



Higgins Lake Property Owners Association

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October 8, 2016

Dear HLPOA Members,

It has been a beautiful September. I hope you had some time to enjoy the lake after Labor Day. I always struggle emotionally when the boats and docks come out. Each day at our lake is precious. Each of the Directors is proud to serve on the HLPOA Board where our central focus is always the protection of Higgins Lake and the interests of its Riparians.

Below are informational items for you.

HLPOA Board Activities:

Environmental: The Environmental Committee is working hard on a variety of topics including water testing, beginning to analyze the U of M/MSU lake level/dam removal study, as well as dealing with storm run-off issues. Attached is a more detailed listing of the Environmental Committee's work written by the Chairperson, Dave Batchelor. They have also developed a series of pamphlets addressing environment issues. Attached is the first pamphlet for your review, Invasive Species. These will be a useful tool to inform the membership and the public of key ecological concerns. More pamphlets will be shared in the coming months.

Legal: We are heavily involved in legal actions to protect riparian interests. A commercial enterprise has been established at the AmVets Lodge the last couple of seasons. It is an expansion of its traditional use. We are working with neighbors to control violations to the property zoned residential.

We are also working with Lyon Township to enforce the road end legal decisions and state statues which limit activities at road ends. It may be necessary to enforce these laws through court action.

Both lawsuits against the HLPOA by former Board members are progressing through the Circuit Court. These lawsuits, in the opinion of counsel, are deciding lacking in legal merit. Unfortunately the lawsuits demand a vigorous defense. Providing a strong legal defense is diverting general fund dollars that would otherwise be utilized to benefit the lake.

Dedicated to preserving the quality and beauty of Higgins Lake

Swimmers Itch: Clearly more work is needed but the reports of swimmer's itch were drastically reduced this past summer. In fact both the HLPOA and the Higgins Lake Swimmer's Itch Organization (HLSIO) received many communications of gratitude for the progress already made on the problem. Your dues dollars were put to good use in fighting Swimmers' Itch. Lobbying efforts funded by the HLPOA led to an appropriation of State funds this coming fiscal year (beginning October 1) for science-based control programs of Swimmers' Itch at Northern Michigan lakes, including Higgins Lake. Much progress has already been accomplished on our lake through the efforts of the HLSIO which resulted in a significant reduction in snail infections rates this past summer. The HLPOA lead the way by making the first donation of \$16,000 to HLSIO based on membership input in 2014. We believe this donation is turning out to be an excellent investment.

Oak Wilt: We are blessed to have some old oak forests around the lake. Unfortunately Oak Wilt, a disease spreading in our region, is negatively impacting our oak tree population. This could have a harmful impact to the lake. This summer I lost an oak to this disease on my shore line. Below is a link to a pamphlet from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service explaining how Oak Wilt spreads and how it should be addressed.

http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/howtos/ht_oakwilt/identify_prevent_and_control_oak_wilt_print.pdf

Membership: We surpassed 500 memberships in the HLPOA again this year. Although we would like to see stronger numbers we are pleased membership totals have stabilized after a decade of decline, especially considering our membership definition under the new Bylaws. Please tell your friends and neighbors about our organization and encourage them to join and support the HLPOA.

Additional Support: Because of all our legal work (protecting riparian interests and defending two lawsuits) and our extensive environmental activities (now and moving forward) our cash reserves are at a lowest point for the past decade. We have worked to keep costs under control and the declining membership trends have ceased. With that said, we would welcome additional financial support of the HLPOA. Please consider making a contribution to the legal fund and/ or the newly created environmental fund. Every dollar received designated for either of the funds will be considered restricted dollars and thus earmarked for programs or expenditures directly related to those designations. Accounting of these funds will be detailed in monthly financial statements. Please consider making your donation today. They can be mailed to:

HLPOA
PO Box 55
Roscommon, MI 48653.

As always, in the best interest of the lake,

Brad Gibson

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The Environmental Niche, September 2016

This year the Environmental Committee presented an Environmental Policy for approval by the membership at the Annual Meeting. This will be used to help guide decision making, developing partnerships and proactive programs to protect the Higgins Lake ecosystem and property values around the lake. In June and July the Environmental Committee conducted a \$2,600 monitoring program to look at the relationship between nutrient levels, the benthic (bottom dwelling) algae community structure and snail densities in the nearshore waters of the lake. The report has been posted on the HLPOA website. Nutrient levels and algal densities were elevated and highest at two locations where snail densities were also highest. The data indicates that groundwater entering the lake and nutrient recycling explain the high nutrient levels and algal growth. The absence of ortho phosphate in the water column suggests Zebra mussels have altered the nutrient cycle in the lake. Another finding was very high organic content in the nearshore sediments. The black color and sulfurous smell was found at many locations around the lake and is an indicator of anaerobic conditions in the sediment. When oxygen is depleted in the sediments nutrients and heavy metals can be reintroduced into the water. This exacerbates eutrophication and can cause toxic effects on bottom dwelling organisms like crayfish, mayflies and fish eggs.

