

# Hubbard County Should Create Lake Improvement Districts

## The COLA Call

by Ed Mutsch

Earlier columns have discussed in some detail the process presently underway to update the Minnesota shoreland rules. [Past columns can be found on the COLA website at [www.mnwaters.org/hubbardcola](http://www.mnwaters.org/hubbardcola).] The DNR took public input on possible amendments to the existing 1989 shoreland rules during the first five months of 2008, then during the month of June held a series of twelve open houses throughout the state at which citizens were provided information on the rule revision process as well as the areas to be included and guidance on how to become individually engaged. A number of committees will now take on the task of creating a draft of updated shoreland rules. Such a draft is projected to be available in mid-2009. The draft will be publicized and citizen critique subsequently solicited through a series of public hearings. A final updated set of Minnesota shoreland rules will then be promulgated, presumably in the first half of 2010.

Minnesota shoreland rules were last updated nearly 20 years ago. Given the accelerating pace of development on and around Minnesota lakes, the attendant dramatic increase in the number of impaired Minnesota waters, and our dramatically improved, scientifically based understanding of how to better protect our precious water resources, the present updating process is clearly long overdue.

However, while the process may be considered a necessary condition for the enhanced protection of Minnesota water resources, the new rules are unlikely to be sufficient to ensure optimal protection of Hubbard County waters, for the simple reason that Minnesota is a geographically diverse state encompassing a largely agricultural south, a substantial central metropolitan conurbation, and a

northern “wilderness” of lakes and forests. The equally diverse representation on the committees charged with the responsibility to draft updated shoreland rules will inevitably find it necessary to accept numerous compromises as part of reaching a consensus on that draft. The result will be a set of proposed statewide shoreland rules that will (hopefully) be an improvement over current rules for all Minnesota waters in any part of the state, but less than optimal for northern Minnesota where lakes loom so much larger as part of the local economy and overall quality of life.

The establishment of Hubbard County Lake Improvement Districts (LIDs) would provide a higher level of region-specific protection of our water resources than is likely to be created by the new set of updated shoreland rules. An LID is a local governmental unit established by resolution of a county board, either of its own volition or in response to a citizen petition. The county board specifies the LID’s funding arrangement and appoints its initial board of directors with subsequent board positions filled by election by property owners of the district. An LID enables and allows greater local involvement in lake management activities, hence the creation of 27 LIDs presently operating in 14 Minnesota counties. While much more information about LIDs can be found on the DNR website [go to [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us), enter ‘Lake Improvement Districts’ in the search box], a look at when and why these LIDs were established reveals a number of interesting trends.

The first trend is a notable acceleration in the pace of establishment of new LIDs. Since LID- enabling legislation was passed in 1973, less than one LID per year on average was created until 2005; since then over three LIDs per year have been created. This suggests a rising concern at the local level about threats to local waters.

A second striking trend is the progressive geographic “creep” in LID formation as more northern Minnesota counties establish LIDs, extending the trend of LID formation northward from the Twin Cities metropolitan core where LIDs were previously concentrated. Nearby counties with LIDs would include Polk (2), Otter Tail (4), Crow Wing (2), Morrison (3), and Todd (1). While Cass County has no LIDs, the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation was established in 1995 with the mission to fund and promote activities to protect the Leech Lake watershed which encompasses 273 lakes mostly in Cass county.

A third pattern has to do with the purpose for which LIDs are being created. While early LIDs were created to address various water quality issues, virtually all of the LIDs created since 2004 have been primarily chartered to deal with the prevention or control of aquatic species invasion.

The late Tip O’Neil, Massachusetts senator and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, was well known for his frequent use of the expression “All politics is local”. This principle is certainly applicable to the issue of protection of Minnesota surface waters. While the federal Clean Water Act and Minnesota

shoreland rules are critically important to this objective, the enlistment of local knowledge of local water protection needs can ensure that the most appropriate corrective actions are taken in the most timely manner. One means that Minnesota citizens have found to make this happen is by the creation of an increasing number of LIDs in a growing number of counties.

Write to [ELMutsch@aol.com](mailto:ELMutsch@aol.com)

This column appeared in the July 19, 2008 edition of the Park Rapids Enterprise.