

Circle Lake Association leading charge to improve water quality

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Lakes across the state face a crisis with invasive species of fish and vegetation, run-off, sediment deposits and algae blooms.

Residents near Circle Lake are embroiled in a battle to combat each of those issues. With little action from government agencies, residents of Circle Lake began a grassroots effort to improve the water quality of the lake in the hopes of preserving it.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency put Circle Lake on its list of impaired lakes years ago and the Circle Lake Association began addressing the myriad issues that led to the lake landing on the list.

“We understand the value of the homes is directly related to the water quality,” Circle Lake Association President Dale Petelinsek said. “We also know the quality of our health is tied to the water quality of the lake.”

Circle Lake suffers from algae bloom in the summer when temperatures rise. The annual eyesore prompted action from Circle Lake residents to help prevent pollutants reaching the lake.

“All you have to do is look out your window and say, ‘That lake is green,’” Petelinsek said. “We’re trying to change it.”

The shallowness of lakes in Southern Minnesota makes work on addressing the issues with water quality more difficult. Circle Lake averages a depth of 7 ½ feet, said Jason Wood, a Circle Lake Association member and project lead for the association’s carp project.

“The water temperatures soar in July and you get algae bloom,” Wood said. “We had some very bad blue-green algae blooms.”

Dr. Peter Sorensen, a fisheries expert at the University of Minnesota, believes the chances of bringing the



Circle Lake

The algae levels in Circle Lake’s water makes it tough for swimming. Lake residents are raising money to continue to work on reducing pollutants and nonnative species from the water. (News file photos)

lakes back to what they were hundreds of years ago are pretty low.

“I’d like to advocate much more strongly for the awareness of the crisis of the situation,” said Dr. Sorensen. “I think we’re going to lose it all unless we’re very vigilant.”

The association continues to address the issue of carp in the lake. In 2010, the association removed 280,000 pounds of carp and continues to remove carp each year.

Carp kill plant life and have adverse effects on game fish and vegetation, Wood said. Carp also increase the biomass of the lake, which increases algae levels.

The association has installed a fish barrier at Wolf Creek to prevent carp from entering the lake from the Cannon River, limited spawning locations for carp around Circle Lake, increased the numbers of game fish that feed on carp eggs and removed adult carp through seining.

The association also started using radio transmitters to track carp and discover spawning locations. Wood helped fin clip 300 carp and radio tagged seven carp in April.

“The idea is when we go out this winter, we will be able to count how many are remaining based on those fin clips,” Wood said. “It’s definitely an overrun lake with carp.”

The association stocked around 5,000 bluegill fish, which feed on carp eggs in the spring to combat the carp.

“We’ve done a good job managing,” Petelinsek said. “We’re one of the few lakes that have shown improvement.”

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources ruled in June 2012 that the lake had a normal amount of carp.

In addition to the carp project, the association started a native planting campaign in 2014 in order to stabilize eroding areas and prevent sediment from reaching surface waters.

The association has worked to slow sediment deposits into the lake by installing structures to slow water. It also used a grant from the Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation to build holding ponds to prevent sediment from reaching the lake.

“In 2014, we put in 11 holding ponds,” Petelinsek said. “This year, we put in four more. We have plans next year to contain more run-off.”

The association funds itself from donations from residents, along with fundraising events like its annual Circle the Lake run, which is set for Sept. 19, the Chunky Dunk polar plunge in the winter, and grants all in an effort to get Circle Lake removed from the impaired lakes list.

“Our whole goal is to get off that list,” Petelinsek said.