

WCOLA Newsletter

Wabana Chain of Lakes Association

Hello WCOLA members,

Where did the summer go? I guess it is true that "time flies when you are having a good time!"

For those of you that attended our first summer dinner concert, I am sure you would agree that a good time was had by all. Many thanks to the WCOLA FUN Committee for organizing this concert that brought our community together & raised money for our association. If you missed the concert this year, be sure to mark your calendar for Friday, August 6, 2027 for our next "Fun Raising" event.

We have a few changes as we move forward. First, Jean Koewler retired as our treasurer. Jean has been the WCOLA treasurer for more years than we can count. Not only was Jean in charge of financials, but membership, newsletter editing, and much more. We thank Jean for dedicating so many years to WCOLA. We'd like to welcome our new treasurers Dan & Jean Hagen. (We needed a team to replace Jean!) Dan & Jean will be a big help to WCOLA as we look into alternate ways to raise money. Mark Popovich joined us in an Environmental/AIS role. As a former AIS inspector, Mark, comes with a wealth of knowledge on AIS. Jack Hartung retired from his position as the Secchi Disc Coordinator. We thank Jack for the many years he's volunteered to help our lakes and lake association. Tommy Bennett will be heading up the Secchi Disc Coordination.

Our association is growing and changing. Last August, our expenses were \$2,000 more than our revenue and our membership was down to 111 members. Now we are cash positive, and our membership has grown to 165. A huge thank you to everyone for your support! We can't do this without you!

We do have some concerning news to share, which we discussed at our annual meeting on August 15th. The State of Minnesota will be reducing their matching AIS grants by 50% starting in July of 2027 and will eliminate those funds completely in 2029. We have been using these matching grants to help pay for the inspectors at both of the Wabana landings. These inspections show to be working to control AIS, and we are blessed to have some very dedicated and professional inspectors. So given these funding reductions, we are going to need to raise money to continue to have our landings inspected during the busy times: Friday through Monday. We are looking for ways to help with raise money to support the costs we expect to incur these next few years. We welcome ideas.

Sincerely,

Scott Hutter
(president.wcola@gmail.com)

WCOLA Calendar:

WCOLA Meetings:

Sept. 14th @ 4pm

Road Cleanup:

Sept. 26th @ 9am

Winter Solstice Party:

More info. coming!

"FUN Raising" 2027 Concert:

Friday, August 6th, 2027



Photo Credit:
Stewart Sage



Looking Back on Summer



Summer Solstice Party

Many of us celebrated the first day of summer together at the annual Summer Solstice Party. The deck was filled with old & new friends as we welcomed another summer on the lake. A big thanks to the Downing & Colburn families for hosting. A fun time was had by all!



The July 4th boat parade was moved to the 5th, due to weather, but that didn't stop anyone from having a good time! Many patriotic boaters showed up with their water guns & decorated boats. It was a refreshing way to celebrate America's 250 year anniversary.



Ice Cream Social



WCOLA, along with the Community Fund, hosted the township's annual Ice Cream Social on July 31st. It was a huge success, as over 110 community members joined their neighbors for a dish of ice cream.



Recent Wabana Township scholarship winners, Nora Wick & Graham Verke served the ice cream. Many children enjoyed the playground afterward.

Thank you to the WCOLA & Community Fund volunteers who help make this community gathering event happen each year. If you are interested in helping out, at a community event, reach out to Jean Koewler at —

"FUN RAISING" CONCERT



Thank you to all who came out for a fun evening of dining & dancing at the WCOLA inaugural "FUN Raising" Benefit Concert on August 7th. The concert was a sold out event. It was great to see so many people from our community get together to raise money for a great cause! The concert raised a few thousand dollars for the lake association, but more importantly than that, it brought us all together for an evening of fun.



Cedar Creek Tavern did an awesome job hosting our event and the food was great. Of course, Adessa & the Beat really knew how to liven up the party and get folks out on the dance floor. Mother Nature even blessed us with a beautiful evening. Because the concert was so much fun this year, we decided to do it again! Mark your calendars for **Friday, August 6th**, for our next big event!



The WCOLA Fun Committee planned the concert and sold tees & sweatshirts to off-set the costs. The merchandise was very popular and we sold out at the concert. The Fun Committee plans to reorder tees/sweatshirts

this fall. The shirts would make great holiday gifts, so please consider helping us organize another concert by purchasing gear.



Summer 2026



Photo credit: Sherry Preiss

This summer's weather will go down in the books as near perfect! The sun was out almost every day, except for on holiday weekends. Outdoor enthusiasts were able to enjoy lots of time outside and there weren't big storms to cause damage. And, for once, the pesky mosquitos weren't too bad. The spiders, on the other hand, seemed to outdo themselves building webs. We also had the most beautiful night skies.

