ESLA Spring 2019 Newsletter

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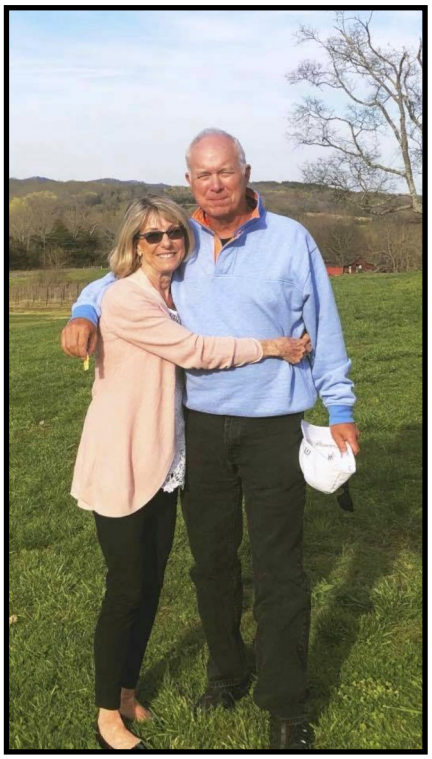
President's Message



Good Day ESLA Riparians,

My #1 priority during the start of spring is getting the Elk River Loon nesting platform out on the water as soon as the ice is gone. Loons just make living on ESLA waters that much more special!

My ESLA 2018-2019 "Volunteer of the Year" is Sue McCraven. Sue is responsible for initiating the 2018 research done to determine cercariae parasite levels present in our lakes, which cause Swimmers Itch. Unfortunately the results showed a major presence of the parasite (Nov. 2018 Newsletter article). Beginning last fall, Sue has been working fulltime on a multiyear SI remediation plan that will be presented to ESLA membership later this year. In addition, she will be evaluating all the responses that are received from a recent SI survey that all of you should have received with Membership renewal envelopes. Thank you Sue!!

Recently it has come to ESLA's attention that some local townships and Kalkaska County, are considering petitions to remove Point-of Sale (POS) inspections of septic tanks. Obviously, this should be a major concern to all riparians. Letters have been written and sent to appropriate officials regarding Board member concerns.

Did you hear about Pure Michigan's new Dark Skies Campaign? Their message is to market MI as a 4-season, 24/7 destination. I'm thinking campaign marketers must have read ESLA's November 2019 newsletter article "What Happened to the Milky Way"!!

Recently ESLA members observed the release of 19,500 yearling brown trout, by the DNR, into Elk Lake. These yearlings are in addition to the large number of yearlings that were also released in 2018. ESLA fishing enthusiasts, should we keep this a secret!! For additional details, read the article in this newsletter provided by Board member Ken Krentz.

We continue to fine-tune the new ESLA website (elk-skegemog.org). Please let your Zone Director and/or me know how you think the website can be improved. Note: If you are not sure which zone is your's, a map of ESLA zones, in addition to Director's contact information, can be found at the ESLA website under "Contact Us".

During the the upcoming June 21 ESLA Annual Meeting at the historic Elk Rapids Town Hall, Dr. Mary Beth Kazanski will become the next ESLA President. During my two year term, it has been a real pleasure working with ESLA Vice-President Mary Beth and all the other ESLA Board members and Directors.

Finally, I'm sure you will find Newsletter articles interesting and useful. Please let us know what other topics you would like to see covered in future ESLA Newsletters.

Best Regards,

Gary

ELSA President

PS. If you have already paid your ESLA 2019 Membership Dues, thank you very much! If you have not, please do so and encourage your neighbors to renew or join also!!

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Michigan DNR Stocking Trout in Elk Lake

By Ken Krentz, ESLA Board Member

Photo by Bob Campbell

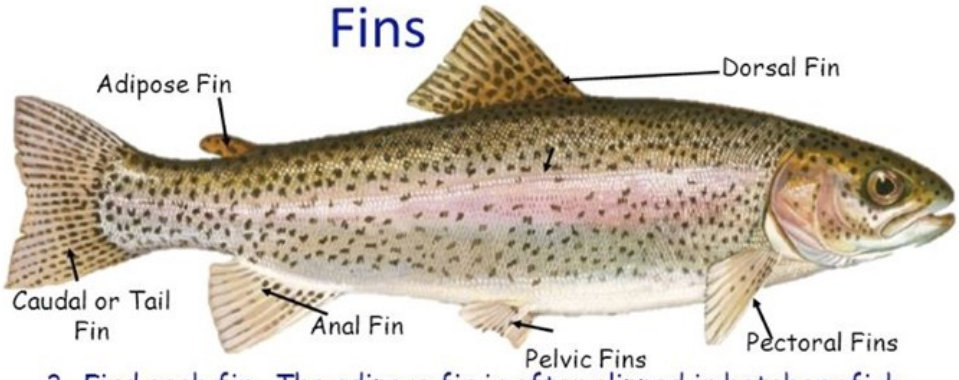
Ken Krentz and Bob Campbell on-site with DNR Biologists planting trout in Elk Lake

The Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources has recently planted trout in Elk Lake, and has plans for continued stocking well into the future. Historically, rainbow and brown trout were stocked annually, but the last rainbow plant was 2008, and the last brown trout plant was in 2000. Stocking was discontinued due partly because of low angler effort.

Many anglers and ESLA have complained about poor trout fishing in recent years. This has been a significant factor for the DNR's decision to re-institute stocking. They believe there is sufficient habitat and ample forage base to maintain a rainbow and brown trout population trout without adding pressure to the native fish.

Trout were stocked twice in 2018 and again in spring 2019. Last spring, 7700 rainbows averaging 8" long were released at the Elk Rapids upper harbor. These fish should be up to 15" long in spring of 2019, and in the 20"+ range in spring of 2020. They have clipped adipose fins and a coded wire tag (CWT) embedded in their heads. The CWT's are fine wire about

the size of this letter "l" and are not externally visible. The CWT is so small it is very difficult to find without the DNR's electronic reader. Therefore, the DNR requests fisherman return the fish heads for dissection and electronic reading. If you catch and keep a rainbow with a clipped adipose fin, please save the head for the DNR. Write your name, address, date, fish length and weight on a piece of paper and freeze it in a plastic bag of water along with the fish head. Then call our area DNR biologist, Heather Hettinger, 231-922-6056, and she will arrange pick up from you.



Last December 40,000 brown trout were released at the Whitewater Twp. Park. This plant was unplanned, however 4"long fish became available from the hatchery sorting process and Elk Lake was fortunately chosen to receive them. They do not have clipped fins or CWT's or any other ID. These fish should reach the 15" legal creel size limit in the spring/summer of 2020.

On April 4, 2019, about 19,500 brown trout were released at the Whitewater Twp. Park. They became available also due to less priority elsewhere. These fish are 5-8" long without any form of ID. Some of these fish should reach 15" in length in the spring/summer of 2020. So, at this point we have a total of 7700 rainbows and 59,500 browns stocked over the past year.

In January 2018, the DNR approved a new trout stocking plan for Elk Lake. This plan was developed to create a fishery because there is insufficient natural reproduction to maintain a significant population. The plan calls for 40,000 brown trout to be stocked each spring for 6 years starting in 2020. Brown tout were chosen because they are no longer in high demand for the Great Lakes and tributaries, whereas rainbow trout (steelhead) are. The fish will be 6-8" long, without any form of ID. It is expected the fish will grow to 15"+, one year after release. The Sturgeon River strain has been selected because of habitat similarities between the Elk River Chain of Lakes and the Sturgeon River system.

The 2018 and 2019 fish plants and the 6 year stocking plan are great news to improve trout fishing for several years in the future. The DNR plans to continue voluntary creel surveys and netting/electroshocking surveys to monitor the population. Fisherman creel surveys are going to be supplied at boat launch sites and DNR creel clerks will be monitoring fisherman on the lake. Please participate and report out your fishing experience and success to the DNR for their continued active fish management.

Good luck fishing!

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Shoreline Plants Help Preserve and Protect Water Quality

By Heather Smith, Grand Traverse BAYKEEPER®

We all know plants are important. They clean the air and provide food and habitat for birds and animals. But one thing we don't often think about is how important plants are when it comes to our shorelines. The areas along our streams, rivers, and lakes are important feeding and breeding grounds for fish and wildlife. When this strip where the water meets the land includes native plants and trees, we all benefit. The water we swim in is cleaner because pollution is caught in the plants roots, the fish we lure are healthier because there are ample insects hiding in the leaves to eat, and our sunset views are accompanied by the sounds of spring peepers who call those plants home.

These shoreline areas with native plants, better known as riparian buffers, have many other benefits as well. Plants that have grown here for thousands of years, such as riverbank wild rye, have deep roots that help hold the soil in place, thus protecting our beaches. These plants also trap sediments and filter out pollutants as they runoff from nearby driveways and lawns, and they absorb rainwater during heavy storms, protecting our property from flooding and erosion.

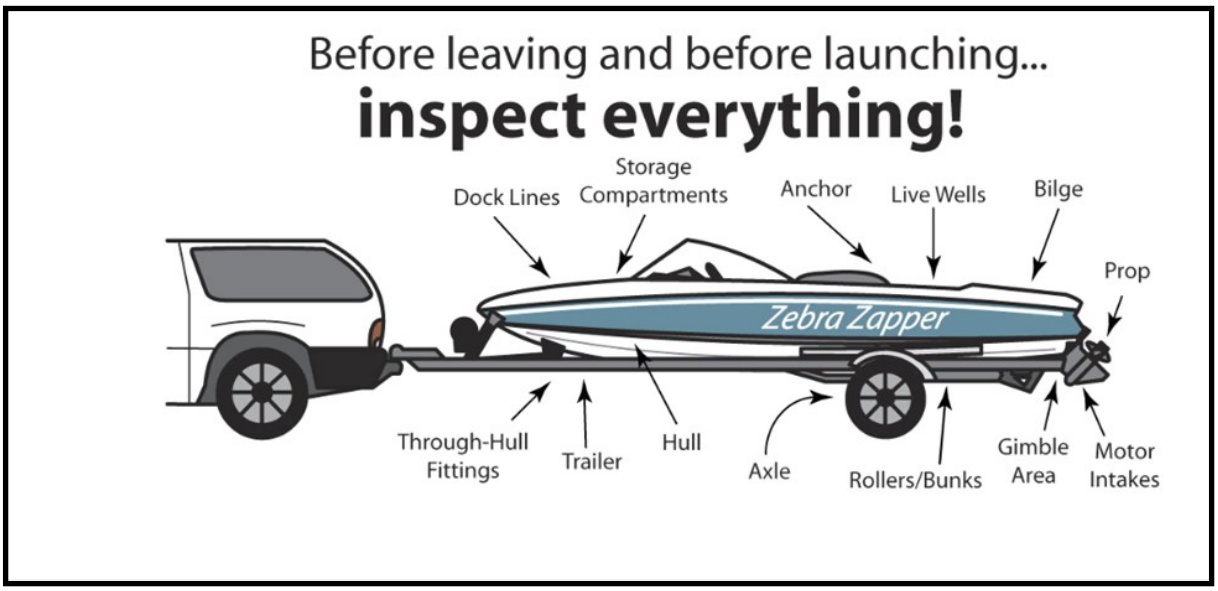
But not everyone sees the benefits of a riparian buffer. As properties split and are redeveloped, the amount of riparian buffers along our shorelines is reduced. Hundred year old trees are replaced by rocks or metal. Turf grass is fertilized and goes all the way to the water. Or plants are removed altogether and replaced with sand delivered by the truckload. This is hurting our water. Monitoring conducted in 2017 revealed that the shorelines along the lower Elk River Chain of Lakes are in poor condition. When one landowner changes their shoreline, it impacts us all.

One tool to help educate and encourage landowners to keep their shorelines as natural as possible is to create local laws. These laws, called ordinances, come in all shapes and sizes. Each township or county can structure it in a way that reflects the issues specific to their community. Many ordinances allow for low impact structures, like docks or decks, and pruning of existing plants and trees so the landowner can better enjoy that precious water view. Ordinances like these are important because our "up north" character is chipped away every time someone decides to chop down their willow tree, or when they pull out reeds and grasses that are home to songbirds and breeding grounds for pike.

At The Watershed Center, we believe there is a healthy balance between what individuals want and what our environment needs. Keeping or creating riparian buffers is one such way to achieve it.

New Michigan Boating and Fishing Laws to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Species

Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (Act 451 of 1994) Part 413 has been amended with changes for boaters and anglers that take effect March 21, 2019. The changes are intended to strengthen protection for Michigan waterways against the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.



What boaters need to know:

Prior to the amendment, the law only required that a person not place watercraft or trailers in the waters of Michigan if an aquatic plant is attached. In addition to this requirement, the new changes require all of the following prior to transporting any watercraft over land:

- Removing all drain plugs from bilges, ballast tanks, and live wells.
- Draining all water from any live wells and bilges.