This work points to the importance of reducing nutrient levels entering the lake from septic systems, lawn fertilizers, storm water drainage systems and other significant sources. It also raises questions that only further monitoring can answer.

Another area of focus for the Environmental Committee has been education and outreach to the membership and general public on invasive species, shoreline erosion as well as nutrients. We hope the Invasive Species trifold included with this message will help inform our members on the need to wash boats and trailers, drain live wells and bilge water and thoroughly wash fishing equipment if used on lakes or streams other than Higgins. The invasive trifold is the first of three that will be sent by the end of the year.

Research, education and information require funds. If you are able to make a donation to support these initiatives, please do so. The Environmental Committee is working on an Action Plan for next year. A key component being discussed is to establish an ongoing comprehensive monitoring program to document water quality, biological diversity, sediment characteristics and collecting samples of suspect and known sources of pollutants to the lake. Your donations can be made to a restricted fund that would be used exclusively for this type of work.

David Batchelor, Chair
Environmental Committee

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Environmental Policy

The Higgins Lake Property Owners Association supports:

1. Maintaining the legal lake level established in 1926 as amended in 1982.
2. A comprehensive, science-based lake wide program to better understand and control Swimmer's Itch.
3. Efforts to reduce nutrient levels in Higgins Lake, including: the proper and frequent servicing and maintenance of septic systems, the use of phosphate free detergents, the preservation and restoration of shrubs and trees along the shoreline to utilize nutrients and reduce sedimentation, minimizing the use of lawn fertilizers near the lake and promoting green belts around the lake.
4. Sustainable development and land use practices, including: sound watershed management planning, the conservation of land around the lake and in the watershed, the preservation of old growth trees and plantings of trees that benefit wildlife, zoning regulations to maintain property values and ensure building densities which do not exceed the environment's capability to assimilate.
5. Efforts to reduce the impact of toxic substances in the lake, including: reducing hydrocarbon emissions from watercraft, reducing or eliminating the nearshore or in-the-water application of pesticides, herbicides and chemicals that are persistent and or become concentrated in the food chain (bioaccumulation).

The HLPOA does not support any activity that is unlawful or any regulated activity which is conducted without the necessary local, state and federal permits or that is conducted in violation of such permits.

Invasive Species What are they?

Invasive species are plants and animals that are not native to a given location. Once introduced and established, they can spread rapidly and damage ecosystems by choking out native species, destroying habitat, transmitting parasites and releasing toxins.

The zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) is a good example of an invasive species that has altered the biological community structure, affected the transfer of nutrients and virtually eliminated native freshwater clams in Higgins Lake.

What to do?

Here are some things you can do to help:
CLEAN boats, trailers and equipment.
DRAIN live wells and bilges of all water.
DRY boats, trailers, waders and equipment.
DISPOSE of unwanted bait, nonnative fish and aquatic plants in the trash.
DON'T PURCHASE invasive plants or animals that are restricted or prohibited in Michigan.
DON'T TRANSPORT or release invasive species into lakes, streams or ponds.
Report your finding to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality by contacting:
www.michigan.gov/invasives
or the HPLPOA office at
www.hlpoa.org/contact-us

Donations for further environmental studies can be sent to the HLPOA, P.O. Box 55, Roscommon, MI 48653.

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Environmental Bulletin No.1 Invasive Species

Prepared by the HLPOA Environmental Committee, September 2016

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What To Look For

Starry stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtuse*) is a species of large algae native to Europe and western Asia. It has become established in one-fifth of Houghton Lake.



The round goby (*Neogobius melanostomus*) is a bottom-dwelling fish native to central Eurasia. A large population has become established in the Great Lakes and inland lakes. It can be spread by the sale and use of minnows for fishing bait.



Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) is native to Europe, Asia and N. Africa and was introduced to the US between 1880 and 1940s. It crowds out native species and destroys habitat.



Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) are native to Russia. They filter phytoplankton (algae) from the water and have virtually eliminated freshwater clams from Higgins Lake. It is believed they affect nutrient cycling and algal community structures in lakes. There is hope in a new bacterial control that doesn't affect other aquatic life.



The Asian clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) is a small (less than 1 inch), yellow to brown clam with concentric rings. They are found on or in the lake sediments.



Watch List - Prohibited in Michigan
(*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*) The New Zealand mud snail is prohibited in Michigan but has recently been found in the East Branch AuSable River. It poses a serious threat to freshwater rivers, lakes and streams.



Report this species to: Seth Herbst, DNR 517-284-6223 herbst1@michigan.gov
Bill Keiper, DEQ keiperw@michigan.gov
and the HLPOA Office 989-275-9181.