



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

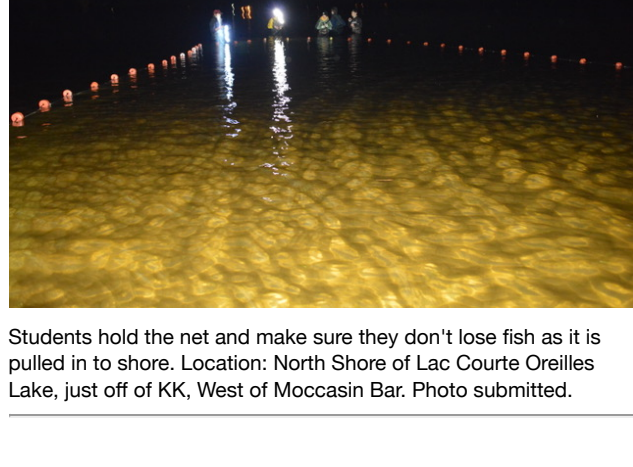
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Seining on Lac Courte Oreilles

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

There's an old saying that the oceans and lakes do not give up their secrets easily. That may be, and yet they deliver lessons to all who care to explore their waters.

Last November 14-15, for two consecutive late, dark evenings, a small group of students from Northern Waters Environmental School (NWES) in Hayward cast their seining net on the shores of Lac Courte Oreilles.



Students hold the net and make sure they don't lose fish as it is pulled in to shore. Location: North Shore of Lac Courte Oreilles Lake, just off of KK, West of Moccasin Bar. Photo submitted.

Under the direction and guidance of NWES field biologist and volunteer Frank Pratt, Liesl Eckstrom, Chance Lee, Blake Kauffman, Logan Christianson, Ben Larson and River Maina—all 6th-8th graders—set up their seine (purchased by COLA from Christiansen Net Co. in Duluth and loaned out for the project) and went about the business of trying to catch, measure, count and determine the sample population of the cisco fish in that part of Lac Courte Oreilles.

For those of you not completely clear, a seine is a fishing net that hangs vertically in the water with its bottom edge held down by weights and its top edge buoyed by floats. Seine nets can be deployed from the shore as a beach seine, or from a boat.

In this case, the students deployed their net from the shore, according to Brittany Hager, the lead teacher at NWES who worked with the Hayward Community School District to start NWES back in 2012.



Brittany Hager, lead teacher NWES. Photo submitted.

"To set up the net, they had one person hold one side up against the shore. With the other end, they pulled it out perpendicular to the shore. With someone holding the end and people along the net, they swept around until the other end was up against the shore. Keeping the net tight, they pulled it in to see what they caught," Brittany said.

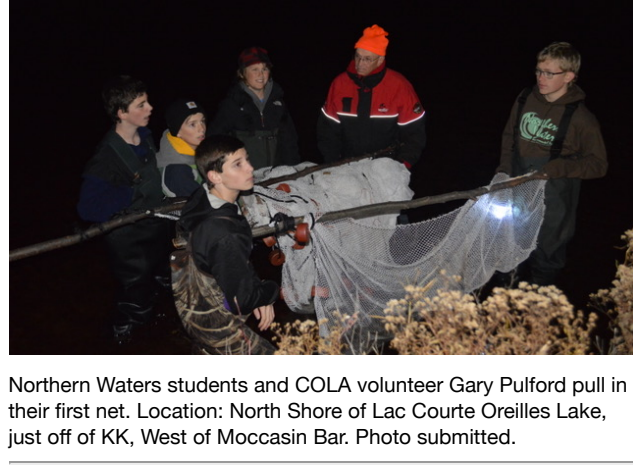
Gary Pulford, COLA vice-president, was also out with the group on one of the nights. He said the net is about 100 feet long with a trap bag at the end. When the net is pulled from the water the trapped fish are taken out of the water, counted, measured, and then put back in the water.

"The cisco spawn in the fall whereas most fish spawn in the spring. They are deep water fish but they come in to the shallow waters to spawn, and they like the sandy bars," Pulford explained.

Both cisco and whitefish are cold-water species, occupying the deeper, colder, well-oxygenated lower story of Lac Courte Oreilles, unlike the smallmouth and largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike and muskellunge that prefer its warm top story.

Lac Courte Oreilles is one of Wisconsin's rare two-story fishery lakes, one of only 200 such lakes, and there are only five lakes in Wisconsin that support both cisco and lake whitefish.

"If you're losing cisco you're losing lake water quality in general," Pulford said.



