

# HLPOA™/DNR PARKS AND RECREATION (PRD) MEETING TO PROTECT HIGGINS LAKE WATER QUALITY

Meeting between HLPOA and DNRPRD Chief, Ron Olson, Michigan DNR Customer Service Center /Roscommon, Michigan

August 18, 2017

# MEETING PURPOSE

- Introduce DNRPRD and HLPOA leadership and begin a dialogue on DNRPRD Higgins Lake water quality/facility operations issues.
- Agree that Higgins Lake continues to be a beautiful and desirable lake for residents and visitors, but like other lakes, it is facing significant man-made environmental pressures.
- Agree on the major Higgins Lake water quality issues and that we will work together to address them.
- Select team members from HLPOA and DNRPRD to define specific actions that will address these critical issues.

# THE HLPOA AND ITS MISSION

- The HLPOA mission is to “Protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Higgins Lake and its surrounding watershed.”
- We are approximately 500 lakefront property owners.
- We all came to Higgins Lake because of its clear, clean, fresh water.
- The HLPOA is committed to its Mission and the principles of the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, We are anxious to begin working with the DNRPRD to protect, preserve and enhance Higgins Lake now and for future generations of property owners.
- The HLPOA and its members are recognized state-wide for their leadership, commitment and ability to take strong action by reducing swimmer’s itch on Higgins Lake by over 95% in three years.
- The HLPOA and its members have a proven track record. We raised approximately \$500,000 to date from the Higgins Lake community to fight swimmer’s itch. We are working with the DNR Fish and Wildlife and US Fish and Wildlife Divisions. We led a successful effort to obtain \$500,000 in state appropriations to date to fight swimmer’s itch. We are leading a coalition of lakes in Michigan working together to fight swimmer’s itch.
- The HLPOA and its members will bring this same leadership, commitment and action to this effort to protect Higgins Lake water quality.

# DNR PARKS AND RECREATION DIVISION AND ITS MISSION

- The DNRPRD Mission is similar to HLPOA and includes “...to protect, and preserve the natural and cultural features of Michigan’s unique resources.”
- The DNRPRD also is a lakefront property owner. In fact it is the largest lakefront property owner on Higgins Lake-North and South State Parks, McMullen Center and West Launch.
- Hundreds of thousands of visitors are attracted to DNRPRD facilities by the beauty of Higgins Lake which is a major revenue source for DNRPRD.
- We know you also want to protect and preserve Higgins Lake now and for future generations of visitors.

# DNRPRD HIGGINS LAKE WATER QUALITY ISSUES

- **INVASIVE SPECIES**-DNRPRD facilities are high volume and represent the greatest risk of entry of new invasive species in Higgins Lake. The lagoon and West Launch are full of milfoil that is being cut loose/carried into the lake by launching boats (see attached pictures.)
- **BOAT WASHES**-Current boat wash facilities at the North and South State Parks were built by private funds. The boat wash near the North State Park is maintained by HLPOA members. The South State Park boat wash is maintained by the South State Park budget. Neither boat wash is staffed or enforced. The boat wash near the North State park is not used by the public and is ineffective. No statistics are kept on South State Park boat wash use. There is no boat wash at the West Launch.
- **DREDGING**-The lake bottom is dredged at the three DNRPRD launch sites. The sand is not being returned to the lake. Beach erosion nearest the North State Park launch is severe.
  - **WEST LAUNCH MAINTENANCE AND EXPANSION**-Excavation/removal and replacement with even wider concrete pads on the lake bottom is planned for 7 weeks beginning September 5. The construction plan calls for use of a barrier to protect the lake during the work.

# WATER QUALITY ISSUES (CONT.)

- NO LIMITS ON BOAT LOAD, BOAT SIZE, BOAT POWER OR BOAT NOISE-DNR uses the boat industry standard allowing 1440 boats to be launched on the lake each day. This standard uses the lake acreage to determine launch capability and does not consider other factors. No study has been done to analyze boat load effects on the lake or to justify three facilities.
- LACK OF CONTROLS AND STAFFING AT THE WEST LAUNCH-Vehicles and trailers park anywhere creating congestion and safety hazards. Other problems include trespassing and littering.
- NUTRIENT LOADING-Nutrient loading is a serious issue for Higgins Lake. Hundreds of thousands of visitors use DNRPRD facilities on Higgins Lake each year. The sewer facility built near the North State Park for Camp Curneila has been significantly underutilized (approximately 20-30%) for a decade which puts it at risk functionally and financially. The North State Park uses it's own waste treatment system which needs upgrading to continue into the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of a system built for 20 years. Will the North State Park join the existing sewer authority sewer at a fair contribution rate? Will McMullen Conference Center and others join to share the cost? The South State Park is connected the Houghton Lake sewer system.
- COPPER SULFATE-We understand the DNRPRD does not use copper sulfate but the DEQ will issue permits. HLPOA members voted to eliminate the use of copper sulfate.
- NOTICE OF ISSUES THAT AFFECT HIGGINS LAKE-HLPOA receives no direct notice of actions and lakefront owners receive winter notices and short timing to respond. Issuing winter permits by DNRPRD is not intended to hide notice. It is done for convenience of the DNRPRD.

