



# Higgins Lake Property Owners Association<sup>SM</sup>

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Higgins Lake Property Owners Association

Board Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2025

The meeting was called to order by President Charlene Cornell at 9:01 A.M.

**Board Members Present:** Charlene Cornell, Greg Semack, Bruce Carleton, Herb Weatherly, Wayne Brooks, Dennis Corte, Becky Gibson, John Ogren, Fred Swinehart, Patty Dennis and Curt DeVoe.

**Agenda: No changes.**

**President's Comments:** Charlene welcomed everyone and said that Chase Schepke, Roscommon Drain Commissioner, will be joining us at 9:30 A.M. to discuss lake level measurements.

**Annual Meeting Minutes:** The July 19, 2025, Annual Meeting Minutes were finalized to present at next year's annual meeting for membership approval.

**August Minutes:** The August 18, 2025, Minutes were accepted as written.

**Speaker Chase Schepke:** Charlene welcomed Chase Schepke, Roscommon Drain Commissioner, and the Board members introduced themselves. Charlene said we are looking for education on the 2 methods of lake level recordings, HiFi and USGS (United States Geological Survey) and the differences. Chase explained he prefers the HiFi method, where graphs show every gauge active in Roscommon County. While he does not view the USGS data, both measurements are relatively close, depending on wave action. HiFi allows data to be accessed easily, such as the days, range, and time. This information can be downloaded into an Excel spread sheet, which USGS cannot. The Board asked several questions about the dam, and a discussion was held about permits, restrictor plates & modifications, banking water, evaporation, and ground water. Chase summarized by saying that a new structure is the best outcome, but is it cost-efficient? Board members thanked Chase for all the information he provided today.

**Committee Reports:**

**Secretary/Office:** None.

**President:** Charlene Cornell, **Vice Pres:** Greg Semack, **Secretary:** Herb Weatherly, **Treasurer:** Bruce Carleton  
**Directors:** Wayne Brooks, Dennis Corte, Patty Dennis, Curt DeVoe, Becky Gibson, John Ogren, Fred Swinehart

*90 Years dedicated to preserving the quality and beauty of Higgins Lake*

**Treasurer's Report:** The August financials were presented and there were no questions. Bruce shared that the QuickBooks transition is going smoothly and that we are now receiving PayPal membership payments. Thank you, Bruce, for coordinating these new transactions!

**Membership & Communication:** Wayne stated we currently have 456 members. Wayne then addressed PayPal online membership/donation payments, which went live in August, stating this is a convenience feature for members. Wayne noted there are 2 fees involved: a 3.49% processing fee (noted as tax) and a .49 transaction fee (noted as shipping).

Wayne then spoke of the directory advertising forms, which have been sent to Dealers Supply. Regarding the Fall newsletter, Charlene asked that all articles be sent to her today.

Wayne and Patty continue their work on updating the website, suggesting that Committee Chairs write an intro for their tabs. Patty also suggested we do more with social media.

**Riparian Committee:** John reported the following:

**Road End Signage:** All known signage projects are completed. Four replacement posts and signs were installed on September 5th: two at Sam-O-Set and two on the east side of the lake.

**DNR Data Collection Project:** Data collection was completed over Labor Day weekend. The HLF students interviewed 664 boat operators at the South State Park boat wash, and 3,032 boat trailers were inspected at seven boat accesses. Data analysis is underway, but it appears that there are no significant improvements from previous years. The DNR does not support our recommendations to inspect and wash all arriving boats.

**Roscommon County Safety Meeting:** The fall meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 25 at the AuSable River Center at 11 AM. The agenda includes updates from the Marine Patrol and Central Dispatch, a wrap-up on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend outcomes, road end issues, status of township STR (short-term rentals) and septic ordinances and issues at the DNR West Access.

**Environmental Committee:** Fred reported the following:

#### **Health of Higgins Lake Initiative – HOHL**

This effort continues with essentially all members of the Environmental Committee taking an active part.