Northern Waters students and COLA volunteer Gary Pulford pull in their first net. Location: North Shore of Lac Courte Oreilles Lake, just off of KK, West of Moccasin Bar. Photo submitted.

Pratt also explained that the Wisconsin DNR has an ongoing study of cisco and whitefish in two-story lakes that began in 2011-12. The State study is based on vertical gill-netting and sonar during the late summer when cisco are suspended in deep water. Those results are not out yet but everyone is anxious to see what they might indicate.

But back to the nights of November 14 and 15. What happened? What did the net yield? What did the students discover?

One cisco. It measured 11.4 inches long.

Take a moment. I had to. They made 14 hauls with the seine each of the two nights and they netted one cisco.

They caught smallmouth bass, perch and crayfish—all warm water fish. But only one cold-water fish in its own spawning season!

Even sixth, seventh and eighth graders knew their mission had revealed serious results, though their obvious excitement over the outing itself and what it represented couldn't be doused.

"The cisco in Lac Courte Oreilles population is even lower than what we thought," said seventh grader Logan Christianson, adding, "The cisco population has declined, that leads us to believe that the lake is receiving excess nutrients from the watershed."



Ethan and Logan check the net as they help pull it in to shore. Location: North Shore of Lac Courte Oreilles Lake, just off of KK, West of Moccasin Bar. Photo submitted.

Eighth grader Chance Lee: "It is important because the cisco population in Lac Courte Oreilles has declined. That impacts the predators that feed on them. It affects the food chain."

Pratt provided a stark historical point of comparison when he said in 1978 a similar seining netted 484 cisco averaging seven inches long.

"Both the severe decline in capture rate and the increase in size indicate a major actual decline in the real-time cisco population. We did not just miss them—they are really almost gone," said Pratt.

Lac Courte Oreilles gave up a big secret back in November: a poet might call it a cry for help; a fisherman would surely call it a forewarning; a field biologist calls it a lake "at its tipping point."

The rest of us would call it a lesson well learned.

Editor's note: The Nov. 14-15 seining took place at the bridge on KK over the cranberry discharge culvert and on the flats adjacent to the outlet of LCO by the Thoroughfare Road bridge.

"Fishing provides that connection with the whole living world. It gives you the opportunity of being totally immersed, turning back into yourself in a good way. A form of meditation, some form of communion with levels of yourself that are deeper than the ordinary self."

--Ted Hughes

THANKS TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE LAC COURTE OREILLES FOUNDATION IN 2016

A new annual record! The [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#) received 332 contributions totaling \$118,026 in 2016! Because of your support, COLA can continue protecting Lac Courte Oreilles. COLA is now well known throughout Wisconsin for its science and highly motivated supporters dedicated to preserving Wisconsin's natural heritage. Ours is an incredible and inspirational journey, and we are so grateful for your support.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

From the 12/19/2016 MSP Star Tribune:

[If you don't get involved, the work won't get done.](#)

SHORELAND BUFFER GRANT MONEY AVAILABLE

COLA has received a WDNR grant to develop shoreland restoration plans and designs, make bulk plant purchases, and arrange construction and installation services from area landscapers. COLA will also help provide continuing education and a hands-on buffer zone training in partnership with the Sawyer County Lakes Forum and other local groups. The primary intended audience for education efforts extends to the Upper Couderay River Watershed lakes including Whitefish, Sand, Grindstone, Windigo, Sissabagama, Osprey, Round and Little Round.

Visit the COLA website for a variety of helpful, downloadable information on Shoreland Restoration for lake associations and lakefront homeowners. For questions and details, email Kris Sivertson, COLA president, at krisw3690@gmail.com or call [715-210-0818](tel:715-210-0818).

NEW COLA WEBSITE FEATURE - LAKE OBSERVATION FORMS

The COLA website has been revised to include a much-needed feature - a place to record [lake observations](#). As we've seen over the last several years, we need to have a timely record of unusual events on LCO, and now you will have the chance to help out. There are forms available for those who want to report unusual fish behavior, invasive aquatic plant species, algae blooms, ice on/off dates, loon sightings, and other events.

COLA'S LAND USE POLICY

COLA has developed a new [land use policy](#) addressing developmental pressures on LCO.

NEW COLA BOARD MEMBERS

Welcome and many thanks to new COLA board members:

Mike Persson
Dick Laumer
Chuck Gundersen

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

We'd like to spread the news of COLA's good people and good works throughout the upper Couderay River watershed. If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears Long Tales, [let us know](#).

Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends.

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES

[View this email in your browser](#)

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.

COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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