

Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization

2373 S I-75 Business Loop
Grayling, MI 49738



Gerrish Township Board
2997 E. Higgins Lake Drive
Roscommon, MI 48653

December 3, 2015

Lyon Township Board
7851 W. Higgins Lake Dr.
Roscommon, MI 48653

Subject: Proposal for a science-based independent panel of experts to mediate the SICON, Northpoint Fisheries Management areas of disagreement and to create a unified future SI control approach at Higgins Lake

Dear Board Members:

Efforts to resolve the differences between the SICON and Northpoint Fisheries Management programs this spring and summer on Higgins Lake have thus far been unsuccessful. Now that funding for SICON has been secured for 2015, both programs appear committed for 2016 and it is in the best interests of our lake, as well as, our community to develop and implement a unified approach for dealing with the critical problem of SI in the coming years.

The HLSIO Board proposes a science-based panel of independent experts to help us all work together to identify, discuss and resolve differences so we can proceed in the future with a unified approach to controlling SI at Higgins Lake. We have made preliminary contact with Mr. Peter Butchko who recently retired from the USD-APHIS. Mr. Butchko is somewhat familiar with both contractors, SICON and Northpoint Fisheries Management. We believe his work and reputation are known and respected by both parties. Mr. Butchko could work with Lyon Township, Gerrish Township, SICON, Northpoint Fisheries Management and the HLSIO by participating and assisting in the formation of an independent panel of experts.

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During our initial discussions with Mr. Butchko, consideration was given to panel members including a science academic from a leading university and possibly a retired employee from both the MDNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This panel would initially focus on “best management practices” in an effort to resolve differences between the two programs on Higgins Lake and then move to helping to advise on the future of SI control efforts on all inland lakes in Michigan represented by the newly formed Michigan Swimmer’s Itch Partnership (there are currently thirteen lakes involved and dealing with the problem of SI).

We propose working together on the operational format for the panel, but we would envision that both SICON and Northpoint Fisheries Management would meet with and present their proposed SI control programs to the panel and answer questions. The panel, in turn, would work to resolve differences and, if appropriate, make recommendations. The panel would be separately funded and remain independent.

Please give this concept serious consideration. Resolving the problem of Swimmer’s Itch at Higgins Lake deserves no less. We recommend moving expeditiously to form the panel and to conduct the mediation so all parties can move forward with necessary planning for the coming year, as soon as humanly possible.

Please let the HLSIO know if the Township’s of Gerrish and Lyon are willing to accept and participate in this science-based independent panel approach.

Sincerely,

Ken Dennings, Vice President, HLSIO

For the Higgins Lake Swimmer’s Itch Board of Directors