

Health of Higgins Lake Initiative Report to the Gerrish Township Board

September 9, 2025

Following it the August 2025 report of the HOHL Initiative to the Gerrish Township Board.



Steering Committee

I am sorry to report that Stan Mandzuik, the chair of the Steering Committee has resigned due to personal reasons. We respect his decision and wish him well. He will be missed. As discussed with the Board at the September work session, it is proposed that Jim Ostling assume the chairman's role on an interim basis as we fill open positions and search for a chairperson.

It is also proposed that we expand the five-member Steering Committee to seven members providing additional flexibility to members' winter schedules and time away from the area.

The Steering Committee will be considering the level of reporting and how to best keep a consistent and informative approach. Sub-committees continue to report on their activities, and the Steering Committee will review and consolidate information and publish as appropriate. While the actual format remains fluid, we are interested in the Boards comments on how, when, and to what level of detail they would like to see reporting. We want to make sure everyone is aware of it and can comment on the work of the HOHL.

Committees continue to meet on a regular basis and are making great progress. Following is a brief discussion on the activities of each.

Science

Science Committee is loading reports into NEXTCloud database. Curators are starting to review docs and tag key words and other searchable items. This work will take time to complete but will eventually provide a searchable repository for reports and documents detailing conditions around the lake. This data can then be evaluated and used for analysis of conditions and whether additional information or studies are needed. Evaluation of the data being loaded will begin by the end of September when comparisons can be made.

Data from studies around other lakes is also being entered for reference. This information can be used for comparisons and evaluating trends elsewhere.

Additional items are being evaluated by the leadership of the Science committee and will be added to their agenda when appropriate.

Communications - The Communications Committee continues to make steady progress in strengthening outreach and engagement efforts.

- **Email Campaigns**
Our email distribution list has grown to approximately 155 addresses. We plan to distribute two emails per month:
 - *The Ripple Effects* – a monthly summary highlighting key updates from each committee.
 - *Committee Reflections* – sent approximately two weeks later, offering an in-depth look at the work of one committee. August’s focus was on Septic’s, while September’s focus is Road Ends.
- **Social Media & Website**
Weekly Facebook posts will share information from committee updates and will also be shared across 12 additional community pages.
Our website has been upgraded, with further improvements underway. To date, the site has welcomed over five hundred visitors. The new tagline is: *“Exploring every impact. Empowering every voice. Ensuring a healthier Higgins Lake.”* A banner featuring this tagline has been ordered and will be displayed at Gerrish Hall.
- We filmed Jim Ostling explaining HOHL and what makes HOHL different than all the other organizations around the lake.
- **Community Outreach**
HOHL business cards featuring our website are now available at most local businesses. Community response to our yard sign campaign has been strong, with 92 of 100 signs distributed. A marquee message is currently posted at Glad’s, and a second location has been secured.
Our next outreach event will be *Rocktober* in Roscommon on October 4, where we will host an informational table.
- **Collaboration & Research**
We have scheduled a meeting with Professor Amanda Buday of Grand Valley State University to explore the possibility of conducting a community-wide survey.
- **Committee Development**
All members of the Communications Committee have now been trained in NeXT cloud to support more efficient collaboration.

Septic – The Septic Committee meets every two weeks. The basic theme adopted by the Committee is: Educate, Evaluate and Execute.

Short clips about what residents should and should not put into their septic's, how septic systems work, how they differ from municipal systems as well as many other topics. These clips are put on the web site each month for folks to review and used as a go to for residents to become more educated.

They are working closely with the Central Michigan District Health to leverage their FETCH GIS database containing information on the septic systems within the Township. Data, handwritten for years has been scanned and is now being evaluated and entered into FETCH. We will have access to this information soon and be able to query the data for additional research. This will allow us to make better decisions about a potential septic ordinance.

At the same time, the Septic Committee is reviewing topics and attributes for a township wide septic ordinance that will address the problem areas around the lake and within the township. Problem areas such as undersized tanks and fields, poor performing systems, systems without any data to do an evaluation, and systems installed too close to the lake or domestic water wells will be looked at.

It is likely that inspections of systems without any old data need to be inspected. We are evaluating a list of potential inspectors and revisiting the checklist they use to evaluate systems.

The committee will make recommendations to the Planning Commission and the Township Board for further action.

IT – The team has been collaborating with all committees to be sure everyone has access to NEXT-Cloud file storage. Storage space on the HOHL server has been created allowing each Sub Committee space to store pertinent documents. Meeting notes, charts and graphs, reports, personnel roster, and general information is all housed under one entity.

For example, the Science committee is searching for pertinent reports, papers, opinions, etc., affecting the Lake. These are being stored and will then be evaluated and categorized for further research. A software product called Zotero is being used for further evaluation.

They are also working with the Communications Committee on our website approach and preparing for mass mailings in the future.

Several training sessions have been conducted to bring users up to speed on NEXT Cloud and Zotero.

Road Ends – Road ends are known to contribute to the contamination and “pollution” of Higgins Lake. In the early 1990’s the Roscommon County Road Commission commissioned an investigation into the runoff at the road ends around the Lake. The study looked at conditions contributing to soil and contaminants that were being discharged into the lake. The study was updated in the early 2010’s so comparisons over time could be made.

The sub-committee is now re-evaluating that information and revisiting the sites, collecting information then reviewing it with the Road Commission. A plan will be prepared to address the most critical sites soon and get remaining repairs on a schedule to address.

Because this is a lake wide effort, the sub-committee is addressing sites in both Gerrish and Lyon Township to be sure all sources are considered. Most of the “field work” has been completed and data is being assembled into a report for the Road Commission now.

In addition to overseeing the work of the Sub-committees, the Steering Committee is keeping abreast of other topics within the community that have or may influence the Lake. Some of these items will find their way onto an existing Sub-Committee for further action. Some may need to have a new Sub-Committee established to investigate or report on. Some items may fall outside the mission of the HOHL and be better addressed by other groups. It is our hope that we can address these as we go along and provide assistance or guidance.

These items include:

- Overuse of the lake
- State Parks / Launch sites and their effect on the Lake.
- Wake boats and the damage caused.
- Noise pollution on the Lake
- Crowd management and major weekend usage
- Invasive species
- Erosion/shoreline management/Natural shoreline protections
- Lake levels / Cut River dam project.
- Higgins Lake Watershed Management Plan update

These will be prioritized and addressed as necessary over the next weeks/months/years.

Schedule A MS project schedule has been prepared and remains a work in progress. Committee chairs are reviewing the document and will provide updates prior to next month's report.

Goals and objectives of the HOHL project will be detailed in future versions of this report.

While we are addressing added items, we will be providing reports of our progress on the items being addressed now. As projects reach milestones or appropriate reporting levels, progress reports will be prepared and distributed by the Communications Committee – keeping the residents informed.

Regards,

Jim Ostling
HOHL Steering Committee - Interim Chair