



THE HEALTH OF
HIGGINS LAKE

PROTECTING OUR WATERS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

COMMITTEE REFLECTIONS

AUGUST 2026

EXPLORING EVERY IMPACT

EMPOWERING EVERY VOICE

ENSURING A HEALTHIER HIGGINS LAKE



COMMUNICATIONS

- Celebrate Higgins Lake & Beyond brought residents and visitors together August 8 for exhibits, demonstrations, children's activities, and lake-health conversations. The event distributed 22 water-testing kits, added 25 people to HOHL's email list, and generated 16 short videos about what people value about Higgins Lake. Planning has begun for next summer.
- HOHL continues to expand its online resources, adding deep-water dive videos, water-testing information, and the Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map. The YouTube channel now includes 21 videos.
- HOHL tested geofencing as a new outreach tool. Technical issues limited its effectiveness and the second month was suspended, but the graphics and videos developed will continued to be used in HOHL communications.



STEERING

- The Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map has been released publicly and formally recognized as an HOHL tool, giving residents, researchers, and township officials a new way to explore information about development density and conditions throughout the watershed.
- Work continues to strengthen the data behind the map and make complex information easier for the public to understand and use.

INFO/TECHNOLOGY

- The IT Committee completed major development and quality-assurance work for the public release of the Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map. Improvements include simplified public controls, watershed and terrain layers, parcel-density displays, Help/About information, and separate public and research presentations.
- The committee also added map versioning and data provenance so users can identify the methodology, data revision, software build, and build run behind the information presented.
- IT continues to support the HOHL website and other technology needs while planning upgrades to Nextcloud storage and exploring a read-only AI-based search tool for HOHL's Zotero research collection

SEPTIC & GROUND WATER

- The Gerrish Township Planning Commission continues its review of the proposed septic ordinance. The Septic Committee and representatives of the Central Michigan District Health Department participated in a joint meeting with the Planning Commission, and HOHL continues to provide research and input as the proposal is considered.
- The Higgins Lake Foundation approved funding for the Sovereign Park Demonstration Map, which will help illustrate groundwater movement and the potential relationship between on-site septic systems and the lake. It is intended to be the first of several maps helping explain groundwater conditions around Higgins Lake.
- HOHL is beginning to organize years of lake and groundwater testing into a searchable database that can help researchers identify trends and better understand changing conditions.
- Together, these efforts are highlighting an important issue: information about septic systems and environmental conditions around the lake remains incomplete. HOHL's work is helping assemble and share the data needed to better understand those conditions and inform future township decisions.



Health of Higgins Lake



Separate Funding, Fertilizer, and Road Ends sections have not been included because the August reports contain limited new public-facing developments in those areas.

SCIENCE

- HOHL's Science subcommittees continue to build a more comprehensive picture of the many factors that may affect Higgins Lake, with research ranging from water quality and fisheries to invasive species, recreation, contaminants, and changing nearshore and deep-water conditions.
- The Non-Nutrient Contamination group has completed initial research on PFAS, pharmaceuticals, heavy metals, microplastics, microcystins, and chlorides and is now investigating additional potential contaminants before preparing its report.
- The Nearshore group is nearing completion of its E. coli assessment. It has added swimmer's itch to its work, while continuing research into water chemistry, biological conditions, and other nearshore issues.
- The Deep Water group is analyzing more than 20 years of MiCorps data, including dissolved oxygen and the lake's trophic state, while incorporating information from recent lake-bottom diving surveys.
- A comprehensive draft report on aquatic invasive species has also been prepared and is now being reviewed by the AIS subcommittee.

RECREATION

- The Recreation Subcommittee continues gathering information about who uses Higgins Lake, where visitors come from, and where they launch. Data collected at lake access sites will help HOHL better understand recreational activity and potential aquatic invasive species risks.
- The committee is also exploring boater education, boat-cleaning resources, and ways to increase awareness of how boating and road-end violations can be reported.