

Committee Activity Report

Health of Higgins Lake Initiative Report to the Gerrish Township Board

October 2, 2025

Following is the September 2025 report of the HOHL Initiative to the Gerrish Township Board.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee met on September 16, 2025, as scheduled. Members present, Booser, Walker, Ostling, Teisan, absent Biggar. August Committee reports were read and approved by Committee. It was noted at the SC meeting that the Township Board has approved the addition of Jenny Walker and the expansion of the Steering Committee from five members to seven.



The Higgins Lake Watershed Management plan was last updated in 2007 by Huron Pines and partially funded by the DEQ (Now EGLE). This was a significant effort and provided the base for grant funding over the years. Recently there was an opportunity to once again apply for grant funding to update the plan. Unfortunately, the turnaround time for the application was so short we would not have been able to prepare an appropriate application. This cycle is likely to repeat again next year and we will monitor the process and be in a position to respond at that time.

There is also an Invasive Species grant opportunity we were made aware of and this was discussed with the Higgins Lake Foundation. The HLF is already very involved with the Invasive species issues and in a better position to make an application.

Importantly, both opportunities were/are being addressed to the benefit of the Lake.

The topic of transparency was discussed at the Committee meeting. As a reminder, the Health of Higgins Lake Steering Committee was formed as an entity reporting directly to the Township Board thus subjecting it to the guidelines and policies of the Open Meetings Act. The SC meets at a regularly scheduled time and place identified early in its formation – Third Tuesday of each month. (Please note: The time of the meetings has been changed from 6:00 PM to 7:00PM). Reporting of its activity is recorded and made a part of the record. Sub-Committee reports of the HOHL are submitted to the Steering Committee and included in a summary. Sub Committees meet on an as needed basis to work through their projects and are not officially subject to rules of the OMA. However, we are all making a

focused effort to keep all of the activity of the HOHL visible and available to the public through newsletters, social media, public meetings Reporting and presentations to the Township board. There are many ways to stay informed on the Health of Higgins Lakes Initiatives' activities.

The chairman changed the reporting structure to eliminate a duplicative step for the committee chairs. An "activity report" was merged with a "report to the steering committee" to create simply a monthly Committee Activity Report. This report, due at the end of the month, is consolidated, formatted and prepared for the Township Work session's draft review then submitted for approval at the regular Township Board meeting on the second Tuesday of the month. The report is a summary of the activity of all committees for the previous month as well as a look forward to what is to come.

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

HOHL Science Committee

- The Science Subcommittee met on September 10, 2025, and again on September 24. We have worked in collaborative fashion to set our ground rules as well as determining the issues and methods we will study. Thus far we have reached a consensus on every item. Below is a list of our accomplishments:
- Created a repository using the Next Cloud software to submit and store data, studies, and reports related to Higgins Lake Health and other studies which are relevant to Higgins Lake Health.
- Members of the subcommittee have been trained in how to submit reports and studies.
- Over 30 studies have been submitted, more likely be presented.
- Zotero software is being utilized to make the reports searchable. Before the searchability function is operational each report goes through a curation process to make the documents searchable. Most of the documents have been curated.
- The subcommittee's work has been sorted into eight various "problems" we wish to review. The eight categories are: Near Shore Water Quality, Invasive Species, Groundwater and Drinking Water Contamination, Watershed Quality, Changing Fisheries, Deep Water Quality, Increasing Recreational Activities on the Lake, and Non-nutrient contamination (PFAS, pharmaceuticals, etc.)
- Each "problem" has a list of questions to be reviewed and analyzed. Note, it is a living document and is updated regularly.

- A decision has been made to create sub-committees to research and study each “problem”.
- Sub-committee members will be selected by mid-October.
- The process each sub-committee will utilize to address the questions has been established. In its’ simplest form, each sub-committee will:
 - Study the questions posed for each problem.
 - Gather data.
 - Evaluate the data.
 - Analyze the data.
 - Draw conclusions and draft a report.
- Each sub-committee report will be submitted to the entire science subcommittee for review and refinement before it is reported to the Steering Committee.