Ensuring that the watercraft, trailer, and any conveyance used to transport the watercraft or trailer are free of aquatic organisms, including plants. This means that after trailering boats, and before getting on the road, boaters must pull plugs, drain water and remove plants and debris.

This short video shows what boaters need to do. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k2osDO7DTY

Violation of the law is a state civil infraction and violators may be subject to fines up to $100.

What anglers need to know:

For anglers, these amendments codify the Michigan DNR's Fisheries Order 245 regarding the release of baitfish, collection and use of baitfish and cut bait, and release of captured fish, specifically:

- A person shall not release baitfish in any waters of this state. A person who collects fish shall not use the fish as bait or cut bait except in the inland lake, stream, or Great Lake where the fish was caught, or in a connecting waterway of the inland lake, stream, or Great Lake where the fish was caught if the fish could freely move between the original location of capture and the location of release.
- A person, who catches fish other than baitfish in a lake, stream, Great Lake, or connecting waterway shall only release

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Boating Law Continued

the fish in the lake, stream, or Great Lake where the fish was caught, or in a connecting waterway of the lake, stream, or Great Lake where the fish was caught if the fish could freely move between the original location of capture and the location of release.

1 Whether purchased or collected, unused baitfish should be disposed of on land or in the trash – never in the water. Any baitfish an angler collects may be used only in the waters where it was originally collected.

2 Anglers who are catching and releasing fish should only release the fish back into the same water or in a connecting body of water the fish could have reached on its own.

3 Violation of the law is a state civil infraction and violators may be subject to fines up to $100.

4 What you should do:

5 To comply with the law and prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species, boaters should:

1. CLEAN boats, trailers and equipment.
2. DRAIN live wells, bilges and all water - pull all drain plugs.
3. DRY boats and equipment. DISPOSE of unwanted bait in the trash.

Farmland and Open Space Preservation

By Laura Rigan

It is impossible to overstate the importance of agriculture in Milton and Elk Rapids Township, as well as the greater Northwest Michigan region. This region's rich land and water resource base is vitally important to the community's economy, quality of life and to the character of our environmental resources. Farming is indeed a way of life in Northwest Michigan, but it is very much at risk. The West Michigan Fruitbelt, which runs through Milton and Elk Rapids Townships, is as threatened as it is unique. Not long ago,

Milton Twp. Near Ringler Road
Photography by Dean Ginther Photography Refined

The American Farmland Trust identified this fruitbelt as one of the 10 most threatened agricultural resources in the entire nation. Milton and Elk Rapids Townships recognized this threat and in 2004 adopted a Farmland and Open Space Development Rights Ordinance. This Ordinance designed a program to protect farmland and open space by acquiring development rights voluntarily offered by landowners creating agricultural conservation easements. On the August 6th, 2019 ballot, voters will have the opportunity to establish funding for this program and enable Milton and Elk Rapids Townships to implement a permanent option to protect farmland and open space.

What is a Conservation Easement? A conservation easement or purchase of development right (PDR) is a voluntary legal agreement that permanently restrict further development of the property and nonagricultural uses, while allowing landowners to retain other rights of ownership.

Advantages to the landowner who sells their development rights:

• Receive cash payment for the development rights
• Retain the ownership of the land and can continue to farm the land
• Potential income, estate, and property tax benefits for the property owner

Farmland Preservation

• Public access is not granted to the property
• Farmland is preserved for future generations

Advantages to the public for preserving farmland, which can include PDR as a tool:
• Productive farmland is not lost and helps to maintain the local farming economy
• Open space is preserved permanently through a more affordable method than purchasing
the property outright
• Prevents the cost of public services provided within a local community from rising
• Helps support other land preservation efforts, such as open space preservation, and protects land from fragmentation, which can impact wildlife habitat and water quality

For more information about farmland protection, please contact Laura Rigan, Farmland Protection Specialist at the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy:

Laura Rigan
Farmland Protection Specialist
email: lrigan@gtrlc.org
web: www.gtrlc.org
telephone: 231.929.7911
3860 N. Long Lake Rd, St D
Traverse City, MI 49684

Camp Maplehurst Purchase Completed

From Glen Chown (Executive Director Grand Traverse Regional Conservancy)

I have some fantastic news to share as we begin the new year: The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has completed fundraising for Maplehurst Natural Area and transferred the property to Milton Township. The property is now open to the public!

