Dear Friends of Higgins Lake,

All of us who love Higgins Lake are sadly aware that Swimmer's Itch (SI) has seriously affected our lake and our community. This letter outlines our approach and asks you to participate with us in a science-based Comprehensive Swimmer's Itch Control Program (Comprehensive Program) to address yet another threat to our lake. We are committed to a broad-based, long term effort focused solely on SI.

The Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization (HLSIO)

After extensive research, consultations with the leading SI experts and carefully reviewing the programs of numerous other lake associations in Michigan, we developed the Comprehensive Program.   To manage and fund the Comprehensive Program, we have formed a non-profit organization called the Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization (HLSIO) devoted solely to fighting SI. The HLSIO board represents a union of Higgins Lake association, business and government leaders. The current Board members are Dale McDonald (RE/MAX of Higgins Lake), Neal Cooley (Owner of Fred's restaurant), Bill Carey (Carey and Jaskowski, PLLC), Bob Schneider (Chairman of the Roscommon County Board of Commissioners), Ed Nellist (Lyon Township Supervisor), Ken Dennings (HLPOA board member), and Jim Vondale (HLPOA President.) The Internal Revenue Service has determined that we are exempt from Federal Income Tax under Section 501(c)(3) as a public charity and are qualified to received tax deductible contributions effective as of January 7, 2015. We are also registered with the State of Michigan to solicit charitable contributions.

Broad- Based Community Support for the Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization

The HLSIO has the support of other concerned organizations that are devoted to protecting Higgins Lake including the Higgins Lake Land Conservancy, the Higgins Lake Environmental and Economic Coalition and the Higgins Lake Property Owners Association. The undersigned are asking that you join with us to support the Comprehensive Program.

Swimmer's Itch Overview

SI is caused by a parasite that enters the human skin and dies, causing a strong allergic reaction. The SI cycle is complex and involves two different animal hosts (one is always a snail and the other is usually a duck, mainly the Common Merganser.) Currently, there is no way to eliminate SI from a lake, but there are proven ways to control and reduce it.

The Science-Based Comprehensive Program

We believe a science-based, Comprehensive Program is the most effective way to address the SI problem. With your support, we will conduct the most comprehensive and advanced science-based SI Control Program ever developed to address all elements of the SI cycle, including ducks, snails, parasites and humans. We will use the most knowledgeable and experienced SI experts in the world. We will bring together the most comprehensive SI knowledge and experience from other lakes throughout Michigan through the Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership (described below.) Further, we will work to develop new and innovative science-based knowledge and methods so that our Comprehensive Program is dynamic and adapts to new information and discoveries. Our Comprehensive Program is built upon a science-based comprehensive plan developed by SICON, LLC, the world's leading experts on SI research and control. With over 80 combined years of experience working on SI, and a proven track record of success, Dr. Harvey Blankespoor, Ronald Reimink, and Dr. Curtis Blankespoor will begin by identifying which SI parasite species are present in Higgins Lake. The Common Merganser will be the major focus of our initial efforts because historically it has been shown to have the highest parasite infection rates. However, we also need to know if infection rates of other ducks and birds have increased in recent years and confirm which snail species in Higgins Lake currently are carrying and releasing parasites that cause SI. The Comprehensive Program is supported by the appropriate government permits (these will be available for viewing on the HLPOA website,) These permits will allow, over a three year period, the trapping and relocating of 350 Mergansers, the lethal "taking" of 20 additional ducks per year, as well as the oiling of 120 duck eggs. The goal is to eliminate duck broods that live on Higgins Lake all summer which contribute most to infecting snails with SI

parasites. Published studies from SICON's work on Glen Lake have shown this to be an effective way to significantly reduce the infection rate of snails in a lake and thus reduce SI. As in Glen Lake, SICON will measure snail infection rates pre and post Comprehensive Program work to measure our progress. The Glen Lake program documented a significant reduction in snail infection rates following the program from 2% to .1%.

Our Comprehensive Program will also have a new component that focuses on manual removal of snails through several large test sites. The identification of snail species that currently carry the SI-causing parasite in Higgins Lake will also aid in their manual removal by lakefront owners and others who use the lake. We will not use Copper Sulfate or other chemicals in our Comprehensive Program.

Education also is an important element of our Comprehensive Program. Representatives from SICON's team of 5 biologists will hold regular meetings at Higgins Lake to explain what they are doing, the progress they are making and to answer questions.

Finally, ducks fly through our lake in the spring and fall. While not the most important source of SI, they contribute to the problem. Other lakes have used organized duck hunting during fall hunting season to help further reduce the numbers of ducks that can infect the lake. We will discuss with other lake associations how they have conducted their programs and work to assemble an effective, organized fall hunting program on Higgins Lake.

The Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership (Partnership) will Work with the HLSIO

Other lakes in Michigan, the US and around the globe also are affected by SI. The HLPOA led efforts to form the Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership (MSIP), a partnership of 10 lake associations in Michigan including Glen Lake, Walloon Lake, Crystal Lake, Mullett Lake, Long Lake, Lake Leelanau, Lake Margrethe, Higgins Lake, 3 Lakes (Torch) and Burt Lake. Jim Vondale, the HLPOA President, is the President of MSIP. The Partnership will be working with government regulators, elected officials, businesses, lake associations and academia to share information about methods to control SI, educate people about the problems of SI and develop new tools to fight SI. The next Partnership meeting on March 31 will bring together all of these major stakeholders to discuss ways we can all work together on this important problem. The Partnership is also meeting with an economic group in Lansing to develop a study to measure the economic impact of SI on our lakes, our communities and our state.

HLSIO Program Cost and Need for Financial Support

The cost of the science-based HLSIO Comprehensive Program for 2015 is $225,000. We anticipate similar costs for 2016 and 2017. We recognize that is a significant amount of money but it is small in comparison to the financial impact we all are facing because of SI. We also cannot put a value on the loss of enjoyment of the lake caused by SI. This cost represents the work of our SICON team of 5 biologists who will conduct the Comprehensive Program. The HLSIO board is committed to managing this Program in a productive and effective manner for the benefit of everyone on and around Higgins Lake. We will work to supplement our fundraising from state, federal and foundation sources. This is an important effort and we need everyone's support. We hope we can count on you.

Please send your check to Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization, 2373 S I75 Business Loop Grayling, MI 49738.

Bob Frye, President
Higgins Lake Land Conservancy

Glen Artz, President
Higgins Lake Environmental and Economic Coalition

Jim Vondale, President
Higgins Lake Property Owners Association

Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization