

To: Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization (HLSIO) Supporters

From: HLSIO Board

Re: 12/8/15 Update on 2015 Comprehensive Swimmer's Itch Control Program

The HLSIO Board of Directors wants to express its sincere thanks to every individual, family and organization that made nearly 500 donations in support of our science-based comprehensive Swimmer's Itch Control Program for 2015. Through your strong support and generous donations, we have met our program objectives and funding commitments to SICON for 2015.

SICON began its work last fall, obtaining necessary permits, preparing equipment and attending various meetings on Higgins Lake. In January of this year, the HLSIO was formed as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization with an experienced and professional board to manage the program. A written agreement was signed with SICON in January, 2015 listing the tasks they needed to perform with a target payment of \$225,000. These tasks included a lake-wide assessment that involved analyzing over 12,000 snails to identify the two snail species that are causing swimmer's itch (SI) on Higgins Lake and to determine the lake-wide SI infection rate of a little over 3% that will be used as an objective metric to measure our progress going forward. SICON tested other birds on Higgins Lake that carry the various forms of SI parasites. They confirmed that the Common Merganser is the only duck that is carrying the SI parasites that match up with the two snail species on Higgins Lake.

The HLSIO board believes that good science and education are critical elements of the program and SICON met with members of the Higgins Lake community on Monday evening of each week during the summer and on two Saturdays to explain the science of SI and answer questions. Most importantly, SICON captured and relocated all nine broods that hatched on Higgins Lake this summer and removed a total of 97 mergansers from Higgins Lake. Without SICON's capture and removal of the 97 Common Mergansers, Higgins Lake would have experienced another year of epidemic levels of swimmer's itch in 2016. We have spoken with SICON and they have told us they are committed to working with us again next year. We are beginning the preparations and planning necessary to carry out the second year of our three year control program. Based on documented successes on other lakes, we will need to design a smaller maintenance program that will continue after the end of our 3 year program. We will continue our efforts to find a way to work with Gerrish Township so that our two programs can be coordinated and compatible.

HLSIO delivered a letter (attached) on Friday, December 4 to Lyon and Gerrish Townships proposing the formation of an independent expert panel to mediate differences between the HLSIO and Gerrish Township programs. The panel also could help guide future SI efforts on Higgins Lake and a broader SI effort that is underway involving the Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership of lakes (MSIP).

After requests were made of Gerrish Township at a meeting on October 13, to hold a public meeting on the subject of resolving differences between the HLSIO and Gerrish Township SI programs, the Lyon Township Board discussed holding a public meeting on November 20 and that has now been scheduled for Saturday, January 9, 2016 at 10 am at the Lyon Township Hall.

Subsequently, on December 4, Gerrish Township announced it will hold a public meeting on December 21, 2015 at 7 pm at the Gerrish Township Hall. We encourage everyone to attend these important meetings.

Representatives of SICON and Northpoint Fisheries, at the suggestion of the Gerrish Township board, will meet in the Grand Rapids area on Tuesday, December 8 to discuss the resolution of differences in their two programs.

The HLSIO board believes that SI is a complex problem that will require a broad, coordinated, science-based effort that brings together partners who are interested in battling this problem. So HLSIO has been coordinating its efforts with other organizations on the Lake including the HLPOA, HLEEC, Lyon Township and The Higgins Lake Conservancy. The HLSIO also has been coordinating with the MSIP, a group of 13 lakes dedicated to addressing the problem of SI on lakes throughout Michigan. The MSIP was formed through the leadership of the HLPOA and Jim Vondale, its former President. The MSIP members have been sharing information, working with government regulators and with our political leaders. The MSIP recently met with staff from Michigan Senate Appropriation's Chair, David Hildenbrand in Lansing to discuss funding a 4 lake pilot program for a total of \$900,000. The meeting was attended by Jim Vondale, representatives from Glen and Crystal Lakes, Ron Reimink, Dr. Curt Blankespoor and Dr. Tom Raffel. We were encouraged by the discussion and will keep you updated on our progress.

Consistent with our broadening, science based approach, the HLSIO, SICON and MSIP are working in partnership with Dr. Tom Raffel from Oakland University. Last summer, Dr. Raffel and Maddie Messner worked on Higgins Lake and 7 other lakes on development of a new approach to identifying and quantifying the presence of SI causing parasites in lake water using DNA technology. Early analysis of those results look very promising. We are continuing to work together towards expanding this work on up to 20 lakes next summer. The HLSIO board believes new science-based approaches can help further improve both our control programs and our overall scientific approach and knowledge about SI and we are committed to moving forward together with our partners along this path.

Finally, the HLSIO and MSIP are making progress in efforts to identify corporate partners to assist our efforts both in funding and research. We will keep you apprised of future developments.

The HLSIO Board

Bill Carey, Neal Cooley, Ken Dennings, Dale McDonald, Ed Nellist, Bob Schneider, Jim Vondale