The former Camp Maplehurst was on our land protection radar for many years, and we couldn't be more excited to permanently protect one of the signature projects in our ongoing *Campaign for Generations.* THANK YOU to the nearly 250 donors who stepped up and made this dream a reality. The Maplehurst Natural Area is sure to be treasured for generations to come.

We will continue to be actively engaged with the township as a management plan is developed for the natural area. Trails and other attractions are planned for this nearly 400-acre property.

Thanks again to everyone who supported this project and our efforts across the five beautiful counties we serve. Together, we are protecting the most amazing places!

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Common Loons in the Elk River Chain of Lakes

by Damon McCormick

Since 2010, my organization, Common Coast Research & Conservation, has undertaken a Common Loon project within the Elk River Chain of Lakes (ERCOL) watershed. The effort has primarily involved color-marking adults and their chicks, monitoring loon activity on approximately 30 ERCOL lakes, and working with local residents and lake associations to protect and propagate the species through public education and habitat enhancement. Regarding the last component, nesting loons require islands or small hummocks that afford protection from mainland predators. Because they are extremely sensitive to disturbance during their 28-day incubation of 1-2 eggs, they also require an ample buffer of at least several hundred feet from all motorboat and paddling traffic. When natural habitat does not exist on a lake, or when islands/hummocks are situated in locations that receive significant recreational pressure, an artificial nesting platform (ANP) can often serve as a highly effective tool for loon reproduction. ANPs are generally 3x3 ft squares of foam-filled PVC pipe enclosing rigid insulation board and wrapped in plastic snow fencing. Every spring after ice-off they are topped with fresh nesting material and anchored in 4-6 feet of water in an area of a lake that is protected from high waves and frequent boat traffic. Over the past decade platform usage has substantially expanded on ERCOL lakes, and as of last year 20 of the region's 25 breeding pairs utilized an ANP. Because public awareness of loon nesting sensitivity has increased in conjunction with the proliferation of platforms, in recent years ERCOL loons have successfully hatched chicks at the highest rate ever documented for a Michigan population.

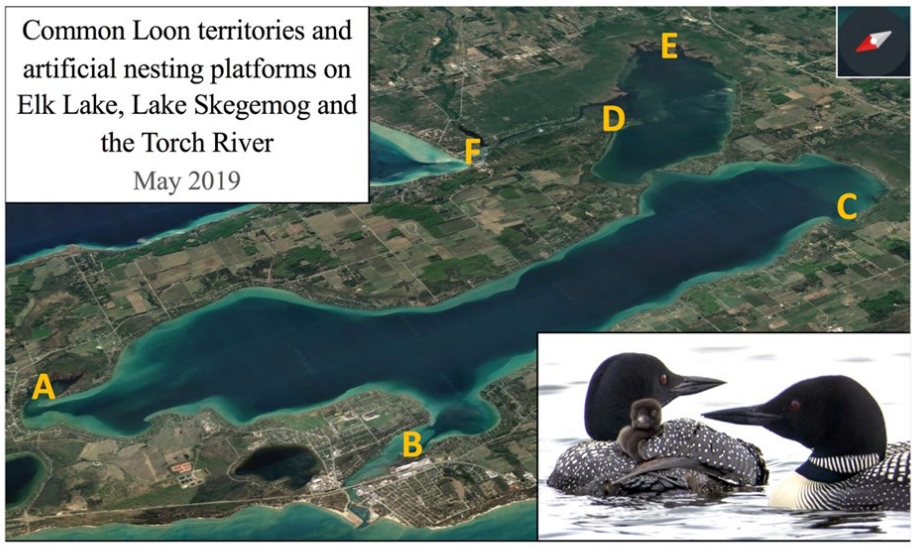
An artificial nesting platform in use on Birch Lake in 2018. If instead of the upright posture depicted above, an incubating loon appears hunkered, with its head lowered toward the platform or ground, it is a clear sign that the bird is responding negatively to the approach of a boat or kayak, and that it will likely flush from its nest if the encroachment continues. Photo: Mary Pecar.

