

**IMPORTANT NEWS** from Otter Tail County Coalition of Lake Associations

# E-Newsletter February 2025



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Picture courtesy Vern Whitten Aerial Photography

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## Lake Stewardship Symposium - May 31, 2025

Thumper Pond Resort in the city of Ottertail, MN, on May 31, 2025 will be the site for the **Lake Stewardship Symposium**. The one-day event from 9:00 a.m to 3:00 p.m. will feature presentations on Aquatic Invasive Species prevention, shoreline restoration, vacation cabin rentals proliferation, septic system best practices and innovative new projects of lake stewardship advocates. Watch for more news about the event in newsletters, publications, social media and other sources. Invitations for registrations will appear in this monthly OTC COLA E-Newsletter, websites and other media outlets. For more information contact:

[Spencer McGrew, Otter Tail County AIS Specialist](#)

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## A Decade of Starry Stonewort - Part 4 Critical Fish Habitat Impacts

Starry stonewort directly impacts fish spawning habitat by the formation of a thick mat that serves as a physical barrier effectively impeding access to substrates for nest creation resulting in (1) reduction in nesting area and density of nests and (2) complete elimination of spawning activity in the area of infestation. In lakes supporting a mature and/or expanding infestation of starry stonewort, spawning fish must compete for remaining spawning habitat in areas that are suboptimal for spawning.

[MORE](#)



Click on image for Ron Schara video

### Keep It Clean 2.0 Moves Forward

“The Keep it Clean 2.0” bill is jacketed and has two authors - in the House and in the Senate. It has not been introduced yet and it has been pared down from our draft. We are hopeful that it will be heard in both committees and that it will be amended to provide some necessary funding. The existing “litter on ice” law is making a difference on frozen lakes this winter. Our billboards and online ads



could be better, but we are doing what we can with what we have. Locally, at Upper Red Lake, the waste removal program and abundance of resources and signage are helping our thousands of visitors to be nice to the ice. The Keep it Clean Wheelhouse will be on display at Lake of the Woods all next week and at the Fishing for Ducks event at Mille Lacs on February 11. When you are talking to your representatives, please put in a good word for the bill and let them know our coalition is growing and continuing to promote our agenda.

Watch for updates in this OTC COLA monthly E-Newsletter for instructions on how to contact Minnesota legislators in support of Keep It Clean MN 2.0.

[Keep It Clean Newsletter](#)

[Ron Schara Keep It Clean MN Video](#)

Website: [Keepitcleanmn.org](http://Keepitcleanmn.org)

**Robyn Dwight Upper Red Lake Area Association/ Keep it Clean Coalition [robbyndwight1@gmail.com](mailto:robbyndwight1@gmail.com)**

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## **EOT SWCD Named SWCD of the Year**

The East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was named SWCD of the Year at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) annual two-day convention held in Bloomington, Minnesota, in early December.

“The purpose of the award is to recognize and inspire leadership within the SWCDs that go above and beyond the base capacity,” Sheila Vanney, assistant director of MASWCD said. “Three critical elements of a successful SWCD conservation delivery are considered for this award, including an engaged board, an effective manager, and a dedicated staff who are knowledgeable about local resources.”



## **MN DNR Fisheries Rulemaking Proposals Open for Public Comment**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is asking for the public to comment on proposed rules about fishing methods that, if adopted, would go into effect in March 2026.

The rules propose increasing the maximum allowed distance between hooks in tackle configurations with multiple hooks from 9 to 18 inches. The rulemaking also allows for the use of certain automatic hook-setting devices for ice fishing that currently are not allowed and includes clarification of the definition of “hook.” These changes would allow anglers to use a wider range of commercially available products and be more practical for bait commonly used. The changes are anticipated to reduce the number of swallowed hooks and deep hook sets, thereby decreasing hooking mortality without posing a threat to conservation.

Comments can be submitted through Thursday, March 20, by email to [bethany.bethke@state.mn.us](mailto:bethany.bethke@state.mn.us) or mail to Bethany Bethke, Fisheries Rules and Regulations Coordinator, Fish and Wildlife Division, Minnesota DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155.

