



Dear HLSIO Supporter,

On behalf of the entire HLSIO board, we want to thank you for your strong support for our science-based, comprehensive program to address the swimmer's itch problem on Higgins Lake. For all of us, Higgins Lake is a treasured resource that needs constant and loving care and attention so that we can continue to pass it on to our future generations. We are pleased to report we made significant progress this year toward our objective of making Higgins Lake safe for swimming without fear of swimmer's itch. This progress was expected as our program was led by an experienced team of biologists, SICON LLC (SICON), with more than 80 combined years of researching and controlling swimmer's itch using equipment and techniques they successfully used on other lakes. But, none of this would have been possible without your willingness to step forward and contribute financially to our control program. Thank you!

As promised, we are providing this detailed report from SICON describing their methodology, findings, actions, results and future actions. You will be pleased to learn that SICON's experienced team trapped and relocated all 9 Common Merganser broods, totaling almost 100 ducks, often within hours of receiving reports. By collecting more than 20,000 snails and analyzing more than 12,000 of them, they were able to scientifically and objectively confirm the snail species and Common Merganser as the duck source of swimmer's itch at Higgins Lake. SICON was also able to accurately establish the lake-wide snail infection rate. Unfortunately, that metric provided a science-based measure of what we already knew . . . We have a very serious swimmer's itch problem at Higgins Lake that must be addressed with a serious, comprehensive and proven control program using the most experienced and knowledgeable team of swimmer's itch experts in the world.

As evidenced in the report, the Gerrish Township (Northpoint Fisheries Management, LLC) program, with its focus on harassment and shooting, is incompatible with the short and long term goals of the SICON program when conducted at the same time as the SICON program. It made trapping of Common Merganser adults more difficult now and in the future, and it significantly reduced the long term effectiveness of SICON's efforts, primarily because the natural flight patterns of Common Mergansers were disrupted and SICON was unable to locate and seal off nests that will continue to draw Common Mergansers to Higgins Lake for years to come. The sealing of nests is a critical element to a long-term sustainable solution. Using nest boxes that attract Common Mergansers to Higgins Lake also is incompatible with a sustainable, long term solution that is intended to deter Common Mergansers from the lake. The Northpoint program also left 24 Common Mergansers on the lake at its spring conclusion . . . followed by an additional 9 broods totaling 88 more Common Mergansers. Thus it is not a viable and effective program on its own. Furthermore, the current overlapping timing of the two programs leaves the lake unprotected after July 31st with no legally permissible means of shooting or harassing Common Mergansers until fall hunting season. We continue to believe the

Gerrish Township program, if properly conducted and timed to follow the SICON control program, would add even greater value in reducing Common Merganser time on the lake, and this later timing would not be incompatible and interfere with a sustainable, long term solution. We support a series of properly timed, complimentary programs, starting with an effective trap and removal/nest location and sealing effort (SICON), followed by harassment and a defined lethal program (Northpoint), coupled with a Fall hunting program. This sequence would provide effective protection from spring "ice out" to the onset of winter. We believe a coordinated and properly timed SICON and Northpoint swimmer's itch effort is the only viable, sustainable approach and the HLSIO will continue to urge this combined/coordinated approach to controlling swimmer's itch at Higgins Lake.

You may have heard that SICON filed a complaint with US Fish and Wildlife reporting a violation of the Gerrish Township permit and other concerns. The HLSIO board believes these claims are serious and need to be addressed by the regulators. We also believe the emphasis of the Higgins Lake swimmer's itch program must focus on a humane trap and relocation effort supplemented by a limited, properly conducted harassment and lethal program in August and September. SICON biologists could share their expertise on Common Merganser identification with Northpoint to significantly reduce the risk of reoccurrence of the problems experienced this spring. Thus, we support the continued work of Northpoint and the permits it is working under with modifications for timing and training. We believe this approach is consistent with our long held principles of respect for the environment, environmental sustainability and the dedicated efforts of both the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. We see them as partners in this very important battle and need their continued support to move forward with our control programs at Higgins Lake.

We hope this detailed explanation of the positions we have taken, the rationale for a logical, effective and sustainable combined program, and the attached SICON Report address any questions you may have. We have a great opportunity to move forward with an even more effective combined program that enhances our chances of success, including a significantly reduced (and less costly) maintenance program after three years. We cannot afford to lose this golden opportunity to bring these two programs together in a logical and rational sequence to maximize their effectiveness and jointly work to fund them through local, state and federal funding. **THERE IS NO OTHER EFFECTIVE AND ECONOMICAL ALTERNATIVE.**

The HLPOA is continuing to work hard with the support of the Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership to obtain government support for our swimmer's itch efforts. Combining the two programs on Higgins Lake appears to be an essential prerequisite to obtaining legislative support. Unless or until we are successful, our program will have to be funded locally and mostly with private donations and/or grants from individuals and concerned organizations in the area.

SICON has been very patient with the HLSIO, moving forward based on trust and a detailed written agreement that contained no guarantees they would be paid in full. For

the SICON biologists, swimmer's itch research and control has consumed much of their lives and it is fundamentally a part of who they are. As expected, they have met all their obligations under the agreement, delivered promised results and more. They have attended countless meetings beginning last fall, spent weeks away from their families, endured some unjustified criticism and conducted weekly educational seminars for members of the Higgins Lake Community. On behalf of the entire HLSIO board we want to thank them for their professionalism, dedication and sacrifice. They want to succeed as much or more than we do and we are extremely fortunate to have them as partners in this critical challenge to reclaim Higgins Lake from this invasive parasite.

We are pleased to report we have now raised nearly \$200,000 in grants and private donations and are within striking distance of our necessary funding goal for this year, thanks in part to a recent fund raiser dinner event hosted by the owners of Fred's Restaurant and Jim's Collision of Roscommon. We are still short approximately \$40,000 in order to cover SICON fees, cottage rental, printing, mailing supplies and postage. Legal support and accounting services have been donated by Carey & Jaskowski, LLC of Grayling.

Please consider making an additional contribution so we can meet our funding objectives for 2015 and preserve the opportunity to continue working with SICON in 2016. It would be a tragedy if our program was unable to continue to conclusion . . . leaving only a short and very limited harassment and lethal program that would leave many Common Merganser broods on the lake throughout the coming summer. No lake has ever been successful in significantly reducing swimmer's itch without a humane trap and relocation program.

The Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization is a Michigan nonprofit corporation and the IRS has determined we are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3). Therefore, your donation is fully tax deductible to the extent permitted under applicable law. Donations can be mailed to Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization, P.O. Drawer 665, Grayling, MI 49738.

Thank you again for your strong support.

HLSIO Board