Common Coast has been banding and subsequently monitoring loons in Michi-

Common Loons in the Elk River Chain of Lakes (continued)

gan for over three decades. Some adults at Seney National Wildlife Refuge, where the work originally began, are now in their early thirties. The primary impetus for initiating color-marking activities in the ERCOL was to better illuminate the status and health of the region's loon population, particularly in regard to type-E botulism outbreaks on northern Lake Michigan that have killed thousands of migrating waterbirds since 2006. For a full discussion of ERCOL banding, botulism, and other aspects of the ongoing project, please see this report:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/5qcs5d5u40pd452/ERCOL_LOONS_2016.pdf



A The Elk Kewadin loon pair utilizes an artificial nesting platform (ANP) near the Kewadin Wetlands Natural Area. This has been the most successful site for long-term chick production within the Elk-Skegemog-Torch River zone.

B The Elk Rapids pair uses an ANP in the vicinity of the Chamber of Commerce, and has successfully hatched chicks every year since the platform was first installed in 2013.

C In an effort to establish a third nesting loon pair on Elk, this April a new ANP has been launched in Palaestra Cove in the south end of the lake.

D The Skegemog River pair has rarely produced young, most likely because the many small islands in the river mouth area – all potential nest sites – are in very shallow water that loons typically avoid. This spring an ANP has been placed in deeper water near the viewing deck in the north unit of the Skegemog Wildlife Area.

E The Skegemog Barker Creek pair utilize a small natural island in the expansive undeveloped southeast section of the lake. Owing to wave exposure and human disturbance from abundant fishing traffic, this pair has produced chicks in only two seasons over the past decade.

F Despite heavy recreational pressure within the Torch River, a territorial loon pair has successfully used an ANP in the Bayou in most years since 2013. This April a second platform has been deployed in a less-trafficked backwater to the south of the Bayou.

Elk Lake, Lake Skegemog, and the Torch River currently harbor five territorial loon pairs; six of these ten adults are color-marked. Additionally, the non-territorial portion of Elk – most of the lake – is home to many unpaired adults who feed and idle there in between efforts to acquire their own mate and breeding ground within the ERCOL region. The map above details the specific territories and 2019 ANP locations on the three waterbodies. Please contact Damon McCormick of Common Coast: dlm@commoncoast.org and 906 202 0602.

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Having Visitors This Summer? A Must Go To Destination

By Jim Sak

Like most people with homes on the lakes of Northern Michigan, you may be expecting company this summer. The company may be family or old friends. Along with the joy of having visitors comes the responsibility of….."what are we going to do during the days of their visit?" Well here is a partial answer to that question.

Right here on US 31 in Elk Rapids is the "Because Of The Water" display in Rotary Park. Several years ago the display was completed through the efforts of community leaders and organizations to highlight the history of the "greater Elk Rapids region" through its dependence on Lake Michigan, the Elk River and the chain of lakes. ESLA was a contributor toward the project. The display includes two storyboards on the railing of the pavilion, three more on the inside wall and 7 more are mounted on pedestals on the outside north wall of the pavilion. Each storyboard features a topic such as, "Lighthouses", "Recreation", and "Working Boats". A favorite storyboard of visitors on the inside wall of the inside the pavilion, "Why All The Stumps?" This storyboard and pictures trace the history of dams on the Elk River which impacted the elevation of the river and Elk Lake and thus the stumps. Perhaps the display which fascinates visitor and local most is the 24ft.wide by 12 ft. high map of the northern lower peninsula (see picture above). The map includes details on water depth, land elevation, major roads, native American historic village locations, light houses, ship wrecks….and so much more.

Information and historic photographs presented in the display have been enjoyed by people of all ages

In summary, bringing a visitor to the Because Of The Water display will be time well spent for the visitor and you!

ESLA Meetings

Don't forget to attend the

ESLA annual meeting on June 21 at the historic Elk Rapids Town Hall, 401 River St.

and

It's a Shore Thing Meetings -- 5:30 pm at the Twisted Fish Gallery, Elk Rapids

- April 26 - Hydrology Study of the Chain of Lakes, Mark Stone
- May 24 - Birdscaping - Kay Charter
- July 26 - Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy projects - Andrew Rupert
- August 16 (Note change of date) - Paddle Antrim - Deana Jerdee
- September 27 - Rehabilitating Reefs - David Clapp

Local Treasure, Rugg Pond natural Area

By Mark Randolph and David Lawicki

Located six miles upstream of Rapid City on the Rapid River, Rugg Pond Natural Area provides easy access to hiking, wildlife viewing, and fishing. A pair of Trumpeter Swans nest near the inlet of the North Branch and cruise the calm water with their cygnets all summer and fall. The pond is cherished by residents and visitors for its scenic beauty and access to nature.