#### **Biological and Chemical Analysis and Flow Rate in The Cut River**

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, following the replacement of stones beneath the outflow at the Cut River dam, John Ogren, John Davis and Fred Swinehart measured the flow rate and recorded it as 16.6 cfs. This was the lowest flow rate measured by the HLPOA Environmental Committee since the program began in 2023. However, this measurement fell right on the 2013 flow rate regression equation from the MSU study of that year as plotted by Jim Seitz. See his graph below:

blob:<https://mail3.spectrum.net/9fe139dd-5f30-4b1f-b428-d83691797cd5>

#### **GIS Layered Mapping of Septic Systems and Wells**

This project slowed somewhat over the summer, due to the usual activities of family and guests of the volunteers. However, some funds became available to CMDHD (Central MI Division of the Health Department) for the hiring of personnel from Fetch GIS (Geographical Information System) to help continue the work. These funds will disappear September 30<sup>th</sup>, but the volunteers will be able to move ahead more actively then. The present estimate is that for properties in Gerrish Township for which documentation is available, the mapping will be complete within a few months. Continuing the project will require acquiring new information for undocumented properties, and will require considerable effort, and possibly new funding to support it.

### **Macro –Invertebrate Surveys**

Macro-Invertebrate surveys will take place on September 23<sup>rd</sup> for both Big Creek and the Cut River. People interested in joining the group should contact either Duncan Lawrence or Melanie Brown.

**HLSIO:** The following was reported by HLSIO President Duncan Lawrence:

Status as of September 2025

Overall, some major progress is giving us hope for 2026 Merganser Relocation. However, if our relocation program is suspended next year, we could expect higher Swimmers Itch cases. We are taking actions to keep communications open.

- Merganser Relocation Status — As we prepare for 2026, we were able to meet with Shannon Lott, Natural Resource Deputy at Michigan DNR. Meeting attendees included: Greg Semack, Duncan Lawrence, Dr. Curt Blankespoor, Vicki Springsted (Invasive Species) and Sam Boumis (HLPOA Lobbying Advocate). Thanks to Sam Boumis and Ken Borton for facilitating this meeting. We were able to share our concerns and recommendations for next year. Shannon was very receptive and extremely knowledgeable. Particularly encouraging is that she appears supportive of field testing any captured Mergansers for Avian Flu. Any mergansers captured and testing positive of HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza) would be euthanized, while those testing negative could be relocated. This approach would be a huge “win” for us in 2026. Hopefully, we will know more in the next few months. Shannon seemed open to having additional meetings later in the year/early 2026. Of note, we have never had conversations with a DNR senior representative. So, we are very optimistic at this point.
- US Fish & Wildlife — There was a letter from the Mississippi Flyway Council (a group of 14 States and 3 Canadian Provinces, dated March 11, 2025, that outlined why there should be NO relocation of ducks going forward, viewing SI as a “discomfort” not a health risk. Also, no research has demonstrated survivability of hens/broods (not true). HLSIO sent a response on August 21, 2025, that we shared with Mr. Brian Smith Assistant Regional Director of Migratory birds. This outlined why SI was more than just a “discomfort”, that it could be an economic hardship for Roscommon County. Moreover, that most of the states in this group have no experience or expertise with SI. Additionally, we outlined alternatives we think would address their primary concerns. Our response also included a letter from the Roscommon Village Manager emphasizing his concern about the economic impact in a rise in SI cases.
- Swimmer’s Itch Prevalence -- Initial results are being analyzed from our Water Exposure Study. It indicates no increase in Swimmer’s Itch (SI) among our regular participants. However, our website reports gave a different story. This indicates SI cases increased substantially from last year. There were about twice as many people reported getting SI on our website. This is obviously a concern as we look ahead to next year, but not surprising since we had four broods on the lake...a large increase over the past few years.
- Fundraising Dinner, Thursday August 14 -- A very successful fundraising dinner was held at Witt’s barn, with the weather being just about perfect. In total, over 120 tickets were sold. Additionally, we

received some private donations supporting our cause. We are tentatively targeting Thursday August 13, 2026, for next year's event.

