

GUIDEBOOK FOR LAKE AND RIVER ASSOCIATIONS LOCATED IN AITKIN COUNTY



2026

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FOREWARD

This guidebook has been prepared by Aitkin Lakes and Rivers Association (ACLARA) as a reference source for new or veteran lake/river associations in Aitkin County.

Questions or comments should be emailed to:

aitkincountylakesandrivers@gmail.com

All information is current as of January 1, 2026.

WHAT IS ACLARA?

An important function of lake/river associations is to serve as the organized voice for its membership with township and county management. A lake/river association can join a county coalition of lake associations to have a stronger, collective voice in local water and shoreline management.

Aitkin County Lakes and Rivers Association (aka ACLARA) represents lake/river associations in Aitkin County. Founded in 1992, ACLARA brings together these associations throughout Aitkin County for the purpose of educating members on keeping its lakes, rivers and shore land healthy for future generations.

Meetings are held on the second Saturday, April through October. Members are encouraged to discuss their association's issues, if any, and share ideas on lake/river management, water quality and conservation matters that impact the waters we all appreciate and enjoy. Communication to the membership is via email.

Annual, nonrefundable dues are \$25 for one representative and one or two alternates. Dues cover the costs of any pertinent information to keep members informed on important issues, local expert speakers on a variety of topics at the monthly meetings and minimal administrative costs. Individuals who share a common interest in the well-being of our lakes/rivers and are not part of an active lake/river association may also join annually for \$25.

Associations vary in structure, and ACLARA is ready to help get new lake/river associations up and running.

ACLARA

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Lake Name _____

Lake Association Name _____

Mailing Address _____

ACLARA Representative _____

Email Address _____

Telephone _____

Alternate Representative Name _____

Email Address _____

Telephone _____

Lake Association Treasurer _____

**MAIL THIS FORM ALONG WITH
YOUR ANNUAL \$25 DUES TO:**

ACLARA
P. O. Box 22
Aitkin, MN 56431

GETTING STARTED

Starting a new organization? First and foremost is to draft your mission statement. It communicates your organization's purpose to shoreline property owners and how it will serve them. Each decision and action in your organization should support and further your mission.

Develop a Board of Directors. Your Board fulfills a variety of roles and legal responsibilities.

Determine what the annual dues will be. Annual dues should cover the costs of publishing/mailing a newsletter and any other pertinent information, as required, a few times a year to keep members informed on important issues, hosting an annual meeting, hearing from local experts on a variety of issues, water quality testing and/or supplies, minimal administrative costs including a post office box and website server expenses. Directors and officers liability insurance is also something you may want to consider having the dues cover.

Information on starting up can be found at:

www.sos.state.mn.us

Click the box titled Register A Business. This will bring you to the Business & Liens page where you'll click How to Start a Business in MN.

Determine if you will operate as a nonprofit. One of the primary benefits of being tax-exempt under IRC Section 501(c)(3) is the ability to accept contributions and donations that are tax-deductible to the donor. Additional benefits include but are not limited to: exemptions from federal and/or state income taxes, ability to apply for grants and other public or private allocations available only to IRS-recognized, 501(c)(3) organizations,

discounts on US Postal bulk-mail rates*, etc. Further information on becoming a nonprofit can be found on the site mentioned above under Types of Businesses, Minnesota Nonprofit Corporations.

Communication is **key** to a successful organization. Develop a database of all shoreline property owners on the lake. Properties/Parcel Search can be found under How Do I on the Aitkin County website:

<https://www.co.aitkin.mn.us/>

Use the search tab to locate property owners by street or subdivision names. Due to privacy regulations, a search can no longer be made using the property owner's name.

Compile a list that includes property owner names, mailing address (often different from the property address), property address, subdivision (if applicable) and the PIN (property identification number).

Once your database is established, send a welcome letter to the property owners describing the formation of a lake association and request their contact information including telephone number and email address. Update the list on a regular basis so it stays current. Many realtors offer a free service that will alert you when a property on your lake goes up for sale. Check with your local realtors to sign up.

Don't hesitate to contact an ACLARA Board Member with any questions you may have.

*Using bulk rate mail rates does not allow for undeliverable mail to be returned to the sender.

WATER QUALITY



An important indicator of a lake's health is its water clarity. Measuring the clarity is done with a Secchi disk. It is the universal tool used to measure water clarity. The Secchi disk, created in 1865 by Angelo Secchi, is an opaque disc, typically white or black/white used to gage the transparency of water by measuring the depth (Secchi depth) at which the disk ceases to be visible from the surface.

Data collected by volunteers is entered into the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) water quality database. The data is used to analyze water quality trends and provide a basis for water quality goal setting. An 8" diameter, black and white disk attached to a rope or chain is lowered into the water while observing the depth at which it disappears.