With the good weather, came the not so good... mid-summer the humidity set in, and for several days we again had wildfire smoke. By August the lack of precipitation and high temperatures began to affect our area's land & lakes. Yards and trees became dry and the lakes experienced an almost record breaking low water level. The warm water & high nutrient content also

helped the aquatic plants grow "like weeds," and we saw some fish kill. Some areas saw the return of the forest tent caterpillar. These caterpillars return every 10-16 years to feed on hardwood trees and shrubs.

We are not sure what the weather will be for the upcoming months, but nice summer memories will certainly help there transition be easier.



Forest Tent Caterpillar

Retro WCOLA Merchandise

WCOLA merchandise has been around since the lake association was first established in the 1980's. Libby Birch was recently spotted wearing her "classic" WCOLA tee that she purchased 30 years ago! And a vintage WCOLA Koozie came out over the July 4th weekend. We love our lake gear!

It's fun to see nostalgic lake merchandise. Do you have photos of your "classic" lake shirts? If so, send your photos to — setofsteins@msn.com



Libby Birch



LAKE GEAR

The WCOLA Fun Committee will be reordering tees & sweatshirts this fall. Please watch your email for a merchandise order form. We appreciate your help in supporting WCOLA and bringing future events to the community.

If you "LOVE the LAKES," then you will LOVE the new gear!



Upcoming Events!

Road Cleanup

Come one, come all and bring a friend!

Our fall roadside cleanup will be—

Saturday, September 26th @ 9:00 am.



We will meet at 9:00 am at the township hall for coffee & donuts before heading out to beautify our township roads.

Thank you, thank you to everyone who helped last spring! If you haven't helped before, it's an easy way to get a bit of exercise & meet some new friends & neighbors. You can "clean" as much as you'd like. The designated stretches are about 2 miles long but if that's too much, do what you can!

If you want an extra stretch, that can be arranged too. This year I'll plan to pick up bags along the roadside when they are full. That allows you to enjoy the walk back to your vehicle without hauling a bag full of debris.

Mark your calendars for a fun fall morning outside with friends & neighbors:

Saturday, September 26, 9:00am at the Wabana Township Hall.

Questions?

Contact Sandra Nelson

320-444-5949



Winter Solstice Party

The Winter Solstice Party is being planned.

Jon & Jess Gunderson will host the party again this year.

Watch for more information to come!

"The winter solstice is a reminder that even in the darkest moments, the light will return" ~ Nikki Van Noy

AIS UPDATE 2026

By Mark Popovich

As of the writing of this article, there is only one Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) known to infest the Wabana Chain of Lakes. This chain includes seven lakes: Wabana, Little Wabana, Big Trout, Little Trout, Bluewater, Doan and Clearwater. The invasive is the Banded Mystery Snail (BMS).

The BMS has currently only been documented in Wabana and Little Trout but is likely in all four lakes that make up the chain that also includes Big Trout and Bluewater.

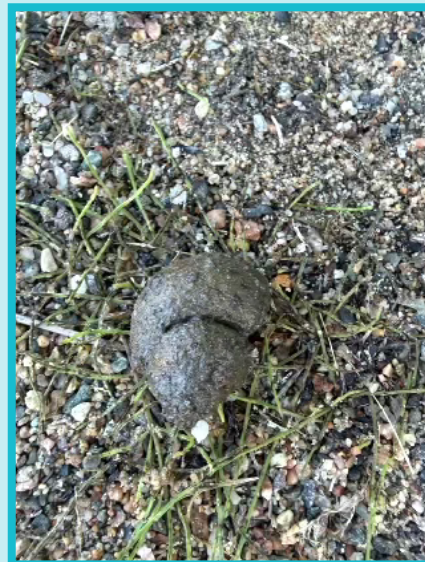
As far as invasives go, it is not particularly destructive to the lake's ecosystem. It is known to get into the nests of spawning fish and spread a pathogen that can cause the fry to not survive. They can be a nuisance when they accumulate in large numbers on your beach or favorite swimming area. There is a small upside to this particular invasive, they are edible if you are a fan of escargot. They originally made their way to the United States as food and aquarium pets.

There are many other AIS that can be far more destructive but have not been detected in any of the lakes in the chain. The ones that are most concerning and have been confirmed in other Itasca County Lakes are; Zebra Mussels, Faucet Snails, Eurasian Milfoil, Rusty Crawfish, and the very scary Stary Stonewort.

Wabana is the only lake in the chain that has public access capable of launching a boat. The two access points, have AIS inspectors assigned to them and there is coverage at each one for forty hours per week. These inspectors do a great job at inspecting the boats and have thus far prevented any of the above listed AIS from entering the chain.