More Information, including the proposed rule language and contact information for comments, is available on the [fisheries rulemaking page of the DNR website](https://mndnr.gov/input/rules/fisheries/index.html) (mndnr.gov/input/rules/fisheries/index.html).



## **Timeline Update for MN DNR's New Electronic Licensing System**

### **Current licensing system remains fully functional**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has moved the rollout date for the state's updated electronic license system (ELS).

This collaborative technology project, developed with Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) and licensing vendor PayIt Outdoors, will modernize the issuance of fishing and hunting licenses and the titling and registration of boats and off-road vehicles.

The state is working with PayIt Outdoors to identify a launch timeline that allows time for them to complete adequate testing and training. While the DNR had initially targeted a March 2025 launch, we now expect PayIt Outdoors to be ready to launch the new system later this year. While the updated timeline is disappointing, it will help ensure the new system fully meets the needs of its users when PayIt Outdoors delivers it to the state.

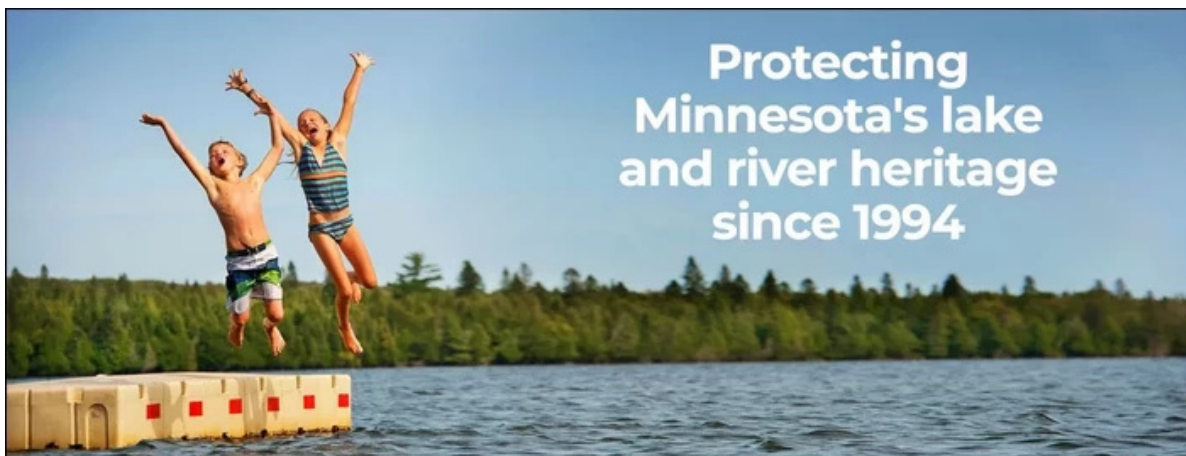
It's important to note that until the new ELS system is launched, nothing will change for license agents, deputy registrars, anglers, hunters, and recreational vehicle and watercraft users as they buy licenses or register motorized vehicles. The current system is fully functional.

We know people are eager to have a new, modernized system, and we look forward to working with you to ensure a smooth and successful launch and the best user experience from the start.

Kelly Straka, Fish and Wildlife Division Director

[MORE](#)

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## MLR February 2025 Newsletter

As winter settles in and the legislative budget session begins, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers (MLR) is starting to meet with lawmakers and mobilize our base of 300 lake association members. We're working alongside our partners to secure sustainable funding solutions and educate legislators on urgent issues like aquatic invasive species (AIS), shoreline erosion, boating safety, and support for lake associations and local governments to protect and preserve our waterways.