HOHL Communications Committee

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

- **Email Campaigns**

Our email distribution list has grown to approximately 167 individuals plus 48 committee members addresses. We plan to distribute two emails per month:

- *The Ripple Effects* – Highlighted the Road End committee this month and was distributed on September 21st.
- *Committee Reflections* – Was not written due to timing of when the committee reports were presented to the Steering committee. We should now be in schedule to send out at the beginning of each month.

- **Social media & Website**

Facebook posts were made from the committee report submitted to the steering committee at the September meeting and public education opportunities. A total of 7 posts were made in September.

Some improvements have been made to the website, but it still needs work.

- **Community Outreach**

HOHL business cards featuring our website continue to be at most local businesses. The two Marquee’s message board are at Glad’s, across from Pioneer Hill.

A booth was set up for the Fireman Memorial Parade to share information. Most attendees were from out of town and there was limited success with this effort.

A banner was purchased with the new tagline and hung in Gerrish Township Hall.

- **Collaboration & Research**

Met with Professor Amanda Buday of Grand Valley State University, she is planning on giving us a proposal for an opinion survey in October. The timing of the survey was decided to be in the spring when people are around. The process will be all electronic with email, Facebook and possible newspaper ad to direct to a site.

- **Committee Development**

The committee met on September 11.

HOHL Septic Committee

Septic Committee met on September 3 and 17, 2025.

The committee continues to review the Certified Inspectors list as well as the Inspection checklist document. We now have a list of inspectors that has been approved by the CMDHD.

Invited guests, Nick Sergeant from Sergeant Septic and Daielle Gerdes from Scotts Septic Service were our guests. They provided valuable insight into the inspection process and what to look for and helpful data on the problems that could occur.

The Committee is investigating the idea of including water well testing within the septic ordinance. The proximity of domestic wells to septic system has a lot of questions and concerns around it. Is 50' enough? What if you can't get the proper separation? What is the effect on the health of Higgins Lake? What is the impact on the health of the residents? Should any studies of ordinance extend to "off Lake" properties? We are not looking for solutions at this point but what are consequences and alternatives?

Member Brown has prepared a "attributes list" that we can enter our thoughts on what should be considered in the ordinance. This list will be refined to reflect the major points needed to be considered. Samples of other ordinances have been distributed and used for review.

We continue to publish monthly clips on the do's and don'ts for proper septic maintenance.

The Septic Question Project Report – Rick Shoemaker presented this for our information and discussion. It is a Synopsis of work done on an ordinance on Lake

Charlevoix. We will discuss to see if there is information or ideas that we should /could expand on.

IT Subcommittee – September–October Summary of Activities

Nextcloud onboarding & training: Delivered additional onboarding and how-to support across subcommittees to standardize secure file storage, collaboration, and link-based sharing.

Zotero literature management: Continued partnering with the Science subcommittee to load studies and references, organizing libraries and metadata for easier retrieval and citation.

Zotero scripts (macOS & Linux): Began developing startup and management scripts to simplify usage, perform updates, and day-to-day use on macOS and select Linux distributions.

Automation & maintenance: Initiated automation for routine maintenance tasks, prioritizing log-file scanning to proactively detect and resolve issues before they impact users.

Cross committee IT support: Provided ongoing consulting and hands-on assistance to other subcommittees as needed to keep projects moving efficiently.

Funding Subcommittee — September–October Summary of Activities

EGLE outreach with HLF: Initiated coordination to align funding pathways around two priorities: (1) development and implementation of a watershed management plan and (2) aquatic invasive species (AIS) mitigation. A short scoping call with the state environmental agency is being arranged to confirm program fitness, eligibility, and required pre-work (e.g., baseline data, partner letters, cost estimates) before applications proceed.

Donate button implementation: Continuing evaluation of a website “Donate” capability with clear use-of-funds language and transparency. Work includes processor selection (card/PayPal platform), an optional “cover fees” checkbox, and back-end routing to a designated township receiving/clearing account with reconciliation of fees and any restricted gifts.