Obviously inspectors cannot be at the landing 7 days a week, 24 hours a day so it is incumbent upon all that live on the lakes, use the lakes and love the lakes, to do our part in keeping AIS out. We can all do this by inspecting our own boats, motors and water accessories, making sure there are no weeds or mussels attached. It is always a good idea to wash your own boat and trailer anytime you have visited a non-chain lake within five days of launching on any other lake.

The future of AIS inspections or a speedy response if AIS is found to be in one of the chain's lakes has been put in question due to the state cutting funding to the counties for AIS related activities. Full funding exists through June of 2027, but then will be cut in half going forward. WCOLA has been aware of this possibility and has been exploring ways to fill the void should the cuts continue into the future. The responsibility to fill the voids left by the states funding cuts will likely fall heavily on WOCLA, Wabana Township and those who use and enjoy the beauty and recreation that the chain of lakes provides.



Banded Mystery Snail

(AIS article continued on page 7)

That weight will be felt in the responsibility we all will have to keep our boats clean of AIS and the necessity of increasing our own funding to fill the gaps. Please watch our website and future newsletters for more information on how we can all help and carry this added weight as a community and keep the Wabana Chain of Lakes clean and beautiful for our children and grandchildren. Always remember to: clean your watercraft, drain all water, and properly dispose of any unused bait!

The Silent Spreaders: the Banded Mystery Snail

Ecology Update from the DNR



As we enjoy our local lakes, rivers, and wetlands, there is a quiet invader beneath the surface making waves in local ecosystems: the Banded Mystery Snail (*Viviparus georgianus*). They are originally native to the southeastern United States, thriving primarily along the Mississippi River system. The snail was imported and sold by the aquarium trade, leading for illegal release into the wild. Over the years this freshwater snail has hitchhiked its way into northern waters, disrupting aquatic food webs and creating a foul-smelling nuisance along shorelines. The banded mystery snail is a regulated species in Minnesota, which means its illegal to possess, sell, buy, or transport.

Why Are They a 'Mystery'?

Unlike most native freshwater snails that lay clutches of gelatinous eggs on rocks or vegetation, female banded mystery snails give birth to fully formed, live young. This unique reproductive trait means a single introduced snail can rapidly seed a brand-new population, appearing as if by magic—or mystery overnight.

How to Spot Them

You can distinguish banded mystery snails from native species by several key features:

- **Size:** Their spherical shells grow up to 1.5 inches tall, noticeably larger than most native snails.
- **Coloration:** The shells are light brown, olive, or yellowish-green, marked by distinct horizontal reddish-brown bands that wrap around the spiral. Young banded mystery snails can be as small as a grain of rice and are able to hide in mud and can stick to things like anchors, ropes, and fishing gear.
- **The Trapdoor:** They possess a hard, fingernail-like operculum (trapdoor) that tightly seals the shell opening, locking in moisture and allowing them to survive out of water for days.

The Ecological and Community Impact

While they might look harmless, these snails cause significant problems:

- **Ecosystem Strain:** They aggressively compete with native snails and aquatic insects for algae and organic debris, starving out native species. They invade bass nests and cause mortality of largemouth bass.
- **Wildlife Threats:** Banded mystery snails are notorious hosts for trematodes (flatworm parasites) that can transmit fatal diseases to waterfowl.
- **Shoreline Nuisance:** Mass die-offs frequently occur in the spring and summer. Thousands of decaying shells wash ashore, producing a powerful, unpleasant odor and littering beaches with sharp debris.

How You Can Help Prevent the Spread

Stopping the spread relies entirely on community vigilance.

1. **Clean, Drain, Dry:** Thoroughly spray down boats, trailers, and fishing gear after every use. Drain all live wells and bait buckets after use.
2. **Dispose Properly:** Many infestations originate from intentional aquarium dumps. Never release aquarium snails, fish, or plants into natural water bodies. Dispose of all unwanted bait in the trash.
3. **Dry Equipment:** Make sure boats, docks, lifts, swim rafts, and other equipment are dry for at least 21 days before putting them in another body of water.

Protecting our waters starts with small steps. By inspecting your watercraft and teaching others to do the same, you play an essential role in keeping our local lakes vibrant, healthy, and INVASIVE FREE!

Annual Loon Survey 2026

In 1994, the Nongame Wildlife division of the MN DNR began surveying loon populations as part of the Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program (MLMP.) There are 600 Minnesota lakes surveyed each year across six key index areas. Lakes must be at least 10 acres in size and deep enough to overwinter fish. This is a long-term project that is made possible by the assistance of hundreds of volunteers across the state. Within a period of 10 days each summer, roughly 1000 volunteers visit their designated lake(s) one morning to conduct the survey. While 32 years of data suggest that the adult loon population remains stable overall across the state, we are seeing two concerning trends in the Itasca county survey area: both adult and juvenile loon populations are declining.



