

**Health of Higgins Lake Initiative Committee Report**  
to the Gerrish Township Board  
March 2026

**Communication 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 285 individuals plus 50 committee members. March had two *Ripple Effect* and no *Committee Reflections* since March steering committee meeting was cancelled. Both *Ripple Effect* publications gave an overview of invasive species. April's *Ripple Effect* will also so be about invasive species with a focus on "what can you do."

- **Social Media & Website**

We are using a battery of factual responses to Facebook posts. Concerns will be passed on to the steering committee.

We are looking into starting an Instagram account and are waiting for the township to respond. We are also discussing a YouTube channel to post videos about the lake.

The website is counting about 300 visitors a day. About 50 of these visits are random from other countries. Discussions with a website professional are planned for this spring.

We are gathering short messages to "push" in social media.

- **Community Outreach**

We are continuing to contact several associations around the lake and will be attending their summer meetings. Some associations are willing to give us some time; others have full schedules but have welcomed us hand out materials and gather emails.

We are planning a one-year update press release to the same news outlets we announce our formation to last year. This will be published after steering committee approval.

Summer outreach is still in planning stages, but we are leaning to a one day "expo" on the same day as the Fire Department open house. Hoping to have a "booth" for each sub-committee and other areas of interest.

Some possible topics are the septic map, road ends report, invasive species, good septic practices, Zotero, etc.

A second option that has been discussed is of having a booth at a local restaurant providing information, collecting emails and giving away swag.

We have started to organize the selling HOHL tee shirts. Currently contacting vendors and developing a plan. Hope to have a proposal for the steering committee in May.

- **Collaboration & Research**

The committee continues to collaborate with the septic map effort.

- **Committee Development**

The committee met on March 24. Next meeting scheduled is April 16.

**Funding Subcommittee:**

- **Donation button implementation:** Coordinating with Treasurer and Communications to implement a Donate button on the HOH-Lake.org website, continuing.
- **Grant opportunity review:** Continuing review of potential funding opportunities aligned with identified water quality priorities, continuing.
- **Partnership outreach:** Identifying and evaluating potential collaboration opportunities to support Higgins Lake water quality initiatives, continuing.
- **Township funding fact sheet:** Working with the Communications Committee to develop a concise fact sheet describing the Health of Higgins Lake initiative and its activities, for potential use by the Township in discussions with funding sources, continuing.
- **Watershed management planning:** Recognized the potential need for an updated watershed management plan as discussed within related committees, and encouraging Steering Committee direction so coordinated funding strategies can be developed in a timely manner, continuing.

**IT Subcommittee:**

- **Nextcloud operations:** Continued monitoring and maintenance to ensure stable and secure collaboration environment for all committees.
- **Certificate automation:** Continued implementation of automated certificate renewal and validation processes to reduce risk of service interruption.
- **Septic Information Map coordination:** Worked closely with the Septic Committee on continued development and internal evaluation of the Septic Information Map, including technical support and implementation.
- **Database development:** Completed the first pass of converting the septic spreadsheets into a SQL database to improve consistency and support internal analysis capabilities.
- **Routine IT maintenance:** Continued ongoing maintenance and support activities across committee IT systems and services.

**Road End/Fertilizer Committee:**

- No report. Committee will meet on April 16.

### Science Subcommittee:

- There is nothing new to report as our March meeting was canceled due to the ice storm. Our next meetings are April 15 and May 20. Science Committee members continue to work in their respective subcommittees.

### Septic Committee:

- The Septic Committee met March 5. March 24 meeting was rescheduled to April 1, due to an unexpected conflict in the Chairmans schedule.
- **Septic Ordinance Draft Submitted** – The Ordinance, previously submitted to the Steering Committee, was forwarded to the Gerrish Board. The Board reviewed the draft at their work session and will act on it at their April 14 general meeting. It is expected that the draft will then be sent to the Planning Commission for further review and comment. Ostling, at the approval of the Committee appended a copy of the definitions prepared by Teri as well as the inspection checklist and the list of authorized inspectors. The chairman will work closely with the Planning Commission and be available to discuss any questions they may have.
- **Database** - Work continues on the database development for the Health of Higgins Septic Committee. The original EXCEL version has been converted to a SQL relational database in an effort to harden its integrity and reliability. One of the outputs from the SQL format will be put back into an EXCEL file allowing a wider audience to use the information.
- The following is some of the same information from last month for clarification purposes.

We are (as of the end of February) in a position to make some initial statements about where we have data and where we are lacking, but first, a little background. As has been stated, Septic Committee personnel first requested demographic information from the assessors in both Gerrish and Lyon Township, including a list of basic information on each property in the respective Townships, e.g., property ID, owner name and address, mailing address, location information, subdivision, etc. We also determined the GPS location of each property, size, classification (residential, commercial, vacant, etc.).

We requested information from the CMDHD about each property to associate their FETCH information with what we had already assembled, e.g., tank size, permit information, drain field size and type, and all critical data.

We also went to the EGLE Wellogic site to capture domestic well information, i.e., size, casing, depth, permit dates, etc. and appended to the database.

- We can now identify what information is available and use it to “rate” each property against the overall information available of Gerrish. Some sites have an abundance of information and others have nothing on file. This now reinforces our original objective of securing data on all sites to determine the overall sum of information available.
- Once the data was assembled into one document, we applied formulas to rate each parcel. Twenty-two categories were considered and each was assigned a “weight” based on its impact on the environment or importance. This allowed us the ability to consider many items and give each a percentage factor – based on the overall impact each has to the environment. Each topic was then further evaluated and its condition rated

from one to five. A parcel in a high-density subdivision potentially has more of a negative impact than a parcel on 10 acres away from the lake. A new raised drainfield with a new tank has much less impact on the environment than a site with no record of a drainfield at all. This rating approach will help to identify properties that are at most risk of impacting the public health and environment.

- **New Map** – Work on a map to display the condition of individual properties continues. This “Heat Map” draws attention with hotter colors for problem areas and is very telling. We are now beginning to see the picture anticipated early in the goals and objectives of the HOH over a year ago.
- **Product information** - We continue to discuss products and procedures related to on-site septic systems.
- **Next steps** – We want to further clarify what the procedure will be to learn about an individual septic location, find the rating, and get information on how to comply with the eventual ordinance. Chair is developing a flow chart with direction and guidance on how to comply. Next meeting will be April 14.

#### **Steering Committee:**

Joint Steering Committee & Subcommittee Chairpersons Work Session Overview – March 9, 2026

- Agenda items to included:
  - Exploring the need to update and seek funding for the Watershed Management Plan to pursue grants, etc. Members will make initial contact with previous plan partners for insight.
  - A discussion of developing a northern Michigan partnership with groups addressing similar lake and stream concerns to better understand and address the concerns of the HOHL and surrounding area. The Steering Committee will explore this in cooperation with subcommittees.
  - A year-end report was discussed. The Communications team will develop an annual report in June.

The March 17, 2026, meeting was canceled due to inclement weather. The next Steering Committee meeting will be April 21. The Steering Committee meets the third Tuesday of each month at 7PM.