

## **The HLPOA Environmental Committee**

On 14 September 2015, the Higgins Lake Property Owners Association (HLPOA) Board of Directors approved the members of the Environmental Committee and an Advisory Panel. Members of the committee are: David Batchelor (Chair), Charlene Cornell (HLPOA Vice President), Bob McKeller (HLPOA Treasurer), Herb Weatherly (HLPOA Secretary), Dianne Wagner (HLPOA Board) and Fred Swinehart (HLPOA member at large). Biographical information for Dave, Charlene, Bob, Herb and Dianne are available on the HLPOA website. The Advisory Panel includes: Mr. Ron Reimink (Biologist, SICON), Mr. Robert Karner (Biologist, Glen Lake), Mr. Kevin Kessler (Mathematical Biologist) and Ms. Madeline Messner (MS Graduate Student, Oakland University).

The HLPOA Board has approved three overarching objectives for the committee and advisory panel over the next year: 1) increasing “environmental awareness”, 2) “strengthening partnerships” to protect the lake; and, 3) serving as a resource and contact point for the membership and board on environmental issues.

An ecological perspective is essential to better understanding how land use patterns and watershed activities affect water quality, the diversity and abundance of aquatic life, the recreational uses of the lake and the economy it supports. Higgins Lake is a living breathing ecosystem comprised of the atmosphere, the land surrounding and draining into the lake, the creeks, springs and ground water which feed the lake, the wetlands connected to the lake, and the fauna and flora that depend on it. A “watershed” approach is critical to understanding the relationships and interactions that directly and indirectly affect the lake and the development of policies and programs to protect the health of the lake ecosystem.

Strengthening existing partnerships and building new alliances through outreach, education and collaboration is essential to achieve public and political support and funding for programs to monitor, maintain or improve the health of the lake. The Environmental Committee will work closely with other HLPOA committees to exchange information and solicit input from the membership. Opportunities to work with other lake associations, local units of government and academia will be pursued to strengthen and leverage resources for existing programs and to implement new initiatives approved by the Board of Directors and membership.

The HLPOA advocates science-based decision making using reliable information. The Environmental Committee is currently collecting and establishing a library in the office for all the water quality and related environmental monitoring studies that have been conducted as far back as possible. This data base will enable the committee, membership and other lake associations to determine trends in water and sediment quality; look at shifts in biodiversity; evaluate land use changes and watershed activities; and, develop recommendations to address areas of concern and improve the health of the lake ecosystem. The intention of the Environmental Committee is to make as much of this information as possible electronically available.