Photo credit: Jess Gunderson

Historically, WCOLA member Bill Berg surveyed both Trout and Little Trout lakes for many years. We took over the Wabana survey from DNR employee Sarah Verke in 2014, and in 2022 we added both Trout and Little Trout. Diane Rutherford is a long-time surveyor of Bluewater Lake. There is also an additional count that has been done later in the summer by a different group of volunteers as part of the Loon Watcher program.

Here are the results of the 2026 survey for the WCOLA lakes included in the count:

Lake	Adults	Juveniles
Wabana	16	2
Little Trout	2	0
Trout	15	1
Bluewater	4	2

The Nongame Wildlife Program is funded only through donations and does not receive any financial support from other sources (license plate sales, fishing/hunting licenses, etc.) The continuation of programs such as MLMP require both volunteer support and financial donations. You can donate directly via the MN DNR website, or you can “look for the loon” line item on your MN tax forms.

Each year the MLMP team issues an annual report discussing the health of our state’s loon populations, and it can be found by visiting the MLMP section of the DNR’s website. You can also reach out to me if you would like a copy of the report.

The loons are preparing to head south for winter, but we will again be waiting to count them next summer as they come home to nest.

Jess and Jon Gunderson
Wabana Lake
jsgunderson@gmail.com

WCOLA Loon Count

By Mary Hutter

WCOLA volunteers conducted the annual loon count on July 23rd. WCOLA annually does their own count which includes all 7 lakes in the association.

A special thanks to all our loon counters this year: Steve Melin, Sue Norgren, Susan Hawkinson, Carol Speedling, Lynne Pernsteiner, Jim Christmas & his grandkids, and Mary Hutter.

On our 7 lakes, the overall count was 38 adults and 8 chicks, which was down 9 adults from last year. The main difference was in two lakes- we were down 15 adults on Big Trout but up 9 adults on Wabana. The overall loon totals on the 7 lakes for last 3 years are:

2024- 36 adults & 3 chicks

2025- 47 adults & 8 chicks

2026- 38 adults & 8 chicks



THANK YOU!!

There have been many businesses that donated to us through advertising and gifts for our silent auction. We are incredibly thankful to these businesses for enabling us to put on a concert this summer. These are the businesses that have supported us. It would be nice to support them back.

Cedar Creek Tavern
Edward LePlant Construction
Cabinet Corner
218 Tree Service
Coldwell Banker- Karen Gessell
Northland Monument Company
Benders
Rivertown Furniture
Bella Rosa Boutique
Stretch Me
Briar's Clothing
Forest Lake
Shaw Florists
Lake & Company
Super One (North)



Also a thank you to the many WCOLA members who donated money, gifts, and time so that we could put on a great event! If you'd like to contribute towards the concert next summer, please reach out to Lynne Pernsteiner at-- setofsteins@msn.com



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A big thanks to the WCOLA Fun Committee for organizing WCOLA events & raising money for our lake association!

The Fun Committee was responsible for planning the WCOLA Spring Social and the "Fun" Raising Concert. They've also sold merchandise, gotten donations, and secured advertising to support these events.

Fun Committee Members:

Elaine Pearson
Leslie Black
Erika Brooks
Libby Igo
Jenai Gilbertson
Sarah Fordham
Sarah Verke
Cassie Johnson
Karen Melysne
Lori Harrell
Kari Hedlund
Jennifer Dulong
Mary Hutter
Michelle Cone
Lynne Pernsteiner

We are selling advertising to help support our organization. If you are interested in advertising in our quarterly newsletter, introductory pricing is being offered through 2026. The cost of a full-page color advertisement per quarterly newsletter is \$100, a half-page ad is \$50, and a quarter-page ad is \$25. Advertisements can be for local businesses, they could be personal too, such as a birthday greeting. It's a great way to support a good cause and it's tax deductible.

WABANA CHAIN OF LAKES ASSOCIATION

Dan & Jean Hagen, Treasurer
38940 Wild Rose Lane
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

WCOLA Board Members:

President- Scott Hutter, Vice President- Tom Horton
Secretary- Chris Freidlieb, Treasurer- Dan & Jean Hagen

Committee Members:

Environmental/AIS- Mark Conover & Mark Popovich, Government Liaison- Sam Nelson,
Communications- Lynne Pernsteiner, Secchi Disc- Tommy Bennett,
Shoreland Advisor- Susan Lick, Historical- Carol Speeding, Website- Mark Miner,
Loon Count- Mary Hutter, Roadside Cleanup- Sandra Nelson

Website: WCOLA.org