A strong, statewide network of dedicated lake stewards is essential to achieving lasting solutions. MLR's **Citizen Action Network (CAN)** tool makes it easier than ever for lake advocates to stay informed, contact representatives, and track legislation that impacts our lakes and rivers. **Sign up to receive our CAN emails.**





## New Projects Launching in 2025

The Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) at the University of Minnesota announces the launch of [six new research projects](#). These projects were selected as part of a competitive proposal process following a comprehensive research needs assessment conducted by MAISRC. Starting in January 2025, the new projects will advance AIS detection, management tools, ecological impact studies, and stakeholder engagement to reinforce prevention and control efforts. The projects include: Your copy should address 3 key questions: Who am I writing for (audience)? Why should they care (benefit)? What do I want them to do (call-to-action)?

[MORE](#)

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**Tell Governor Walz  
No 50% AIS Prevention Funding Cut**

Reprint from MN COLA News mailing January 21, 2025

This email is an urgent plea for you to contact Governor Walz, **and** your state and local leaders, to oppose the Governor's 2026-2027 biennial budget recommendation to cut to the AIS Prevention Aid funding.

The AIS Prevention Aid (established 10 years ago) is crucial to prevent the spread of AIS. Minnesota counties share \$10 million annually and most of that money funds AIS inspections for watercraft moving into and out of our public waters. Fewer boat inspections will be the result, and this will translate into greater risk of spreading AIS into the lakes and rivers that you love.

We've created a template for your [letter to the Governor](#), but it will be most effective if you add your own thoughts and make it your own. You can send a handwritten or printed letter, or you can send an email.

The mailing address for the Governor is:

Office of Governor Tim Walz  
130 State Capitol  
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

There is also an [online form](#) to send the Governor a message.

We've also created a template for your [letters to your state and local leaders](#).

You can find your State Representative and State Senator using this [online tool](#).

Search your County website for County Commissioners and County Soil and Water Managers

**Please act today!** It would be a huge setback to lose this important source of funding. AIS isn't taking a vacation, and neither should our protections.

Thank you,

For assistance in formatting your letter please contact [otccola2@gmail.com](mailto:otccola2@gmail.com)

We encourage you to check out MN COLA's excellent newsletter - <https://mncola.org/current-waters/>

Go [HERE](#) for a review of the benefits of joining MN COLA

[MNCOLA.ORG](http://MNCOLA.ORG)

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[David Helgerson](#), OTC COLA Director Liaison with MN COLA

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## OTC COLA Speaker Team 2025

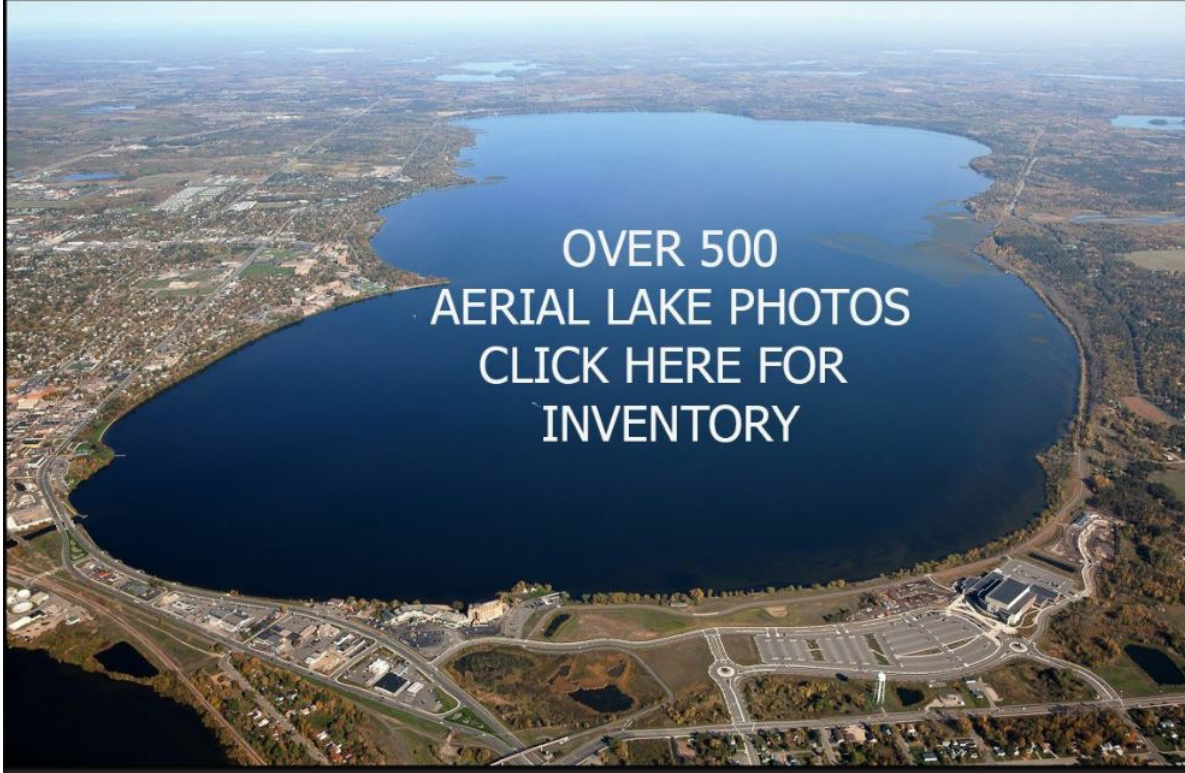
The OTC COLA Speaker Team will be active again this year. The Team is comprised of members of the OTC COLA Board of Directors. Lake Associations are invited to schedule an OTC COLA Board Member to speak at their summer events including Lake Association Annual Meetings. Content of the presentations includes review of their current lake Water Quality Analysis Reports, a summary of COLA's activities and events during its 33-year history and overview of current COLA programs and activities benefitting Otter Tail County lake property owners. There is no cost for the OTC COLA Speaker Team Member to speak at Lake Association Member meetings.

