



Lake Association News

A newsletter for the Association for the Preservation of Clear Lake

Summer 2017

APCL Update - Deb Tesar

During last week's RAGBRAI stop in Clear Lake, I enjoyed introducing several guests to our wonderful lake, and in particular, to swimming in it. I of course had to alert them about the hazards of zebra mussels to barefoot swimmers. But this also gave me the opportunity to share the story of our journey in lake water quality restoration.

Although our progress is exciting and encouraging, we still face numerous threats, including additional invasive species lurking not far away, continued nutrient concerns, and uncertainty in funding priorities for watershed improvement projects.

Our upcoming Annual Picnic, featuring Bruce Trautman, Iowa DNR Deputy Director, Scott Grummer, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist, and Jim Sholly, CLEAR Project Coordinator, will present a great opportunity and to learn more about the next big challenges in our continuing quest for improved water quality in Clear Lake. We will also take a moment to celebrate our successes and reflect on how far we've come.

I hope you can join us at this very informative and inspiring event!

Catching Food for Thought: Fishing Clear Lake, Iowa for Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

Tim Dekoster—IDNR Fisheries Bureau

Many anglers, in the Midwest and Clear Lake, Iowa, target channel catfish because they put up a good fight and are fun to catch. However, some people not only catch channel catfish for fun, but also consume them on a regular basis. For many anglers eating wild-caught channel catfish serves as a heart healthy source of protein and omega three fatty acids. Channel catfish can be identified by their slim build, which has a green-blue colored upper body and pale-white lower body with spots on their side. Specimens lacking spots that are darker in complexion can be identified by locating a convex anal fin that has 24-30 fin rays. Live bait such as crayfish, minnows, chicken liver, and night crawlers are baits commonly used to catch channel catfish. Additionally, various scented artificial baits can be used to catch channel catfish, since they rely on their sense of smell to detect prey. Like most catfish they can be caught by shore angling anytime from dusk to dawn. Channel catfish fishing is best during the mid-summer season (June-August), since their metabolism (i.e. feeding habits) increase every time there is a ~17-18°F rise in water temperature. However, the best time to catch channel catfish is during their spawn season, which occurs in early June when water temperatures reach between 75 °F-80 °F. During this time it is best to target rocks, hollow logs, and other cavities that the catfish typically use for spawning. For information on fishing in the North Central Iowa area, contact the Clear Lake Fish and Wildlife office at 641-357-3517.



Choosing Native Prairie Plants for Your Landscaping

Jim Sholly — CLEAR Project

Like any home improvement project, planning is the key to success, and planning for your native landscaping is no exception. Luckily there are several great tools that can be utilized to find out what plants will work best in your area based on the amount of sunlight, soil conditions, and competition with other plants. A great resource for North Iowa is the website for the Tallgrass Prairie Center (www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org). They have a wealth of knowledge about prairie species native to this area and the history behind our ever changing landscape. A popular method of adding natives to your current landscaping is by planting from potted stock that is already 1-2 years old. This allows you to choose specific species and arrange them to best suit the flower bed. Planning for mature growing heights, bloom time, and bloom color will allow you to create a very personalized flower bed. Shooting Star Native Seeds is a great place to look for high quality started plants (www.shootingstarnativeseed.com). If you would like help planning your next landscaping project or to find out if any financial assistance is available, please contact us online at www.ClearProject.net, by phone at 641-357-2200, or stop by the office at 800 1st Ave South in Clear Lake.

The American Coot — Brianna Sholly—Cerro Gordo County Conservation Naturalist

If it looks like a duck and floats like a duck, it's probably a duck – right? Certainly that reasoning works on many occasions, but such is not the case for the American Coot, *Fulica americana*. These dark-bodied birds with white faces are common sights in Iowa, often mixing in with ducks during migration. However, they belong in the family of birds known as rails and are closer in relation to a sandhill crane than to a mallard.

Somewhat chicken-like in appearance, their plump body and rounded head are often all you see of them, unless you happen to catch them in flight or walking on shore. They have tiny tails, short wings, and large, very strange, feet. If you've ever caught a glimpse of their green feet, you'll notice they aren't webbed like a duck but have lobes on them, more like a grebe. These lobes fan out when they paddle to push more water but are able to

collapse when the coot brings his foot back forward so as not to cause more drag. If you happen to spook some by getting too close, they'll often hurriedly paddle away or dive rather than fly.

That's because coots are awkward fliers and require long running distances to take off from the water! They may start to take off, but often nestle back down on the water before actually becoming airborne.

During the breeding season, look for coots to inhabit any water body with emergent aquatic vegetation, where they build floating platform nests that hold 8-12 eggs. They eat mainly aquatic plants, anything from sedges, duckweed, wild celery, and cattails to algae, hydrilla, and water milfoil! Occasionally, they also dine on terrestrial plants, insects, crustaceans, and small vertebrates, such as tadpoles and salamanders.

Often referred to as mud hens, coots can be harvested for food but are rarely targeted by hunters in our area since their meat is less-desirable than ducks. However, coot is somewhat popular in Cajun cuisine on the Louisiana coast, particularly as an ingredient in gumbo.

While maybe not appreciated for their looks or taste, coots can play an important role environmentally. Because they are found in wetlands and tend not to stray too far, scientists can use coots to monitor toxin levels and water pollution. And remember those less-than-desirable plants they eat like hydrilla and water milfoil? Those are aquatic invasive species in Iowa and even though coots probably don't eat enough of each of them to significantly reduce their abundance, every little bit helps in the fight!



Upcoming Events

August 13th — APCL Annual Picnic

August 17th — Field Day – Goats of McIntosh

August 22nd — Soil Health Workshop

For more information on any of these events, please visit www.ClearProject.net.