

Caribou Lake Rusty Crayfish Harvest Initiative

August 27/2026

Project Description:

- Caribou Lake is experiencing exponential growth of its Rusty Crayfish population. They were first found in 2020 when the US Forest Service trapped 50 to where in 2026 an estimated 250,000 will be trapped through commercial and volunteer efforts.
- The project is a multi-year effort to see if trapping is an effective way of mitigating the Rusty population on Caribou Lake. The results found will be useful in applying to other Cook County lakes.
- Why did we chose to harvest? We reviewed available data and literature, and harvesting has seemed effective in other lakes. Women lake in Cass County is an example.

AIS Prevention Plan strategies:

- Goal: manage the population of the invasive Rusty crayfish in Caribou Lake.
- Share trapping methods and results county-wide.
- Expand resources available for AIS prevention through volunteerism.
- Recording harvest totals and location and maintaining a multi-year database.
- Murmur Creek will continue to be to be assessed for its Rusty migration pathway from Pike Lake. Barrier methods will be developed and studied.
- The trap lines will be harvested and rebaited every other day, weather permitting, throughout the summer. The harvested Rusties will be put in freezers where they will humanely die. Any native crayfish will be returned to the lake.
- Harvest totals by location can be compared to prior years. Trends can be established along with future strategies.
- Volunteers have been trapping Rusties on Caribou Lake since 2021 and now possess experience on methods and trends on their lake. Awareness and involvement have increased every year.

The harmful effects of Rusties on a lake:

- Native crayfish eliminated
- Native grasses eliminated which are needed to:
 - Trap sediment
 - Absorb nutrient pollution
 - Add dissolved oxygen
 - Nursing environment for fish
- Fish population declines
- Negative effect on property values?

Our history of Rusties Harvested on Caribou - growth by year:

Year	Count
2020	50
2021	1,100
2022	3,900
2023	12,000
2024	60,000
2025	140,000
2026	250,000

Our multi-year harvesting plan utilizing volunteers and Crowdaddies:

- The association supplies bait and traps for members to deploy on their docks. Approximately 20 members are doing this. Fishing licenses are required to trap.
- The association has purchased a boat and motor for volunteers to utilize, supplying the lines, bait and gas. Five lines of eight traps are managed. Volunteers are scheduled continuously throughout the summer harvesting every other day. The association has a commercial fishing license which is required for having more than 25 pounds of crawfish in possession.
- Lines of eight traps and bait are also offered to members who want to manage them from their own boats. Seven lines are managed in this way, three of which are managed by the Cathedral of the Pines camp.
- The association has four small freezers which are used to euthanize the Rusties in a humane way. They then are disposed of at the Caribou USFS gravel pit
- Crowdaddies hired to harvest from late May to mid-September at \$600/wk

Costs:

- Used boat and new motor : \$3,100
- Traps, lines, and buoys: \$4,500
- Bait and gas: \$500/yr
- Freezers: \$800
- Crawdaddies: \$9,000/yr

Costs have been funded by:

- SSD (subordinate service district): \$6,900 (\$50/yr on 138 lakeshore property owners' taxes)
- County AIS grant: \$4,250
- Designated donations by members

Conclusions:

- Exponential growth.
- Expansion of effected areas.
- Reduce vegetation notable in infested Bigsby Lake which adjoins Caribou.
- Need for a crayfish barrier on Murmur Creek or Bigsby Lake inflow.
- Trap early before females' eggs have a chance to hatch. 200+ eggs per female.
- Multi year effort.

Collaboration:

Data sharing and operational assistance are to be extended to county-wide partners and county waterbodies like Pike Lake, which connects to Caribou Lake via Murmur Creek.