In 2024 members of the OTC COLA Board of Directors were speakers at six Lake Association annual meetings. All of the events were well received and appreciated. Several Lake Associations indicated that a COLA speaker at the event stimulated Lake Association Member turn-out.

Please consider scheduling an OTC COLA Speaker Team Member to speak at your summer meeting. Coordinating Team Members with desired meeting dates and times is a challenge but we will do the best we can to accommodate requests. Early submissions are the best way to help secure a desired place on the schedule.

To request an OTC COLA speaker at your meeting email John Kruse, OTC COLA Administrative Assistant, at [otccola2@gmail.com](mailto:otccola2@gmail.com).

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## **Free - Get An Aerial Digital Photo of Your Lake**

Vern Whitten Aerial Photography has taken pictures of lakes in the region for over 50 years. Over the years his business with commercial accounts has routed him over a lot of lakes. Having always been interested in lakes, he took pictures of those he flew over. He has compiled an inventory of over 500 lake pictures of not only Otter Tail County lakes but also lakes in Western Wisconsin, throughout Minnesota, into Northeastern South Dakota, and North Dakota.

The pictures are of high quality having been taken by a 50 megapixel camera. Depending on the lake and the altitude he uses this camera or another one for telephoto applications. You can check out his website at [www.vernwhittenphotography.com](http://www.vernwhittenphotography.com) . Find your lake [HERE](#). If you can't find your lake, tell Vern and he will help you find it on the website or may take a picture when he is in the area.

Vern has offered to make his digital lake pictures available at no cost to Lake Associations for newsletters, Facebook, or other media outlets. Contact Vern Whitten at [whittenaerials@gmail.com](mailto:whittenaerials@gmail.com) or 701-261-7658.

FYI- I used one of his pictures for the Lake Property Owner Lake Stewardship Symposium logo.

[John Kruse](#), OTC COLA Administrative Assistant

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**OTTER TAIL**  
COUNTY - MINNESOTA



Spencer McGrew

### **McGrew Elected Chair of the DNR's Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has announced the election of Spencer McGrew as the new Chair of the Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee. McGrew's leadership in Otter Tail County has been instrumental in developing and implementing effective AIS prevention initiatives, and his new role will allow him to bring his expertise and leadership to the statewide level.

