



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gerrish Township Wins \$40,000 State Grant for Higgins Lake, Invites Community to August 8 Celebration

EGLE Watershed Council funding will strengthen the Health of Higgins Lake initiative; free family event at the Gerrish Township Marina will showcase the work and celebrate the lake

GERRISH TOWNSHIP, MI — July 10, 2026 — Gerrish Township has been awarded a \$40,000 state grant to protect Higgins Lake — and the community is invited to celebrate the news, and the lake itself, at a free family event this summer. The township is one of 19 communities across Michigan selected to receive a Watershed Council grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), and it will mark the milestone at **A Celebration of Higgins Lake** on Saturday, August 8, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Gerrish Township Marina.

Announced by EGLE on June 22, the Watershed Council grants distributed more than \$600,000 statewide for projects that support local conservation and educational efforts. The grants are funded under Michigan's Public Act 22 of 2025 and administered through EGLE's Nonpoint Source Program, which helps communities reduce pollution and stormwater runoff. A total of 55 applications requesting over \$2 million were received, making the award a competitive recognition of HOHL's work.

What the grant will fund: The grant will support two priorities: community engagement to help lake users understand how their actions affect water quality, and cutting-edge data management and analysis to identify and prioritize the remediation of failing septic systems around Higgins Lake. Together, these efforts will help the township build the capacity needed to protect the lake for the long term.

Why this matters for Higgins Lake: Higgins Lake is the only inland lake in Michigan bordered by two state parks and draws roughly one million visitors each year. It is also the headwaters of the Muskegon River, which flows through nine downstream counties before reaching Lake Michigan. Failing or aging septic systems can contribute to a lake's water quality, and better data is essential to addressing them effectively.

The project builds on an ongoing partnership with the Central Michigan District Health Department (CMDHD), which has prioritized the Higgins Lake watershed for digitizing historic septic and well records through its FetchGIS system. With those records now largely complete, HOHL will develop secure database tools to merge and analyze property data, flag systems with incomplete or problematic information, and generate reports that prioritize systems for follow-up — all while protecting the

privacy of individual property owners. This work also supports the implementation of Gerrish Township's forthcoming septic ordinance.

Launched by Gerrish Township in 2025, the Health of Higgins Lake initiative brings together more than 50 community volunteers — including residents and non-residents, engineers, environmental and wastewater specialists, aquatic ecologists, and information technology professionals — working across committees focused on science, septic systems and wells, road ends and fertilizer, communications, funding, and IT.

"This grant is a meaningful vote of confidence in what our community has built together," said Gerrish Township Supervisor Brian Hill. "It allows us to turn newly available data into real action — helping property owners, protecting public health, and safeguarding Higgins Lake for the generations who will enjoy it after us. The August 8 celebration is our way of thanking the community and inviting everyone to be part of this work."

A Celebration of Higgins Lake — Saturday, August 8: The community is invited to a free, family-friendly event from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Gerrish Township Marina, 103 Mill Road, Roscommon. The celebration will feature food for all ages — hot dogs, chips, and ice cream — along with a bounce house, HOHL merchandise and T-shirt giveaways (with additional items available for purchase), and hands-on ways to learn about the lake.

Attendees can tour the Higgins Lake Foundation's DASH boat, watch boat-wash demonstrations by Michigan State University Extension, view video from recent dives in Higgins Lake, and explore a new interactive Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map. Representatives from the Central Michigan District Health Department, the Higgins Lake Foundation — which will hand out free water-testing kits through its Be Well Wise program — and MSU Extension will join HOHL volunteers at booths covering fisheries, road-end runoff, invasive species, septic systems, and wells. It's an opportunity for residents and visitors to see firsthand the work the EGLE grant will help advance.

Residents and visitors can learn more about the Health of Higgins Lake initiative, sign up for monthly updates, and get involved at HOH-lake.org.

For more information, contact the Health of Higgins Lake Steering Committee at HOHL@gerrishtownship.org.

About the Health of Higgins Lake: The Health of Higgins Lake (HOHL) is a community-driven initiative launched by Gerrish Township to facilitate and guide a renewed collaborative effort of stakeholders with a common interest in securing the overall health of Higgins Lake for generations to come. Drawing on the expertise of more than 50 volunteers, HOHL works to increase access to clear, science-based information on the condition of the lake and to build community consensus around protecting it.

About Gerrish Township: Gerrish Township is located in Roscommon County, Michigan, and encompasses the majority of the Higgins Lake shoreline. The township is governed by a five-member board committed to protecting the area's natural resources while serving the needs of residents and visitors.

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