

Preventing the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species on the Sauk River in Stearns County

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) can cause recreational, economic, and ecological damage – changing how we use and enjoy the water of Minnesota. One such species, flowering rush, was discovered on Sauk Lake several years ago. It is actually an attractive decorative plant, but once introduced to a lake or river, its aggressive growth along shoreland can: 1) make it difficult to access the water, 2) overtake and outcompete native plants, potentially lowering biodiversity, and 3) provide unsuitable shelter, food, and nesting habitat for native animals. In the spring of 2022, Stearns County Parks employees discovered a new population of flowering rush 15 miles downstream from Sauk Lake near Melrose. It is spreading downriver, and the Sauk River Chain of Lakes Association (SRCLA) wants to make sure it doesn't make it to the Chain. The SRCLA designated me (Brad Matuska) to manage an aquatic invasive species control project through the Stearns Coalition of Lake Associations (Stearns COLA) which is being funded by a grant from the MN DNR. The goal of this project is to keep flowering rush from spreading further. The project started in the summer of 2022 with a team from Limnopro Aquatic Science of St. Cloud surveying the location and concentration of flowering rush. However, we were unable to treat these infested areas, because the river was inaccessible due to extraordinary low water levels. We hope to treat these areas in the summer of 2023. Other entities involved in the project include Clarke/SOLitude Aquatic Services, Stearns County Parks, MN DNR, and the Sauk River Watershed District.

The problem is that all project activities, including the treatment and post-treatment surveys, need to be completed by July 1, 2023 when the grant money will no longer be available. Because of the growth pattern of flowering rush and the resulting timing for effective treatment and post-treatment survey work, it cannot be done in this timeline. At a Stearns COLA meeting last fall, Senator Howe and Representative Demuth suggested to me that they could help and Senator Howe introduced a bill ([Senate File 136](#)) to extend our funding. Please pass this bill to extend our funding so that we can prevent the spread of AIS. Thank you!

Brad Matuska
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srcl.org