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Lake Association Offers \$100,000 to Fix Pollution from Cranberry Operations on Lac Courte Oreilles

COLA ready to fund proven solution

HAYWARD, WI (October, 24, 2016) Courte Oreilles Lakes Association, [COLA](#), is offering \$100,000 in funds it has raised to help install closed-water management systems on the cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles that have not yet transitioned to this [best- management practice recommended by the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association](#) (see lower right video). These cranberry bogs, operating on more than 140 acres on the shores of Lac Courte Oreilles, are the [documented source of excess phosphorus and declining water quality in the lake](#). Closed systems are a known solution to cranberry operations repeatedly sending water full of phosphorus fertilizer and other contaminants back into the lake throughout the year. Some progress has already been made, but there is more work to be done, and COLA wants to be part of that solution.

How Cranberry Bogs Work—Why All that Water

Cranberry bogs require millions of gallons of water be taken from the lake throughout the year—that waist-high “marsh” you see in so many ads and TV commercials for cranberry juice. That water is pumped into those bogs from the lakes and other waters on which these operations are located. Flooding bogs with lake water is done for a number of industrial purposes including harvesting, preventing frost from damaging crops, and for pest control.

However, each time the “used” lake water, which has sat in the bog and become full of the phosphorus fertilizer used on the plants, is then poured back into the lake. Ordinarily, return of “waste water” to a lake would require a permit. The problem is that this wastewater is considered a “non-point source,” so its discharge back into the lake does not require a permit of any

kind. It is allowable as long as it is considered a non-point source. But, this is not in keeping with the Wisconsin law that the WDNR is charged with enforcing on behalf of its lakes, rivers and other affected waters.

Closed Systems – The Proven Solution

Closed-water management systems—or “closed systems”— keep phosphorus from fertilizers and other contaminants from cranberry operations out of the water bodies on which they are located and from which they draw, use, and return water, currently without any regulation or permits required.



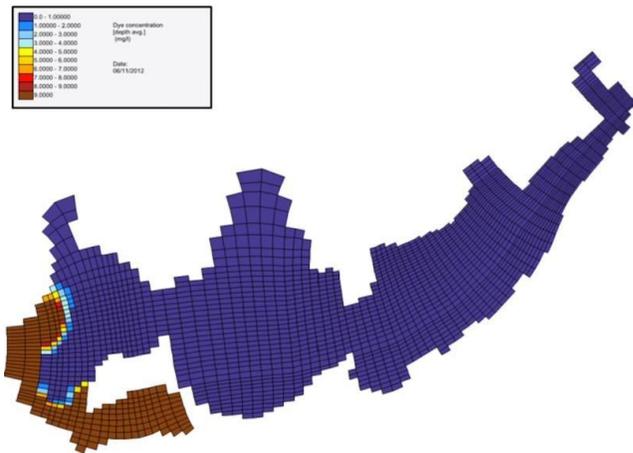
Two of the cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles that have already acted independently to install a closed system as a way to improve water quality.

Barry and Amanda Depew have constructed a six-acre holding basin and completed installation of the necessary piping and pumps to turn the 23-acre Zawistowski Cranberries LLC east bog on Musky Bay into a closed system. As part of a rejuvenation of his six-acre bog near Point O' Pines on Lac Courte Oreilles, Gary G. Jenson, owner of Castle Rock Cranberries LLC, has constructed a closed system and installed piping and pumps that will eliminate the need to discharge used water back into Lac Courte Oreilles.

But, it is the two largest cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles that still need to install these closed systems to keep their wastewater out of the lake: The 73-acre Zawistowski west bog that discharges into Musky Bay, and the 67-acre Jonjak bog that discharges into Stuckey Bay and the West Basin of Lac Courte Oreilles.

Problem Going Unchecked by the Wisconsin DNR

After years of inaction and stalled timing by the Wisconsin DNR, Lac Courte Oreilles, the fifth largest natural lake in Wisconsin and an [Outstanding Resource Water](#), is currently at a tipping point. Already in May of this year, algae mats and filamentous algae were “blooming” in and on the surface at the outlet of the Jonjak Cranberry operation on Stuckey Bay. Algal mats are also forming at the Zawistowski West bog discharge point even earlier than in previous years. [See in the animation video pictured at right](#) how quickly fertilizer-filled water returned back spreads to the rest of the lake unchecked by any industry regulation or operator’s permit.



Massive fish die-off and pushing for help at state level

As early as mid-summer, many areas of the Lac Courte Oreilles are choked with excess aquatic plant growth that makes them non-navigable by boat and unfit for recreation. Even more dire, this excess phosphorus also threatens the survival of the lake’s cisco and whitefish populations. These are the feeder fish for the lake’s historically record musky and large walleye, which are now drastically diminished in number. In August of 2016, [a massive die-off of hundreds of whitefish and cisco](#) was documented—the largest on record for Lac Courte Oreilles. Data analysis, eyewitness reports, photos, and the cause are now published in [a comprehensive report available to the public](#).

“COLA along with the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians is already going through all the proper channels provided by the Wisconsin DNR and the state of Wisconsin to pursue a new phosphorus standard for Lac Courte Oreilles. COLA and the Tribe [filed a joint petition with the state of Wisconsin](#) on June 11, 2016 to set this phosphorus standard, another part of the solution. After an already lengthy eight-year process, however, we also want to help work directly on the closed-system solution as well,” said Kris Sivertson, COLA board president.

More funding available from the NRCS

The \$100,000 COLA has raised can help offset the cost of constructing the closed-systems still needed. In Wisconsin, it is up to individual cranberry operations to construct closed systems for their bogs. However, there is support from the [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#), an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that provides America’s farmers with financial and technical assistance to implement measures that help the environment and their own operations. COLA has been in contact with the NRCS and is encouraged by their willingness to help make closed systems on all the cranberry bogs on Lac Courte Oreilles a reality.

“NRCS has a long history of providing technical and financial assistance to growers with installing conservation practices on lands they operate on. Many of these conservation practices are proven to have a significant impact with improving water quality,” said Ron Spiering, District Conservationist, Spooner Service Center, Wisconsin NRCS.

Given legal and DNR timelines, this may be the quickest solution and a way to finally help Lac Courte Oreilles before it’s too late.

Learn more about COLA’s efforts to protect the water quality of Lac Courte Oreilles—the fifth-largest natural lake in Wisconsin, an Outstanding Resource Water, and a rare, two-story cold-water fishery. As part of this goal, COLA is committed to helping provide the science and lead the way in reducing pollution, to serve not only Lac Courte Oreilles and its watershed, but also other Wisconsin lakes and the organizations that support them. Visit www.cola-wi.org. For questions and interviews, contact Jim Coors at colacommunications@gmail.com or call 608-628-0694.