# MANDATORY, STAFFED BOAT WASHES ARE REQUIRED TO BE EFFECTIVE

- DNRPRD FACILITIES ARE HIGH RISK-The greatest risk for the spread of new invasive species comes from boats launching at Higgins Lake from other infected lakes, especially fishermen.
- DNRPRD FACILITIES ARE HIGH VOLUME-Three high volume public launch sites attract thousands of boats each year from outside Higgins Lake.
- THE DNR ATTRACTS OUTSIDE BOATS TO HIGGINS LAKE-The DNR stocks Higgins Lake with fish to attract fishermen to Higgins Lake.
- UNSTAFFED, VOLUNTARY BOAT WASHES-Observations at recent North State Park boat wash “Educational Events” showed the boat wash was not being used even during these events. Data on use at the South State Park is not tracked.

# MANDATORY, STAFFED BOAT WASHES ARE REQUIRED TO BE EFFECTIVE (CONT.)

- ENFORCEMENT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE BOAT WASH USE-Other experience such as safety belts use also demonstrates that education is ineffective and enforcement is needed for compliance.
- STAFFING BOAT WASHES AIDS COMPLIANCE AND USE-Staffing boat washes with trained inspectors/washers ensures compliance and quicker, more effective washing.
- MANDATORY, STAFFED BOAT WASHES WORK-Crystal and Glen Lakes have local ordinances that require boat washing. (see next slide.) A single, staffed DNR boat wash facility at Glen Lake has conducted approximately 2,000 inspections and 1,200 washes from 2007 to Sep. 9, 2016 according to Glen Lake biologist Robert Karner.
- The DNRPRD is taking the position that local ordinances do not apply to state land and they are removing local signs that suggest boat washing is mandatory at Glen and Crystal Lakes.



# GLEN ARBOR TOWNSHIP (GLEN LAKE) AQUATIC NUISANCE ORDINANCE

- It shall be unlawful for any person to launch any watercraft/trailer or related equipment into any water body in the Glen Lake-Crystal River Watershed in Glen Arbor and/or Empire Township unless such watercraft has been washed in such a manner so as to clear it of any aquatic nuisances (invasive, non-native plant or organisms); watercraft/trailer or related equipment which has been out of any water bodies for the ten days immediately preceding such launching do not have to be washed before launching into a township water body so long as any live wells and bilges have been cleaned and water has been blown out of the engine of any such watercraft.
- It shall be unlawful for any person to empty any bait box or aquarium into any of the waters in the Glen Lake-Crystal River Watershed with Glen Arbor or Empire Township.
- A violation of this ordinance is a municipal civil infraction and any person or firm found responsible for such violation shall be subject to a maximum civil fine of \$500 plus costs.

# THE DNRPRD AND HLPOA MUST WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

- WEST LAUNCH MAINTENANCE-Document that the 7 week maintenance work beginning September 5 was performed in a manner that protected the water quality of Higgins Lake.
- WEST LAUNCH OPERATIONS-The West Launch is zoned R-1 single family residential. It has continually expanded over the years to a major public launch site in close proximity to lakefront property owners. Establish effective staffing and controls to address pollution, trespassing, illegal parking, congestion, littering and other related problems. (see attached Batchelor letters.) Work together with other government authorities like Lyon Township and the Roscommon County Road Commission and Sheriff on these issues.
- INVASIVE SPECIES-Take immediate and effective actions to address the critical problem of invasive species created by the three DNRPRD high volume public launch sites. Meet together with the new state invasive species lead. Begin with clean up of launch sites (focusing on the lagoon and West Launch/surrounding properties) to eliminate further spread of Eurasian milfoil by boats launching at those facilities. Agree on proper treatment methodology and start treatment in spring or early summer. Establish mandatory boat washing staffed by trained inspectors. Develop a plan to move the existing, unused boat wash to the North State Park and build a boat wash at the West Launch.
- STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS FOR INVASIVE SPECIES-Our joint interest in addressing this critical issue presents a unique opportunity to work together to obtain grants, including mandatory and staffed boat washes and installing a boat wash at the West Launch.
- BOAT LOAD, SIZE, NOISE, POWER-Study boat load to justify the continued need for three facilities. Establish limits at each site for boat launches, size, power and noise that consider relevant factors and not just the size of the lake.

# PROPOSED HLPOA ACTION PLAN (CONT.)

- DREDGING-Study the effects of dredging of Higgins Lake DNRPRD facilities on nearby property owners and the lake.
- NOTIFICATION PROTOCOL-DNRPRD agreed to provide direct notification to HLPOA. Agree to notification of HLPOA and affected lakefront property owners that provides adequate timing to respond. Consider convenience of property owners as well as DNRPRD.
- SEWER FACILITY-Agree that the North State Park will promptly join the nearby sewer facility at a fair entry price and yearly maintenance costs. Work to add other facilities.
- COPPER SULFATE-Agree to support the HLPOA resolution to eliminate the use of copper sulfate on Higgins Lake including eliminating DEQ permits. Meet together with the DEQ to gain agreement.
- Collect a special Higgins Lake visitors fee to fund projects to protect the lake, including staffing mandatory boat washes.
- Work with DNRPRD to communicate the good news about SI reduction on Higgins Lake. Eliminate the current SI signage, include a short, positive message on the DNRPRD website and work together on a positive press release.
- ESTABLISH A DNRPRD AND HLPOA team. Promptly schedule our next meeting. The HLPOA and DNRPRD have agreed to work together. We will make regular reports to HLPOA members.