



## Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

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### Topic of the Month - August 2019

# Twenty-nine sites hold ‘Starry Trek’

Volunteers in Minnesota and Wisconsin turn out to search lakes for aquatic invasive species

Perhaps you’ve never heard of starry stonewort? You may not even be knowledgeable about Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels or curly-leaf pondweed. But many volunteers in Minnesota are educating themselves about aquatic invasive species (AIS) and doing something about it.

Volunteers from all over the state gathered at 29 sites Aug. 17 for “Starry Trek,” a training event hosted by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC), University of Minnesota Extension and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This was the third year for this program which is held every August. A similar event was held at sites in Wisconsin the same day.

One local site was Farm Island Lake where AIS detectors and volunteers, Penny Stiles and Mike Thurk, instructed nine volunteers on AIS identification and search protocols for the lakes they were sent to. All received a bag with necessary equipment.



Of special interest was the starry stonewort, first discovered in Minnesota near Paynesville in 2015. There were additional discoveries in Minnesota in 2016. Starry stonewort is a fast-growing grass-like form of algae not native to North America. It can be distinguished from other grass-like algae by the presence of star-shaped bulbils. It can interfere with recreational and other uses of lakes where it can produce dense mats at the water’s surface. It is believed to be spread by the use of water-related equipment (boats, trailers, lifts, etc.) that was not properly cleaned.

“If you think milfoil is bad you don’t want starry stonewort,” said Stiles. “It’s 10 times worse. Hopefully you don’t find this one today.”

In groups of two or more, the participants were dispatched to area lakes, where they tossed rakes into the lake from the shore, aiming for concentrations of plants. They examined the samples for anything suspicious and if it was, bagged it and labeled it to bring back to Stiles at the host site. They even had brushes to clean their shoes of anything that could be transferred to other locations.

“The people did a nice job,” said Stiles, who reported five samples of a variety of possible aquatic invasive species sent to the DNR for identification. Stiles’ paperwork is submitted to the U of M Extension Service, which processes the information.

Several area lakes, including Round and Big Pine in the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed, were sampled Aug. 17 by the participants. On other days, Stiles and Janet Smude, district technician with the Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Mike and Linda Thurk sampled a few more. In all, 20 lakes were checked for the presence of starry stonewort and any other invasive species.



### **Inspect everything!**

The most likely way for AIS to enter a lake is by a boat, trailers, dock, lift, float plane or other gear used previously on an infested lake. To prevent transfer of AIS, people should: remove all standing water, mud, aquatic plants and invasive species from their boat, trailer and equipment before leaving a lake, regardless of whether that lake is infested; remove the bilge drain plug and drain all lake water from the boat interior including from live wells or internal ballast systems; and dump bait water and excess bait on land well away from the shore.

Boats coming from infested waters should receive a thorough hot water exterior cleaning prior to launch or dry out for at least five days. Those who purchase a dock, lift, swim platform or other lake equipment that has been used on any other lake or river, should clean it thoroughly, then dry it for at least 21 days prior to introduction to a different lake.

### **How to volunteer**

If you are interested in participating in the 2020 Starry Trek program, visit [www.StarryTrek.org](http://www.StarryTrek.org). Those who would like to become an AIS detector should visit [www.maisrc.umn.edu/ais-detector](http://www.maisrc.umn.edu/ais-detector).

***As always, stopping the spread of invasive species to other lakes and rivers, protects habitat for native species such as sunfish and crappies.  
Overall lake and river health is better without invasive species.  
Healthy lakes and rivers benefit fish, wildlife and people.  
Remember, “Clean, Drain, Dry and Dispose.”***

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