The pond is created by an historic earthen embankment. The dam was originally constructed in 1904. Electric power generation ceased in the 1950s, and the property was deeded to Kalkaska County. A major reconstruction of the dam and spillways was completed in 1984. Part of the reconstruction was the addition of a spillway tube to pass cold water from below the pond surface to the Rapid River downstream. This helps keep the downstream water temperature perfect for native trout species.

All dams in Michigan are inspected by professional engineers every three years. Rugg Pond is no exception. In the most recent inspection report, some minor spalling of concrete near the upstream end of the outlet tube was noted. The small scope of the spalling classifies the repair as minor maintenance as the dam structure itself is not impacted.

Another maintenance issue identified in the report is the slope of the downstream embankment. Although the report indicates the dam condition is good, a more gradual downstream slope would strengthen the dam and make future inspections easier and more thorough.

Any visitor can see the sediment that has built up in the pond over the past 115 years. The sediment provides a place for weeds to root in shallow water, and the weeds now impede canoeing, kayaking and fishing. Removing the sediment would restore the cold water fishery and make the pond more attractive for recreation.

The Kalkaska Conservation District seeks public input into local priorities are for the Rugg Pond Natural Area. Residents and visitors to the area are invited to send comments and suggestions for future activities at the Rugg Pond Natural Area to: Kalkaska Conservation District, PO BOX 2068, Kalkaska MI 49646 or electronically to mark.randolph@macd.org

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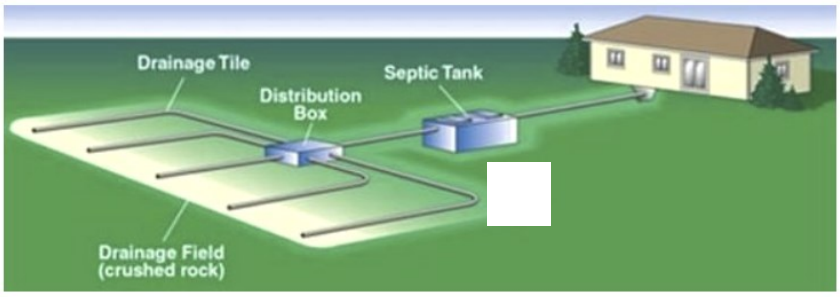
Flushed but not Forgotten: Where does it all Go?

by Dean Ginther



There is only a limited amount of capacity for the sandy soils often found around our lakes and streams to absorb and dissipate septic waste water. For those concerned with maintaining the high water quality of the Chain of Lakes, septic contamination of ground and lake water has long been a concern. A couple of years ago Milton Township and the Village of Elk Rapids took a major step forward by requiring septic systems to be inspected when lakefront property is sold.

Property owners can help ensure that their septic systems are functioning effectively by engaging in periodic maintenance, inspection, and best practices. Disposing of chemicals, micro plastics, medicines, and other non-human waste substances can be particularly damaging to ground and lake water. Septic holding tanks should be pumped-out when needed but not before. For most modern septic systems, this is typically between three to five years (or sometimes longer) although older systems may require more frequent pump-outs. Usage and capacity affect the frequency of pump out so, if in doubt, ask for an inspection by your local septic professional.

Septage which has been pumped-out should be properly disposed. The preferred disposal method is to transport the pumped septage to a municipal sewage facility for proper treatment. Again, ask your local septic professional if this option is available in your area. If not, make sure the site being used for disposal is State approved and monitored.

For the homeowner, the optimum method of septic disposal is to be connected directly to the municipal or Township sewage disposal plant — no more expensive pump outs; no worry about frozen septic lines in the winter, and no inspection required at the point of sale. It's a win-win; convenient and cost effective for the homeowner and good for the ground and lake water quality.

Recently some fortunate riparians and property owners living between Elk Rapids and Kewadin have been able to connect to the Village of Elk Rapids sewage treatment facility. It is possible that this line may be extended beyond Kewadin to residents on the east side of Elk Lake. It is also possible that Milton Township might build a sewage treatment facility to serve the residents of Milton Township. Both of these options are under preliminary consideration in the Village and Township.