McGrew's election as Chair reflects his commitment, knowledge, and leadership in AIS prevention efforts. His colleagues have praised his ability to collaborate and lead meaningful progress in protecting Otter Tail County's 1,048 lakes and Minnesota's waterways.

[MORE](#)

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**Septic Systems Grants and**



## Free Online Course Available

Homeowners with septic systems understand the significant investment they have made in their subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS) or septic systems. Proper maintenance is essential to protect that investment and ensure and preserve underground water quality. To assist homeowners in understanding and maintaining their systems, the [National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association](#) (NOWRA) and the [Rural Community Assistance Partnership](#) (RCAP) have partnered to offer a [free online course](#).

[MORE](#)

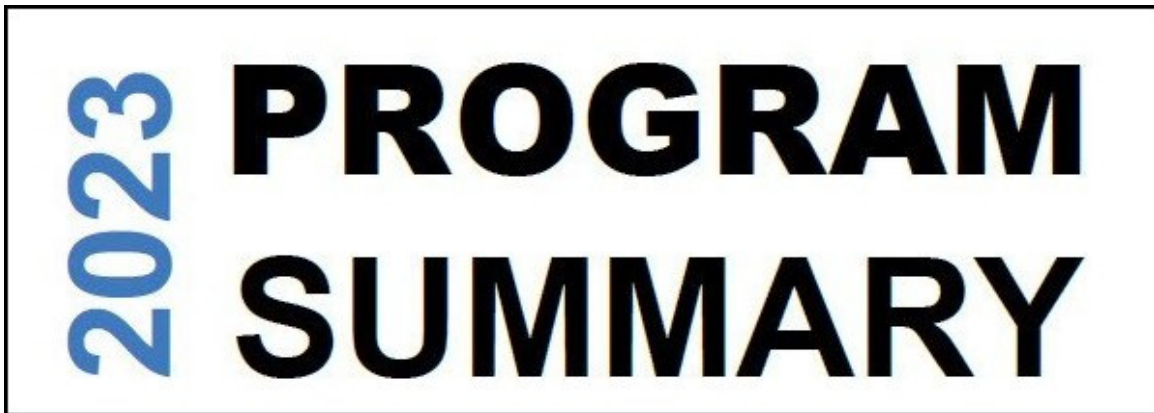
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## AIS Task Force February 2025 Update

- Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee (SAISAC) elects Spencer McGrew of Otter Tail County to Committee Chairman
- SAISAC responds to Governor Walz' proposed 50% cut to AIS funding
- Otter Tail County is hiring watercraft inspectors for the 2025 season
- Lake Stewardship Symposium for lake property owners, May 31, 2025

[MORE](#)