Secchi disk kits are available free of charge from the MPCA. To obtain one, call 800-657-3864 or email them at info.pca@state.mn.us Supplemental detail on MPCA's data can be found at:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/hows-the-water>

Additional information on testing water quality is found here:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/slice/waterquality.html>

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS)

Lake stewards are vital to the water quality of your lake. They check the lake bottom and weed beds by sections of shoreline for AIS, i.e. Eurasian watermilfoil, starry stonewort, purple loosestrife, curly leaf pond weed. They also examine rocks and native mussels or other hard surfaces for evidence of zebra mussels. The search is done once a year, usually in August, with results reported to the MN DNR. Develop a committee of volunteers who will take a section of shoreline and do a search using a rake or something to pull up questionable-looking plants and compare what they find to pictures provided to them while also checking hard surfaces for zebra mussels. If something suspicious is found, it should be placed in a jar or baggie and very carefully noted where collected. As soon as possible, the sample should then be taken to the Aitkin DNR office at 1200 Minnesota Avenue South.

Another step in monitoring for the presence of zebra mussels is sampling for their larva. Zebra mussel larvae are called "veligers". Obtaining samples with a plankton net from multiple locations and compositing the samples into one bottle for analysis during the anticipated peak period when veligers would be present in the water column in late June early July and submitting those samples to a qualified lab is the best screening method. If any veligers are detected, resampling at discrete locations can be done to determine if they are found in limited areas of the lake. If veligers are found in any of these locations, the lake has a breeding population and eradication is not a likely option. However, knowing they are there can help lakeshore owners and the DNR to notify boaters and visitors to prevent spread to other lakes.

Eurasian Watermilfoil

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquaticplants/milfoil/index.html>

Starry Stonewort

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquaticplants/starrystonewort/index.html>

Purple Loosestrife

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquaticplants/purpleloosestrife/index.html>

Curly-leaf Pond Weed

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquaticplants/curlyleaf_pondweed.html

Zebra Mussels

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquaticanimal/zebramussel/index.html>

You can obtain various brochures on AIS from the Aitkin DNR office.

Also, a good resource for AIS is the Minnesota Aquatic Species Research Center:

<https://www.maisrc.umn.edu>

If a particular AIS is in fact found and confirmed, the Aitkin DNR office will recommend the next steps in either treating, managing or eradicating.

AITKIN COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

On May 16, 1957, the Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was established by local farmers and other to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners. This assistance took the form of survey and design of erosion control practices, cost-share for projects like fencing, advice/information to landowners planning to develop property, education programs and contests for school-aged children.

Their mission is to apply conservation practices to the land and provide educational opportunities to landowners and groups. They strive to develop common sense, cooperative programs to address resource needs. Their purpose is to work with others to achieve sound management of our natural resources.

Some SWCD activities include information/advice to landowners, water planning, shore land buffers/vegetation protection, tree sales, educational activities, Wetland Conservation Act, cost-share assistance and forestry assistance.

More information can be found here:

<http://www.aitkincountyswcd.org/>

CONSERVATION



Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLT) is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect water quality and preserve environmentally sensitive lands and water resources. NWLT serves the watersheds in Cass, Crow Wing, Hubbard, and Aitkin Counties of Minnesota. NWLT represents 2,235 lakes, 3,400 miles of rivers and streams and nearly 4.2 million acres of land. As our north-central region faces warming lake temperatures, development pressures and projected population growth, proactive conservation is more critical than ever before.

NWLT provides private landowners with a tangible way to conserve their land *forever*. Their two methods of conservation are Conservation Easements and Fee Title Acquisitions. To learn more about these options, [click here](#) to watch a short NWLT video. Also, tune into their monthly “Conservation Conversations” segment on Northern Community Radio. [Click here](#) to listen to past episodes and [click here](#) to read a **Star Tribune** article featuring the work that NWLT completed on Wabedo Lake.

NWLT enjoys connecting with landowners and talking about their options for conservation. Discover more about NWLT at:

<http://northernwaterslandtrust.org/>

MINNESOTA LAKES & RIVERS ADVOCATES



Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates (MLR) is a nonprofit advocacy group focused on protecting Minnesota's lakes and rivers for current and future generations. They forge powerful links between lakes, lake advocates and policy makers.

Learn more about them here:

<http://www.mnlakesandrivers.org>

LINKS

Aitkin County

218-927-7276

<https://www.co.aitkin.mn.us/>

Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District

218-927-7284

<https://www.aitkincountyswcd.org>

Aitkin Area Fisheries

218-429-3010

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/aitkin/index.html>

State of Minnesota

651-296-2803

<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota DNR

651-296-6157

<http://dnr.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota DNR Water Quality

651-296-6157

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/slice/waterquality.html>

Minnesota Aquatic Species Research Center

No telephone number available

<https://www.maisrc.umn.edu/>

Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates

952-854-1317

<http://www.mnlakesandrivers.org/>

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

800-657-3864

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/hows-the-water>

Northern Waters Land Trust

218-927-7276

<http://northernwaterslandtrust.org/>