

Dear Friends of Minnesota Lakes,

To those of you who braved a blustery Minnesota winter day to attend the first public forum discussing my “Star Lake” proposal, thank you! I know many of you were unable to attend, however, because of either the weather or a time conflict, so I’ve been asked to schedule another meeting in the district which Paula West (Executive Director, Leech Lake Watershed Foundation) is in the process of arranging with my office for some time in early January. In the meantime the following is my summary of the comments from the December 4<sup>th</sup> meeting. Please feel free to e-mail back any input or additions you may have regarding this summary.

### **Criteria to Become a Star Lake**

Alternative Shoreland Standards.

1. The majority of those present support the implementation of the Alternative Shoreland Standards but did not feel this initiative should be tied to the Star Lake proposal because the needed county approval is outside the control of lake association members.
2. Everyone present felt a criteria for becoming a Star Lake should be an active lake association with a formal plan that addresses specific criteria designed to manage the lake and educate lake association members, those in the watershed area surrounding the lake, and targeted entities that have a particular impact on the lake (i.e. dock installers, weed harvesters, government officials, fishing tournament participants and their parent organizations and others). The group felt other criteria for the management plan should address water quality monitoring (with the PCA program being a minimum standard); a specific communication requirement that would provide options such as a newsletter, website, and/or in person meetings; and a specific measurement of certain base line elements such as phosphorus levels and vegetation (mapping) with a plan to improve problem areas as needed. A plan to control invasive species.
3. The consensus of the group (with some descent) was that the lake associations should be required to represent a minimum percentage of lake shore owners, but the group was opposed to setting a minimum number of annual volunteer hours, because of the paper work that might be required to keep track of this potential requirement.
4. A lot of discussion centered around the issue of a requirement regarding compliance monitoring and reporting and/or a requirement that a percentage of lakeshore properties (to be determined) must be in compliance with all water-related laws and ordinances. Senator Olson explained that her concept was to reward lakeshore owners who voluntarily helped minimize the DNR resources needed for enforcement issues and that a “Star Lake” should be a reward that

would not be appropriate if there were significant noncompliance issues on the lake. Many attendees spoke in favor of this concept while others were concerned that they did not want to alienate lake association members by becoming involved in compliance issues. There was a general consensus that more discussion of this issue is needed

5. There was a strong consensus that the proposal should emphasize shore land re-vegetation, but again it was agreed that more discussion would be needed regarding how criteria should be determined in this area, taking into consideration that there are differences between lakes with regard to natural vegetation, differences in the level of development of various lakes, problems presented with respect to measuring any definite criteria and the need to encourage a lake at any level of development to begin at its present baseline to move in a positive direction regarding re-vegetation and/or, with respect with less developed lakes, preserve the natural vegetation already in place.
6. It was suggested that the proposal should encourage the development of conservation easements.
7. It was suggested that the proposal should coordinate its efforts with the Clean Water Legacy Initiative.
8. It was suggested that the proposal should include a healthy fisheries component, which again would require baseline measures with a plan for maintaining and/or improving a healthy fishery.
9. Conforming septic systems were identified as a key ingredient needed for a healthy lake and quite a bit of discussion centered on this issue. Present problems identified were the difficulty in convincing lake shore owners to test their septic systems, lack of enforcement, and cost considerations. More discussion of this issue is needed before a consensus can be reached on this issue
10. The group felt it would be appropriate to require the lake association to take a position with regard to any proposed zoned variances and substantial new development and to become actively involved with local government in determining whether there would be an adverse impact on the lake
11. Already mentioned above in paragraph 2, it deserves special emphasis that the group stressed the value of education and outreach with respect to all of the above mentioned items, including a uniform method of making certain that lake association members and others know who to contact for assistance as needed, and what resources are available to aid their efforts.

## Proposed “Star Lake” Benefits

1. The group consensus strongly supported the concept of formal recognition as a “Star Lake” in exchange for meeting criteria as discussed in the first section of this letter.
2. For the most part, the discussion was supportive of the idea of incenting participation in the Star Lake program through prioritized government program assistance. It was pointed out, however, that this program would need to be in addition to, and not in conflict with, other efforts to make government assistance available to deal with lake quality problems where they are most needed. Some ideas with regard to recognition/assistance included: prevention grants and cooperative grants from the DNR Invasive Species Division; assistance with financing signage and other infrastructure at public landings to control the spread of invasive species; tee shirts for volunteers at public landings to make their presence more visible; assistance with water quality monitoring; a state funded revolving loan fund to assist with septic system monitoring, maintenance and enforcement; state level legal assistance to aid local efforts to enforce water quality related issues and to provide information and guidance as needed by the lake association; tax incentives to reward shore land restoration, septic system testing and repair/replacement when needed.
3. There was some concern and discussion regarding the legality and appropriateness of limiting tax incentives to only those lake shore owners on “Star Lakes”. Others felt rewards were necessary and appropriate.
4. One attendee suggested the possibility of a tiered program (1 – 4 stars) based on level of performance, others talked about the need for there to be different requirements for different sizes and types of lakes, others pointed out that the proposal would have to take into consideration time periods for implementation. These were all thoughts that would require more discussion.
5. The suggestion was made to consult with a planning and zoning representative (Annalee Garlatz, Legislative Director for AMC) MCPEZA

More discussion will be needed with DNR, PCA, and other Department representatives in order to fully explore the possible support the state may be able to give to this proposal and to determine these department’s level of interest in participating in its development.

Over all, I’m extremely pleased by the progress made at our first public meeting to discuss the Star Lake proposal. I’m excited by the level of support for this idea and look forward to working with those who attended and any others with interest in this idea as we more fully develop this plan going forward. I look forward to receiving any

additional comments you may have before our next meeting and again thank you for your interest.

Best regards,  
Mary Olson  
Senator, District 04