**PAC:** Greg reported the following:

- HLPAC Sponsored a Meet and Greet Fundraiser on 8-28-25 With Rep Ken Borton, who has been very helpful in getting us to a higher level within the DNR. The fundraiser was very well attended and Ken answered many questions for the attendees. One of our goals at the beginning of the year was to develop better relationships with our State Rep and Senator and I believe we have taken big steps in that direction.
- We had a second DNR meeting with Deputy Shannon Lott on Sept 11. This meeting was designed to go into more depth about our problems in fighting AIS and Permitting for HLSIO. Attendees were Vicki Springstead who gave details of HLF involvement with DASH Boat and boat washing and Curt Blankespoor and Duncan Lawrence about permitting and alternative methods of control if relocation is suspended again next summer. Nancy Lamb was invited to attend but was on vacation and could not participate. Shannon seemed more than willing to help, had a couple ideas for helping in each area and will be our advocate for internal DNR meeting when discussing SI permitting for next year. This is a huge development compared to past years.
- We also suggested that the DNR sponsor a mandated boat washing program at the South State Park and move the North Park boat wash to the drive leading to the launch ramp. At the south park we suggested more park effort at the launch site to advise boaters to clean weeds off their boats and trailers before entering the boat ramp and again before leaving the park. Writing more tickets was discussed. The improper way that the south Park Lagoon is handled was a big point of conversation and the unsupervised West Launch was noted as being a huge problem.

## **Local Politics**

### **County**

We continue to talk to the commissioners about pausing the SAD (Special Assessment District). They are attempting to finish the Assessment Roll and Computation of Costs in order to apply the Assessment to the Winter Tax bills going out in December. Attorney Ellison will be filing against the process going forward. Currently we have over 550 people who have signed on to join our objection. Much of the objection deals with improper costs and assignments of costs. The hearing on September 2<sup>nd</sup> was changed at the last possible moment to a Special Meeting of the Roscommon Board of Commissioners. The purpose was to avoid answering questions as many of the questions posed at the August 6<sup>th</sup> meeting were inconvenient. In addition, although people were told that the meeting was being recorded as all the Commissioners Board meetings are, this was not done. Approx. 200 to 225 people attended, all stated their objection to the creation of the SAD. Commissioner Morley incredibly stated that she hears from many people who are in favor of the SAD.

The county had a Lake Level meeting on Sept 10<sup>th</sup> at which time it was expected to accept the Assessment Roll and Computation of Costs and push the process forward. Again, many people were in attendance and spoke against the Assessment Roll and Computation of Costs and the SAD in general. It was suggested that the county should wait to see what the appellate court would rule if they lose that appeal, they would need to refund any money collected, with interest, and would lose the money spent on making and processing the assessment roll and computation of costs and charges involved with that phase of the project. The County Board put off the

vote and rescheduled the meeting for Wednesday, 9-17 at 2 PM. Commissioner Morley was a constant voice to hurry the process and even commented that she didn't want to wait as there would always be a **vocal minority**.

**Gerrish Township** met with their attorney and decided that their assessment in the SAD was improper. They voted to have their attorney file an objection to the Assessment Roll and Computation of Costs. The county explained the GT assessment first as an assessment on their road end ownership and when they were told they do not own the road ends, the reason they were given for their assessment was the intangibles they would receive based on the passing of the SAD.

Gerrish Township is also considering passing an ordinance to regulate STRs. There will be at least one hearing and public input will be contemplated. Nothing will be passed until likely the winter or next spring. The Township board does believe that doing something is necessary but are cautiously looking at the details. The ordinance is likely to be a police power act.

**Lyon township** has found the answer to long township meetings. They will now stop any meetings at one hour regardless of where they are in the agenda. The Board has allocated \$5300 for a new baseball diamond and planned to do water testing for nitrates over Labor Day weekend at the two state parks.

**New Business:** Charlene said there is an upcoming HOHL meeting. Patty confirmed the meeting is 6:00 Tuesday at Gerrish Township.

**Adjournment:** Greg moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by John. Motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 11:32 A.M.

**The next meeting will be October 20, 2025, at 9:00 A.M.**