopeful for the day's catch. I prefer to bundle up and crunch across the snow, soaking in the serene beauty of the pale trees. There's something uniquely Minnesotan about embracing the stoic calm of winter—a quiet season that invites us to slow down and reflect.

Beneath the snow and ice, the lakes are far from dormant. The water near the surface cools, becomes denser, and sinks, pushing the warmer water below to the surface. This natural process, called stratification and turnover, is essential for maintaining a healthy ecosystem. It brings oxygen to the bottom of the lake for fish and other cold-blooded creatures to thrive. Meanwhile, aquatic plants go dormant, conserving their energy in their roots until the ice finally melts.

It's a moment of rest and renewal, both for the lake and for us. In these winter months, we gather, huddle together for warmth, and take a collective pause before the busy cycle of the year begins again. But when spring arrives, the lakes will awaken, first at the shoreline, where the warmth of the sun meets the earth. Shoreline plants are more than just a picturesque backdrop to a lake day—they are vital guardians of our lakes. They act as a natural shield against erosion, with their deep roots holding soil in place and preventing harmful runoff from entering the water. As the ice melts, these plants will spring to life, covering the shoreline with a vibrant palette of colors. Milkweed, Joe Pye weed, and Asters—native plants to Minnesota—will bloom, attracting essential pollinators like bees and butterflies. These plants will stabilize the shore while also protecting the lake from phosphorus runoff, which can lead to algal blooms and water quality degradation.

Minnesota's lakes, and the ecosystems that they are a part of, have been shaped by human hands for thousands of years. But today, the impact we have is more profound than ever. From the increasing frequency of harmful algal blooms to the spread of aquatic invasive species, our actions have consequences. But there's hope. The health of our lakes is still a delicate balance, and it's not too late to make a positive difference.

Caring for our lakes doesn't necessarily require a monumental effort—it can start with small, simple changes. For instance, leaving a buffer zone of native vegetation between your property and the water can go a long way in protecting the ecosystem. You don't even need to plant anything—just set up some stakes 25 feet from

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the shoreline and stop mowing past them. In a few short years, you'll see a thriving polyculture of plants that help filter runoff, provide wildlife habitat, and keep your shoreline intact.

There's also plenty of support available to help you take action. Educational resources, grants, and materials are readily accessible. In fact, Minnesotans voted overwhelmingly to approve continued funding for the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), which provides crucial financial support for programs like Lawns to Legumes. This initiative helps individuals restore their yards and reduce water pollution, creating a more sustainable future for our lakes.

Protecting our lakes shouldn't be a lonely endeavor—it's a collective effort that requires all of us to come together. More and more, local governments and organizations like the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) are emphasizing the importance of property owners in safeguarding our natural resources. If we all take responsibility for our piece of the shoreline, we can make a real impact.

The idea is simple: together, we can create a movement of sustainable stewardship, where every Minnesotan plays a part in preserving the beauty and health of our lakes for future generations. Whether you're planting native plants, reducing your water use, or simply advocating for better environmental practices, your actions matter. When we all act, we inspire others to do the same, and together, we can restore balance to these delicate ecosystems.

So this spring, as the ice begins to melt and the lakes come to life, consider the role you can play in protecting the waters we cherish. It doesn't need to be a massive overhaul—just a few thoughtful, intentional changes to the way we interact with the land can make a world of difference. By managing our properties sustainably, we not only protect the lakes but ensure that future generations of Minnesotans can enjoy them too. Become a Lake Steward, teach your neighbors, and before long see the benefits of collective stewardship on your lake.

Summer will be here before we know it- Now is the time to apply for grant funding through Lawns to Legumes! Find the application [here](#) and see if you qualify for up to \$400 matching funds for a restoration of your yard! By becoming a Lake Steward, you lead the movement in collaborative, positive, lake protection.

Looking for more information? Visit the Lake Steward webpage for resources and steps you can take, one at a time, towards healthy lakes.



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