

Fall 2005 Update

Originally published September 15, 2005

This summer has been hot in temperature and in activity. The HLPOA held it's annual meeting at the Roscommon High School two weeks earlier than usual due to a scheduling conflict. Instead of being held in comfortable, cool seats in the school auditorium, a power outage forced us to re-locate to the school cafeteria and the meeting was held in a hot, stuffy room by the light coming in through the windows. It was just one more in a long line of challenges this organization and its members continue to face.

In addition to celebrating the 70th anniversary of the HLPOA, those of you in attendance at the annual meeting helped us bid an emotional and heartfelt farewell to Ken Dennings as he stepped down from his Presidency to attend to family commitments. As your incoming President, be assured that my priority will be to continue the good work of Ken, and his predecessors, as we move into the future and the HLPOA continues it's mission: To protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Higgins Lake and its surrounding watershed.

Currently, the work of the HLPOA runs the gamut from legal and legislative issues to strategic planning and organizational restructuring to protecting our lake environment. It is the mission of the Board of the HLPOA to inform our members of the many important situations around this beautiful lake.

Road Ends and Legal Activity: This Spring, Ordinance 53, passed by Lyon Township in the fall, was struck down by the Circuit Court in Roscommon. Lyon Township was directed to pay the HLPOA court costs and the Township was held in contempt. Presently, Lyon Township is appealing this decision and we believe the appeal will be heard soon and that the Appellate Court will agree with the previous Circuit Court ruling.

Judge Thomas ruled on April 19, 2005, that the HLPOA could place signs at the adjudicated road ends stating what can and cannot be done at these road ends. The HLPOA installed approximately sixty-five signs at those road ends. Over the July 4th weekend, roughly thirty-five of those signs had been stolen or vandalized in an unbelievable act of civil disobedience. All of the signs have been or will be replaced.

It is a testament to the effectiveness of the HLPOA in its relentless pursuit of road-end violations that fewer boats were observed at the road ends this summer in comparison to previous years. There are, however, a few very serious exceptions: Kelly Beach and Sovereign Park road ends. In August 2005, Judge Baumgartner made a ruling that will give the HLPOA an enforcement tool to uphold the Jacobs Ruling in the thirteen subdivisions that have been previous litigated around Higgins Lake. The Judge ruled that henceforth, upon presentation of dated photographs of violators with affidavits to document them, sanctions will be imposed upon the violators.

It has been an exceptionally active legal period this year, and we greatly appreciate the generous contributions that members have made to the legal fund.

Ramps: Two ramps have been installed — one at Townline Road in Lyon Township and the other at Kelly Beach in Gerrish Township. The HLPOA has filed for a "contested case hearing" for both locations and will pursue all possible remedies available. Townline Road, Kelly, Newman and Hoffman Road ends have all been issued notices of violation for operating marinas by the DEQ.

House Bill 4576-H3: The long road that began with HB4141 continues in the form of a new House Bill 4576-H3. This bill, regarding the use of road ends, was passed out of committee by an 8 to 3 vote in the House over the summer. The bill is now actively being lobbied by both sides of the issue. Our lobbyists expect the bill to be voted on in September by the House of Representatives.

We are asking that you once again contact your Representative asking for support of House Bill 4563-H3 without amendments. Our membership comes from many districts in the State, and your call from your district is very important. Please make this call or e-mail when the new session begins after September 12th. Those who oppose the bill will also be calling and e-mailing, so please spend a few minutes on this priority. Ongoing news will be posted on our website — and you can follow links to your legislators.

Gerrish Township Marina: Gerrish Township is seeking a grant from the DNR for a marina to be constructed at the site of the Higgins Lake Boat Yard on the South end of Higgins Lake. The grant deadline was August 1, 2005, and as a result of the Township not having an updated Recreational Plan, the grant application has been delayed. They may re-apply for the grant in the Spring of 2006. Check our website for updates as they happen.

Water Quality: The HLPOA Environmental Committee continues the important work of testing the water of Higgins Lake, monitoring levels of dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll, phosphorus, water clarity and many other important areas of concern. Volunteers have been out all summer collecting samples and obtaining data.

Milfoil Update: The Benthic Barriers are being moved from exiting sites to new milfoil sites, and should be in place by the end of September. This labor intensive work appears to be very successful, the lake bottom underneath the panels is completely free of milfoil and area previously covered by the barriers have not experienced a return of the invasive milfoil seaweed. In fact, in many locations, native species of seaweed are returning where the milfoil once was.

Weevil Update: Enviroscience, the organization that planted the Eurasian Water Milfoil Weevils at Higgins Lake, will return late in August to study the survival and impact of the weevils. Some 20,000 weevils were planted in two locations last summer.

Strategic Planning: Last Spring, the HLPOA held a restructuring and strategic planning workshop. Results of this important meeting were detailed in the Spring 2005 Newsletter and may be viewed on the HLPOA website. Goal No. 1 was to develop an organizational restructuring plan. What has become very evident during the planning of that restructuring is the importance of the HLPOA having a space of its own. In the past, Ken Dennings ran the bulk of the HLPOA business out of his residence. Other Board Members continue to conduct HLPOA business out of their homes, necessitating an inordinate amount of time and space. The result is that the records, files and equipment of the HLPOA are all in various locations.

The HLPOA is currently working to locate office space and hire an administrative assistant so that we may better serve our members, and relieve Board Members of the burden and need to use their personal residences for HLPOA business matters. A committee has been formed to research locations for an office, and explore purchase and lease options. Ideas being explored include finding an “angel” to purchase a building and either lease it back to the HLPOA or donate it for a tax write-off. The HLPOA will also be seeking donations to help us cover the cost of office furniture, equipment, computers, etc.

This is just a part of what has been happening with the HLPOA recently. Please check the website frequently for updates.

Thank you very much.

Pat Springstead, President, HLPOA