

Invasive common carp removal in Pleasant Lake

Reaching goals and looking back

By Dawn Tanner

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The Vadnais Lake Area Water Management Organization (VLAWMO) and Carp Solutions have been working on invasive common carp removal in Pleasant Lake and connected waterbodies since 2019. Early efforts included partnerships with St. Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) and the North Oaks Home Owners' Association (NOHOA). North Oaks Company (NOC) has been an important partner throughout the program as a landowner for barrier placement. NOC also owns and maintains a permanent barrier at Wilkinson Lake that has been critical to the program's success.

Pleasant Lake is impaired for nutrients. Carp disrupt the lake bottom when feeding, uprooting aquatic plants. They stir nutrients into the water column, where those nutrients stimulate algae growth and reduce water quality. Carp removal is a key action toward improving lake water quality.

The carp removal program began with boat-based electroshocking surveys in 2019. Those surveys allowed establishment of science-based management goals. Removal work began after that. Four seasons of successful carp removals have now been completed, beginning with removals in spring 2022.

Early surveys allowed Carp Solutions to estimate that the carp population density in Pleasant Lake was 273 kg/ha. The management threshold for good water quality is 100



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

The removal team worked together to remove invasive carp.

kg/ha, so carp density was about three times that threshold.

A double-barrier system was used to trap carp. Remote-camera monitoring and passive tags, like those used in pets in case they get lost, were implanted to allow the team to detect carp at a barrier. As large numbers of carp arrived, a remote-controlled gate was closed, holding the carp inside for removal later the same day.

Removals have gone well and allowed us to learn more about this population. These carp are large, old fish (in their mid-40s to early 50s), likely due to the permanent barrier built by NOC in the 1990s that has apparently prevented successful recruitment of young carp.

At the end of 2025, Carp Solutions estimated that the population is



Carp numbers are now very low and successful reproduction has not been detected.

now about 500 carp, with a density of 14 kg/ha in Pleasant Lake. That's a 95% reduction since the program began. With carp density very low, the program is transitioning into a maintenance mode. That will include monitoring in the spring and possibly a low level of removals. Photos from the years of the carp removal program are featured in this article to highlight the many efforts that have made the program a success.

As carp move and gather in the coming spring, you may notice them at the barrier at Chickadee Lane on Deep Lake. Look closely. Bigmouth buffalo are native fish that also migrate in the spring. Bigmouth buffalo and carp look similar, and they move in mixed schools in the spring. Bigmouth buffalo have a blueish-gray body and dark eyes. They have a wide mouth that points straight ahead, with no barbels (whiskers). Carp are brown with a yellowish-orange tinge. Their eyes have dark centers with a yellow ring around the outside. They have a large, down-turned mouth, for suction-feeding on the lake bottom, with two barbels.

Take a look in the spring to see if you can spot bigmouth buffalo and common carp. Feel welcome to let us know what you see.



Carp were removed, measured and weighed to understand the population distribution.



Telemetry was used to detect spring spawning movement.

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