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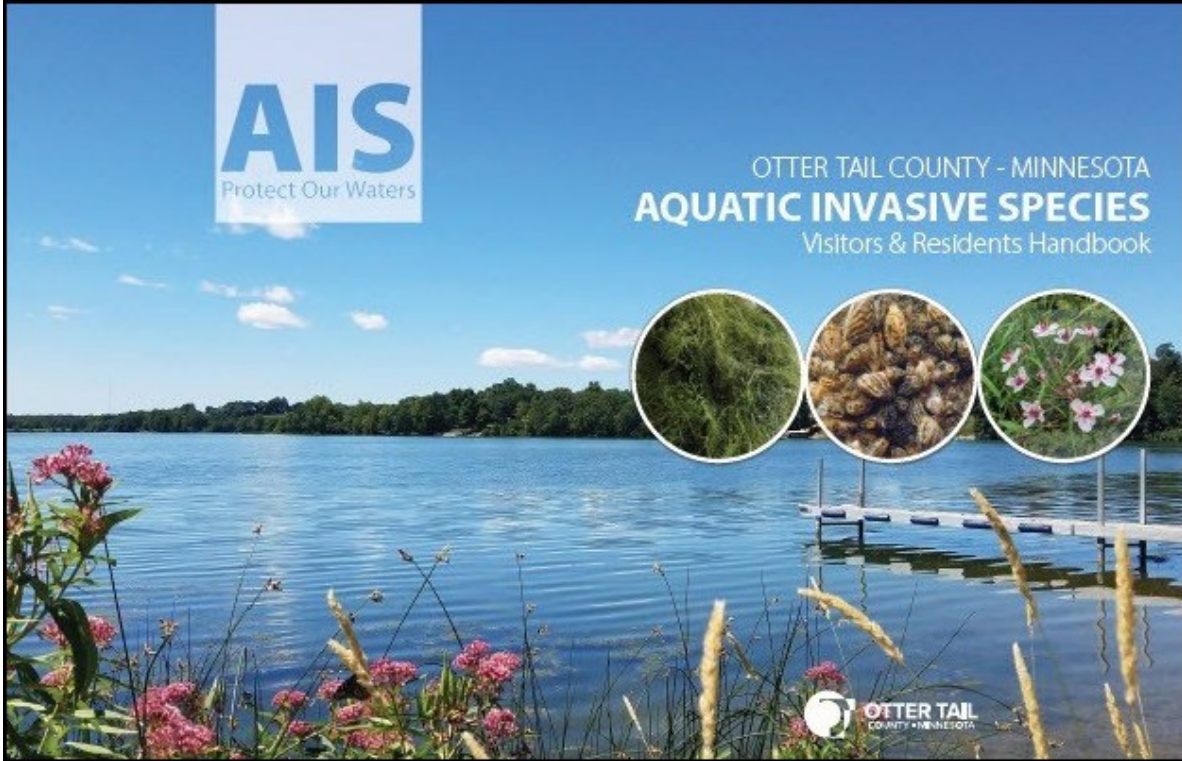


## AIS Prevention Aid Program Snapshot 2024

The AIS Prevention Aid Program Snapshot is prepared annually for submission to the state of Minnesota outlining use of funds provided for control of aquatic invasive species in Minnesota lakes and rivers. The Snapshot for 2024 has been created and submitted to the state of Minnesota. Supporting details for the Snapshot will be published in the Annual AIS Prevention Report currently in the process of being compiled.

[Spencer McGrew](#), Otter Tail County AIS Specialist

[AIS Prevention Aid Program Snapshot 2024](#)  
[AIS Prevention 2023 Report](#)



## **AIS Handbooks Now Available**

The enthusiastically acclaimed AIS Handbook sponsored by the Otter Tail County AIS Task Force is now available. The Handbook will be distributed to lake property owners, resort owners, and civic organizations in Otter Tail County. Quantities can be reserved from Otter Tail County Land & Resource 218-998-8095. Besides disseminating AIS prevention best practices in the Handbooks, the AIS prevention information will also be published in area newspapers and included in social media posts.

[\*\*AIS Handbook for Visitors and Residents\*\*](#)

[\*\*AIS Handbook for Visitors and Residents Cover\*\*](#)

[\*\*Spencer McGrew, Otter Tail County AIS Specialist\*\*](#)

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### **OTC AIS Task Force Minutes**

- [\*\*November 7, 2024\*\*](#)

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### **OTC Board Of Commissioner Minutes**

- [\*\*January 14, 2025\*\*](#)
  - [\*\*January 28, 2025\*\*](#)
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## **Featured Posts - February 2025**

- [Lake Property Owner Event Administration](#)
- [Get The Lead Out](#)
- [It's Not Too Early- Lake Association Directories](#)

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to learn about new and featured posts

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## **Instant Access Links**

- [Newsletter Article Index](#)- Visually scan article titles from all OTC COLA E-Newsletters from 2018.
- [Water Quality Analysis Reports \(2024 samples- Individual reports for 60 OTC COLA Lakes](#)
- [Lake Property Owner Directories \(2019\)](#)- Directories by Street and Name for 100 OTC Lakes
- [OTC COLA Brochure](#)- View and/or download the OTC COLA Brochure
- **We want to hear from you! - Go [HERE](#) to give OTC COLA your comments and suggestions**

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**[John Kruse](#), OTC COLA Administrative Assistant**

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