

SPEAKERS



Nick Phelps

Nick Phelps is a Professor and Interim Head in the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology and the Director of the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center at the University of Minnesota. His research focuses on emerging threats to aquatic systems at both the macro and microbial scales in the fields of fish health and aquatic invasive species (AIS). His work has led to many interdisciplinary collaborations in Minnesota and around the world on topics related to fish health, aquaculture, risk assessment, aquatic invasive species, diagnostic development and pathogen discovery, ecotoxicology, ecosystem health, food safety, and more!

Millions of dollars are spent each year in Minnesota to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). It is a fair question to ask... are those approaches working? Using several statistical approaches to analyze historical data, the patterns are consistent: we have slowed the rate of spread of AIS in Minnesota. The presentation will describe our approach to evaluating the cost-benefit of AIS prevention and celebrate our collective success. Recommendations for prioritizing future funding and management decisions will also be presented.

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Chris LeClair

Chris LeClair is the Director of the Land & Resource Management Department for Otter Tail County. Chris began his career in 1993 as a regulator in the environmental health field at Anoka County while finishing his B.S. in Natural Resources & Environmental Studies at the University of Minnesota. In 1996, Chris was the Environmental Health Specialist at Washington County where he remained for 22 years. In 2002, Chris was assigned to the septic system regulation program at Washington County. In 2018 Chris came to Otter Tail County taking the position of Department Director for management of regulating septic systems, wetland conservation and shoreland development. In 2024 Chris began supervising the County's environmental health specialists.

Chris will give an overview of how septic systems work and what we look for when conducting a compliance inspection of an existing system. He will also cover county and state regulations and the work he is doing nationally.

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Jeff Forester

Jeff Forester has been the Executive Director of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers (MLR) for over two decades. MLR seeks to protect Minnesota's lake and river heritage for current and future generations by forging powerful links between lakes, lake advocates and policymakers. Jeff was Hubert Humphrey Public Policy Fellow and Shannon Leadership Fellow. His book, *Forest for the Trees, How Humans Shaped the Northwoods* (Minnesota Historical Society Press) examines fire and forestry in northern Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. He was associate producer of *TRANSPLANT, A GIFT FOR LIFE*, which won an Emmy. MLR has been working to stop the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species in Minnesota since 2009.

Jeff will be talking about organizing and harnessing the power of lake associations to drive public policy in Minnesota, and our shared goals of protecting Minnesota's lakes and rivers for current and future generations. Our focus at this point is to restore the County AIS Prevention Aid that is set to be rolled back 50% on July 1, 2027 - this would be about a \$200,000 hit to Otter Tail County.

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Pete Guck

Pete Guck is the Riparian Conservation Specialist at the EOT SWCD (East Otter Tail Soil & Water Conservation District). He specializes in riparian conservation partnering with Otter Tail County lake property owners providing technical, financial, and educational opportunities to restore shorelines. This all by incorporating methods and expertise that benefit water quality throughout our regional watersheds.

The EOT SWCD has published the finalized version of their updated [Lake Stewardship Booklet](#). They are promoting its distribution throughout the county. They are suggesting that lake associations make the Booklet available to lake property owners at annual meetings and other lake property owner events. Also for Associations that publish newsletters or have other methods of communicating to their members, mention of the availability of this important information would be appreciated. For more information visit the Table Display for EOT SWCD at this Symposium.

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All Speakers are hosting Table Displays at the Symposium