



# THE COLA UPDATE

A Publication of Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Associations  
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[www.hubbardcolamn.org](http://www.hubbardcolamn.org)



## Voices on The Water by Peter Pierson

This month we are initiating a new feature that will showcase the stories of those who find a sense of beauty, a sense of place, amidst the lake country of Hubbard County. Through the words of your neighbors, your family and friends, we hope you find a common bond and a shared appreciation for our lakes. Hubbard County COLA is dedicated to preserving the quality of the lakes and our lake experience for all to enjoy, so that one day our children and grandchildren will be sharing their own stories of their love for this place.

We kick off our new feature, “**Voices on The Water,**” by revisiting a story from the late Vern Thompson, long-time Little Sand resident, “**To the Last Loon on Little Sand Lake.**” Loons are an iconic part of our northern lake country. Many feel a sense of being home, of coming home, when we hear the call of a loon on a summer night. We stop and let our thoughts fall to watch a pair slip by, just past the back of the boat, on a misty fall morning.

*Voices on The Water continued on page 2.*

### To the Last Loon on Little Sand Lake

by Vern Thompson, Little Sand Lake, Park Rapids  
(published in West Central Daily Tribune, Willmar, MN – 04/13/2006)



So here we are, drifting side by side on the quiet evening water, watching the lake turn red and the darkness finger out from the pines and spruce

along the west shore.

We are an odd pair, you an upstart not yet in full plumage and I an old geezer long past his prime.

It’s late. Your season here is over. The lake-shore has drawn in upon itself, boatlifts and docks piled well above the waterline. The laughter of children gone, the lake waits, almost breathless, to close over.

You are the last. I have watched you, alone and silent now, having no one to call to. Others of your breed left weeks ago, obeying their primal call to flee before the gales of winter.

So, too, it is with many of my neighbors. Each night I see fewer lights across the lake. “We’re getting out on Tuesday,” one told me. “We’re gonna drive straight through.” I can picture them, fleeing through the night to alight at last among their own kind, to sit in the sun in front of their RV and celebrate their escape. I wish them well.

But with you, my young friend, this is serious business. You have to leave or you will die. Ice has glazed the rocks along the shore. Soon it will creep out after you. You can’t suddenly explode from the water, taking your cue from the mallards in the bay. You need a clear runway to churn and flap and pound before the water releases you to stagger into flight.

Are you still here because you are not fledged enough to fly? Or is it some perverse urge to take your chances as long as possible? When your parents left, did you, like some balky adolescent in an avian airport, insist on a later flight? Or did you want to see the last of the birch and maple leaves burnish the water or the sedges and bulrushes laced with frost each morning? I can understand that kind of wanting. The other morning when you slipped phantomlike out of the clinging fog toward my boat, we shared one suspended moment, as if we were the last waifs in a spirit world.

But aesthetics must give way to reality. That is the lesson to be learned here—perhaps, sadly, the only one. My neighbor was right when he said, “You gotta know when to haul-ass outta here.”

“So listen up, kid! Life does not give you unlimited choices!” I slap the water with my oar as I yell, but you don’t even flinch. You just cock your head and, I swear, faintly smirk. You have dodged too many water skiers and jet skis to be impressed by a flailing old codger yelling nonsense.

I am going home. I am going to build a fire and share a glass of wine with my wife as the night gathers in around us. And hope that in the morning you’ll be gone.

Godspeed.

*Postscript: Several nights later the lake froze over. The next morning my neighbor across the lake called to say that he was watching, through binoculars, two eagles out on the ice—feeding on a dead loon.*

*Some of the brightness went out of the day.*

## Voices on the Water

(continued from page 1)



by Peter Pierson

Loons, though, are not just an iconic symbol of the northern lakes, but an indicator species dependent on clear, clean water and natural shoreline nesting habitat. Loons are sensitive to declines in water quality and loss of safe nesting habitat along undeveloped shoreline. Disturbance from invasive, and at times careless, recreational users threatens young birds and can lead to nesting sites being abandoned.

If you've developed an interest in, perhaps even a relationship with, loons on your lake, you might want to consider getting involved in the DNR's Loon Watch program. Volunteers gather and report information on numbers of loons, observation of juveniles being reared, interesting incidents, and problems that may negatively affect loons. Information on this program is available on the web at: [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/mlmp\\_2013.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/mlmp_2013.pdf)

**We'd like to hear, and share, your stories.** If you would like to share your words, your reflections (pardon the pun) On the Water, please send to: "Larry Roberts" <lrobertsmn@gmail.com>; "Peter Pierson" <p.pierson99706@gmail.com>; or hccolamn@gmail.com

## To the Last Loon on Little Sand Lake

### About Vern Thompson

Vern was a true champion of Little Sand Lake and his stewardship, dedication and leadership played a key role in the protection of the crystal clear waters and natural shorelines of Little Sand Lake that provides critical habitat for loons that he portrays in his story....."**To the Last Loon on Little Sand Lake**". Vern and June Thompson moved to their lake home in late 2001 and became actively involved in Little Sand Lake Area Association. Vern was also a member of Mantrap Valley Conservation Club, Jackpine Writer's Bloc, and Let's Go Fishing.

### CHILI CHALLENGE

The great Chili Challenge is almost here! Theora Goodrich and crew will again represent Hubbard COLA at the American Legion on Wednesday, March 12, 11 am - 1 pm. This year Theora will be making "Lake Lover's Chili". Last year, COLA won the People's Choice Award. We expect to repeat as winners. Theora is collecting monetary donations again from COLA members and friends. Please send this information to your lake owners and seasonal friends and ask for donations. You can mail donations to: Theora Goodrich, 28933 State 87, Nevis, MN 56467. Please make checks payable to Hubbard County Food Shelf. Thanks much for your generosity!



## How Big is Your Environmental Footprint?

### HC COLA Education Team Engages 4-H Members

On President's Day, 2/17/2014, four members of the Hubbard County COLA Education Team participated in the Hubbard County 4-H Project Day by teaching a class designed to interest children in potential water-related 4-H projects. We focused on helping the children understand how to make their environmental footprint smaller. Eighteen children participated in the two Shoreline Habitat class sessions that day.

Shoreline habitat pictures were displayed and discussed by Steve Hall. The pictures provided the backdrop for understanding that for wildlife, the optimal shoreline habitat provides access to the water, food sources, shelter and nesting areas for birds and animals. A hands-on demonstration with a spray bottle helped the children see and feel water energy deflection when a rock (which represented rip rap) was sprayed. The children then observed how coconut logs absorbed the energy of the water from the spray bottle. They learned that wave or wake energy absorption helps prevent erosion in an animal friendly way.

We played "The Lake Game" next. The children were assigned various scenarios where they had to make a choice in actions.

If they chose an action that affected the lake, they then implemented the known impact to the lake water. For example, a choice might be fixing their leaking septic system or taking the long-planned family vacation instead. The children learned how their individual decisions impact the lake.

The children also had a chance to identify aquatic macro-invertebrates. They learned what they become in their adult stage, how important they are in the food chain and that some of them are good indicators of a healthy lake eco-system. For example, a dragonfly nymph is an invertebrate which is large enough to be seen without the use of a microscope so is considered a macro-invertebrate.

We are exploring the possibility of expanding this type of class in the annual Children's Freshwater Class which is for 6th Grade. Thanks to these Education team members: Jan Rumpza, Sharon Natzel, Steve Hall, and Julie Kingsley – Hubbard County SWCD for helping to engage and educate our future lakeshore owners!