Last summer Robin Sims, a property owner on the east side of Elk Lake, sent 400 letters to residents to enlist support for extending or creating access to a septic treatment facility. This summer she plans to continue that effort with individual contact and information about the possible options. If a person comes knocking on your door wanting to talk about septic waste water treatment, it will probably be Robin. She is friendly and enthusiastic about supporting access to a treatment facility for residents on the east side of Elk Lake.

If you would like more information about her initiative and/or would like to assist in her efforts, you can contact her directly at:

Robinsims4@gmail.com

Michigan Boater Operation and Education Regulations

WHO MAY OPERATE A PERSONAL WATER-CRAFT

Those less than 14 years of age may not legally operate a personal watercraft (PWC) (ie. jet ski, wave runner).

Those 14 and 15 years of age may legally operate a PWC if they have obtained a boating safety certificate; and are accompanied on board by their parent, legal guardian or by a person who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian and is at least 21 years of age; or are operating or riding the PWC at a distance of not more than 100 feet from their parent, legal guardian or by a person who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian and is at least 21 years of age.

WHO MAY LEGALLY OPERATE A BOAT IN MICHIGAN

Those less than 12 years of age:

- may legally operate a boat powered by a motor of no more than 6 horsepower (hp) without restrictions.
- may legally operate a boat powered by a motor of more than 6 hp, but no more than 35 hp, only if they: have been issued a boating safety certificate and have it on board; and are directly supervised on board by a person at least 16 years of age.
- may not legally operate a boat powered by a motor of more than 35 hp legally under any conditions.

Those at least 16 years of age and born after Dec. 31, 1978 may legally operate a PWC only if they have obtained a boating safety certificate.

Take a Michigan boating safety class online - there are a couple different options available:

- www.boatEd.com

- www.boaterExam.com Or Visit the DNR's Recreational Safety Education Class Database and select the class type (Marine) and county in the drop-down lists.

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Battling oak wilt disease

By KATHLEEN LAVEY Michigan Department of Natural Resources

In state forests and on urban streets, the oak is a mighty tree. Towering nearly 100 feet tall, it can live up to 150 years and offers plenty of shade under its heavily-leafed, spreading branches.

But oaks – especially trees in the red oak family – face a threat from a disease known as oak wilt, caused by a fungus with microscopic spores that can infect and kill a red oak within weeks.

"The leaves begin to turn brown, with parts of them still green," said James Wieferich, a forest health specialist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "When the leaves start dropping in the middle of summer, that's when we get a lot of oak wilt calls."

Wieferich said there's good news and bad news about oak wilt.

The bad news: you cannot save a red oak that is already showing symptoms.

The good news: simple actions, such as refraining from pruning oak trees between April 15 and July 15 and covering accidental bark wounds with paint, can help keep healthy trees from being infected.

People who spot a tree with symptoms of oak wilt – in the city or the forest – are encouraged to check the DNR's interactive oak wilt map at Michigan.gov/ForestHealth to report it.

Oak wilt is caused by the fungus *Bretziella fagacearum*. It spreads from tree to tree by underground root contact, through tiny, sap-feeding beetles that carry spores from fungal pads on infected trees into wounds on healthy oaks.

Spores also can be found on recently cut firewood from trees that died of oak wilt. This is one of the reasons why the DNR and other agencies advise against moving firewood.

Oaks in the red oak family, including black oak, northern red oak and northern pin oak, are most susceptible to the disease, which kills trees by interrupting the flow of sap.

Trees in the white oak group are less susceptible because they have a different internal cell structure that prevents rapid spread of the infection through the tree. Trees in the white oak group have rounded leaf edges and include white oak and swamp white oak.

The highest risk of infection occurs from April 15 through July 15, but it is prudent to avoid pruning or injuring oak trees until they have lost leaves for the winter.
If pruning or removing oaks cannot be avoided during the high-risk period, or a tree gets damaged, immediately cover wounds with tree-wound paint or latex-based paint. Treating tree wounds with paint is not usually recommended; doing so to combat oak wilt is the exception.
Infected trees will usually begin to display symptoms beginning in June through September. The symptoms include the leaves showing two colors during these months and rapid leaf drop from the tree's upper crown.

Report infections at Michigan.gov/ForestHealth using an interactive map.

Contact a local DNR forest health specialist for more information at DNR-FRD-Forest-Health@Michigan.gov or 517-284-5895.

ELK-SKEGEMOG LAKES ASSOCIATION

July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

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