Standing meeting day/time: Adopted a consistent monthly slot to improve participation and align with reporting cadence: last Wednesday of each month at

4:00 PM

Community survey funding & coordination: Exploring ways to coordinate with the township's master-plan community survey. This would align select survey items, so results strengthen future grant narratives (need, outcomes, community benefit). Coordination will occur with planning and communications functions to time messaging and ensure data is accessible for proposals.

Calendar of grant deadlines: Building a rolling calendar of opportunities (rolling/quarterly/annual) that logs deadlines, eligibility, match requirements, and typical award ranges. The calendar will be used to sequence proposals against HOHL priorities and to signal prerequisite work (e.g., letters of support, data gathering) in advance of each due date.

HOHL Road End Committee

Road Committee will be meeting on Oct 9 and Oct 23.

Committee has met on several occasions to gather GPS data as well as site conditions at road end around the lake all month. All GPS locations have been captured and the data archived and shared with the HLF at their request. This has been a much-needed effort and nears completion.

Assessments for the Lyon Road ends are ongoing but making progress with the help of committee members from Lyon Township.

All Assessments will be consolidated and likely completed by mid-November. Once completed, they will be shared with the RCRC, and next steps will be discussed.

As a reminder as stated last month, 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
- Croud 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

Regards,

Jim Ostling
HOHL Steering Committee - Interim Chair

The Health of Higgins Lake (HOHL) Initiative provided its September 2025 report to the Gerrish Township Board, detailing progress and activities across various committees focused on lake health and management.

- **Steering Committee updates:** The committee met with most members present, approved August reports, and noted the expansion of membership from five to seven with the addition of Jenny Walker. Grant opportunities for updating the watershed management plan and invasive species control were discussed, with the Higgins Lake Foundation taking lead on the latter. Transparency and reporting processes were emphasized, including monthly activity reports and public engagement efforts. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

- **Science Committee progress:** The subcommittee met twice in September, establishing ground rules and study issues. They created a data repository using Next Cloud, trained members in data submission, and collected over 30 studies. Using Zotero software, they organized searchable reports and categorized work into eight key problem areas related to lake health. Subcommittees for each problem will be formed by mid-October to analyze data and produce reports. [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)

- **Communications Committee efforts:** The committee expanded its email list to about 215 contacts and plans bi-monthly emails. Social media posts and website improvements continue, alongside community outreach through business cards, marquee messages, and event booths. Collaboration with a university professor is underway to develop an opinion survey scheduled for spring 2026. [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

- **Septic Committee activities:** Meetings focused on reviewing inspector lists and checklists, with input from septic service professionals. The committee is exploring inclusion of water well testing in septic ordinances due to health concerns. An attributes list for ordinance considerations was prepared, and monthly educational clips on septic maintenance are published. A report on a similar ordinance from Lake Charlevoix was discussed for potential insights. [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#)

- **IT Subcommittee support:** Provided onboarding and training for Nextcloud and Zotero tools, developed management scripts for software use, initiated automation for maintenance tasks, and offered IT assistance across committees to ensure efficient project progress. [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#)

- **Funding Subcommittee initiatives:** Coordinated with the Higgins Lake Foundation and state environmental agency to align funding for watershed management and invasive species mitigation. Evaluated website donation capabilities with transparent fund use, set a standing meeting schedule, explored coordination with the township's master-plan survey to support grant applications, and developed a calendar of grant deadlines to organize proposal efforts. [\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#)

- **Road End Committee updates:** Continued GPS data collection and site assessments of road ends around Higgins Lake, sharing data with the Higgins Lake Foundation. Collaboration with Lyon Township members supports progress on Lyon area assessments,

aiming for consolidation and completion by mid-November for further discussion with the Road Commission. [\[13\]](#) [\[14\]](#)

- **Additional lake-related concerns:** The Steering Committee monitors various community issues potentially affecting the lake, including overuse, state park impacts, wake boat damage, noise pollution, crowd management, invasive species, shoreline erosion and protection, lake levels, and the watershed management plan update. These topics may lead to new subcommittees or be referred to other groups as appropriate. [\[15\]](#)
[\[16\]](#)