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How One Lake Association is Encouraging the Cranberry Industry to Control Waste Discharges into Its Lake

Includes thanks to two cranberry growers for constructing
“Closed Systems” on Lac Courte Oreilles

HAYWARD, WI (September 9, 2016) – Closed systems are considered a best-management practice for reducing the amount of pollutants from cranberry bogs into the lakes, rivers, and streams these bogs use to run their operations. The biggest problem is contamination from phosphorus in the fertilizers used by cranberry growers.

On Lac Courte Oreilles, in Sawyer County, WI, phosphorus has been damaging musky and walleye populations, the fish on which they feed to survive, and even their spawning habitat. [As seen in this video by the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association](#) (see lower right-hand video), closed systems, also referred to as tail- water recovery systems, can be a win-win, with important benefits for both the cranberry grower in addition to keeping harmful contaminants out the lake and other downstream waters where Wisconsin lives, works, and plays.



Two such closed systems are now in place on Lac Courte Oreilles. Closed systems are one of the critical solutions the [Courte Oreilles Lakes Association \(COLA\)](#) is working on both locally and [at the state level](#) to help eliminate excess phosphorous in Lac Courte Oreilles.

How a Closed System Works

A closed system includes a water-containment area such as a holding basin or pond that gives cranberry growers the ability to store and then re-use the water they need to grow and harvest cranberries and to protect cranberry crops from pests and frost. This containment process keeps used water and its contaminants from entering the lake.

How Cranberry Bogs Work—Why All that Water

Cranberry bogs require millions of gallons of water throughout the year—that waist-high “field” you see in ads and [TV commercials for cranberry juice](#). What you don’t see is that this water is pumped into those bogs directly from the lakes and other waters on which these operations are located. But, that deep water is not needed all the time, so each time a bog is flooded with lake water for a particular purpose, that water level needs to be adjusted down again. That excess, used water is returned right back into the lake, only this time containing the phosphorus, nitrogen, and pesticides all used in the growing of cranberries.



Thanks to Those Working Toward a Solution

COLA enthusiastically thanks two of the cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles that have already acted independently to install closed systems 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. The closed system has been in operation for two years and

already there are encouraging signs in Musky Bay water quality. For the second year in a row there has been little to no algal mat or filamentous algae accumulating at the former east bog discharge point, and water clarity is improving. Total phosphorus levels in Musky Bay, while still exceeding state standards, appear to be leveling off.



A closed water system being built.

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. This closed system won't be placed into operation until new cranberry vines begin to produce fruit, a couple years from now.

"We really appreciate the move on the part of these two growers on Lac Courte Oreilles to take that initiative on behalf of their operations and the lake," said Kris Sivertson, COLA board president.

Financial Support for Growers

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 Ronald Spiering, District Conservationist, Spooner Service Center, Wisconsin NRCS.

More than 140 Acres Still Need to Be Contained

While two cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles have transitioned to closed systems, the remaining and two largest cranberry operations on Lac Courte Oreilles, totaling more than 140 acres, still need to install closed systems to keep their wastewater out of the lake. These cranberry operations discharge into Musky Bay, Stuckey Bay, and the West Basin of Lac Courte Oreilles.

"We are very heartened to see the Depew and the Jensen cranberry operations voluntarily construct closed systems,"



Cranberry discharge canal feeding polluted water directly into Lac Courte Oreilles

said Sivertson. “There is still work to be done, but we see growing interest in working toward a complete and permanent solution together.”

Learn more about COLA’s efforts to protect the water quality of Lac Courte Oreilles—the fifth-largest natural lake in Wisconsin at 5,030 acres, 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.