

## Improving water quality is FLLA's top goal

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Blake Roberts, right, is the current president of the Forest Lake Lake Association.

Jennifer Larson

Staff Writer

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The Forest Lake City Council appropriated \$25,000 in the 2009 budget, far from the \$60,000 set aside just two years prior.

According to Forest Lake Lake Association (FLLA) President Blake Roberts, the program may have remained suspended if he and others would not have persisted the council to reinstate it last year.

In 2008, he noted the program limited mechanical harvesting to just the channels and access points for a total of 128 hours, which is a huge cut from the hundreds of hours done in the past.

In addition, herbicide was used on 15 acres of Forest Lake to treat the invasive curlyleaf pondweed.

This year, Roberts said the plan is to treat up to 100 acres identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with herbicide.

The FLLA also has an agreement in place with the city to use its mechanical harvesters.

The labor, estimated to be around 200 hours, would be provided by lake association volunteers. He said FLLA would also provide additional dollars, if needed.

For its part, Roberts said the city would provide the fuel, maintenance on machines, haul the weeds to the composite site as well as training the volunteers to use the mechanical harvesters.

The training will be put on sometime in May. Those interested in volunteering to work the harvesters should contact Chance Norby at 612-384-6042.

Roberts said the weed harvesting would be done during the week since that is when city staff is available.

Because curlyleaf pondweed grows from the shore to depths of up to 15 feet, Roberts said they have found that using chemicals to treat the amount of acreage is more cost effective over mechanical harvesting. Once the machine is put in the water, it can only cut down around five feet of weeds.

"We got a lot of positive feedback on just 15 acres," he said. "This year, we'll be able to treat 85 more acres with herbicide."

Roberts said the FLLA could have treated more weed beds (the DNR was able to GPS the coordinates) if the council wouldn't have re-appropriated \$5000 to the Clear Lake Lake Association.

Because of that action, the FLLA now has to work with \$20,000, which is the same amount budgeted in 2008.

"I think funding should be for all the lakes in the city," he said.

Roberts noted that lakeside property owners pay a substantial amount more in taxes.

He said the dollar amount allocated in the city budget for aquatic plant control should not only be increased without raising property taxes, but also funding should be brought back to 2007 levels.

With a bigger pot, lake associations within the city — not just the FLLA — would be able to apply for that money.

Mayor Stev Stegner said having a cooperative agreement with the FLLA is "a great opportunity for the city to decrease its costs while improving the quality of our lake by having people in the community help."

Stegner explained his reason for supporting the re-appropriation of the Lake Improvement Fund, saying the council looks to leverage the city's tax dollars to do the most good.

"Completely funding the Forest Lake (FLLA) program is a lot to ask when Clear Lake is in our district and only asked for partial funding," he said.

It is possible there could be more funding available in the city coffers for lake improvement programs.

“Probably not in the short-term based on the budget shortfalls we’re seeing,” said Stegner.

He foresees the long-term direction to keep using the mechanical harvester at a very palliative price as well as provide funding for herbicide too.

#### Membership drive

The FLLA will be kicking-off a membership drive this spring, Roberts said. Currently, there are 150 households — a majority live on the lake — out of around 1,000 potential members.

The cost to join the lake association is \$40 per family.

There are two levels of business and corporate memberships at \$100 and \$250. The latter allows some advertising in the newsletter and on the FLLA website at [www.ourforestlake.com](http://www.ourforestlake.com).

The association has also hosted three clean-ups on Forest Lake since forming in 2007.

There’s strength in numbers, which Roberts said is one of the benefits for joining.

After all, the FLLA was able to get one-third of the budget reinstated last year.